

Natural Selections

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

WISer (Women In Science at Rockefeller): A New Initiative

ASMA HATOUM, MARIKO KOBAYASHI, AND ALESSIA DEGLINCERTI

This summer, a small group of postdocs came together to launch a new initiative called WISer (Women In Science at Rockefeller) to begin to tackle a persistent problem: the underrepresentation of female leaders in academic and non-academic sectors of science.

While women hold 60% of all bachelor's degrees and constitute 48% of the overall workforce, females in leadership positions, particularly in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields, remain a minority. In 2009, the National Research Council released a congressionally mandated report on gender differences in science and engineering faculty at key transition points in their careers. One of the most striking findings in the report was that a gender gap is most apparent at the PhD to faculty transition—women are simply not applying to tenure-track positions at research-intensive institutions. This gender gap is particularly pronounced in the biological sciences: in the 1999-2003 period, women received 45% of biology PhDs but represented only 26% of applicants for tenure-track faculty positions.

Why is maintaining gender diversity important? Quite simply, a diverse workforce is more likely to be innovative and productive than one with uniform backgrounds and experiences. Arden L Bement, former director of the National Science Foundation, aptly stated: "Year by year, the economic imperative grows for broadening, empowering, and sharpening the skills of the entire U.S. workforce—just to remain competitive in the global community. This fresh talent is our most potent mechanism for technology transfer to our systems of innovation. Fortunately, we have a fount of untapped talent in our women, under-represented minorities and persons with disabilities. Our need to broaden participation and increase opportunity is critical,



for both the science and education communities and the nation." Furthermore, female faculty serve as role models for the next generation of female scientists, and, intriguingly, the percent of women faculty members at undergraduate institutions has been a predictor for the success of female students at those colleges.

While the need to maintain gender diversity is evident, the question remains: how? The gender gap is a multi-faceted problem that may only be fully addressed once the barriers to gender diversity are clearly understood. While women might be pulled away from career advancement by increasing family responsibilities, other more subtle barriers exist. In recent studies, gender biases and unconscious thought processes have been shown to limit women's progress in science and engineering fields. Moreover, pre-existing societal stereotypes can reduce the performance of those individuals belonging to the targeted group.

To assess the specific needs of the Rockefeller community and guide future programs to address the gender gap, we issued a survey earlier this summer. Out of 146 respondents (85% women), nearly 95% were interested in engaging successful women scientists in career-related discussions. Furthermore, the needs for career guidance/mentorship and a more prominent presence of our own female faculty

were apparent. Here at Rockefeller, female students and postdocs represent about 40% and 38% of trainees, respectively, while female heads of labs are a mere 13%. This disparity, coupled with the palpable needs of the Rockefeller community, has spurred the WISer initiative.

WISer aims to create opportunities for professional development, career guidance, and mentorship for female scientists at Rockefeller. Given that the gender gap in the biological sciences is manifested in the PhD to faculty transition, graduate students and postdocs are most likely to benefit from WISer's efforts to promote gender diversity. With full support from the President's office, the Dean's office, the administration, and members of our faculty, WISer has been officially launched, and its first events are already underway.

The first series of events organized by WISer and sponsored by the President's office will be conversations over breakfast with distinguished female academic scientists. These intimate roundtable discussions will feature our female invited speakers for the Friday lecture series. Topics of discussions will include career navigation, social and professional needs of female scientists in academia, and the speakers' personal stories of success. Please keep posted for future invitations to these events.

WISer's future efforts will be focused on facilitating mentorship opportunities (among students, postdocs, and alumnae), as well as providing networking opportunities. In doing so, WISer aims to build a stronger, more supportive, and more collaborative community of young female scientists at Rockefeller University, with the overarching goal of advocating equal representation of both genders in high-level positions throughout all scientific professions.

We invite the Rockefeller commu-

nity to join in our discussions and events and help build a solid community to empower our next generation of female leaders in science. We will soon have our first organizational meeting, so stay tuned for more details. We also welcome feedback and ideas! Email us at wiser@rockefeller.edu for any comments or inquiries. We are working on the launch of our website, so be on the lookout for information about that as well! ☺

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selections.rockefeller.edu
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De Gustibus The Bird's the Word

MARK RINALDI

If you've never had occasion to enjoy the marvel that is Japanese *yakitori*, I'll break it down for you: wooden sticks are stuck through bits of chicken, and then those bits are grilled over coals. Simple, right?

Not so fast--there's a bit more to authentic *yakitori*. The grilling medium absolutely must be *binchōtan*, a slow-burning, low-smoke charcoal made from oak (specifically *Quercus phillyraeoides*, for those dendrologists among us) the gentle embers of which impart a flavorful char to poultry and vegetables. After their time on the fire, skewers must be glazed with *tare*, a sweet-and-salty reduction made from rice wine, soy sauce and chicken stock. A procession of condiments also accompanies these bites of fowl--some sweet, some sour, some funky and some incendiary.

If this brief description has piqued your interest, you should consider yourself quite fortunate that the Rockefeller campus finds itself a mere two-block jaunt from the best *yakitori* in the city, served by the ablest of hands across the dimly-lit bar at Torishin. The atmosphere at this reservations-only spot is convivial and focused, with diners who are otherwise embroiled in excited

conversation occasionally eliciting "oohs" and "aahs" whenever a chef reaches over the counter to present them with a glistening, steaming skewer. The noise level is never deafening, but you should not expect to really get any reading done there, either. Adult beverages flow freely, with a requisite selection of Japanese beers (the perfect accompaniment to *yakitori*) and an ever-evolving selection of *sake* and *shōchū* – the latter being a spirit made from a variety of starches ranging from Japanese sweet potatoes to barley. On school nights you can opt for their exceptional green tea (and save yourself a few dollars in the process).

Menu selections are best left up to the chef by way of \$50 and \$55 *omakase* – or "chef's choice" – options. These guarantee you a healthy portion of all-organic poultry skewers, along with two or three vegetables. The more expensive option also features a seasonal dish and a small bowl of broth, tea-soaked rice called *chazuke* to round out the meal. Both options also include refreshingly cold, homemade pickles and a palate-cleanser of grated daikon radish in broth (*dashi*) made from dried skipjack tuna.

The meat skewers themselves are succulent, tender revelations, with immediate stand-outs being a tightly packed row of rib meat, a trio of supple and vaguely cartilaginous meatballs called *tsukune*, and the juiciest chicken wing I have ever experienced in my entire life. So juicy, in fact, that my schmaltz-soaked shirt required subsequent dry cleaning. It was worth it.

More unique offerings abound as well – humble breast meat, stuffed with preserved plum (*umeboshi*) and swaddled in *shiso* leaf, takes on a new and graceful countenance. The "oyster," an often-forgotten morsel of tender flesh hidden at the base of the thigh, here is ushered into undying light. Even regular-old thigh meat is reborn through the intercession of a modest dab of *yuzukoshō*, a caustically savory relish of chilies and Asian citrus that wavers one notch below potential weaponization. It *begs* to be experienced.

If you have an adventurous palate or friends who like to dare

NATURAL SELECTIONS



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you to eat strange things, Torishin can take you places you never thought you'd go. Crispy chicken skin happily flies solo; hearts are fresh and snappy and livers are smooth and rich. Even the gristle of the knee joint – a part of the chicken that I had never even considered as edible – provides a satisfying half-crunch that will incite your carnivorous guilt as much as your satisfaction. I would definitely avoid the kidney, though; it's gamier than a Pac-Man machine.

The only warning I should offer about Torishin's hospitality is toward vegetarians, including my fiancé: there is possibly not a single item on their menu that is devoid of any form of flesh. I suppose that, if asked nicely, the chefs would be willing to forego the sacramental bath in *tare* for a few sticks of veggies, opting instead to anoint them with sea salt or lemon. But the risk of having one's *shishito* peppers or *enokitake* mushrooms dipped into a meaty sauce or a fishy broth is just too high. It is better to steer clear.

Vegetarians, don't despair—I will deal with your needs in a later issue, I promise.

Torishin's price point forbids habitual visits for most of us—I have indulged on birthdays, and when I've had a particularly frustrating day at work. But their elevation of the common domestic fowl, to an almost sanctified level, warrants at least an encounter. This is less of a restaurant and more of a temple, where chef's knives dance in a ballet of deft fabrication and ruddy coals smolder in ceaseless patience. And the chicken is really, really good. ☉

Torishin

1193 1st Ave New York, NY 10065 between 64th and 65th
<http://torishinny.com/>

Author's Suggestions:

Go For: Crispy chicken skin; *tsukune*; "special chicken meatball";
crispy chicken wing

Avoid: Kidney; duck with asparagus

Torishin is not currently serving lunch.

Happy Halloween!

AILEEN MARSHALL

Halloween is coming up at the end of this month on October 31st. It has become a very big holiday in this country, for children as well as adults, and it is growing in other countries. How did Halloween get started?

The holiday we know today is actually a combination of a pagan harvest festival and a Christian holy day to honor the dead. It actually started in Ireland in medieval times as a harvest festival called *Samhain* (pronounced *so win*). *Samhain* in Gaelic means "summer's end." It was the end of the Celtic calendar, the start of the "dark half of the year." It coincided with the end of the growing season, with the crops dying off and days getting shorter. The ancient Celts believed it was a day the dead's spirits could return to earth and visit their relatives or on which evil spirits possess someone. Wearing costumes was a way of fooling ghosts and demons. People would also light bonfires and carve out a turnip and put a candle in it as a means of keeping evils sprits away. There is an ancient Irish folktale of a man named Jack who tricked the devil, and trapped him in one of those carved turnips. The devil eventually got out and cursed Jack to wander the earth every Halloween carrying his lantern. Hence the term "jack o' lantern" or Jack of the lantern. It was also common to have games of fortune telling. One game was to peel an apple so the skin came

off in one piece and throw the peel over one's shoulder. It was said the peel would form the first letter of the person he or she would marry. In England and Scotland people would go "guising," visiting friends in costume and asking for food or coins.

Then, in the early Middle Ages, Christianity started to take a hold on the Irish population. The church, at the time, decided it would be wise to place the holy day of All Souls Day, a day to pray for the souls of the deceased, near *Samhain*, since the holidays were similar. The word Halloween is a contraction of *All Hallows Even* (All Saints' Eve).

Halloween wasn't a big holiday in this country until the wave of Irish immigrants came during the potato famine of 1846, when it became very popular both here and in Canada. The custom of trick or treating became more mainstream around the 1920s. This is the tradition of children going door to door in costume saying "trick or treat?" The meaning is that if they don't get candy, there will be a trick. In more recent years, the practice of "Mischief Night" has grown. This is the night before Halloween when teenagers will throw eggs at a house "egging" or strew toilet paper across a person's lawn and shrubbery "tp-ing" a house. It was also very popular to have Halloween parties with games such as "bobbing for

apples," where one has to pick up an apple from a tub of water using only one's teeth. In Scotland this game is called dooking, a derivative of the word dunking. In more recent years, it has become common to have community celebrations such as parades. The biggest one is right here in our own city, the Village Halloween Parade. It attracts thousands of tourists and has been likened to Mardi Gras in New Orleans. Parade participants and spectators alike walk down the street in very elaborate and creative costumes. It is televised nationwide. Other cities also have Halloween parades such as Madison, Wisconsin; Chapel Hill, North Carolina; and Keene, New Hampshire.



A jack-o'-lantern, made from a pumpkin, lit from within by a candle

Halloween, or something similar, is celebrated in other countries as well. In many European countries it is celebrated much the way it is in the Celtic Isles. And it's also traditional to visit and decorate the graves of relatives. In Romania, Halloween centers on the story of Dracula, and there are reenactments of witch trials believed to have happened there. In China a holiday called *Yue Lan* (Hungry Ghost) falls

in the autumn when people make shrines to their deceased relatives. Tokyo Disneyland, Hong Kong Disneyland and Universal Studios Singapore have been having Halloween celebrations in recent years. Mexico has *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) to honor one's deceased relatives. People will create a shrine for their loved ones and go to the cemetery to clean and decorate their graves. There are also masks

and candies, sometimes in the shape of skulls. Halloween has become prevalent lately in India and many South American countries because of the depiction of Halloween in movies and television shows.

The Graduate Student Council has an annual Halloween party in the Faculty Club. The costumes can be quite interesting to see. This year it will be held on November 1 beginning at 7 pm. ☉

Culture Corner

A Visit to the Musée national du Moyen Âge (Paris)

BERNIE LANGS

By roundabout way of introducing this museum review, there is a funny scene in Woody Allen's film comedy *Midnight in Paris* when, after having visited the Rodin Museum accompanied by a know-it-all art history buff, Owen Wilson returns there alone and asks the docent (Carla Bruni) if she remembers him from the other day. She replies, oh yes, "You were with the pedantic gentleman." The point is, I hope in my columns I don't come off that way, since what I'm trying to do is express the idea that the further you go into art and art history (or music or literature), the greater the benefits are to one's being. I can't teach anyone how to experience a museum, but hope only to translate my own excitement to others with the idea that the more you put in, the more you get

out of it.

Speaking of Paris, I passed through Paris for just one day in July and was given a small window of time to go through the Musée national du Moyen Âge (National Museum of the Middle Ages, formerly known as the Cluny Museum). I'd visited the museum in 1991 and I've learned not to be surprised when things are completely different from how I remember them. The museum boasts an exceptional collection of works from the medieval period, including sculptures, architectural remnants from cathedrals and abbeys, tapestries, paintings, stained glass, and other items. I would doubt there is a better such inventory of the Middle Ages anywhere else in the world. About halfway through my visit, a most extraordinary feeling of contentment and satisfaction began to wash over me like a wave. Although many of the works on view center around Christian iconography, I am not a traditionally religious person (I was brought up Jewish and have devised my own spiritual philosophy). I realized that the museum acted as a sort of profound, wonderful aesthetic experience for me, a feeling akin to what one must feel when your team wins the World Series.

With the traditional museum experience of seeing paintings, visitors are drawn to individual painters and marvel at the genius of such widely viewed artists such as Van Gogh, Picasso, etc. But most pieces of medieval art are viewed as period pieces of "type," and the majority were done by anonymous artisans, akin today to construction workers or carpenters and other fine craftsmen who make buildings

or goods and whose identities are unknown to us. One is overwhelmed by the details of the colorful tapestries and majesty of the colossal heads of sculpted monarchs. The Renaissance ushered in the new period of the famous Master painter and his workshop. The late medieval paintings on view are mostly by unknown artists and the room displaying them had me nearly breathless in wonder. Other rooms that dazzled displayed themed tapestries, such as a "Unicorn" cycle, and another had several full-length sculptures, each on the level of a masterpiece.

The truly great art historians don't just give overviews of art history, they interpret each work of art and, teach their readers how to actually view them, not only as visual stimuli, but each as a living, breathing presence with a vital, intellectual message. In particular, the late Erwin Panofsky and the late Michael Baxandall taught of the need to attempt to view a work of art in context of its historical and cultural circumstance. As one learns of the medieval period, one can't escape its propensity for violence, superstition, and war, capped by plagues and pestilence. Wandering through the National Museum in Paris, one does sense all of that in the heavy-handed sculptures, which seem weighed down by their history and in the paintings that can be almost frightening in their stark depiction of the cruelties of Christian history and its myths. One is left to wonder if the artisans who made some of these fantastic pieces knew just how beautiful and ethereal they appear now, and that the works would be seen as such by future generations. ☉



Tapestry: *The Lady and the Unicorn*



New York State of Mind

This Month Natural Selections interviews Carly Gelfond, Assistant Director of Development. Country of origin: United States.

1. How long have you been living in the New York area? I've been living here for seven years, since I graduated from college in central New York State. I'm originally from New Jersey.

2. Where do you live? I live in Park Slope, Brooklyn. It takes me an hour to get to and from Rockefeller, but it's worth it. I love where I am at both ends of the trip.

3. Which is your favorite neighborhood? People make fun of me because I love the West Village so much. I can't help it! The streets are so pretty and there are so many good restaurants over there. It's bohemian-fancy, in the best way.

4. What do you think is the most overrated thing in the city? And underrated? Overrated: Going to Broadway shows. Not the shows themselves necessarily, just going to them, as in getting yourself through the crowds of Times Square. I wish visitors to New York wouldn't feel as though going to a Broadway show was a "must-do." There are so many better experiences to have here! Underrated: The subways (stay with me). They get you anywhere in the city you want to go, or at least, relatively close.



They are heated in the winter and air conditioned in the summer, and most of the trains are new. Guys, do a Google image search for "New York City trains in the 1980s" and you'll never complain again.

5. What do you miss most when you are out of town? I miss being able to do practically anything (anything!) I'm in the mood for—in New York, I can take a cooking class or ride my bike to one of the top rated restaurants in the country. I can go to a night of free gallery openings in Chelsea, or hang out by the water

at Brooklyn Bridge Park. And if I have a glass of wine or two while I'm out? The subway!

6. If you could change one thing about NYC, what would that be? The rent is—you know.

7. What is your favorite weekend activity in NYC? I play street hockey with a league in Tompkins Square Park every Sunday. I'm terrible but it's really fun.

8. What is the most memorable experience you have had in NYC? I was chased by a raccoon while running in my neighborhood in Brooklyn one morning. Fortunately, I was able to make a sudden turn down an alleyway and lose him. I also saw Molly Shannon on the street twice in one day!

9. If you could live anywhere else, where would that be? Raleigh, North Carolina. I'm moving there, though, so I might be trying to convince myself a little.

10. Do you think of yourself as a New Yorker? Kind of. But when we've moved to the South, I'm sure I'll feel like one through and through. ☺

For Your Consideration— Best Picture Check-In Edition

JIM KELLER

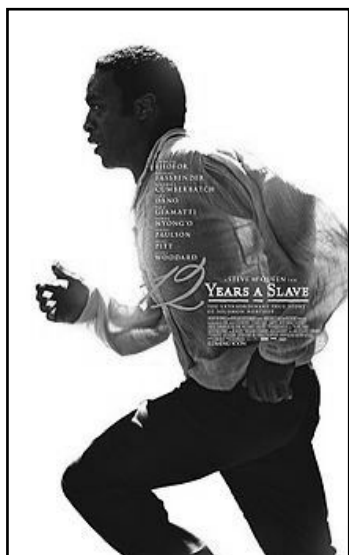
I dare not take a stab at the ever-changing supporting actor categories when several of the films that could very well give us our nominees haven't been seen, so stay-tuned to FYC next month when I'll offer my thoughts on the Best Supporting Actor and Actress categories and conclude the four part Ones to Watch series. With that said, there has been quite a bit of movement in the Best Picture race of late, so let's dive right in. Here I give my analysis of where things stand right now—Oscar is a moving

target, but there are always indicators along the road that can help us sniff out our nominees and eventual winner.

12 Years a Slave (director: Steve McQueen):

Based on Solomon Northrup's 1853 autobiography, the film tells of freeman, Northrup's, tragic kidnapping in Washington, D.C. in 1841, where he was forced into slavery in Louisiana until his rescue 12 years later. Both the Telluride and Toronto Film Festivals have had audience

members raving about McQueen's latest—especially Chiwetel Ejiofor's performance as Northrup (discussed in last month's column). The film is said to give an unflinching look at slavery in America—the first not sanitized through the eyes of a white man. Some critics have proclaimed it will be this year's Oscar winner—a fool's errand, as the race has just begun and many twists and turns lie ahead. It's worth noting that in this technological age, backlash spreads like wildfire via social media outlets such

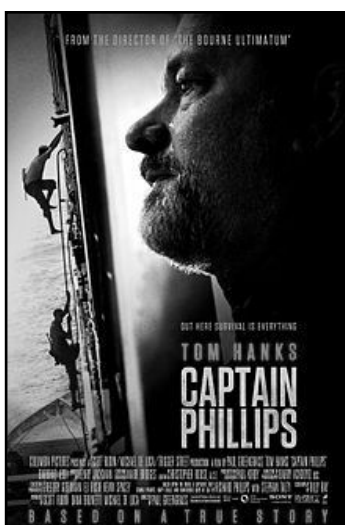


as Twitter, until the film's chances are reduced to ash (See last year's contenders *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Lincoln*, both spectacular films, which suffered under the hands of outspoken politicians).

So for now, we concentrate only on what we know, the film's elements in contention for Oscar: Ejiofor (Best Actor), newcomer Lupita N'yongo (Best Supporting Actress), Michael Fassbender (Best Supporting Actor), John Ridley (Best Adapted Screenplay) and McQueen (Best Director). While the combination of these and other possibilities are part of what make the film a serious Best Picture contender, they are not the whole story. Generally, Oscar-nominated films come armed to the teeth. Outside of impressive performances or artistry, they often have a large box office haul, capture the zeitgeist, or have garnered industry support in the form of the Producers Guild Awards (PGA) or Directors Guild Awards (DGA). Given that the film is scheduled for a mid-October release, the box office take and any industry-specific awards are anyone's guess, but the zeitgeist for this film is poignant and shouldn't be underestimated. America's first black president is now in his second term and, as I mentioned last month, the Academy's first black president (and only third female) Cheryl Boone Isaacs was recently elected. In addition, this year Kerry Washington became only the fifth black actress to ever be nominated for a Primetime Emmy in a leading role for ABC's *Scandal* an award that has yet to be given to a black woman. So everything is on the up and up, right? Wrong.

Look no further than Florida where George Zimmerman fatally shot teen Trayvon Martin, or California where Oscar Grant was killed by BART station officer Johannes Mehserle (as depicted in the feature film, *Fruitvale Station*) and you'll see the air of racism is alive and well. I've already mentioned in this column several times the lack of awards that the Academy has bestowed upon minorities as a whole, but it certainly seems with racial tensions reaching a fever pitch and more minority contenders across the board, the thermometer is about to shatter.

Captain Phillips (director: Paul Greengrass):



This biopic based on Richard Phillips and Stephan Talty's book, *A Captain's Duty: Somali Pirates, Navy SEALs, and Dangerous Days at Sea* depicts the true story of Captain Phillips and the hijacking of the Maersk Alabama by Somali pirates in 2009. Much like *12 Years*, the film has taken audiences by storm beginning with the Toronto and New York Film Festivals and boasts a career best performance by Tom Hanks in the title role. It also features a standout performance by newcomer Barkhad Abdi and marks a comeback for Greengrass whose Academy tryst began and ended in 2006 with *United 93*. The film is an interesting choice for a contender given its genre flavor as a thriller—something that this writer was fairly confident would keep it out of Academy consideration and subsequently left out of last month's Best Actor discussion. Yet, there it is. A strong socioeconomic narrative is said to foster a tête-à-tête be-

tween Phillips and Muse (Abdi) that asks audiences to question the idea of a villain. Again, box office draw and any industry awards are off the table for now and the film hits in mid-October.

Gravity (director: Alfonso Cuarón):



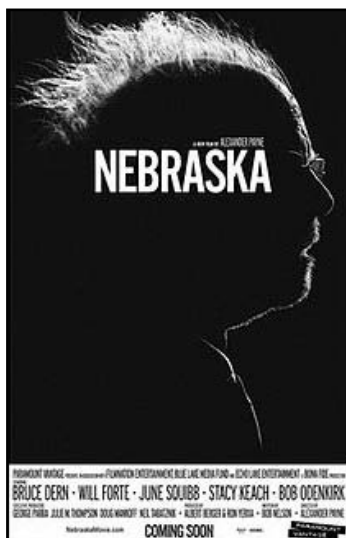
Speaking of genre films, Cuarón's *pièce de résistance*, concerning the plight of medical engineer Dr. Ryan Stone (Sandra Bullock), the lone survivor of her first space mission gone awry, is said to be visually awe-inspiring. While it being a genre film hasn't stopped many prognosticators from penciling it in their ten contender lists, this type of movie can be a hard sell for the Academy. Bullock finds herself once again in contention for Best Actress, a boon for the film, but more important is the camera work, which is said to give the impression of weightlessness. This was achieved through the construction of a large cube surrounded by LED lights inside of which Bullock and her counterpart (George Clooney) were rigged. Given the apparent success of the effect, we can posit that the film will be up for multiple tech awards, including special effects, but also that Cuarón will be up for Best Director. With a 3D release and strong buzz coming out of Venice, Telluride and Toronto, the film will likely make a killing at the box office, which is what a genre film seeking Academy recognition needs (see 2009's Best Picture nominee *District 9*). The film is set for an early October release.

Blue Jasmine (director: Woody Allen): The film is a take on *A Streetcar Named Desire* by way of Woody Allen with



Cate Blanchett fulfilling the title role. Throughout the film Jasmine tries to hold it together in the wake of a financial crisis that plucked her from a well-to-do New York housewife existence and dropped her in the confines of her sister's tiny, San Francisco apartment. Ask any prognosticator at the moment and they'll likely tell you that the Best Actress Oscar is Blanchett's to lose. Sally Hawkins also has a strong performance as Jasmine's sister and critics were impressed with Andrew Dice Clay's supporting performance as well, so these two could also find footing in their respective races. The script, as ever, was written by Allen who could certainly figure in the Best Original Screenplay race—something that could then clinch the film a Best Picture nomination, since it won't be up for any of the tech awards. Unlike the majority of its competition, *Blue Jasmine* debuted in July in New York and Los Angeles and had its wide release in August. The film currently has a 78 on metacritic.com—an online instrument that compiles critics' consensus in one place and it has earned \$30.6 million to date. While the film is considerably smaller in scale than its juggernaut counterparts, Allen nor his films should not be underestimated (see 2011's *Midnight in Paris*, which has a metacritic score of 81 and a \$56.8 million box office take).

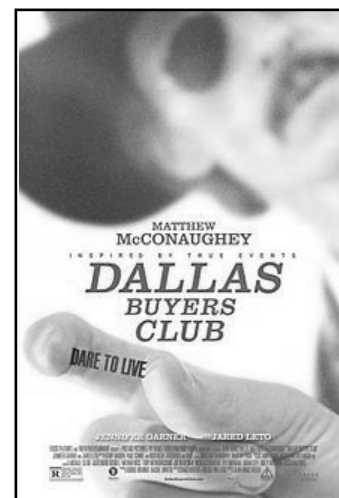
Nebraska (director: Alexander Payne): Payne's latest centers on an aging drunk and his son who trek from Montana to Nebraska to claim a million dollar Publisher's Clearing House sweepstakes prize. The film premiered at this year's Cannes Film Festival where it was nom-



inated for the festival's top prize, the Palm d'Or and where Bruce Dern won the Best Actor award. The black and white film has since screened at Telluride and is set to screen at the New York Film Festival this month. Given the film's divisive critics' reaction, there's no way to gauge audience reaction by the end of November when it will be unveiled. But if it goes over well and draws audiences to theaters, it could certainly figure in. The film, more than any of the others discussed here, is at the mercy of the general public—despite its shining, industry veteran star, Dern. If the film is to crack the Best Picture ten (assuming that the Academy chooses to nominate ten this year), dollars and butts in seats are the key. Of course, it could also be a slowburn of a film that chugs all the way through the year (as it has so far), manages to avoid backlash while it's competitors fall, and takes the top prize.

Dallas Buyers Club (director: Jean-Marc Vallée):

The film tells the true story of how Ron Woodroof, a pill-popping, promiscuous, HIV-positive, homophobe was able to survive for six years during an epidemic and how he helped pioneer the first organization to smuggle and sell illegal, non-toxic, anti-viral medications to HIV patients in the U.S. As I mentioned last month, expectations for Matthew McConaughey's portrayal of Woodroof have been high due to emaciated images of the actor that surfaced. Sure enough, the film's bow in Toronto last month served as the lightning rod for his thunderous performance. What critics didn't



anticipate was an equally compelling case for Jared Leto in a supporting role as Rayon—an HIV-positive, transgender woman. Add to that, the film's high relevance in the public eye with the latest gay rights win in June, when the U.S. Supreme Court found Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) unconstitutional. It should be mentioned that the film is relevant, not only due to this country's misstep in initially characterizing HIV and AIDS-related illness a gay disease—a tall-tale buried inside many American minds, but also due to the current healthcare climate in the U.S. Until the film's release in November, we'll have to wait on any box office numbers, but McConaughey himself is a box office machine lately.

It's possible that some of our nominees or even our winner haven't yet been seen, but expected heavy-hitter Benet Miller's *Foxcatcher* can be struck from that list as it has been pushed to 2014. Given that Martin Scorsese's *The Wolf of Wall Street* isn't finished and that the director is scrambling to meet the film's new December release date, it too, may not surface this year. Still to come, however, are David O. Russell's *American Hustle*, John Lee Hancock's *Saving Mr. Banks*, and George Clooney's *The Monuments Men*—all waiting in the wings, ready to unseat their opponents. ☺

Metacritic Scores:

Gravity: 95
12 Years a Slave: 92
Dallas Buyer's Club: 85
Captain Phillips: 83
Blue Jasmine: 78
Nebraska: 78

Life on a Roll



Fountain



Symmetry



Manhattan and Brooklyn bridges

All photos contributed by Elodie Pauwels, <http://elodiepphoto.wordpress.com>

