

'I'D LIKE TO THANK THE LITTLE PEOPLE' SECOND-GUESSING THE ACADEMY IS NEVER EASY, BUT WE TRIED ANYWAY

By Richard Smith
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The Oscars are some sort of masturbatory fantasy," said Elliot Gould back in 1969. He was right then, and he's right now. The Academy Awards are designed, above all, to make the Academy happy. If Academy voters can come away feeling smart, then that helps. If they can come away with the notion that they made "the popular choice," then so much the better. Like so many of Hollywood's movies, it's primarily a feel-good event.

Bernardo Bertolucci understood the ironies of this self-indulgence perfectly when his 1987 film *The Last Emperor*, as foreign a film as the Academy is ever likely to recognize, swept the board, winning all of the nine awards for which it was nominated. "If New York is the Big Apple," Bertolucci said when he won the director's award, "then tonight Hollywood is the Big Nipple." His film had undoubtedly sucked it dry.

Last year was a reaction against the Bertolucci sweep. The Academy, even in the nominations, virtually assured that all honors would stay this side of the Atlantic. In a foregone conclusion, *Rain Man* took the top spot, and became the most successful film ever to win Best Picture, grossing an astonishing \$170 million.

Bearing all this in mind, here are the 1990 Oscar predictions; a noble, if mildly pointless, attempt at leaping into the minds of the nefarious Academy, what it has done in the past and what it is likely to do on Monday night. For the most part, they are predictions of what is most likely to happen, not necessarily what any of us want to happen.

Each category can be divided into those who won't win, those who stand a chance, and the one, given here in bold type, who's gonna get it.

Best Actor
We might as well start with a tough one—in fact, this year's toughest category to call. We should dispense with Kenneth Branagh first. He's nominated here for his film debut in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, and also nominated in the direction category for the same film. Without doubt, these two nominations will be seen as reward enough.

Robin Williams stands the next least chance. Despite the fact that his *Dead Poets Society* performance was his best yet, he will always be a comedian. To put it simply, the Best Actor Oscar is not for comedians.

Daniel Day Lewis, however, with a brilliant catalogue of film performances behind him (consider the range of his work in *My Beautiful Laundrette*, *Room With a View* and *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*), is a more difficult man to ignore. He has been nominated for *My Left Foot*, in which he plays a fiery Irish artist with cerebral palsy. Day Lewis has already won a plethora of awards for the role, but the Academy is not the same as the New York or Los Angeles Critics Circles and, in any case, he has to contend with a much more popular wheelchair-bound actor.

No, the real race is between the two favorites for Best Picture, *Born on the Fourth of July* and *Driving Miss Daisy*. More specifically put, that's Morgan Freeman and Tom Cruise.

Freeman, acclaimed by New Yorker film critic Pauline Kael as America's greatest actor, is nominated for the role he created in the original off-Broadway production of *Driving Miss Daisy*, for which he won several drama awards. The success of *Miss Daisy* is at least 50 percent his doing, but Freeman is not going to win for the simple reason that someone else will.

Despite the fact that he is so young (usually a disadvantage), the Academy will reward heroics over dignity and

Tom Cruise can be expected to give an acceptance speech. Of all the young American actors, he has shown ability and some daring in his choice of roles: consider the variety, and box office success, of *Risky Business*, *Top Gun*, *The Color of Money* and last year's *Rain Man*. He is thus respected in the industry. This, plus the fact that in *Born on the Fourth* he plays with some skill a sportsman-turned-paraplegic war veteran, makes him an irresistible choice to the same Academy so thrilled with Dustin Hoffman's autistic savant performance last year.

Best Actress
In severe contrast to its male counterpart, there is simply no competition in the Best Actress category. Isabelle Adjani, nominated for the French film *Camille Claudel*, won't win because foreign-language actors never do. Pauline Collins, for *Shirley Valentine*, won't win because not enough people saw her film. The same is true for Jessica Lange in *Music Box*. Michelle Pfeiffer is nominated for her steamy performance in the sultry *Fabulous Baker Boys*, but her time has not yet come.

No, if there is any certainty regarding this year's awards, it's that octogenarian Jessica Tandy will win for her part in the great *Miss Daisy* success story. It doesn't matter that the Academy prefers age over youth; Tandy will win because, of the nominated bunch, she gave the best performance. Which, one naively supposes, is exactly what the Oscars should be about.

Best Supporting Actor
The Academy is remarkably fickle in its approach to supporting awards. Often they favor old actors who haven't previously been recognized (Sean Connery, Peggy Ashcroft for instance). Marlon Brando, this year's blast from the past, has won before, most notably for *The Godfather*. Brando didn't turn

up to accept that award; instead he sent a woman named Littlefeather to accept it on his behalf, as a protest against the treatment of Native Americans in the film industry. It's doubtful that the Academy will risk a rerun of that little number. Still, Brando's the wild card.

Denzel Washington gets his second Oscar nomination for his role in the civil war epic *Glory* (he was nominated for *Cry Freedom* in 1987), but unfortunately the talented actor didn't really stand out enough to get a win here. Dan Aykroyd won't win either: his nomination is more due to the success of *Miss Daisy* than his individual performance in the film.

The real battle here is between *Do the Right Thing*'s Danny Aiello and *Crimes and Misdemeanors*' actor Martin Landau. Both were excellent in their films; both are screen veterans of sorts. Aiello's advantage is that, whereas Landau's work was hidden amongst a typical Woody Allen ensemble cast, Aiello stood out as the white voice in Spike Lee's controversial film. *Martin Landau's* advantage, however, is that he was nominated last year for *Tucker: A Man and His Dream*, and this might swing the balance for him.

Best Supporting Actress
Just to complicate matters, this year's Supporting Actress list involves two actresses who have won before. Anjelica Huston, nominated for *Enemies, a Love Story*, won in 1986 for *Prizzi's Honor*; Dianne Wiest, nominated for *Parent Hood*, won in 1987 for *Hannah and Her Sisters*. They're both worthy candidates, but are they good enough to win twice? Brenda Fricker, brilliant in *My Left Foot*, is also nominated.

The principle fight here though, is between rising star Julia Roberts for her sterling *Steel Magnolias* performance, and Lena Olin for her astonishing work in *Enemies, a Love Story*. There's no question who deserves the role more; Olin gave the best performance of any woman in any film last year, but Roberts is undoubtedly more "Hollywood." Despite this, it's worth assuming, if only for this category, that the Academy's actors know a good performance when they see one. Lena Olin will win.

Best Cinematography
Winning films tend to have a sense of scope and high drama (previous winners include *The Killing Fields* and *Mississippi Burning*)—there's power in that that lens. This suggests that *Blaze* and *The Fabulous Baker Boys* don't possess the goods, leaving *Glory*, *Born on the Fourth* and *The Abyss* to squabble for top cat.

In terms of power and scope, *Born on the Fourth* has the edge over *Glory*. The spanner in the works is *The Abyss*, that extraordinary, totally pointless foray into underwater filmmaking. Will the Academy's photographers reward technical wizardry? Not over *Born on the Fourth* of July.

Best Costume Design
Costume-design and art-direction awards often go hand in hand, which suggests another win for *Miss Daisy*. It's unlikely however (if *Miss Daisy* wins here then there's no stopping it), for all four other competitors featured more noteworthy designs. Baron



Jessica Lange probably won't win for her performance in *'Music Box'*

Munchausen's whimsy; *Harlem Nights'* twenties pizzazz; *Valmont's* 18th-century style and *Henry V's* 14th-century costumes: who knows? *Henry V* might win: it's an unusual period.

Best Visual Effects
The Abyss must surely win over *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* and *Back to the Future, Part II*.

Best Film Editing
Always a tough category to figure out. Complicating matters is that this is the only technical category which pits the two Best Picture favorites against each other. Other nominated films—*The Bear*, *The Fabulous Baker Boys* and *Glory*—might have to take a back seat. The difficulty is, however, that *Born on the Fourth* and *Miss Daisy* are as different as chalk and cheese; the former bombastic and frenetically paced, the latter more gentle and smoothly flowing. Looking at the films that have previously won this award (*Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *The Killing Fields*), *Born on the Fourth* would seem the likely choice. It is possible too that neither will win. I'm voting for *The Bear*.

Best Makeup
Last year we made the mistake of thinking that the clever cameos of Eddie Murphy and Arsenio Hall in *Coming to America* would be praised above the malarkey of *Beetlejuice*. So this year, having learned the lesson, I should ignore the seamless aging processes undertaken by Jack Lemmon in *Dad*, and Tandy and Freeman in *Miss Daisy*, and say that this is the category that *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* will win. Except I'm a bad learner: *Driving Miss Daisy*.

Best Original Score
No question: Alan Menken's delicious score for *The Little Mermaid*.

Best Original Song
No question: as sung by a crab called Sebastian, "Under the Sea" from *The Little Mermaid*.

Best Sound
The more complicated the film, the harder it is to create the soundtrack. *The Abyss* has the edge, so to speak.

Best Sound Effects Editing
Same thing, only different. Purely for sentimental reasons, let's go for Indiana Jones and the *Last Crusade*.

Best Original Screenplay
A category full of unclassifiables. Woody Allen may not win (he's won twice before and not cared either time, preferring to play his clarinet at Michael's Pub, Manhattan). Spike Lee and Steven Soderbergh, the young driving forces of American film-making, won't win because they are the young driving forces behind American film-making. Tom Schulman might win for his sentimental *Dead Poets Society* (if he does, then look to *Dead Poets* to bring about the coup of the evening). A more likely winner would be Nora Ephron for her dating-game comedy, *When Harry Met Sally...* It contained, of course, the most talked-about scene of the year, and generally had audiences rolling in the aisles with delight and hysteria. Ephron has one disadvantage in the eyes of the Academy: she's a woman. So they'll get to feel really good about themselves for such a bold move.

Best Adapted Screenplay
Here we go. Undoubtedly, the adapters of *Enemies, a Love Story*, *Field of Dreams* and *My Left Foot* are going to be lost in the wake of *Born on the Fourth* and *Miss Daisy*.

Oliver Stone and Ron Kovic's adaptation of Kovic's book is an inconsistent, muddy affair at best. The film loses the book's more complete understanding of why (not just how) Kovic transformed from being pro- to anti-Vietnam war. It is unlikely, however, that the Academy will have picked up the paperback, and in any case, this is not necessarily a category that judges the worthiness of a screenplay against its original source.

Even so, Alfred Uhry, *Driving Miss Daisy's* writer, is a more likely winner. His screenplay, based on his Pulitzer prize-winning play, was a model of stage-to-screen adaptation, and will be recognized as such.

Best Foreign Film
Sadly, none of the nominated films listed for this award have yet made it to North Carolina. I have only seen one of the five: the Canadian entry, *Denys Arcand's Jesus of Montreal*. Arcand is best known for his controversial *Decline of the American Empire*. *Jesus of Montreal* is the story of a man who gathers actors for a reworking of the Passion and, true to form, the film aims a few well-sharpened arrows at institutional religions. From the way the crit-

ics are talking, it might well win. The favorite to win, however, is Italy's *Cinema Paradiso*, a reportedly delightful film about a village and its movie theatre. Favorites have a knack of losing, however (think of *Au Revoir Les Enfants* and *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*), so I'm hedging for a win for Canada and *Jesus of Montreal*.

One thing is apparently certain—Denmark's run of winners (*Babette's Feast* and *Pelle the Conqueror*) is over: *Waltzing Regitze* is not a candidate by all accounts. The remaining nominations are *Camille Claudel*, starring nominee Isabelle Adjani as artist Rodin's abused assistant, and *Santiago, the Story of His New Life*, a film from Puerto Rico.

Best Director
Best Director and Best Picture have gone to two different films on only three occasions in over 30 years. Only *Born on the Fourth*, *Dead Poets Society* and *My Left Foot* have been nominated in both categories. That puts otherwise favorite *Miss Daisy* at a distinct disadvantage for top spot.

Both *Henry V's* Kenneth Branagh and *My Left Foot's* Jim Sheridan are first-time directors, and that's the principal reason why neither of them will win. Woody Allen won't win because *Crimes and Misdemeanors* hasn't got a Best Picture nod, and because, as previously mentioned, he really doesn't care.

The competition is between Australian *Dead Poets* director Peter Weir who was last nominated for *Witness* in 1985, and *Born on the Fourth's* Oliver Stone, who has won two Oscars, the first for his *Midnight Express* script in 1979 and the second for *Platoon* in 1987. There is no questioning who has made the more important film in the eyes of the Academy, or which film the Academy is more likely to recognize. After last year's *Rain Man*, they will want to sink their teeth into more substantial stuff. Oliver Stone should pick up his third Oscar.

Best Picture
This is tricky. It's obvious that *My Left Foot* won't win. However good it is, it's not the Academy's right stuff. In terms of what the Academy goes for, the male mysticism of *Field of Dreams* probably gives it the edge over *Dead Poets Society*.

Steven Spielberg, however, got it exactly right when he said of the Academy's choices, "History is more weighty than popcorn." So who are we trying to kid? We all know who the competition's really between. As mentioned above, *Born on the Fourth* has the advantage because these days Best Director and Best Picture go hand in hand. But is the three-in-30-years statistic just waiting to be smashed? It's possible.

The more important question then in this feel-good-fest is: which film will make the Academy feel most good about itself? *Born on the Fourth*, need it be said, is typical Best Picture stuff. It's historical, heroic, popular, well-made, very

Hollywood; it features a big issue, verges on the controversial (if it had overstepped the mark it wouldn't stand such a good chance); it features some star names (Cruise, Dafoe, Berenger), it's directed by a well-known, once-maverick, now-respected director: all things the Academy loves. It's the only nominated film that has any kind of gutsy, emotional power behind it. In comparison, all the others seem too sentimental.

To its disadvantage is that it's an angry film: it has a rage that is disquieting to its audience and may have the same effect on Academy voters. *Driving Miss Daisy* may seem to be too small for the job. It's all words and poignant moments: no high drama or self-importance here. It verges on comedy at times, usually a disadvantage. It has a minimal cast, a tiny set, little location work. Sure, *Miss Daisy* is historical, and even comes with an underlying race relations theme (just the sort of thing the Academy can feel trendy about), but it might be too subtle for its own good. Not only this, but *Miss Daisy* was made by, shock horror, an independent company.

Herein, however, lies an interesting detail. Released by Warner Brothers, *Miss Daisy* was made by The Zanuck Company, a film-making group recently formed by producers Richard and Lili Zanuck. They may sound small on the face of it, but it would be foolish to

underestimate the influence and talents of the Zanucks. Richard Zanuck, son of legendary Hollywood giant Darryl F. Zanuck, headed 20th Century Fox when it produced such films as *The Sound of Music*, *Patton* and *The French Connection*. Zanuck first went independent in 1972 when he was responsible for the success of, among other films, *Jaws*, *The Sting* and *Cocoon*. Make no mistake, *Driving Miss Daisy* is no small fry production. More importantly, the Academy could give it an award and still feel they were rewarding their own, and that, of course, is a real advantage.

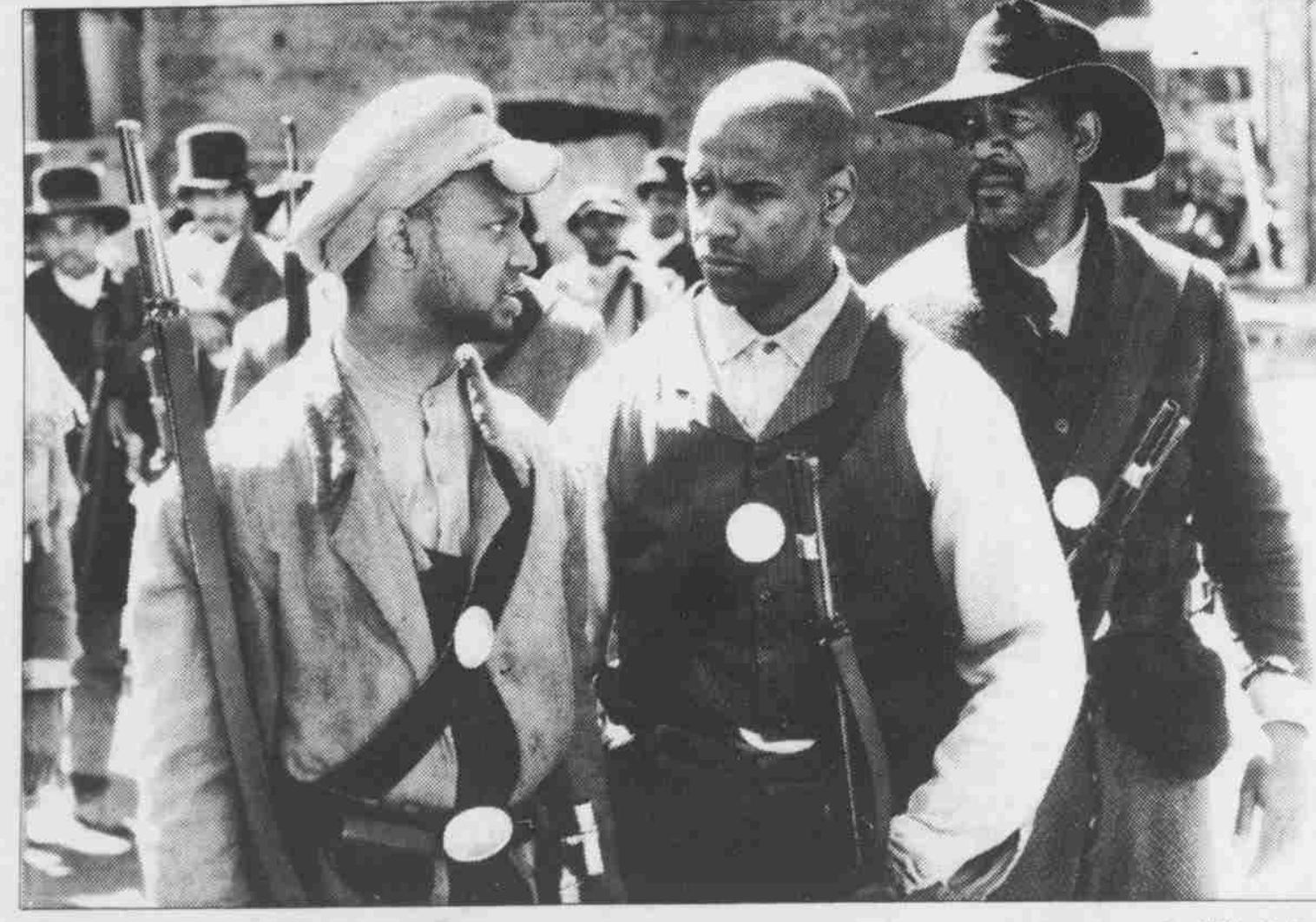
Which will it be? *Born on the Fourth* of July probably still has the odds tipped in its favor, but *Miss Daisy* is hard to discount. *Driving Miss Daisy* would be the more popular choice, and that's why it's worth flying in the face of odds and better judgment and predicting it will win.

Bear in mind that all of the theories and opinions above could be wrong. I'm kind of hoping that they are. An evening's warfare between *Born on the Fourth* and *Miss Daisy* isn't going to be gripping stuff exactly, especially when so many other films should be vying for the top spot in their stead. No, the best reason to be watching Monday night's extravaganza is in the hope of an upset or two. A little spilled milk, over which there is no use in crying, is all we ask.

Films that have won the Oscar for Best Picture, 1928-1988

- 1927-28 Wings
- 28-29 Broadway Melody
- 29-30 All Quiet on the Western Front
- 30-31 Cimarron
- 31-32 Grand Hotel
- 32-33 Cavalcade
- 34 It Happened One Night
- 35 Mutiny on the Bounty
- 36 The Great Ziegfeld
- 37 The Life of Emile Zola
- 38 You Can't Take It With You
- 39 Gone With the Wind
- 40 Rebecca
- 41 How Green Was My Valley
- 42 Mrs. Miniver
- 43 Casablanca
- 44 Going My Way
- 45 The Lost Weekend
- 46 The Best Years of Our Lives
- 47 Gentlemen's Agreement
- 48 Hamlet
- 49 All the King's Men
- 50 All About Eve
- 51 An American in Paris
- 52 The Greatest Show on Earth
- 53 From Here to Eternity
- 54 On the Waterfront

- 55 Marty
- 56 Around the World in 80 Days
- 57 The Bridge Over the River Kwai
- 58 Gigi
- 59 Ben-Hur
- 60 The Apartment
- 61 West Side Story
- 62 Lawrence of Arabia
- 63 Tom Jones
- 64 My Fair Lady
- 65 The Sound of Music
- 66 A Man For All Seasons
- 67 In the Heat of the Night
- 68 Oliver!
- 69 Midnight Cowboy
- 70 Patton
- 71 The French Connection
- 72 The Godfather
- 73 The Sting
- 74 The Godfather, Part II
- 75 One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest
- 76 Rocky
- 77 Annie Hall
- 78 The Deer Hunter
- 79 Kramer vs. Kramer
- 80 Ordinary People
- 81 Chariots of Fire
- 82 Gandhi
- 83 Terms of Endearment
- 84 Amadeus
- 85 Out of Africa
- 86 Platoon
- 87 The Last Emperor
- 88 Rain Man



Denzel Washington (center), was nominated for his role in *'Glory'*, while Morgan Freeman (right) got one for *'Miss Daisy'*