

NIGHT at the OSCARS

WAR,
LOVE
QUEEN
ELIZABETH
CARRY
OSCARS
INTO
NEW
MILLENIUM

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Move over, James Cameron. This year's king of the world is Shakespeare.

During last night's Oscar ceremony, "Shakespeare in Love," the witty, Elizabethan comedy, reaped seven Academy Awards, while Steven Spielberg's war epic "Saving Private Ryan" garnered five.

Surprisingly, "Shakespeare in Love" won the Oscar for Best Picture. In a category dominated by dramas, the romantic lark seemed destined for runner-up status, but apparently the Academy appreciated the movie's humor and intelligence just as much as everyone who saw it.

"Saving Private Ryan" received just praise, though. Unsurprisingly, Steven Spielberg won Best Director for his gritty, bleak portrayal of a World War II squad sent on a mission to find the last surviving son of an American farm family.

Gwyneth Paltrow won Best Actress for her role in "Shakespeare in Love." Paltrow's win seemed guaranteed, thanks to her effervescent portrayal, off-screen sweetness and Golden Globe win.

"Shakespeare In Love" also won best screenplay written directly for the screen. This probably was one of the most deserved awards of the entire evening, for Tom Stoppard and Marc Norman brought the world of Shakespeare to life in a brilliant, modern way.

But the belle of the ball was the bouncy Roberto Benigni. Benigni's surprise win for Best Actor in "Life is Beautiful" was the first

best performance Oscar for a foreign film in 40 years. Benigni's comic portrayal of Guido beat out Nick Nolte's meaty, dramatic role in "Affliction" and Ian McKellan's daring, complex role in "Gods and Monsters." "Life is Beautiful" also won Best Foreign Film.

Best Supporting Actress went to the classy yet adorable Judi Dench for her role as Elizabeth in "Shakespeare in Love." After being nominated, but not winning, for her role in "Mrs. Brown," this award seemed well-deserved.

In a slight upset, "Shakespeare in Love" also won the Oscar for art direction. While a beautiful film, some considered "Shakespeare In Love's" Elizabethan fare a bit mundane next to the inventive, graphically rich and surreal sets of "What Dreams May Come."

Best Supporting Actor went to James Coburn for his role as the vicious, alcoholic father in "Affliction." With the award, Coburn achieves temporary comeback status, especially after winning in a category brimming with show-stealing performances by noteworthy actors such as Geoffrey Rush, Robert Duvall and Billy Bob Thornton.

"Gods and Monsters," the story of the last days of Frankenstein movie director James Whale, won best screenplay based on previ-



COURTESY PHOTOS
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: WOODY HARRELSON cameos in "The Thin Red Line," which was nominated for Best Director, Best Cinematography and Best Picture. Terrence Malick's first picture in 20 years won no Oscars.

GWYNETH PALTROW was the true queen of the Elizabethan evening. She carried home an Oscar for Best Actress in the Best Picture-winning film "Shakespeare in Love."

WINNER OF FIVE Academy Awards, "Saving Private Ryan" won for Best Cinematography and Best Director.

CATE BLANCHETT as the Virgin Queen in "Elizabeth."

ously published or produced material.

The evening's surprises were not confined to the awards.

Without Billy Crystal's annual Oscar song to look forward to, everyone wondered what opening gimmick new host Whoopi Goldberg would find. Capitalizing on this year's preoccupation with Queen Elizabeth, Goldberg came out bedecked as the virgin queen. She then continued the show by appearing in various costumes from other academy nominated films.

Both Goldberg and Chris Rock spoke the unspeakable, joking about Elia Kazan's controversial Honorary Oscar.

Kazan, the director of such movies as "Streetcar Named Desire" and "East of Eden," testified in 1952 against eight friends in front of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. His nomination for the honorary award was protested by survivors of

the blacklist era.

As Kazan came onto the stage to accept the award, the crowd greeted him with a mixture of standing ovations and cold, arms-crossed stares. Kazan then thanked the Academy for having the courage to give him the award. His last words: "I'll just slip away."

Much ado was also made about this being the last Academy Awards of the century. Given the surprise attention to a romantic comedy, a foreign film and a former "informant" director, the night was certainly a mark of changing times.