

THE CampChuck REVIEWER

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TWENTY NINTH ANNUAL EDITION

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February 17, 2008

Editor, critic, layout, distribution, and general factotum ...



Meryl Streep on the Lamb

page 9

The 80th ANNUAL ACADEMY AWARDS Nominations

Oscar Night: Sunday, February 24

Best Picture

Atonement

Juno

Michael Clayton

No Country for Old Men

There Will Be Blood

Best Director

Jason Reitman

Tony Gilroy

Ethan & Joel Coen

Paul Thomas Anderson

Best Director only:

The Diving Bell and

The Butterfly

Julian Schnabel

Best Actor

George Clooney

Daniel Day-Lewis

Johnny Depp

Tommy Lee Jones

Viggo Mortensen

Michael Clayton

There Will Be Blood

Sweeney Todd

In the Valley of Elah

Eastern Promises

Best Actress

Cate Blanchett

Julie Christie

Marion Cotillard

Laura Linney

Ellen Page

Elizabeth: The Golden Age

Away from Her

La Vie en Rose

The Savages

Juno

Best Supporting Actor

Casey Affleck *Assassination of Jesse James*

Javier Bardem *No Country for Old Men*

Philip Seymour Hoffman *Charlie Wilson's War*

Hal Holbrook *Into the Wild*

Tom Wilkinson *Michael Clayton*

Best Supporting Actress

Cate Blanchett *I'm Not There*

Ruby Dee *American Gangster*

Saoirse Ronan *Atonement*

Amy Ryan *Gone Baby Gone*

Tilda Swinton *Michael Clayton*

(Underlined nominees equal CampChuck predictions)

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\$1 Billion, \$100 Million, \$100,000

More than 30 years ago, the term "blockbuster" came of age when "Jaws" was the first \$100 million ticket seller. "Titanic" leads all time sales with more than a half billion in the US and more than a billion worldwide. Sci Fi and fantasies dominate, including sequels.

Some of my favorite moving viewing this year involves documentary films whose creators would salivate at the thought of a hundred thousand dollars in tickets sales.

I am pleased to have played a small part in the 6th Wild and Scenic Environmental Festival (www.wseff.org) in my town, Nevada City, CA. It's the largest festival of its kind in the US (more than 120 films).

Here are award winners from the January 2008 festival:

<i>Recycled Life</i>	1000s living off garbage
<i>The Endless Knot</i>	Giving back to sherpas
<i>A Land Out of Time</i>	Saving Rocky Mtn. lands
<i>King Corn</i>	Misguided mega-farming
<i>Mountain Top Removal</i>	Coal's dirty presence
<i>The Edge of Eden</i>	Living with grizzlies
<i>Kintaro Walks Japan</i>	Goofy respectful adventure
<i>The Greening of Southie</i>	Super green condo project
<i>Fridays at the Farm</i>	Back to committed basics

Use contacts at www.wseff.org for local Nevada City DVD rentals. Some films' websites sell their DVDs.

Best Supporting Actor

is a solid detective yarn, with Casey in the lead unraveling a child abduction mystery.

“The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford” uses a cowardly Academy Awards ploy to consider Affleck’s lead role as Robert Ford for Best Supporting Actor. Good as he is stirring an undercurrent of the Jesse James aura, there will be no Oscar for too much Casey too soon.

Hal Holbrook is the easiest contender to dismiss. He plays a father figure with some desert wisdom to give and receive in “Into the Wild.” Holbrook confers an engaging comfort as he has so many times in a long, distinguished career. Honoring his body of work is a wild card factor, but not enough for a film with an effectively spread ensemble of supporting players.

Though Bardem has added a wholly unnerving murderer to the pantheon of movie bad guys, Tom Wilkinson should be the one to hold the Support Oscar to his chest.

In “Michael Clayton,” Wilkinson plays a mentally ill man. Modern medicine helps him function in an unseemly corporate environment. When he stops taking his meds, his character goes crazy. It’s a truth-telling craziness that George Clooney’s Michael Clayton is challenged to “fix.”

Wilkinson’s role provides more depth and pith than the other nominated parts. Wilkinson’s part is also more in tune with the Supporting Actor designation. It won’t, however, disarm Bardem’s larger than life badness.

Manufactured Mailbag

Dear Editor,

In your Mailbag last year, Adam Dons wrote about “Happy Feet” (Best Animated Feature, 2006). And “March of the Penguins” (Best Documentary, 2005). Will “Surf’s Up,” yet another Oscar nominated penguin film, win the 2007 animated feature Oscar?

W. Chumley, Tuskegee, GA

Dear Mr. Chumley,

“Ratatouille” seems unbeatable. Permit an “I kid you not” aside: This month, I was flying home. A real penguin (followed by its San Diego Zoo trainer) walked down the aisle of my plane.

Ed.

Dear Editor,

Hey, I caved and actually looked at your www.startlets.com web site. You got, like, nothing there but reviews from mostly films people don’t care about.

A friend, Los Angeles

Dear friend,

I appreciate that you checked the web site. You probably will do fine getting your movie reviews from TV commercials. My web-based reviews tend to offer a look at films that receive less -- sometimes way less -- media attention and distribution.

Ed.

Find *The CampChuck Reviewer* at <http://www.startlets.com>.
Email: jaffee@startlets.com
(that’s three “t’s” in startlets).

Dear Editor,

With you sticking to Oscar level films, we don’t get to read about films you think are big stinkers?

Wiff Hassendish, Pittsburgh, PA

Dear Wiff,

Last year’s “August Rush” of musical genius and family love was one of the biggest stinkers in recent memory. Anything-goes, mystical capability and far fetched coincidences surprised me by getting continually worse on its path of shallow predictability.

Ed.

Dear Editor,

Now that you’re retired, do you have a second career reviewing movies?

Jay Lussly, Greenville, SC

Dear Jay,

“Career” tends to involve earning a living, something my movie reviewing does not attempt. The retirement package I took last year was too enticing to ignore. After what will be a year of increased travel, film devotions, and more, I need a little more of that earning a living to sufficiently fuel such devotions.

Ed.



Cyclic Adjustments

Every four years is a leap year. Every leap year is a presidential election year. The United States is sorely in need of a leap.

February 29 is just one day, a dependably corrective day. Election day is just one day, a potentially corrective day. Between those two days, campaigns drone on. You may think the leap can happen on election day, but it can only happen from grounded devotions by leaders with a vision of a sustainable future and followers that guide their leaders more than 1 or 2 days a year. After this leap year, it will take more than touted experience or elected hope, and surely more than imperialism stretched thin, to better secure the future.

One reason CampChuck supports Rocky Mountain Institute so enthusiastically is their non-partisan quest for sustainable economic practice. Here's a quote from what RMI calls its politics: "...entering, in a friendly and open spirit, into the midst of even bitter controversy. Handling conflict with integrity, respect, and sincerity, we've found, can often turn it into an opportunity for mutual learning, trust-building, and resolution."

CampChuck continues as it has **since 1992, matching every subscription dollar for dollar**. All subscriptions – more than \$25,000 plus CampChuck's 100% match of \$25,000 -- have funneled through CampChuck to RMI and Food Banks. Whether you subscribe at the official \$5 level or the average participation of \$30, think sustainable economic practice and the golden rule. And think access to CampChuck's newsletters.

February 29th
washes away

faster
than footprints

at the edge
of the ocean

and returns
every day

in every wave
of time

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CampChuck continues its encouragement of the fundamental human sharing embodied by the "Food Banking" concept. Since CampChuck now resides in Nevada County, CA, please make checks payable to "Food Bank of Nevada County." Of course, if your inclination is to continue with a check to "Second Harvest Food Bank," you are still riding the CampChuck spirit.

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CampChuck Predictions (as also indicated by underlined nominees on page one)

Widespread high praise for "No Country for Old Men" and the Coen brothers' flawless, brutal style beats the more powerful but slightly stilted "There Will Be Blood." Daniel Day-Lewis is a force of nature that dominates his category. Julie Christie's elegant, sensitive turn beats Cotillard's incomparable incarnation of Piaf, because "La Vie en Rose" is a mess. Javier Bardem's adorably creepy bad guy wins a very competitive category. Amy Ryan's troubled mom edges out Cate Blanchett doing Dylan after her Oscar doing Hepburn.

Picture and Director:	<i>No Country for Old Men</i>	Ethan & Joel Coen	<i>No Country for Old Men</i>
Actress and Actor:	Julie Christie	<i>Away from Her</i>	Daniel Day-Lewis <i>There Will Be Blood</i>
Supporting Actress & Actor:	Amy Ryan	<i>Gone Baby Gone</i>	Javier Bardem <i>No Country for Old Men</i>

Best Supporting Actress

Only Tilda Swinton seems to have no chance to win Best Supporting Actress, although she has created a unique characterization. In "Michael Clayton," Swinton plays the CEO of a mega-corporation. This top executive must have been tough to get there, yet she repeatedly needs to lacquer her poise to represent her company's course in a multi-billion dollar lawsuit.

Swinton signals an unusual sort of vulnerability that is critical to the story, but it feels a bit mealy for serious Oscar consideration.

One might say Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee are the Black version of Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy. It hardly matters that most people are not familiar with their careers. Ruby Dee is the only one of the four still alive. She would not have been nominated without factoring in her long, distinguished life, a life more highly revered than famous.

Although she packs a wallop telling off her hot shot, "American Gangster" son, the part is too small to use it as a career appreciation Oscar.

Saoirse Ronan is the reason why there is any story to tell in "Atonement." She plays a young teen who thinks she knows things. She makes accusations that cause, to say the least, great heartache.

Ronan captures a stiff, immature awareness very well. Her character grows up and learns complex lessons about the truth. The problem, for Oscar winning purposes, is that the grown up person is played by two other

actresses. By itself, Ronan's part is interesting but not award worthy.

Cate Blanchett won an Oscar recently playing Katharine Hepburn in "The Aviator." It's an especially tall order playing someone with such famous characteristics.

In "I'm Not There" she conjures a portrayal of Bob Dylan that is startlingly good. It is great fun to watch her have at it, only in part because she is a woman playing this famously peculiar man.

The whole film is peculiar -- very inventive. Six actors play someone who is supposed to represent Bob Dylan. Only Blanchett does anything like an impersonation. The crutch of impersonation could keep her from winning, but she could get it for the rare reason that it's too trippy to pass up.

Amy Ryan's part in "Gone Baby Gone" is the meatiest acting showcase of the nominated supporting actresses. Her character spews South Boston attitude.

She don't care who's judging her drugged up, boozy life. She don't care what she does in keeping the company she keeps. Most of all, she don't care who's judging what kind of mom she is.

Amidst all this, Ryan makes us hold out that somewhere in this lower middle class burnout is a mom that deserves caring attention, at the very least to find her abducted 4 year old daughter. Her support part solidly fuels the twists and turns of a rough detective yarn. Ryan is mainlining for an Oscar win.



Best Supporting Actor

Javier Bardem is adorable in "No Country for Old Men," that is, if he doesn't totally creep you out as a ruthless, far-from-subtle assassin. Bardem's character performs according to a strict code of ethics and a loose-nut combination of bloodthirst and playfulness.



Despite an extremely competitive group of five supporting actor nominees, it seems fairly safe to predict Bardem will grab this Oscar. If his character's haircut is an official consideration, Bardem is the undeniable winner.

If Oscars were given for excellence in multiple films in a single year, Philip Seymour Hoffman would be the clear winner. Besides sharing the lead in the downbeat drama "Before the Devil Knows You're Dead" and in the black comedy "The Savages," Hoffman works his supporting actor wonders bouncing off Tom Hanks in "Charlie Wilson's War."

As an abrasive CIA man, Hoffman parlays a politician's curious window of leverage into a huge covert operation in Afghanistan. Hoffman is much of the reason that this film is one of the finest political science lessons you'll find in a comedy. The comedy tack of "Charlie Wilson's War" will also keep Hoffman (who won recently for "Capote") from winning Gold.

In 2007, Casey Affleck has catapulted from being Ben Affleck's brother to being a mature actor. "Gone Baby Gone"

Best Picture / Best Director

Given the tone of the frontrunning films, this would be a good year for a Best Picture coup at the Oscars.

Think about “Juno,” the best script of the 2007 movie year. Young director, Jason Reitman, stayed faithful to Diablo Cody’s first time screenplay. As a filmmaking success story, “Juno” gels even better than “Little Miss Sunshine” did in 2006.

“Juno,” however, is just another touching little comedy. The Academy Awards disproportionately dings comedies, and this one does not have the breakthrough stature of “Shakespeare in Love” or the overrated “Forrest Gump.”

“Juno” stays real, though it hardly takes a breath from wisecrack to wisecrack. It nudges what could have been stereotyped characters endearingly off-center.

Ellen Page carries the tone perfectly as Juno, a girl who gets pregnant from her one-time-only experience. Right-on as well are the characterizations of Juno’s boyfriend and parents, the prospective adoptive parents, and even the small parts in the film.

Gold for “Michael Clayton” would be a surprise, though not a coup. First-time director Tony Gilroy wrote all three “Bourne” screenplays (“Identity,” “Supremacy,” and “Ultimatum.”) He has traded up making “Michael Clayton.” Granted, the non-stop implausible action of the Bourne thrillers makes blockbusters. This idea-based lawyer yarn doesn’t.

George Clooney stars as the title character of the most substantive film on the list of contenders. The playing field for “Michael Clayton” involves the power wielded and the collateral damage caused by a mega-corporation. Clooney plays a talented “fixer” who has to deal at the same time with his own faults and rising conscience.

The film is taut. At heart, it’s believable that a huge global company is doing more than dragging its feet in a multi-billion dollar lawsuit about poisoning its consumers. With a crazy head lawyer (when he’s off his meds), a too vulnerable CEO, and the flaws in the Michael Clayton character, this well written story can feel a tad far fetched. That said,

complexity fetches a cautionary movie reminder that one way or another corporations can kill people. That is, people in corporations, kill people.

Forget about a Best Picture coup or a Best Picture surprise. One of the two frontrunners will win: either “There Will Be Blood,” cynical and violent, or “No Country for Old Men,” cynical and very, very violent. The praise for these two films is widespread and lavish. The cinematic vision and talent brought to bear is impressive.

There’s no chance that a film with winning heart or hope in it will grab Oscar’s highest honor this time around.

The competitive leak in the excellence of “There Will Be Blood” is a lack of chemistry between the characters, a lack of felt tugs between the human beings in the film. Because of this, the film’s end seemed to have nowhere to go but overly excessive.

Nonetheless, scene after scene, including the final scene, is packed with powerful sounds and images and affecting characterizations. Writer/Director Paul Thomas Anderson tells a big story of how big oil gained its foothold in the wild West.

With “There Will Be Blood,” Anderson has evolved from his already bold (and irritating) accomplishments like “Boogie Nights” and “Magnolia.” And Daniel Day-Lewis, as a single minded oilman in the first third of the 20th century, is an indelible force of acting nature leading this film.

Although Anderson and his film have the kind of heft that is ripe for Oscars, “No Country for Old Men” has the more fully realized script, including plenty of chemistry between its characters.

A regular, no account guy finds a couple million dollars in the desert, amidst a bunch of shot dead drug dealers. He takes the money, even though he knows from the beginning it’s a bad idea.

From start to finish, the Coen brothers lay out the murderous hunt, led by an iconic, new bad guy played by Javier Bardem. Tommy Lee Jones plays a

(continued on page 6)

Best Picture / Best Director



third generation lawman, overwhelmed by the modern day pitch of lawlessness, but still trying to do the job.

Ethan and Joel Coen write and direct films like no one else. “No Country for Old Men” is not as imaginative or quirky as “Fargo” (Best Screenplay, 1997), but the excellence is twisted effectively enough. It’s just that “No Country” has it easier employing a villain with Terminator-style invincibility and a good guy forced to sidelined importance. The Coen boys will win the Best Picture and Best Director Oscars that eluded them with “Fargo.”



“Inside” did. That film won Best Foreign Language Film in 2005 with a story about a quadriplegic fighting for the right to die.

“The Diving Bell and the Butterfly” is an intelligent, warm, and life-affirming triumph, based on a true story. Triumph notwithstanding, it wasn’t nominated for Best Picture. Foreign language films rarely are, although it is not infrequent that a foreign language film director gets nominated. Anyway, not being nominated for Best Picture assures a blocked path to a Best Director win.

Something had to fill the remaining Best Picture slot. Since Oscar gets nervous without an epic romance on the list of nominees, “Atonement” got the nod. It doesn’t deserve the nomination and certainly won’t win.

The British romance steams up well enough between Keira Knightley and James McAvoy. Then he’s banished into World War II. The depiction of the war is no big deal dramatically, and the lovers’ pangs of separation don’t keep the steam rolling. Though insufficient as an epic or a romance, it does have a surprisingly crafty little ending.

After “No Country for Old Men” enjoys its big Oscar night, see “Fargo” again. It’s definitely a more inspired, juicier example of the Coen movie genius without forgoing our penchant for extreme violence.

If this were truly a year for Oscar coups, Julian Schnabel would win Best Director for “The Diving Bell and the Butterfly.” How do you make an engrossing story, a positive, engrossing story, about a man totally paralyzed except for the his ability to blink one eyelid? Why not make it more challenging? It’s a story about using this one eyelid to dictate his memoir.

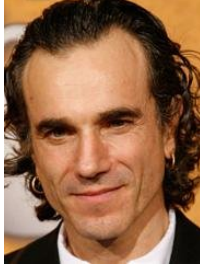
Schnabel succeeds masterfully, in part because of the way he avoids tugging disproportionately on sadness or hope. Schnabel doesn’t rely on deliberating an issue on screen the way “The Sea

Top Ten

-
1. *Into the Wild*: Untypical examination of an individual’s striving that tugs controversially at whether a fine young life was immaturely wasted; fine character ensemble
 2. *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*: Intelligent, warm, and life-affirming story about a man totally paralyzed except for his ability to blink one eyelid; a filmmaking challenge well met
 3. *Juno*: Best script of the year, substantive teen story and plenty of wisecracking fun
 4. Documentaries: Such as *Sicko*, *In the Shadow of the Moon*, and *No End in Sight*, documentaries continue to be the best way to find alternative movie going
 5. *Michael Clayton*: Taut, heady thriller of doing right when the mega-corporation is doing wrong
 6. *Once*: Warmed with music, a unique little love story, fresh in its friend-like passion
 7. *Lars and the Real Girl*: Making such a bizarre gimmick work for a whole film is impressive fun
 8. *Breach*: Telling, tense, it is real, big stakes spy stuff without explosions and chases
 9. *Across the Universe*: Taken as Pop Art, it’s a visual romp and a creative Beatles music feast
 10. *No Country for Old Men*: Can’t let this Oscar dominating Coen brothers triumph slip from the top 10
- After the Top Ten (alphabetically): *American Gangster*, *Away from Her*, *Charlie Wilson’s War*, *Hairspray*, *Great Debaters*, *I’m Not There*, *Kite Runner*, *Namesake*, *There Will Be Blood*

Best Actor

None of the other nominees can derail Daniel Day-Lewis from an Oscar for “There Will Be Blood.” He doesn’t act in lots of films, and other actors are in awe of him. Curiously his films receive uneven levels of appreciation.



Winning Oscar for “My Left Foot” in 1990, Day-Lewis didn’t cast a shadow over all the other nominees as he does this time.

Could the American West have been tamed to deliver big oil without the fierce determination Day-Lewis portrays from the start of “There Will Be Blood”? He carves a small empire, with ruthless and single-minded focus, throughout the film.

Some acting challenges build on deep dependencies between characters. It’s fair to say that such roles are tougher to realize. More singularly, Day-Lewis ratchets the intensity of a transcendent yet mundane man. It’s a testament to his acting that he doesn’t burst into caricature. It could have happened anywhere in the film, especially its excessive ending.

George Clooney is a world’s sexiest, world’s most beautiful type. Yet, behind his smug command, we have a professional adept at putting everything in its place. He rolls with the idol thing. He takes fun movies seriously and heavy movies seriously. Sometimes he produces or writes or directs.

Such Renaissance-man attributes, with pretty-boy as the top layer, can keep a deserving contender from winning Oscars, but George cracked that nut, too, with supporting actor Gold for “Syriana” (2005).

As “Michael Clayton,” Clooney cuts a multi-faceted character well. He’s a corporate “fixer” of bad behaviors large and small. He’s also hamstrung by his own problematic behavior. His character labels what might be considered a glamorous specialty as being a janitor. The very complexities and vulnerabilities that make Clooney and “Michael Clayton” work don’t generate the same kind of wow that Day-Lewis and “There Will Be Blood” do.

It seems unlikely that Viggo Mortensen would have received an Oscar nomination if it wasn’t for his

naked fight scene in “Eastern Promises.” Dangling a naked man in a Hollywood movie registers as bold acting, compared with the far more common directives that actresses must bear.

In fairness to Viggo, he plays an ambitious tough guy in the Russian mafia very well. Amidst the brutal perversities of criminal life, Viggo’s character plays it cool. “Eastern Promises” is one of those films about behaving bad in order to do good in a world of bad. Last year’s Oscar winner, “The Departed,” did it better. Both films end up glamorizing extremes at least as much as exposing them.

A leader in bold acting, Johnny Depp repeatedly flaunts peculiar challenges. After chasing the blockbuster sequel dollar too far in the “Pirates of the Caribbean,” Depp moved on to another commercially viable version of strange.

As “Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street,” Depp sings better than the producers may have expected. All in all, this adaptation of the Broadway musical is somewhat flat, but Depp puts effective gothic charm into his warbling serial killer. Even though he is one of the finest actors working today, Depp won’t win his first Oscar by doing such a playful part, even if he does dare to sing.

Moviegoers don’t know that what made Tommy Lee Jones good in “No Country for Old Men” made him better in “In the Valley of Elah.” This Middle East based film bombed worse than the full frontal finger wagging of “Lions for Lambs” and “Rendition.”

Too bad. Though “Elah” feels a bit too much like a scripted story, it’s a tense, emotional combination of a mystery to solve plus a personalized example of the toll of war.

A critical but sidelined counterpoint in “No Country,” Jones makes the whole story happen in “Elah.” He plays a hard bitten military retiree and a father trying find out what happened to his son. Jones plays versions of no-nonsense strength in film after film and always effectively. “Elah,” however, is nowhere near noticeable enough to give Jones any Oscar traction.

Best Actress

If the film “La Vie en Rose” weren’t in French with subtitles to read, and if the organizing vision of the movie wasn’t such a mess, Marion Cotillard would be a lock for the Best Actress Oscar.

Cotillard plays Edith Piaf. You may not have heard of Piaf, although she is arguably the most iconic French entertainer ever. Cotillard is all but possessed by the look and spirit of Piaf. The agonizing ups and downs of this physically tiny but passionately huge singer tug at you, whether you are familiar with Piaf or not.

Piaf sang a song, “No Regrets,” about her hard living, hard loving life, a life filled with misfortune and brimming with excess. This racked her insides. It shriveled her appearance and ability to function. She was old by age 40 and dead three years later.

Make up alone could not deliver the shocking transformation. The brilliance of Cotillard’s mimicry and singing gel with the incomparable life force she was called to portray.

Oscar, however, will honor an acting triumph that is very different. There is a tendency to think that a quieter role is less challenging. This is not so with Julie Christie in “Away from Her.”



Christie plays an Alzheimer’s sufferer. The character descends into the clutches of the disease with dignity and elegance and with a transformed sort of understanding. Her condition makes her the center of the movie’s attention. However, much to Christie’s credit, she balances the lead with the troubled awareness of her husband. He comes to terms, all too slowly, with being “Away from Her.”

More than 40 years after her Lara in “Dr. Zhivago,” Christie continues to be a vision of womanhood. This is not frequently what Hollywood offers a woman in her mid sixties.

Deserving as her performance is, Christie will get the Oscar, to a notable extent, because she is an older actress, blossoming in accomplishment. This is a senior boost for Christie, even though it is premature to think of her as old.

Cate Blanchett is no less than commanding. Good thing, no doubt, if you’re playing Queen Elizabeth, one of the most impressive reigns in the history of royalty. The trouble with crediting Blanchett in this role is that her film, “Elizabeth: The Golden Age” is awash with grand, royal posturing and very little interesting about it.

Blanchett was already nominated for the same part in 1999 when the film was merely called “Elizabeth” with no subtitle or sequel in sight. That first film, with Cate Blanchett front and center, was far more striking. Furthermore, she won an Oscar recently playing Katharine Hepburn in “The Aviator.” Her chances disappear completely behind her deserving contention for a Best Supporting Oscar playing Bob Dylan in “I’m Not There.”

Laura Linney is a better actress than most actresses who get more attention than she does. She typically plays plainer personalities. Nonetheless, Linney often takes on vulnerability and other acting nuances in dependably satisfying ways.

In “The Savages,” it may be one of the only times one might suggest that Linney isn’t creating something especially fresh. She plays the sister of a pair of siblings coping with a father falling into Alzheimer’s. You might be more impressed with what she does with the role, if you aren’t familiar with her work in films like “The Truman Show,” “You Can Count on Me,” and “Kinsey.”

It doesn’t help that “The Savages” is a downbeat comedy that hardly stacks up to “Away from Her,” the other Alzheimer’s story in this category.

If you want to talk about a fresh performance, Ellen Page is the name to remember. She has a slight chance of winning if voters fall into the thrall of a young, new face. Though she is perfect as the title character, “Juno,” her part in this wholly satisfying comedy cannot seem as substantial as the frontrunners.

Playing a teen dealing with a pregnancy from a one-time-only experience, the biggest buzz, even without an Oscar to go with it, goes to Ellen Page.