

Fall Preview

NEW YORK

SEPTEMBER 12, 2005

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and her triumphal
return in *Proof*

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(FALL
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movies

Aftermath

In *Proof*, Gwyneth Paltrow gives a devastating—and devastated—performance as the grieving daughter of a brilliant man. BY LOGAN HILL

I hated acting," says Gwyneth Paltrow, discussing her very public decision to quit Hollywood last year. "Acting and the whole circus around it." At the time, Paltrow was grieving the death of her father, Bruce; celebrating the birth of her daughter, Apple; and recovering from a furious run of work. In her twenties, Paltrow blistered her feet on red carpets, appearing in more than twenty movies. She scored an Oscar for *Shakespeare in Love* at 26, and became Miramax's mascot and *Vanity Fair*'s favorite cover girl by her 30th birthday. Then she fell in love with Coldplay front man Chris Martin, the paparazzi swarmed, her father died, a few films flopped, and, finally, she'd had enough. In 2003, she backed out of two projects. In May 2004, she announced that she was quitting. At least for a while, leaving only the last film she'd completed: *Proof*, which opens September 16.

"I had spent my twenties at a fast and furious pace," she says, as Apple plays at her feet. "I had done some films that were bad, even a few I thought I shouldn't have done and I'd been talked into for one reason or another"—following the infamous logic of Hollywood, which dictates that actors alternate artistic roles with blockbusters.

"One for them, one for you? I just don't think there's much point to that anymore," she says flatly. "I realized that time is very precious."

If there's one reason that she's staying in the game at all, Paltrow says it is *Proof*. When she starred in the play in London, in a production that reunited her with *Shakespeare in Love* director John Madden, she found the part "so demanding and rewarding that I remembered why I became an actor in the first place."

Proof, which won a Pulitzer for playwright David Auburn and a Tony for Mary-Louise Parker in 2001, revolves around a grieving daughter who takes care of her mathematician father in the last years of his life—a woman so distraught she doesn't trust her own emotions or memories. During the production, Paltrow's own father fell deathly ill.

"My father had almost died during the play—so the idea was full of fear in me," says Paltrow. He died shortly after the play's run concluded. Paltrow, of course, was devastated. But she agreed to step back into the character for the movie. "She's an actress who knows how to draw on her emotional life," Madden explains, "and she had the terribly raw and hot experience in her own life to draw on."

Paltrow agrees. "He had died, and it changed the performance," she says—again, flatly—describing her work on the film with Anthony Hopkins, Jake Gyllenhaal, and

Hope Davis. "It was more completed, there was less fear on my part, and it was more full of grief. Some of those scenes were much harder."

There were other changes: The sharp, biting lines in the play were toned down for the film. In the original, "you kept seeing her attitude," says Paltrow. But she found it hard to play funny "when someone has just died. It had to be less sarcastic."

Since then, Paltrow's made decisions with a sense of purpose. She hasn't picked up a starring role in the two years since the film was shot—but she's carefully selected a few bit parts (in Doug McGrath's upcoming Truman Capote biopic and *Running With Scissors*). The only projects she's considered have been "things that (a) I would want to see, and (b) that would enrich me as a human being. At this point, that's the only reason I'd be away from my child."

Her recalcitrance can seem like arrogance, but that hard surface may just be self-possession—the defining trait in screen icons, from Garbo on. At a time when so many young starlets seem too eager to please, Paltrow has perhaps soaked in the ethos of her husband's business: Like a rock star, she's walked offstage at the height of her powers, certain that her fans will beg for an encore.

Proof Directed by John Madden, Miramax Films; opens September 16 (PG-13).

