

Oscar Picks 2011!

by Joe Mulder

I'm not going to lie to you, folks: I don't feel particularly good about my Oscar picks this year. First of all, I've seen a good portion of the movies, and that never helps. Your own preferences only get in your head and mess everything up. Plus, I was pretty much right on with my picks in 2010, even winning our friends and family Oscar pool for the first time in a while. Do I trust myself to be that on point again this year? I do not.

Still, read on if you want the picks for this Sunday's Oscars; the years have proven that my guesses are about as good as anyone's.

As I (pretty much) wrote for the first time in 2005:

Please note: these are my [PoopReading.com] predictions, not to be confused with my all-important picks in [PoopReading.com co-contributor] Jameson Simmons' [Onebee.com Oscar pool](#), aka "The Only Reason At All I Still Pay Any Attention to the Oscars"). I reserve the right to refine my choices for Jameson's until late Sunday afternoon.

And keep in mind: I'm telling you who *will* win, not necessarily who *should* win. There aren't any Oscar pools that reward you for accurately picking the most deserving winners instead of the real ones (and if there are such Oscar pools they're run by people I definitely don't want to hang out with).

BEST PICTURE

Winner:

The King's Speech

Other nominees:

127 Hours
Black Swan
The Fighter
Inception
The Kids Are All Right
The Social Network
Toy Story 3
True Grit
Winter's Bone

Unlike recent years I actually *have* seen all of the "top tier" contenders in this category (save for *The Fighter*, which I've heard was excellent but which couldn't have looked like more of an Oscar-bait homework movie to me), and luckily for my Oscar pool chances I didn't have quite as passionate a reaction to *The Social Network* as some people did. Many seem to regard it as some sort of generation-defining

masterwork and cannot countenance the notion that it will lose Best Picture to anything, let alone something as stuffy and Britishy and Oscary as *The King's Speech*.

The Social Network gained early momentum via a nearly unprecedented sweep of the critics' awards, but critics and industry professionals simply aren't the same people. That's why *The King's Speech* will win, and fans of *The Social Network* will decry the Academy as a stodgy, out-of-touch institution whose slavish adherence to staid, mainstream fare has made their awards culturally irrelevant.

Those same *Social Network* fans likely *won't* go on to point out that the three previous Best Picture winners were *The Hurt Locker*, *Slumdog Millionaire* and *No Country For Old Men*.

The King's Speech, to be sure, wasn't any more relevant in 2010 than it would have been in 2003 or 1995 or 1972, but it's a beautiful story, wonderfully told and gloriously acted. I have no issue with its upcoming inclusion on the Best Picture winners list.

(Still, we all know that the *real* best movie of 2010 was *Toy Story 3*)

BEST DIRECTOR

Winner:

Tom Hooper, *The King's Speech*

Other nominees:

Darren Aronofsky, *Black Swan*
David O. Russell, *The Fighter*
David Fincher, *The Social Network*
Joel and Ethan Coen, *True Grit*

Make no mistake, my friends: this is an upset pick. Though there is no clear consensus on the Oscar-predicting landscape this year in regards to Best Director, more people are predicting David Fincher than Tom Hooper. Generally my No. 1 rule for Oscar picking – "Don't Be a Hero" – would lead me to go along with the crowd and pick Fincher as well, but a careful reading of the tea leaves suggests otherwise.

Follow my logic, if you please: *The Social Network* at one point seemed like an overwhelming favorite to win Best Picture, to the point that it seemed by New Year's like Oscar season might not even be any fun at all; Best Picture for *The Social Network* was a done deal. A little less than two months later, though, most are predicting *The King's Speech*. So, given that *The Social Network* had so much going for it at one point, imagine how much momentum *The King's Speech* must have picked up in the last few weeks in order to overtake it (call it a backlash, call it a desire to manufacture a Best Picture race where once there was none, call it what you

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will). I like that surge in momentum to carry over into the Best Director category.

But who's to say, really? One of the best predictive indicators gives us little help this year: the Directors Guild of America award, which Hooper recently won, matches up with the Best Director Oscar 90% of the time... but it's been almost ten years since they didn't match, so the law of averages says we're due. And in a year in which a slim majority are actually predicting such an unlikely split?

Who knows. I'm sticking with Tom Hooper, though. It's strictly a *King's Speech* momentum pick.

BEST ACTOR

Winner:

Colin Firth, *The King's Speech*

Other nominees:

Javier Bardem, *Biutiful*

Jeff Bridges, *True Grit*

Jesse Eisenberg, *The Social Network*

James Franco, *127 Hours*

I have nothing to add here, since Colin Firth will win this Oscar and if he doesn't it won't matter because everybody else in your Oscar pool will have picked him anyway.

So I'll just relate to you that when I found out earlier this year that Jesse Eisenberg was the brother of Hallie Eisenberg, that little girl from those Pepsi commercials ten years ago, I was incredibly shocked despite the fact that they have the same last name and look almost exactly alike. It was the same way I felt after I found out that Zach and Amanda Peterson were siblings (they went to my high school; you don't know them).

"Wait... *those two* are brother and sister?"

"Wait... why haven't I been assuming that all along?"

Anyway. Moving on.

BEST ACTRESS

Winner:

Natalie Portman, *Black Swan*

Other Nominees:

Annette Bening, *The Kids Are All Right*

Nicole Kidman, *Rabbit Hole*

Jennifer Lawrence, *Winter's Bone*

Michelle Williams, *Blue Valentine*

Poor Annette Bening, turning in yet another Oscar-worthy performance but destined to lose once again to a cute little twentysomething (yes, yes; Hilary Swank was 30 when she beat Bening and won that *Million Dollar Baby* Oscar, but she was in her 20s when the movie was made so I'm counting it). You'd almost feel sorry for her if she wasn't a rich, gracefully aging movie star married to one of the most handsome and famous men in the world.

But Annette Bening will probably fall juuuust short of Oscar gold once again, because Natalie Portman wasn't just good in *Black Swan*, she was transformative. For somebody as sophisticated as Portman to portray a character as slow-witted and fragile as Nina Sayers was an achievement in itself, never mind the fact that Portman essentially made herself into a real ballerina for the role (much like Mickey Rourke essentially morphed into a professional wrestler for *Black Swan* director Darren Aronofsky's previous film).

I have nothing against Annette Bening and I didn't see her in *The Kids Are All Right*, but I can't imagine that "finding Julianne Moore sexy" is quite as big an acting challenge as "becoming a schizophrenic 90 pound ballet dancer." * Natalie Portman's particular brand of genius notwithstanding, hers is the kind of role that the Academy tends to notice.

*No offense intended to anyone, but it should probably be noted that the "finding Mila Kunis sexy" portion of Portman's role was undoubtedly even easier than the "finding Julianne Moore sexy" part of Bening's.

BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR

Winner:

Christian Bale, *The Fighter*

Other Nominees:

John Hawkes, *Winter's Bone*

Jeremy Renner, *The Town*

Mark Ruffalo, *The Kids Are All Right*

Geoffrey Rush, *The King's Speech*

Will *The King's Speech* momentum sweep all the way into the Best Supporting Actor category? I'm betting it stops just short, and that Christian Bale takes home the Oscar he was always going to win sooner or later. It's difficult for me to imagine anybody, in any movie, delivering a supporting performance as good as Geoffrey Rush's in *The King's Speech*, but those who have seen *The Fighter* assure me that Christian Bale was in that class. And since Geoffrey Rush already has an Oscar, everybody's happy (except, perhaps, for John Hawkes, Jeremy Renner and Mark Ruffalo).

BEST SUPPORTING ACTRESS

Winner:

Hailee Steinfeld, *True Grit*

Other Nominees:

Amy Adams, *The Fighter*
Helena Bonham Carter, *The King's Speech*
Melissa Leo, *The Fighter*
Jacki Weaver, *Animal Kingdom*

Why am I going out on so many limbs this year? What's up with that? Melissa Leo is still the odds-on favorite according to the punditry but a not-tiny minority of Oscar watchers, including Roger Ebert (of the *Chicago Sun-Times*), Sasha Stone (of AwardsDaily.com), Dave Karger (of *Entertainment Weekly*) and me (of this) are sensing some love for Steinfeld and for *True Grit* overall. It's incredibly easy to imagine a reality, in an alternate universe very much like our own, in which *True Grit* was the movie that overtook *The Social Network* as the Oscar favorite; that didn't quite happen here on our plane of existence, but *True Grit's* ten nominations show that the Academy definitely appreciated the Coen brothers' work.

Add in the fact that Steinfeld's character was heroic and likable, add in the recent history suggesting that Supporting Actress is the most upset-prone of all the acting categories, multiply that by how much fun it would be to see a kid win an Oscar (would have been nice if it had been Chloe Grace Moretz as Hit Girl in *Kick-Ass*, but you can't have everything), and it all equals a rare flyer taken by this Oscar predictor.

BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY Winner:

The King's Speech, David Seidler

Other nominees:

Another Year, Mike Leigh
The Fighter, Scott Silver and Paul Tamasy & Eric Johnson;
Keith Dorrington & Paul Tamasy & Eric Johnson
Inception, Christopher Nolan
The Kids Are All Right, Lisa Cholodenko & Stuart Blumberg

Everybody seems to agree on the screenplay awards this year, which might not mean much. Everybody agreed that *Up In the Air* would win Adapted Screenplay last year, and when *Precious* won instead everybody was wrong.

But if it's *The King's Speech's* year, as it looks like it's shaping up to be, conventional wisdom should prove correct and former stutterer David Seidler should take home an Oscar for his passion project.

BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY

Winner:

The Social Network, Aaron Sorkin

Other nominees:

127 Hours, Danny Boyle & Simon Beaufoy
Toy Story 3, Michael Arndt; John Lasseter, Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkrich
True Grit, Joel Coen and Ethan Coen
Winter's Bone, Debra Granik & Anne Rosellini

Aaron Sorkin will win, and probably should (although I think I'd vote for *Toy Story 3* here, too). He has affected an entire generation of writers with his pitch-perfect ear for sharp dialogue and masterful sense of pacing. He was most definitely the ideal man to write the movie about a condescending misanthrope who founded a popular website, both because Sorkin alone could make such a movie exciting and because in Aaron Sorkin's world the condescending misanthrope is always the hero. Because in Aaron Sorkin's world the only proper thing to be is a condescending misanthrope, because after all, if other people wanted to have their feelings taken into consideration then they wouldn't be so goddamn obstinate and dumb all the time, would they? No, they'd come to their senses and agree with Aaron Sorkin – er, I mean, Aaron Sorkin's main character – all the time, about everything.

We get it, Aaron. That random guy at the conference table's lack of intimate knowledge of 18th century Italian literature automatically means he's worthless as a human being. Pointing that out certainly reenforces the righteousness of your main character's ideological stance, I tell you what. Also, I can't shake the idea that somewhere, in some parts of the world, there are people who *don't* speak exactly like Aaron Sorkin would speak to the guy who called him a faggot in high school if only Sorkin could travel back in time and confront him in front of the whole class so everybody could see what an insecure asshole the guy really was. There must be people in the world who don't speak like that, right? But none of those people show up in *The Social Network*.

All that said, when's the last time you ever burned that many calories thinking about one screenwriter? Never, that's when. Aaron Sorkin, that's why you're the best. You wonderful douchebag, you.

And now we come, as we must, to the pee break categories. But don't head out for a smoke or go and grab a beer just yet, my friends; the pee break categories are often where an Oscar pool is won or lost.

Now, because I don't expect you to believe that I've got any particular insight into, say, the Sound Editing category, I'll cut-and-paste what I wrote in last year's (highly accurate!) Oscar picks column in order to explain how I arrive at the following predictions:

I use two primary sources, *Entertainment Weekly* and AwardsDaily.com (a website that assembles several predictions into something of a consensus), to determine my picks for these categories. If I make a pick that differs from either or both of these sources, I'll be sure to tell you why.

Off we go:

BEST FOREIGN LANGUAGE FILM

Winner:

In a Better World, Denmark

Other nominees:

Biutiful, Mexico

Dogtooth, Greece

Incendies, Canada *Outside the Law (Hors-la-loi)*, Algeria

A good rule of thumb in this category, as well as in Best Documentary Feature, is that if you've heard of a movie it's not going to win (take as evidence recent losses by the likes of *Amélie*, *Downfall* and *Pan's Labyrinth*). So out goes *Biutiful*; if you're reading this then you at least heard of it when it I listed the Best Actor nominees.

A large minority at AwardsDaily.com pick *Incendies*, but isn't it almost like cheating to let a Canadian film in there? Come on; three quarters of *our* movies are shot in Canada.

A slim majority favors *In a Better World*, so I do too.

EDITING

The Social Network is the favorite here, which – if I'm wrong about Best Director – leaves us open to the curious possibility that the Academy will recognize *The Social Network* as the best edited, best written and best directed movie of the year... but not the best movie overall. And as odd as that sounds, I think that might be just about right.

CINEMATOGRAPHY

This is about as sure as you can be in a below-the-fold category: *True Grit*'s Roger Deakins has been nominated eight times before, and eight times as come up empty. All the meaty parts of *The King's Speech* and *The Social Network* take place indoors, so *True Grit* is a relatively safe bet.

ART DIRECTION

EW says *Alice in Wonderland*, but AD.com's roundup of prognosticators narrowly picks *The King's Speech*. I say stick with *The King's Speech* in any of these close races; if a period piece is also a Best Picture front runner, why fight it? Just don't be too mad at me if I'm wrong and *Alice* wins here.

ORIGINAL SCORE

Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails fame and Atticus Ross set quite the mood for *The Social Network*, and should really win this one. AD.com has them in a virtual tie with *The King's Speech* but you've got to go with your gut sometime, don't you? *The Social Network* it is.

ORIGINAL SONG

See, here's where actually knowing the material gets you into trouble. I can't *not* pick "I See the Light" from *Tangled*, both because it happens to be a very lovely song and because it was used during a highly emotional scene that twice left me a blubbering heap of a half-man right there in the movie theater. *Tangled* was so good, you guys; you don't even know. Plus, the guy who sings it (along with Mandy Moore)? Zachary Levi! "Chuck!" I love "Chuck!"

Well, I really like "Chuck," let's put it that way. I'm not going to pick against singing Chuck.

So be advised: while the AD.com consensus picks "We Belong Together" from *Toy Story 3* and EW picks "If I Rise" from *127 Hours*, anyone with a soul will vote for "I See the Light" from *Tangled*.

COSTUME DESIGN

Everyone picks either *The King's Speech* and *Alice in Wonderland*; this category, along with the aforementioned Art Direction, would be so much easier to predict if *Alice* wasn't around. I said *The King's Speech* there and I'll say *The King's Speech* here. Let's keep riding that wave.

MAKEUP

Most people say *The Wolfman*; that's good enough for me.

SOUND EDITING

Inception. They could almost just call this award "Most Tolerable Blockbuster."

SOUND MIXING

Inception. Though don't be utterly shocked if *The Social Network* slips in and grabs this one. *The Hurt Locker* won both sound categories last year, but recent trends show that the sound awards are about as likely to split as they are to go to the same movie. I'll still pick *Inception* for both, though.

VISUAL EFFECTS

Inception. There are only four picks upon which 100% of the Oscar geeks in the AD.com prediction roundup agree: Colin Firth, Aaron Sorkin, *Toy Story 3* for Animated Feature, and *Inception* for Visual Effects. If *Inception* loses it will be as

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big a surprise as it is a miscarriage of justice.

DOCUMENTARY FEATURE

As I mentioned before, any documentary of which you've actually heard doesn't stand a chance in this category (*March of the Penguins* and *An Inconvenient Truth* being, of course, the exceptions that prove the rule). You're going to have to follow me deep down into the rabbit hole here, but since the "heard of it" rule disqualifies *Exit Through the Gift Shop* and *Inside Job*, I'm going with the Afghanistan war movie *Restrepo*, because why not?

It might be foolish to shy away from picking the front runner (*Inside Job*), especially in a category that's a bit of a coin flip most years. But I've picked front runners before in this category and been burned. I'll stick with *Restrepo*.

DOCUMENTARY SHORT; *Strangers No More*. I think you just power on through and go with the consensus on this one. Why get cute? You'll probably still be wrong, but by sticking with AD.com there's an ever-so-slightly greater chance that you won't be.

ANIMATED FEATURE

Ah... just when things were getting tough. *Toy Story 3* is a shoo-in.

Now that that's decided, let's talk about *How To Train Your Dragon*. Did anybody who saw *How To Train Your Dragon* and also saw *Tangled* actually prefer *How To Train Your Dragon*? I mean really? For real?

I think *Tangled* stands one of the four or five best Disney animated musicals of all time, and was probably my #2 movie of the year (only narrowly edged out by *Toy Story 3*). By what rationale *How To Train Your Dragon* could possibly be considered in *Tangled*'s league escapes me completely. And I saw both movies with my four-year-old and she concurs, so it's not just me.

I know the the animated French film *The Illusionist* was also nominated instead of *Tangled*, but I missed that one (it's subtitled, and the four-year-old isn't a big reader yet). I'm sure it was plenty artsy and extremely fartsy, but since I didn't see it I can't technically claim that *Tangled* was clearly a far, far superior movie (even though I'm sure it was).

Long story short: *Toy Story 3* wins this one.

ANIMATED SHORT

The AD.com consensus favors *Day & Night*, the Pixar short that ran before *Toy Story 3*. It's been about ten years since one of those Pixar shorts won, though, and I don't think *Day & Night* is going to be the one to break that streak. Running a not-too-distant second in the predictions is *The Gruffalo*,

which is what I'll take.

LIVE ACTION SHORT

No man's land. That's not the name of the film I'm picking to win, that's just what this category is. *Na Wewe* and *Wish 143* seem to be slight favorites, while EW is one of only two sources to pick *The Confession*, all five nominees are actually represented on AD.com's gigantic master picks chart, which is true of no other category... it's a madhouse, I tells ya.

Let's take *Na Wewe* and be done with it. It's got some heavy subject matter about the Rwandan genocide; that sounds Oscary.

And on that uplifting note, we'll finally bring this thing to an end. Enjoy the Oscars, and good luck! There's a very real possibility that you're going to need it if you plan on using my picks this year.
