

The Snubbies: Best Actress

by Joe Mulder

We now move on to what I found to be the toughest Snubbie category: Best Actress. It turns out that most Best Actress nominations – and most snubs – come from movies that I'd have no intention of ever seeing, so I can't claim to be bringing a particularly large amount of expertise to bear. Perhaps Helen Mirren or Judi Dench or somebody should have been nominated for *Old British People From Back Before There Were Cars*, but I have no way of knowing.

Another reason this was a tough category to fill is that other than "chick flicks" and soporific period pieces, let's face it: not that many movies are made starring women. The chick flicks are rarely Oscar caliber, and pretty much any actress who appears in a period piece (especially if she's British) gets a nod; it's tough to pick out very many Best Actress snubs because, at least since Madonna and Debbie Reynolds got left out in 1996, pretty much anyone who's thought of as a potential Best Actress nominee actually gets nominated.

But we soldier on. Luckily, we've got the Academy's bizarre prejudice against comedies and movies set in the present day to bail us out. Also, the Academy evidently has no time for young hot American actresses in this category. Luckily, young hot American actresses are pretty much our favorite type of people here at PoopReading.com, so we can set things right.

Best Actress

Nominees:

[Amy Adams](#), *Enchanted*

[Julie Delpy](#), *Before Sunset*

[Scarlett Johansson](#), *Lost in Translation*

[Natalie Portman](#), *Garden State*

[Keri Russell](#), *Waitress*

As the father of two very young daughters it's highly unlikely that I will ever see any other live-action Best Actress Snubbie contender's performance as often as I've seen that of Amy Adams in *Enchanted*. Luckily for me, Adams is effervescent and irreplaceable as Giselle, a cartoon Disney princess transported via an evil spell into live-action, present-day Manhattan.

She sings, she dances, she charms, and she even emotes quite skillfully, particularly in a scene during which her ever-chipper princess first encounters the not very fairy tale-like frustration and anger that you can feel when you've finally had enough of the worst quality of someone you deeply care for (in this case, Patrick Dempsey's character's unimaginative cynicism regarding love).

This is far more than standard kiddie-movie fare. In fact *Enchanted*, and in particular Amy Adams' performance in it, deserve to be considered among the very best entertainment that mainstream Hollywood has produced in recent years. If Amy Adams becomes one of her generation's most successful and popular stars, nobody who saw *Enchanted* will be the least bit surprised.

You can't go home again. That's generally the way it works, right? You get together with a certain people at a certain place, nothing all that memorable happens but it all adds up to one of the more memorable nights of your life, so a little while later you try to get everybody back to the same place and recreate the experience once again, only it's never quite the same. That sort of thing almost never works, and probably won't work this time either.

But one of the nice things about life is that "almost never" isn't "never," and that "probably won't" isn't "won't."

Thus we have *Before Sunset*, a movie attempting improbably to recapture the fleeting, of-the-moment spirit of something once possessed with almost magical charm (namely *Before Sunrise*, the little-seen but much-beloved film to which it is the sequel). What's more, the movie itself is *about* characters attempting improbably to recapture the fleeting, of-the-moment spirit of something once possessed with an almost magical charm.

Wonder of wonders, it all works.

For the filmmakers, the audience and the characters themselves, *Before Sunset* not only recaptures the magic of *Before Sunrise*, it builds upon it. In *Sunrise* Ethan Hawke (Jesse) and Julie Delpy (Celine), having met on a train and spent an unforgettable night exploring Vienna together on the eve of Jesse's return to America, decided to reunite again in six months. Did they?

Before Sunset catches up with the two characters nine years later. Jesse is at a Paris bookstore, the last stop on a tour to promote a novel he's written that is, from what we can surmise, not-too-loosely based on his night in Vienna with Celine. His book ends with the two characters vowing to reconnect in six months but, like *Before Sunrise*, gives no indication as to whether the meeting takes place. Celine shows up to say "hi," we soon learn that this is the first time they've seen each other since the day they met, and for the next hour-and-a-half we watch them have one long, meandering conversation about, essentially, the universe and their place in it. That's the movie, and it's absolutely wonderful to watch. All along it appears that the events of their initial meeting affected the course of the rest of Jesse's life dramatically, certainly more so than they did Celine, and yet the subtle genius of Delpy's performance is that you don't realize until later that the reason there's a sequel in the first

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place is because *she* went to see *him*.

It's as if Celine wants to reconnect with Jesse but needs it to be his idea. She'd spend the rest of her life alone before she'd admit to a regret or a mistake, but maybe if she shows up at the bookstore it won't come to that. She wants to hit the "reset" button on certain aspects of her life just as much as Jesse does. Just as much as we all do.

The very best of cinema – indeed, the very best art – reveals something about our condition while also providing us with a kind of psychic wish fulfillment we can't get anywhere else. *Before Sunset* gently asserts that we don't turn into the people we thought we'd be; but it also leaves us to suspect that's not necessarily so tragic. And we can't really go back and relive our youth with the wisdom we've acquired in our maturity, of course; but watching Julie Delpy's Celine try to get it right this time around, we get to live an hour-and-a-half of our lives as if we could.

This is where it gets tough, because these last three performances came in movies I either didn't see or didn't particularly care for. Although in all three instances I don't really blame the movie; it's probably more my fault. In any case, I only feel qualified to cover each one briefly, so here goes.

Everybody seemed to love *Lost in Translation* except me, although I certainly didn't hate it. It has to be considered one of *the* movies of 2003, though, and it doesn't really work without Scarlett Johansson. I mean, Bill Murray's sure as hell not going to form an unlikely, cross-generational bond with *himself* based on a mutual isolated directionlessness, is he? I don't think so.

And I really didn't want to get into bringing up any actual Oscar nominees during the course of the Snubbies, but, really, in terms of impact on early 21st century film, which of the following 2003 performances "stuck": Diane Keaton in *Something's Gotta Give*, or Scarlett Johansson in *Lost in Translation*? Because Diane Keaton was nominated, and Scarlett Johansson wasn't. No matter what you think of *Lost in Translation*, that probably could have been handled differently.

As on board as I was with Zach Braff in the middle of the decade due to "Scrubs," I didn't really get *Garden State*. I did find Natalie Portman's Sam, however, to be a very interesting and memorable character. She did get nominated for Best Supporting Actress for *Closer* the same year that *Garden State* came out, so it's tough to argue that she wasn't doing Oscar-caliber work right around that time.

Other than that, though, I don't have much else to say. Sorry, *Garden State* fans.

I've never even seen *Waitress*, but quite literally everybody I approached for Snubbie suggestions mentioned Keri Russell's work in that film as deserving of consideration, and that's good enough for me.

And the Snubbie goes to:

Amy Adams, *Enchanted*. I mean, come on; she sings, she dances... well, actually, so does Julie Delpy in *Before Sunset*, now that I think of it. Still, it's Amy Adams, in the closest Snubbie race to date.
