

# THE CampChuck REVIEWER

*A nonprofit subsidiary of CampChuck*



THIRTIETH ANNUAL EDITION

<http://www.startlets.com>

February 15, 2009

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

## Meryl Streep Replacing Hillary Clinton

page 9

### The 81st ANNUAL ACADEMY AWARDS Nominations

Oscar Night: Sunday, February 22

#### **Best Picture**

Curious Case of Benjamin Button, The      David Fincher  
Frost/Nixon      Ron Howard  
Milk      Gus Van Sant  
Reader, The      Stephen Daldry  
Slumdog Millionaire      Danny Boyle

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President, Precedent, Prescient      3  
Best Supporting      4  
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#### **Best Actor**

Richard Jenkins      *The Visitor*  
Frank Langella      *Frost/Nixon*  
Sean Penn      *Milk*  
Brad Pitt      *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*  
Mickey Rourke      *The Wrestler*

### Thirty Years of CampChuck

#### **Best Actress**

Anne Hathaway      *Rachel Getting Married*  
Angelina Jolie      *Changeling*  
Melissa Leo      *Frozen River*  
Meryl Streep      *Doubt*  
Kate Winslet      *The Reader*

1980      Premier Edition (4 page format 1<sup>st</sup> three years)  
1981,      Only times predicting fewer than 3 for 6 of  
1983,      Picture, Director, Actor, Actress, Supporting  
2002,      Actor and Supporting Actress  
2003      Name change to "The CampChuck Reviewer"  
                from "The Unsolicited Movie Newsletter"  
1986      CampChuck Film Festivals, including special  
                newsletter editions  
1986,      First year of annual subscription/donation  
1990,      invitation to readers; from 1992 to date, 100%  
1994      passed through to RMI and Food Banks along  
                with 100% CampChuck match (see page 3)  
1992      2nd special travel edition (unique 4 months,  
                Europe 1986, was 1st); total travel editions=16  
1994,      Six for six predictions of Picture, Director,  
2004      Actor, Actress, Supporting Actor and Actress  
1995      1<sup>st</sup> time available on internet  
1996      1<sup>st</sup> printed answer to "The Question": "How  
                many did you guess right?" (16 year rate: 58%)  
2005      Bought 1<sup>st</sup> DVD player; began using Netflix;  
                1<sup>st</sup> time ever viewing a major nomination,  
                before Oscar night, *not* in a movie theater  
2005      Begin [www.startlets.com](http://www.startlets.com) internet site  
2004      2<sup>nd</sup> best prediction streak, 73%; followed worst  
                prediction streak, 1999-2003, 40% and best  
                streak, 1993-1997, 77% (29 year rate: 58%)  
thru      2008  
2009      Thirtieth annual edition

#### **Best Supporting Actor**

Josh Brolin      *Milk*  
Robert Downey Jr.      *Tropic Thunder*  
Philip Seymour Hoffman      *Doubt*  
Heath Ledger      *The Dark Knight*  
Michael Shannon      *Revolutionary Road*

#### **Best Supporting Actress**

Amy Adams      *Doubt*  
Penelope Cruz      *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*  
Viola Davis      *Doubt*  
Taraji P. Henson      *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*  
Marisa Tomei      *The Wrestler*

(Underlined nominees equal CampChuck predictions)

(continued from page 4)

## Best Supporting Actor

it thinks it is, Ledger deserves the honor he will win.



A study of great acting without celebrity puff is Philip Seymour Hoffman. In "Doubt" he portrays a priest who may or may not have behaved unacceptably with a child. He straddles appropriate indignation and possible guilt to incisive effect.

Matched up against Meryl Streep in "Doubt," both she and Hoffman will miss out on Oscar because, for them, they are too good to win for a film that won't be seen as special enough.

Michael Shannon (who?) injects nothing memorable, except that his supporting role in "Revolutionary Road" earned an Oscar nod while Leonardo DiCaprio's mainstream intensity in that film was overlooked. As the neighbor and a sexual release valve for Kate Winslet's character, Shannon is effective but nondescript and hardly key.

Josh Brolin is entirely key to a story about a watershed challenge to the status quo, but his presence in "Milk" is too ordinary on the same list with Heath Ledger's Joker hold on the family of actors.

Straightlaced, ineffectual, frustrated, Brolin's character cracks and the first openly gay public official is murdered. It's a toss up which deserves more attention: an example of an all too real blemish on human progress; or entertaining quasi-symbols of disproportionate evil.

## Manufactured Mailbag

Dear Editor,

Couldn't Tom Cruise, Will Smith, Harrison Ford, Bruce Willis, Spielberg, you know, a bunch of those billions grossing movie guys help bail out our economy?

Pub Jonkew, Cheyenne, WY

Dear Pub,

Spielberg is a billionaire, but billion dollar box office does not translate to billionaire actors. Anyway, it does seem like they all can afford to help more than the government can. Imagine a spell cast over 1000 people worth over a billion dollars, making them tithe 10% (20%) to appropriate projects. If we cast the tithe from anyone worth more than 100 million, the spell would include a fair bunch of actors -- and scads more beneficiaries.

Ed.

Dear Editor,

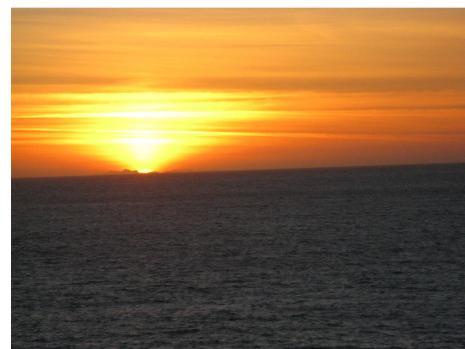
Your retirement ended, didn't it?

Bea Bizzebod, Provo, UT

Dear Bea,

September 2008, the sun set on my June 2007 retirement. Back working til the next sunrise.

Ed.



Dear Editor,

It irks me in movies when a guy, who's clearly way faster than the man or woman he's chasing, takes a ridiculously dramatic amount of times to catch the person.

Chevy Sanborn, Louisville, KY

Dear Chevy,

Yes, but at least they're never too out of breath to engage in script-advancing dialog or fisticuffs.

Ed.

Dear Editor,

Man, what is all this documentary film appreciation pouring into your halfway sane movie madness?

A friend, Los Angeles

Dear friend,

Halfway sane, indeed. You just keep your balance by going to see "The Dark Knight" for the 18<sup>th</sup> time. Some of my loose movie screws are held in place by the improving presence of documentary films. From the heartwarming vitality in 2008's "Young@Heart" to a treasure trove of films at the Wild & Scenic Environmental Film Festival, moviegoers should be on the lookout for the variety, awareness-raising, and typically non-commercial-minded qualities of documentaries.

Ed.

Find *The CampChuck Reviewer* at <http://www.startlets.com>.  
Email: [jaffee@startlets.com](mailto:jaffee@startlets.com)  
(that's three "t's" in startlets).

## President, Precedent, Prescient

Barack Obama now leads the fact and tone of America's example. We, the People, carry the fact and tone of that example in the way we follow our leaders and lead our leaders. President Obama is the symbol of America. Not of hope and change. OK, that, too. Obama is part White and part Black, and in America, that means you're Black. Issues of race symbolize the United States, crystallize the complexity of the example America sets for an ever shrinking world.

Along with that soul of truth, the engine of America's truth has always been the entrepreneurial spirit. We need it thriving now. We need it to be well led and well followed. The color of that spirit leads Green. Not the color of money. OK, that, too.

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 \$27,000 plus CampChuck's 100% match of \$27,000 -- 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.

### Food Bank of Nevada County

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.

Please, make checks payable to  
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(or to  
"Food Bank of Nevada County")

### Rocky Mountain Institute

This nonprofit helps individuals and communities and businesses and governments to make money, yes, make money, by being smart about the environment. By research and science, by education and negotiation, by example, the Rocky Mountain Institute helps us ... and the U.S. ... and the world "us" to make long term economic sense by making long term environmental sense.

Please, send "subscription" donations to  
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## CampChuck Predictions (as also indicated by underlined nominees on page one)

"Slumdog Millionaire," with great credit to Danny Boyle, most notably demonstrates size, creative flare, and deserving execution. Kate Winslet is overdue for her Oscar and once again her acting combines control and daring. Sean Penn's measured performance amidst socially and politically incendiary possibility will edge out the sentimental favorite, Mickey Rourke. Adams, Davis, and Henson cancel each other out but don't cancel out Penelope Cruz. Ledger wins for sure because his death coincided with his immersion in a tantalizing role.

**Picture and Director:**

*Slumdog Millionaire*

Danny Boyle, *Slumdog Millionaire*

**Actress and Actor:**

Kate Winslet, *The Reader*

Sean Penn, *Milk*

**Supporting Actress & Actor:**

Penelope Cruz, *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*

Heath Ledger, *The Dark Knight*

America,  
You Black now.

Haw.  
You always  
Been Black.

Naw.  
Ain' no taint.

It always  
Been yo'  
Potential.

## Best Supporting Actress

Who knows how Marisa Tomei won an Oscar for the formula comedy, "My Cousin Vinny" (1992). It will not happen again just because 40-plus year old Tomei struts her naked stuff as a stripper in "The Wrestler."

Best Actress contender Kate Winslet has bared her bod several times. Her forays seem to tackle challenging parts that happen to include nudity. When Tomei does it (a couple of times recently), it shows more like trying to prove her middle aged acting chops.

Let's be clear. Tomei's bod does the job well. Fairer than that, she plays a complex character well -- a single mom earning a living, working not to cross certain lines, and being touched by the need of a man.

Now on to the deserving Supporting Actress Oscar contenders.

In "Doubt" what Viola Davis does with a few minutes on screen is phenomenal. As the mother of a Black boy at risk in a White school and at risk in his father's home, Davis delivers a practical plea that nearly upstages the film's three other outstanding performances.

Davis's part is just too small and she's too unknown. Add to that, she and Amy Adams will siphon votes from each other, both with strong supporting performances in the same film.

Amy Adams plays a classic supporting role. Without the seed she plants in "Doubt," the story cannot sustain its considerable tension. As a young nun and

teacher, Adams injects a vital absence of entrenchment that characterizes her confident superiors. Furthermore this is a fine dramatic turn from the bubblier acting fair of a busy actress nominated for her second Oscar.

Not only will Davis and Adams pull votes from each other, Davis and Taraji P. Henson will also dampen each other's chances.

Like Davis, Henson plays an earthy Black mother, making life work as well as she can. Unlike Davis, Henson's part in "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" is a more traditional, southern style Black woman. Although it's a well-sized, confident, and firmly grounded portrayal in a big film with 12 other Oscar nominations, Henson's part feels too familiar to win an Academy Award.

Only one role does not seem to bump up against conflicting comparisons. In "Vicky Cristina Barcelona," Penelope Cruz plays a high strung, perhaps loony, former wife, still percolating through her former husband's world, including his new lover. Cruz lends a complex vivaciousness to the character. She builds on strong acting turns in Spanish language films.

Her considerable celebrity appeal hardly works against her in a successful film directed by Woody Allen. Neither does her previous nomination in Pedro Almodovar's "Volver." Cruz will win because, as L'Oreal will tell you, "She's worth it."



## Best Supporting Actor

Pretend for a moment that anyone but Heath Ledger has a chance to win Best Supporting Actor.

Robert Downey Jr. does seriously impressive acting having fun in "Tropic Thunder." Not incidentally, he did the same in a better 2008 summer blockbuster, "Iron Man."

In "Tropic Thunder," an over-the-top action comedy, Downey plays a White actor who acts off camera as if he were a Black guy because he's playing a Black guy in a war film. Meanwhile, he doesn't know that the film location is smack in the middle of a real war.

Downey is a much respected actor, in part because of demons he has overcome in real life.

Heath Ledger did not overcome his demons. Sadly, it is fair to say that the death, last year, of this 28 year old assures him a Best Supporting Actor Oscar. It is also fair to say he deserves the Oscar.

Unlike Downey, who loses Oscar mojo because his role is merely blockbuster comedy fodder, Ledger's boffo appearance gets a pass – even a boost. In "The Dark Knight," Ledger plays The Joker with a menacing flare that transcends caricature. He is clearly the best thing about a cluttered special effects extravaganza.

Because of the way Ledger plays evil for evil's sake, he is the most tantalizing of the nominated supporting roles. The way his comic book portrayal rises above a film that is not as heady as

(continued on page 2)

## Best Picture / Best Director

If you can inject one of the following two ingredients of movie magic into a film, you're well on the way to making a good film. Mesh both and you're well on the way to winning the 81<sup>st</sup> Oscars for Best Picture and Best Director.

First of all, "Slumdog Millionaire" feels like a film you've never seen, and yet it has a familiar resonance. Second, "Slumdog Millionaire" captivates with a hugely preposterous whir of circumstances and coincidences.

Set in the teeming Indian metropolis of Mumbai, director Danny Boyle exposes us to a level of poverty and outcast population that should humble any class of people in the United States. Still, this cinematic manipulation is a romantic fantasy, as real as anything that was ever pumped out of the studio system of Hollywood in its heyday.

Using three sets of kids, the story spans more than a decade. This timeline adds to the movie's size, another Oscar boost. The youngest set of three kids, skilled and adorable, set the tone. They escape death and fates worse than death.

Providing the storytelling stage for all this is the Indian version of the "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" TV show. Instead of trivializing or messing up the film effort, this inspired storytelling linchpin heightens our hopes and worries.

The last quarter of the movie trades in some of its excellence but remains pretty much top notch. The very last scene reminds us that none of this heavy and heart tugging trip should be taken too seriously. (No, knowing about this surprise spoils nothing.)

Only "Milk" is a contender that competes well for a Best Picture or Director Oscar. Completely different in style from "Slumdog," Gus Van Sant's "Milk" purposely chooses a moderate style to heighten historical awareness and human drama.

Homosexuality is still hugely controversial, and yet TV and films lend it a peculiar kind of familiarity. It's not so easy to put entrenched perspectives into fuller light or to avoid presenting gays in ways that cater to various stereotypes.



"Milk" does a great service showing what a big deal it was when being openly gay was just starting to be possible. "Milk" is Harvey Milk, the first openly gay person to be elected to public office in California. That was a very big deal, not the least being that Milk was murdered less than a year later by a fellow official.

What makes "Milk" an especially good movie is the way director Van Sant and title character Sean Penn tone down many storytelling dynamics. They let the core story be how people learn to work within the system. They make a story about persistence. (Milk lost 3 runs for supervisor before winning.) While the core story is a historic example of being an active citizen, the mix of personalities and personal needs keeps the film well rounded and well grounded.

While not a serious contender to win Oscars (except Best Actress; see page 8), "The Reader" is nonetheless a bold, mostly effective story on film.

Movies deserve attention when they try to add something fresh to difficult themes. Not that such films haven't been done, some frown at or dismiss a love affair between a fifteen year old and a woman more than twice his age. What the affair means in their later lives is quite a remarkable twist on time and intimacy and devotion.

There's no shortage of films about the Holocaust. Some might say "The Reader" is too humanizing in reflecting on the life of a former Nazi. "The Reader" earns the thought provoking attention it stirs about justice, official and otherwise. With bigger ideas swirling around them, the story is mostly about how two people cope with who they are and what their lives have been.

The only Best Picture nominee that shouldn't even be on the list of five is "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button." Somehow this tedious, overlong film garnered 13 Oscar nominations. (Four films share the record of 14.)

This idea of a person who starts life old and grows young for 80 years runs into all kinds of storytelling

(continued on page 6)

## Obses Respectfully Keeping Track

## Best Picture / Best Director

Acting is not a competition. That said, Meryl Streep crushes the competition as the best movie actor (man or woman) ever. Awards, most notably the Oscars, make acting seem like a competition. Acting is not a competition. Nonetheless, Streep earned Oscar nomination 15 for the movie, "Doubt." (See page 8.)

Katharine Hepburn received her 12<sup>th</sup> Oscar nomination 48 years after her 1st, at age 74. Streep's 15<sup>th</sup> nomination, at age 59, came only 30 years after her first. She averages an Oscar nod every 2 years!

There is, however, an estimable cloud over this Oscar-measured "best ever" thing. Hepburn won four Oscars. Streep has won only two. Could it be that Meryl Streep ever thinks, "I have two more years before I'm the same age Hepburn was when she won her 3<sup>rd</sup> Oscar, but hey, she went 34 years between her 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Oscars"?

I should have waited to write this until Meryl wins her 3<sup>rd</sup> Oscar (probably not this year), but I couldn't help myself. Although the cloud will remain in her sky when she wins her 3<sup>rd</sup> Oscar, it will dispatch Jack Nicholson (12 nominations, 3 wins) from challenging Meryl's best-ever positioning.

Acting is not a competition, but Meryl, you're the best living actor (and the best ever).

inadequacies that lots of people seem willing to swallow. OK, the magic of movies overcomes this time and again. Not here. The magic, wisdom, and juice of Benjamin Button is stunted. There's too much ground to cover and not enough going on.

"Frost/Nixon" also suffers from limitations, but unlike "Benjamin Button," its strengths build and arrive at a place that has effective chemistry. "Frost/Nixon" has the advantage of providing an intimate view of the aura that continues to surround Richard Nixon.

The key limitation of "Frost/Nixon" is that David Frost never feels like an equivalent match to Richard Nixon. One might say the results of the drama vindicate this feeling, but for Oscar consideration you spend quite a bit of time with a story and a personality that feel too lightweight.

"Frost/Nixon" supposedly raises awareness about an important detail of political history. As a film it's more like dramatizing a footnote, while giving Frank Langella an opportunity to do a masterful Richard Nixon impersonation.

Reflecting the films of 2008, the 81<sup>st</sup> Oscars don't seem particularly memorable, but "Slumdog Millionaire" definitely transcends the pack.

### Top Ten

A top ten should have more films vying for inclusion and a surer sense of why each merits the list. Anyway...

- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1. <i>Slumdog Millionaire</i> : | Ambitious and fresh, yet with familiar resonance; its big movie magic works   |
| 2. <i>Milk</i> :                | Even keeled, very human watershed of trying to make the system work   |
| 3. <i>Young@Heart</i> :         | Its cup brims with affirmation of life; fills you with gladness, warmth and respect   |
| 4. <i>The Reader</i> :          | A provocative yarn: a unique relationship and a different Holocaust perspective   |
| 5. <i>The Visitor</i> :         | Character rich, an issue picture that's not an issue picture; it's a relationship film  |
| 6. <i>Happy-Go-Lucky</i> :      | Its extreme brand of positive resignation is fresh and real, if you can take it   |
| 7. <i>Doubt</i> :               | Four outstanding acting performances make a solidly good film seem much better  |
| 8. <i>Iron Man</i> :            | Much better sci-fantasy blockbuster than <i>The Dark Knight</i> 's overblown clutter  |
| 9. <i>The Wrestler</i> :        | Delivers a crude sweetness and a sad combination of pride and humility  |
| 10. <i>The Fall</i> :           | So visually enticing, the challenge is well worth its storytelling shortcomings   |
| After the top ten:              | (alphabetically): <i>Cadillac Records</i> ; <i>Frost/Nixon</i> ; <i>Vicky Cristina Barcelona</i>  |
| Foreign language films:         | [I've not seen these, but suspect they might compete for top ten consideration] <i>A Christmas Tale</i> ; <i>The Class</i> ; <i>Let the Right One In</i> ; <i>Waltz with Bashir</i> |

## Best Actor

“The Curious Case of Benjamin Button” is endearing if you buy into it early and hang on to its sentiment through the story’s tedious unfolding. Across more than 80 years, the script gives Brad Pitt too much ground to cover and not enough to do, except to be adorable when he’s wrinkly and small, and to become eye-candy Brad Pitt after he isn’t.

Pitt has earned acting credit solidly beyond pretty-boy stardom, but he’s riding an overgrown Hollywood gimmick playing a guy who starts life old and grows young. Pitt is the only nominated actor who doesn’t rate Oscar Gold consideration.

Richard Jenkins also cannot win Best Actor, but at least it’s satisfying to bow with full respect for his unassuming lead in “The Visitor.” A familiar face from TV and movies, this little known name plays a white-bread professor wallowing in deflated midlife. When that life intertwines with 2 illegal immigrants, we share growing vitality and relationships.

Unlike “Benjamin Button,” the contrivance and arc of “The Visitor” fades into the background of storytelling. Unlike Pitt, Jenkins’s story lets him develop a character we grow to care about, rather than a character that is essentially an overdrawn exercise.

If Frank Langella is somewhat less understandable as an actor’s favorite for the Oscars, it may be because his long and award-winning career has foremost been Broadway. With a Tony Award for doing Richard Nixon on stage, he has his first Oscar nod converting “Frost/Nixon” from stage to screen.

Langella occupies a higher plateau of recognition and regard than Jenkins. Incarnating the lightning rod that is Richard Nixon boosts his chances further. People have such a vivid image of the look and sound of the real Richard Nixon. It works for and against Langella’s chances. The acting seems more masterful than the script, leaving an opening for other Best Actor nominees.

The sentimental favorite is Mickey Rourke cast in the part of a lifetime. Playing “The Wrestler,” Rourke uses his own wreck of a life as a model. Well past his prime, Rourke’s wrestler comes closest to having a life when he’s in the professional

spotlight. Well past his prime, Rourke, the actor, helped director Darren Aronofsky fully exploit him. Rourke plays very affectingly in this spotlight.

Rourke’s good chance to win is about more than sympathy voting. He sucks us into crude sweetness, a sad combination of pride and humility. The story is straightforward. The daughter the wrestler hardly knows might find it in her heart not to hate her father. The stripper might find it in her heart to think of the wrestler as more than a customer. And there’s the wrestler, who never really knew what to find in his heart except maybe one more night in the arena.

Already an Oscar winner for “Mystic River,” Sean Penn’s depiction of “Milk,” Harvey Milk, strikes a perfectly measured tone. Penn represents a watershed bit of history that does more than inspire an Oscar win. He brings to life the drive that Harvey Milk must have sustained to work boldly but astutely within the system. Penn has channeled a spirit of activism and citizenship on screen and helps us feel the ideas that drive it.

Behind Harvey Milk’s ideas was plenty of heart. Through Penn, we feel the emotion and the personal needs of this man, without it exceeding a certain pitch. Penn makes this film work because he needs to play very gay, without it feeling anything like stereotype. That way, the film could effectively tell its core story about running and losing and running and winning public office. The head and heart Penn puts in this role gives him a doubled advantage that will win the Oscar.



Jan: 2009: documentaries given awards at Nevada City’s Wild & Scenic Environmental Film Festival:

<i>3Peaks 3 Weeks</i>	Women fundraising in Africa
<i>American Outrage</i>	Native women vs. big mining
<i>Fighting Goliath</i>	Texas mayors vs. big coal
<i>Garbage Warrior</i>	Radical architect at work
<i>I Met the Walrus</i>	Doodles on a John Lennon talk
<i>The Price of Sugar</i>	Tireless priest vs. big sugar
<i>Saving Luna</i>	A whale of a friend to all
<i>So Right So Smart</i>	Proven green in big business
<i>Under Our Skin</i>	Lyme sufferers vs. deniers
<i>Wild Ocean</i>	A bastion of underwater life

## Best Actress

My fancy for Meryl Streep is no secret. I'm ready for her to receive her third Oscar. (See page 6.) In "Doubt" she adds a new accent to her famous ability to do accents.

Purposely overstated, the New York drawl matches the essence of a domineering nun, a Catholic school principal. The accent shoves through stares and body language that evince another stellar Streep offering.

For her 15<sup>th</sup> Oscar nomination, Streep can be set aside as this year's Best Actress. Why? Because, her role is a bit blunt, and it's in a film not quite special enough for this best-ever movie actor.

Another serious contender, Anne Hathaway, must certainly be thrilled that her first Oscar nomination shares a berth with the great Meryl Streep. Indeed, she faired more impressively acting toe to toe with Ms. Streep in "Devil Wears Prada."

Nominated for "Rachel Getting Married," Hathaway has graduated, this being what is commonly labeled a courageous role. She plays a woman with a driven need for attention and a stressful scenario for someone mired in guilt and just out of drug rehab.

Despite a well earned dramatic diploma, the film's approach makes this young star more a sore thumb than an Oscar winner. Behind her emotional roller coaster, more interesting dynamics get short shrift.

Hathaway is probably better suited to romantic comedy, but this role proves she deserves more shots at (better written) heavy drama.

Unlike Hathaway, Angelina Jolie has a proven track record as a dramatic actor. Among other roles, she won Best Supporting actress playing a seriously disturbed young woman in "Girl, Interrupted."

In "Changeling," Jolie plays another highly disturbed woman. This time, her character is incorrigibly sane, not giving up an inch in the search for her missing son. As with Hathaway, neon signs flash that this rates an Oscar nomination.

Once again, the script undermines the Oscar merits of a performance. Though heart wrenching, the pitch of "Changeling" is too shrill to embrace it

fully. There is no doubt. Jolie leaves her unparalleled celebrity at the door, but this commanding actress can scope out her second Oscar elsewhere.

Melissa Leo stands as far from Jolie and Hathaway as any single list of Oscar nominees could allow. Though long busy as an actress, it's fair to label Leo as an unknown. Her low key performance in a low key film, "Frozen River," deserves respect, but still leaves her essentially below the radar.

"Frozen River" exposes a willing moviegoer to a fresh telling of drab and desperate reality encased in rural poverty. This film and Melissa Leo deserve winning applause from the 843 people who will ever see it. Too bad. The story is neither mundane nor far fetched. It involves child smuggling and a telling juxtaposition of marginalized Whites and Native Americans. It is disarmingly matter of fact.

Kate Winslet was the youngest actress ever to be nominated for a second Oscar, the youngest actress to be nominated for a fourth Oscar and a fifth Oscar. The 33 year old is ripe to win.

In "The Reader," her character engages most alluringly in a sexual affair with a 15 year old boy. On top of that, she plays a former Nazi. Anything offputting about these story elements, Winslet deftly adds to the shape of solitary human affectations.

The affair carries a sort of humble vitality, but also an intimate impact that seeds a unique flowering of the relationship decades later. As a former Nazi, she carries the burden of trying to be an ordinary person, of trying to pigeonhole her compliance with extraordinary decisions in her past. It adds a well-treated perspective on the Holocaust.

Oddly, Winslet has already won the Screen Actors Guild and Golden Globes awards for Best

Supporting Actress for "The Reader." For those she had the advantage of a leading role and no rule saying she couldn't be placed in the supporting category. Oscar voters won't be stunted by the competing classification. A psychological obstacle perhaps, but voters will grant what she's earned – Oscar Gold.

