NAN PANG | NATURAL SELECTIONS

Natural Selections

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

---

*This issue is dedicated to our fellow Editorial Board member **Miguel Crespo, PhD**. Miguel came to us from Weill Cornell Medical Center where he worked in a stem cell lab doing colon cancer research. He was thoughtful, considerate, and a talented and motivated writer/editor with a gift for creating vivid imagery through his poetic use of language. He was ambitious in his work at Natural Selections and was always willing to take on new tasks. He was a great person to work with and he will be missed.*

Getting a Head

MIGUEL CRESPO

If you thought Dr. Frankenstein was just a figment of Mary Shelley's imagination, history is about to turn against you. If you believed connecting heads to different bodies was just a gimmick of old-school science fiction comics, here is a slap in the face from destiny. After successfully transplanting hands and even faces, neurosurgeons are now trying to live up to the ultimate challenge of transplanting a head. Yes, you read correctly, this is not a typo.

Dr. Sergio Cavanero in Italy and Dr. Xiaoping Ren in China have already been trying to get around the legal and ethical hurdles that concern such a procedure, and they claim they can make it with more than

a 90% chance of success. Detractors call him bombastic, but Dr. Cavanero pays no heed to critics. Most likely, the surgery will have to take place in China because no other country seems willing to permit it yet. Dr. Canavero is known to make unfounded claims and promote his work largely through the media. However, he is an accomplished surgeon with a solvent publication record in top-notch journals.

A similar procedure has already been carried out in mice by Dr. Ren where the spinal cord was sectioned with a diamond blade and the nerves glued back. The miracle was made possible by a chemical known as PEG, poly ethylene glycol by its full name. This amber fluid can break open the lipid membrane, which lines the neurons and fuse together two different cells, thereby allowing them to function as a sin-

gle hybrid cell.

History is punctuated with attempts of head transplants in dogs and monkeys. The first "two-headed" dog came into being in St. Louis Missouri back in 1908. The bicephalic beast was again generated in the Soviet Union, and lived for 23 days. In the 1970s, a surgeon named Robert White transplanted the heads of several rhesus monkeys onto others' bodies. And in January this year, Dr. Ren was able to duplicate the feat. Unfortunately, these animals couldn't do much more than blink, breathe, and follow objects with their eyes.

The first human to volunteer was 31 year old Russian, Valerey Spiridov. Paralyzed from the neck down, he can barely eat, type, or move the joystick that sets his

Dr. Sergio Canavero, who plans to carry out the world's first human head transplant in December this year.

chair in motion. He suffers from a rare muscle wasting disease. In spite of the surgeons' optimism, concerns of all kinds have been raised. In the first place, the procedure entails the concert of 80 surgeons working together on the order of days. The limiting step in the process is keeping the brain cold after the head has been removed in order for it to be transplanted onto the donor's body. The brain suffers irreversible damage within minutes of losing blood flow; cooling the brain can delay damage for up to one hour.

In this procedure, only one hour is available by injecting a liquid into the head blood vessels and recirculating it throughout. Once the surgeons get that down, then comes the rest of the procedure joining of the arteries, veins, muscles, and, ultimately, the skin. Such a procedure requires a great deal of choreography and its cost is estimated at $10-100 million, depending on where it takes place.

Is it worth it? Well, Spiridov himself initially said that he was not signing up for an expensive euthanasia and would not go through the operation unless success is guaranteed. But as the date approached, he announced he will not undergo the surgery.

However controversial, if successful, this procedure would bring hope to those who become immobilized from spinal lesions. But this raises more questions than answers: if according to Drs. Ren and Canavero this technology is available, why not apply it to remedy spinal lesions?

Many scientists and ethicists have slammed the project, accusing the surgeons involved of promoting junk science and raising false hopes. However shaky, others find scientific foundation in the project.

What we know so far is that hearts, livers, kidneys, lungs, uteruses, voice boxes, tongues, penises, hands, and faces can be transplanted. So there's good reason to think that the next logical step would be the head. However, in this case immunological rejection becomes more of an issue than in the previous instances. And who is rejecting who anyway? Is it the body donor who receives a head transplant? Or is it the head donor who receives a new body from a neurologically dead donor?

Yet another way to look at it, what would happen if an older head was transplanted onto a younger body? Would we be at the gates of life extension technology? Another aspect to take into consideration would be personality. It is known that hormones produced by the body have an effect on the brain. Would this result in a body changing the person's mood, a head commanding a new body, or a mixture of both? And if so, would the head donor be inheriting the ways of a dead person or imposing his on a corpse?

There's no previous evidence to back up claims in any direction, and, unfortunately, there is only one way to know.

2

Nessa Noms: Paku Pakus

Vanessa J Wu*

Paku Pakus is a new ramen restaurant on 2nd Avenue, between 72nd and 73rd Streets. It is right off the 72nd Street stop on the Q line and opened on Monday, October 23. The restaurant is the culmination of two sisters' love of food and Japan, modified to fit the needs of those on the Upper East Side. They are enthusiastic about their housemade products, signature flavors, and quality you can taste. I spoke with both the owner, Chin Ip, and the chef, Sarah Ip.

Paku Pakus Sisters.

Paku Paku.

VANESSA J. WU | NATURAL SELECTIONS

NS: Would you say there's a special meaning to the name Paku Pakus?
CI: *Paku paku* literally means open and close. So for dining, it means your mouth is opening and closing constantly. Eating nonstop and also in big mouthfuls. *Paku paku* is also this [picks up origami fortune teller]; it is part of our logo. This paper-folding is like fortune-telling, so it would be good to expect what is unexpected and let life tell you what is going on and the next step.

NS: What inspired you to open this restaurant?
CI: I spent quite some time in Japan–a lot of different kinds of places, a lot of different kinds of food. But ramen has really become my passion. I like trying different kinds of ramen from different regions. Different regions have different kinds of soup. Like *kaito* is more fattening, more rich. Soup noodle is one thing, but I found out I also like *mazemen*, which is with different kinds of sauce; it's kind of spicy. In the Upper East Side, you don't see a lot of ramen shops, unlike Lower Manhattan, so I saw this as a good opportunity to open one for myself. And I knew to find a good chef, so I hired Sarah and the team in the kitchen. I think, together, we can really make it work.

NS: Sarah, how did you start working with Chin and Paku Pakus?
SI: Actually, we're sisters! So we've been working together for quite a long while. We're always looking for good food, good restaurants. If we thought a restaurant was serving crappy food, we thought, "Oh, if we had a restaurant, we could do it better."

NS: How long have you been cooking?
SI: I've been cooking since I was young! Actually, I was a pastry chef before. I love cooking and I went to Paris for cooking classes. Also, I spent time in Japan. We tried many different places for ramen, so we were like "Oh! Maybe this is something we can handle and try to make our own."

NS: How long were the two of you in Japan?
CI: I have been on and off for 2-3 years; Sarah would travel to Japan and visit me. She also visited her friends there before. She and our cooking staff have been working on Japanese food for quite a while, so I thought this would be a good team to start with.

NS: What do you both think makes for good ramen?
CI: First of all, it should not be soggy. The noodles have to be chewy, but not undercooked. For soup noodles, the soup has to be steamingly hot, especially to fit the cold weather in New York. The meat–the *chashu*–has to be melty, not dry; it should still be moist, so we keep the fat to keep the moisture of the meat. Egg-wise, it should not be overcooked, it should be—
SI: Soft-boiled.
CI: Yes. That's what I was thinking. How about you?
SI: No MSG! The soup that we cook, I cook over 8 hours. A lot of people just use from concentrate.
CI: We are trying to tell the story to the community about the birth of our most popular dish so far, the Rich and Creamy. So how we get it, we have a big pot and we load it with a lot of bones, full of gelatin, which is good for our cold weather.
SI: We use maybe 60-80 pounds of meat in order to reduce to only 20 quarts of soup. So in the summer, we will probably make it less concentrated, because it will likely be too rich for people in the summer. But in the cold, it is really good when it's really thick. So if you put a spoon to your lips, it's gonna' stick.
CI: It's one of our most popular ones so far. It's really picking up in the cold weather.
SI: For the dumplings and everything, we grind the pork ourselves, do the dumplings ourselves, instead of just buying it from the store.
CI: The principle is that we are not making anything for our customers which we ourselves don't eat. So for us, no MSG and the pork has to be hand-ground. That's our principle; that's our rule.

NS: What would you say is your favorite item, for each of you, on the menu?
CI: *Tantan men*! I always go for some strong flavor–black coffee, strong tea. So *tantan* is my favorite because it is spicy, nutty, sour. Everything seems to be going on in your mouth.
SI: The chicken lollipops. First, we got the Japanese wing sauce, and after that, we thought why don't we put some strawberry puree and balsamic vinegar? We loved it. That's still my favorite.

NS: What are your future plans for the restaurant?
CI: After we get more business, we will be thinking of spinning off to other areas in Manhattan or Queens. That will be some years down the road. We want to really stabilize our quality, make this one successful, and make a name for ourselves before we start expanding.
SI: After we make this successful, maybe we can have a central kitchen and make our own noodles. It is only one store right now and the space in the kitchen is not really big, so we cannot make our own noodles. But if we have a central kitchen, we could.
CI: Our next step is making our own noodles. That's how you can maintain the quality and customize it, too.
SI: For example, some of our customers think the lunch portion noodles are too big. If we could make our own noodles, we could make it a smaller portion for lunch hours. For lunch, we have our lunch combo with the salad and appetizer; if they have the full

portion of the ramen, it's probably too much and they'll fall asleep when they get back to the office.

CI: Also, we think the mazemen, those with sauce, should go with a thick noodle. It's like pasta. To me, I'd like for it to be like linguine, but when we check with our supplier, the thickest they can offer us is not really to our standards.

NS: And are you planning on expanding the menu?

SI: We are minimizing at the beginning because we like to do everything step by step. We still have a lot of interesting dishes that we're going to do.

CI: Some of the items printed on our flyer, we are taking out from our menu, because we talked to the staff and they said it's better to minimize the number of dishes and make sure it's good quality before we expand the menu. I think the next step is vegetarian stock. We are now offering fish stock and the pork stock that we are proud of. It used to be a Jewish area, so the pork stock is actually a minus here. As for the fish stock, some people are vegetarian, so they can't even take the fish stock. So we really want to embrace our vegetarian community.

NS: Do you have any sneak previews of what you want to add to the menu once you start expanding, besides making your own noodles and veggie stock?

CI: The ones we planned before that we've taken out from the menu. Like the cheesy *gyoza*. We find it quite interesting. The first few days, we offered it and people loved it; it's just a little labor-intensive.

SI: It has parmesan on the bottom, so it's crispy.

CI: It takes a long time to prepare, so I said let's sacrifice it for the time being and come back later. That is one thing. Another is the eggplant, which is on our flyer, but we took it out as well. That one is –

SI: Spicy miso and also lime miso. We use the Korean spicy sauce, mix it with the miso on the eggplant, and grill the top; you can eat it alone or with chips.

CI: The miso that we use is four types of miso; we blend it all together in different portions, so it is something that is really house-made for us. It's not something you can get from the supermarket. We want to use this miso blend that we have, our signature one, and use it in more and more dishes.

Rich and Creamy.

NS: The area we're in is more Eastern, traditional seating while the rest of the restaurant is more Western style seating. What made you choose this difference in layout?

CI: Tatami is very uniquely Japanese. I thought a tatami table would be good especially when it's facing the street, kind of overlooking the street: being seen and also seeing people. The problem with the tatami is that a lot of Westerners, probably with long legs, would have a harder time, because with the real tatami, people sit on the floor with their legs folded at the back. That's why we have the hole down there so people can stretch out their legs. We tried to make it Japanese, but we modified it in order to try to fit the Americans. We have the long table over there in the back as well. We thought of putting those low stools, which is very Asian, but we found out this area, the Upper East, has a lot of elderly people, so they may have problems with backless seating. So for the backless, we have it at the bar, but for in the dining hall, we have something with a back.

NS: There's this eye-catching mural all along the wall when we walk in. Tell me about how that came to be.

CI: Noodle shops usually have a long noodle bar. This was our first thought of what to do with our décor. But the thing is our setup is a little difficult, so we changed our mind. When you think of a noodle bar, it's a long table. And we wanted to have a lot of different, colorful characters. When you think of a long table, with a lot of characters, the first thing that comes to mind is Da Vinci's "The Last Supper." So when I talked to my manga artist in Tokyo, I gave them the idea of a long table with different characters that [mimicks] Da Vinci's "Last Supper". So some of the gestures, you can find in "The Last Supper" as well. The judge who is holding back those two guys behind him, you can also find in "The Last Supper," but we kind

Tantan Mazemen.

of changed it a little bit. The theme is still there, but instead of Jesus saying someone betrayed him, we get the reactions of colorful figures and how they handle their different bowls of noodles. A little boy gets shocked by his dad and drops his bowl, so it flies off the table and we have a girl in school uniform flying off and catching a mouthful. And we have a guy nonstop *paku paku*, nonstop eating. We also have a ramen competition–three contenders trying to get in the competition: the winner and the other two, still trying to fight for it and stay in the game. We're thinking of different ways people will handle their noodles, how people treasure it, and fight for what they want.

NS: You mentioned the ramen eating contest. Do you think you'll have anything like that here?

CI: That would be a very good promotion for us, but we haven't really thought that through yet.

NS: Is there anything either of you would like to add?

SI: I really want to take any comments where we can make improvements from it. At the beginning, I don't mind. Tell me, instead of not coming back!

CI: Daily, we are fine-tuning our recipes from the comments we are getting from our customers. The serving team and the cooking team are working very closely. If anyone isn't finding it good enough for any reason, we always tell the cooking team.

*This interview was conducted on November 4, 2017. Since then, Paku Pakus has made some of the changes mentioned in the interview, such as creating a vegetarian-friendly broth.
*For my review of this restaurant and others: vanessajwu.yelp.com
*For more photos from this restaurant and others: instagram.com/vanessajwu

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION
Ones to Watch, Vol. 3 Edition

J IM K ELLER

As I have said in the past, the Best Supporting Actor and Actress races of the Academy Awards are extremely unpredictable. Often a film's narrative can decide who from the supporting races makes it in. Last year was a bit different, as you can see from the outcomes below, but look no further than Rachel Mc-Adams's nomination for *Spotlight* and you can see that there are plenty of other forces at work besides one's actual performance. (For those of you who haven't seen *Spotlight*, Mc-Adams does next to nothing on screen). This is why I use a different format when discussing the supporting than with the leading races. Instead of laying out each actor's accomplishments and whether I would bet on them for a nomination, I have broken down the various circumstances these actors find themselves in as a result of the film's narrative, and how that may influence Oscar voters.

Various critics groups, including the National Board of Review (NBR), the New York Film Critics Circle (NYFCC), and the Los Angeles Film Critics Association (LAFCA) have announced their respective winners and The Broadcast Film Critics Association (BFCA), Hollywood Foreign Press Association (Golden Globes), and the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) have announced their respective nominees. These announcements and the events associated with them help to form a consensus of Oscar nominees and make the acting categories more clear as we approach nominations on January 23rd. In effect, they signal the start of the Oscar race's second leg.

~THE GENTS~

Last Year's Best Supporting Actor Results:
Mahershala Ali — *Moonlight*: Ali was not only nominated, but he took home the Best Supporting Actor Oscar and deservedly so.
Dev Patel — *Lion*: He was nominated in this category, though his was a leading role (category fraud).
Lucas Hedges — *Manchester by the Sea*: Hedges beat the odds of being a young newcomer who was nominated.
Michael Shannon — *Nocturnal Animals*: My hunch that Shannon would end up being the only nomination for the film in the major categories was correct. In fact, it was the only Oscar nomination the film received in any category, and he bumped co-star and Golden

Mark Rylance (left) in *Dunkirk.*

Globe winner Aaron Taylor-Johnson out.
Jeff Bridges — *Hell or High Water*: As I predicted, Bridges easily took one of the five slots and earned his fourth nomination in this category.

The only real snub was Hugh Grant (*Florence Foster Jenkins*) who gave his best performance to date. Clearly, by this time last year, it was easy to determine which supporting roles would go on to be nominated by the Academy.

Before we dive into this year's list of contenders, let me touch upon some of the phenomena we often see in the supporting races:
Two for one: A film can often have multiple supporting nominees. The precedent was set in both supporting categories back in 1939 when Hattie McDaniel competed against Olivia de Havilland for *Gone with the Wind*, and Harry Carey and Claud Rains were nominated for *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Since then, we have seen this play out 29 times in Best Supporting Actress and only 16 times in Best Supporting Actor in the 89 years of the Academy Awards. This last occurred in Supporting Actor for 1991's *Bugsy* when Harvey Keitel and Ben Kingsley were nominated and in Supporting Actress for 2011's *The Help*, which yielded a win for Octavia Spencer and a nomination for Jessica Chastain. Recently, many Oscar watchers have come to believe that a double nomination for a film would cancel both actors out, which could explain why we haven't seen it in six years.

Ride Along: A Best Picture nomination can often yield supporting nominations for the film's actors, e.g., Rachel McAdams (*Spotlight*) and Lucas Hedges (*Manchester by the Sea*).
Category fraud: In years where there are too many high-quality performances to choose from, Academy voters often fill lead performance slots with supporting roles and vice versa. This year, keep your eye on Steve Carell in *Battle of the Sexes* and Armie Hammer in *Call Me by Your Name* for the men. Similarly, Brooklynn Prince in *The Florida Project* for the ladies.

Eyes on the newcomer: Oscar voters will often rally around a newcomer and anoint them the prom king/queen, e.g., Mahershala Ali in *Moonlight*).

Here is a guide to the precursor awards and nominations standings: BFCA (*), LAFCA (⁺), NBR (˜), NYFCC (^), Golden Globe (#), and SAG ($). The symbols appear after the contender's name.

Zeitgeist
Mark Rylance (*Dunkirk*), Ben Mendelsohn (*Darkest Hour*)*:
In the year following the year that saw the #OscarsSoWhite curse beat back with a broom, we're all hoping that the Academy will continue to stem the tide of controversy. But we do so perhaps with more on the line than the country is accustomed to. In any given year, the Academy Awards, to some degree, take the temperature of what is going on in the world. Last year's the Best Picture lineup included *Hell or High Water*, at once a crime thriller and a comment on the plight of the disenfranchised American. This year there are three films in play for Best Picture that comment on the Trump regime, including two films that take place during WWII. The first is *Dunkirk*, Christopher Nolan's gorgeous depiction of the evacuation of allied soldiers who were surrounded by the German Army. The film,

which capitalizes on Winston Churchill's famous "We shall fight on the beaches", illustrates the very air, land, and sea combat that he portended in his speech, but more importantly shines a light on what we can achieve when we work together. Enter Mr. Dawson (Rylance), a private boat captain among the 850 Little Ships of Dunkirk that ferried more than 338,000 soldiers to safety as part of Operation Dynamo. With a 94 on Metacritic *Dunkirk* is one of the year's best reviewed films, and it has wracked-up eight BFCA nominations. Rylance's subtle performance skillfully represents the courage and heart of the seafaring men. Where *Dunkirk* focuses on a singular WWII event, *Darkest Hour* concerns the whole enchilada. The film follows the newly appointed Churchill (Gary Oldman delivering a towering performance) while Hitler closes in on Britain, forcing Churchill to decide whether to negotiate or retaliate. Perhaps best known to American audiences for his work in Netflix's *Bloodline*, Australian actor Mendelsohn plays the reigning monarch of the time, King George VI who was known for his stutter. His role in the Netflix series was well received by the Primetime Emmy Awards and the Golden Globes. Given the luck he has had in television, it will be interesting to see if the film community welcomes him. Despite both men missing out on precursor awards and nominations, their respective films stand firmly in the Best Picture race, which increases their chances for a nomination.

Teachers

Willem Dafoe (*The Florida Project*)[~ ^ + * # $], Armie Hammer[* #], and Michael Stuhlbarg[*] (*Call Me by Your Name*): The second category of contenders dovetails nicely with the first because in dark times, we look to true leaders to lead us into the light. Dafoe, Hammer, and Stuhlbarg's characters strive to lead by example—a characteristic that also shines through in Rylance's character, I might add. Because many of the tenants living in the motel inhabited by mischievous Moonee (Prince, more on her below) and her young friends are too wrapped up in themselves to do any real parenting, Dafoe's caretaker Bobby functions as everyone's parent. And what is a parent, if not a teacher? The film premiered in the Director's Fortnight section of the Cannes Film Festival this year and went on to play at the Toronto and New York film festivals (TIFF and NYFF) where Dafoe earned frontrunner status. Dafoe has two Best Supporting Oscar nominations under his belt for *Platoon* (1989) and *The Shad-*

Willem Dafoe (left) and Brooklyn Prince (right) in *The Florida Project*.

Armie Hammer in *Call Me by Your Name*.

ow of the Vampire (2001). Stuhlbarg plays the father of young Elio (a riveting performance from relative newcomer, 21-year-old Timothée Chalamet) who falls in love with Oliver (Hammer who has never been better) thus the two men teach the teenage boy about two distinct kinds of love. Stuhlbarg was nominated for the Golden Globe for Best Performance by an Actor in a Motion Picture - Comedy or Musical in 2010 for *A Serious Man*. He also appears in *The Shape of Water* this year thereby clocking in two memorable performances. In *Call Me by Your Name*, his performance is subtle but powerful, and the onus falls on him to deliver one of the film's most poignant scenes. Hammer, on the other hand, has struggled to gain ground following his debut in *The Social Network* back in 2010. Here, he imbues the film with such a warmth and vitality that it proves he has more to offer than a pretty face. Between the two men, Hammer has the edge with his Golden Globe nomination, but Dafoe has maintained his frontrunner status. In fact, as the only actor in the race to be selected by every precursor awards group, a win by anyone else would be a shock.

Villains

Sam Rockwell[* # $] and Woody Harrelson[$] (*Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*) and Michael Shannon (*The Shape of Water*): Where there is darkness, there are villains. In the last five years alone 7 out of 25 Best Supporting Actor nominees were villains. This may not sound like a lot, but when you factor in that 2 out of the 5 winners were villains, Christoph Waltz *Django Unchained* (2012) and J.K. Simmons *Whiplash* (2014), it can't be ignored. Rockwell's small town deputy is a racist momma's boy who takes advantage of his station. It's clear that much of what is disagreeable about him was homegrown, and so it is surprising to see his character go through such a transformation by the end of the film. The closest Rockwell has come to Oscar is a pair of BFCA nominations in 2011 and 2014. The first was for Best Supporting Actor for *Conviction* and the second for Best Actor in a Comedy for *The Way Way Back*. Harrelson, on the other hand, is the sheriff of the town whom is on the receiving end of the ire of Mildred Hayes (Frances McDormand in top form) following his department's failure to catch those who raped and murdered her teenage

daughter. I will not give anything away, but with limited screen time, he makes quite the impression. Harrelson has two Oscar nominations under his belt: Best Actor in 1997 for *The People vs. Larry Flynt* and Best Supporting Actor in 2010 for *The Messenger*. That brings us to Shannon's performance in *The Shape of Water*, which takes place in the Cold War era and is the third film that fits the zeitgeist of this year. On display in his Richard Strickland is a hawkish brute whom has no regard for human beings, going so far as to relieve himself in front of the two cleaning women who ultimately work against him (Sally Hawkins and Octavia Spencer who both deliver in spades) and to cover his wife's mouth during "love" making. He is a vile example of a man who in today's society would be on the receiving end of a fair share of #metoo accusations. The Academy has singled out Shannon twice with nominations for films where other standout performances were overlooked: in 2009 for *Revolutionary Road*, and this year in *Nocturnal Animals*. Given this pattern, and the fact that *The Shape of Water* is a major Oscar contender, it's tempting to want to pencil him in. Rockwell delivers what is probably his best work to date in this TIFF audience award winner. It's not likely that he will miss the cut for an Oscar nomination, but if enough voters go for Woody Harrelson's performance, the two could cancel one another out. Generally, Oscar loves a good villain, but maybe not this year when we have too many real villains in our midst.

Other considerations: All eight men I discussed here are white. If the Academy remains vigilant about #OscarsSoWhite they could mix it up with Idris Elba in *Molly's Game*, newcomer Algee Smith in *Detroit*, Jason Mitchell in *Mudbound*, or Laurence Fishburne in *Last Flag Flying*. I can't speak on the latter's performance, but I can say that Smith's, coming from my favorite film of the year, which has been woefully overlooked, is probably the most resonant. Elba holds his own opposite Jessica Chastain, who always delivers top-notch performances, and Mitchell is the heart and soul of *Mudbound*. Any of these men are more than worthy of a nomination, but haven't been appearing in the precursor awards conversation. Sadly, even more white men have: Richard Jenkins (*The Shape of Water*), Steve Carrell (*Battle of the Sexes*), and Patrick Stewart (*Logan*).

~THE LADIES~

Last Year's Best Supporting Actress Race Results:
- **Viola Davis – *Fences*:** She was nominated and won for her powerhouse performance as was predicted.
- **Nicole Kidman – *Lion*:** Kidman's banner year began with this nomination and continues today with her roles in television (*Big Little Lies* and *Top of the Lake: China Girl*) and film (The Killing of a Sacred Deer).
- **Michelle Williams – *Manchester by the Sea*:** She was nominated despite grumblings from some critics who claimed she didn't have enough screen time.
- **Naomie Harris – *Moonlight*:** Nominated
- **Janelle Monáe – *Hidden Figures*:** She was not nominated despite a BFCA nomination.
- **Greta Gerwig – *20th Century Women*:** She also was not nominated despite her BFCA nomination.

Last year's fifth nominee was Golden Globe and SAG nominee Octavia Spencer for *Hidden Figures*, who replaced Monáe, thereby earning her second Best Supporting Actress nomination.

By my discussing six nominees last year, you can see that on the ladies' side, picking the eventual Oscar nominees was not so cut and dry—mainly because of the BFCA's inclusion of Monáe and Gerwig in their list of six. Both actresses were ignored by the other awards bodies. Still, it was easy enough to determine almost all of the eventual Best Supporting Actress nominees by this time last year.
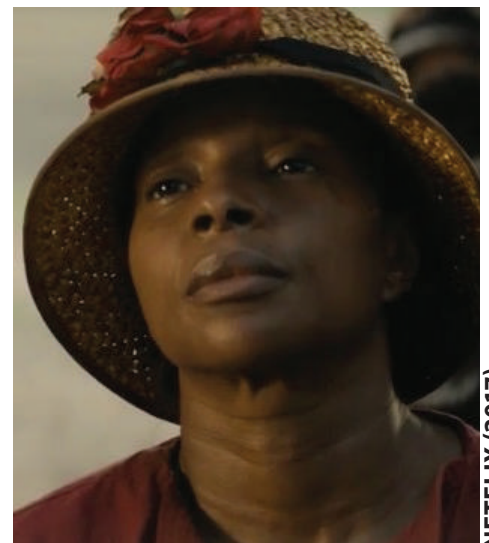
Mother!
Laurie Metcalf (*Lady Bird*)[+ ~ * # $]**, Mary J. Blige (*Mudbound*)**[* # $]**, and Allison Janney (*I, Tonya*)**[* # $]**:**
TIME just named their person of the year: The Silence Breakers. This is big news in a year following one that saw an accused sex offender take the presidency. Women have become the new cause to champion, and rightfully so. For far too long our culture has enabled sexual abuse against women and children by turning the other way, or providing hush money—no more. The Oscar for Best Picture went to *Spotlight* in 2016. The film depicted the true story of how the Boston Globe uncovered the massive child molestation scandal and cover-up within the Catholic Church. One can only guess what the film that discusses details of Harvey Weinstein's or any other of the countless sex offenders' actions that have been exposed this year will be like. But I hope our society learns from this and moves forward with the same vigilance that we are now witnessing, and continues to champion women

Laurie Metcalf in *Lady Bird.*

A24 (2017)

Mary J. Blige in *Mudbound.*

NETFLIX (2017)

and those who have been victimized by these heinous acts. Through all of this, my thoughts have turned to the mothers of these women and children. How helpless they must feel bringing children into this world where they cannot protect them. No once captures that sentiment more perfectly than Metcalf (*Lady Bird*) who struggles to maintain a positive relationship with her teenage daughter (Saoirse Ronan holding her own) as she prepares to leave the nest for college. Metcalf, perhaps best known as the titular character's sister Jackie on *Roseanne*, earned multiple Primetime Emmy Awards nominations and wins for the show, and was also nominated for guest actress work in *3rd Rock from the Sun* (1996), *Monk* (2006), *Desperate Housewives* (2007), and triple nominations last year for *Getting On*, *Horace and Pete*, and *The Big Bang Theory*. Outside of television, she has had a lot of success on the stage, and most recently won the Tony Award for

Best Actress in a Play for *A Doll's House, Part 2.* Dee Rees' *Mudbound* is a gorgeous epic and at the center is Blige's mother who, like Metcalf's character, cannot protect her child (Jason Mitchell) from the evils that befall him. Blige is best known as a musician and performer, but here she strips down to the bare essentials, so much so that one hardly recognizes her, allowing her to fade into the role like a chameleon. Although her acting career is just heating up, Blige has been nominated for two Golden Globes for Best Original Song - Motion Picture: *The Help* in 2012 and again this year for *Mudbound.* Historically, the Academy runs cool on Netflix-produced films (see *Beasts of No Nation* last year, which failed to earn a single nomination). But something tells me that Blige will make it in the top five, even if it is just to stave off the curse of #OscarsSoWhite. Where it's clear that Metcalf and Blige's mothers love their children, Janney's portrayal of the mother of one-time Olympic hopeful Tonya Harding (Margot Robbie giving the year's best performance) in *I, Tonya* paints a picture of constant physical and mental abuse. Janney earned four back-to-back Primetime Emmy Awards nominations for her work in *The West Wing.* She won for the same role in 2000-2002, was nominated for lead the following year, won the next and earned one final lead nomination for it in 2006. In 2014, she won two Primetime Emmys for *Mom* and *Masters of Sex*; she also was nominated for a Golden Globe for the former and nominated again for both the following year. In 2017, she was nominated again for *Mom.* Like Metcalf, Janney has also enjoyed success on the stage, having been nominated for Best Actress in a Play in 1998 for *A View from the Bridge*, and Best Actress in a Musical in 2009 for *9 to 5.* Metcalf appears to have the momentum, and hers is my favorite of those in supporting this year. But you certainly can't count out Janney, and the possibility exists that the two veterans of stage and screen could cancel one another out, allowing Blige, or someone else to sneak in.

Comfortable Favorites
Octavia Spencer (*The Shape of Water*)* # **and Holly Hunter (*The Big Sick*)* $:** Oscar often retreats to what is comfortable, and what better way to do that than to nominate those whom have won or been nominated? In the role of the best friend to love struck mute Elisa (Sally Hawkins knocking it out of the park), Spencer capitalizes on her screen time, making her very memorable. As I mentioned ear-

Margot Robbie in *I, Tonya.*

Hong Chau (left) in *Downsizing.*

lier, she won for *The Help* and was nominated for *Hidden Figures*, but it's worth mentioning that both films were sprawling ensembles, and though not everyone gets nominated from an ensemble, she did. That is a testament to how strong her chances of a nomination are, though a win is unlikely. Hunter was first nominated for Best Actress back in 1988 for *Broadcast News*, she earned double nominations in 1994 for *The Piano* (lead) and *The Firm* (supporting), and was last nominated for Best Supporting Actress in 2004 for *Thirteen.* There has been a groundswell of support for *The Big Sick,* which chronicles the true story of actor/comedian Kumail Nanjiani's relationship with his wife, Emily Gordon, who battled cancer. The screenplay was written by the couple and Hunter plays Gordon's mother who struggles to deal with her daughter's illness. The film is struggling to hold on for a Best Picture nomination, but looks strong for screenplay, and with enough support Hunter could also get in.

Newcomers
Brooklyn Prince (*The Florida Project*)*: The performance from the seven-year-old actress is really a lead, but Academy members could slip her in here. She was recognized by the BFCA in the Best Young Actor/Actress category. Although it would be well-deserved, it is an unlikely scenario.

Hong Chau (*Downsizing*)* # $: The Thai actress, perhaps best known for her small television roles in *Big Little Lies* and *Treme*, has the most heat for this social satire that asks if our lives would be better if we were able to shrink ourselves. Despite the strong buzz for the performance, there is a feeling that the Vietnamese woman that Chau portrays is more of a caricature. But it has been eleven years since an Asian actress (Rinko Kikuchi for *Babel*) has been recognized by the Academy (unless you count Hailee Steinfeld who is one-eighth Filipino and was nominated for *True Grit* in 2010), and the optics of this possible nomination should not be ignored.

For the ladies, other possibilities include Kristin Scott Thomas for *Darkest Hour* as Clementine Churchill, and Melissa Leo for *Novitiate* as a stern Mother Superior, and Rosamund Pike as yet another kind of mother in *Hostiles.* There is also the opportunity to recognize Tiffany Haddish for her standout comedic performance in *Girls Trip.*

Any Oscar race is a wild ride; what seems like a sure thing can be gone tomorrow. We're living in uncertain times where men (especially) are being taken down by their actions. Nothing is set in stone, and no one is safe.

Culture Corner | "Airbag" by Radiohead

Bernie Langs

I've come to believe that there are two masterpiece records that not only predicted the political, cultural and even emotional condition of the 21st century, but expressed them musically and lyrically in such a way as to leave themselves open to years of listening and thoughtful reflection. The first was David Bowie's *Heroes* LP, released in 1977, and the other was Radiohead's *OK Computer*, which debuted twenty years later and recently celebrated its 20th anniversary. The album and CD covers of these collections also display thought-provoking artwork subtly adding to the message of their music, Bowie poses in an oddly Vulcan-like, emotionally removed posture, and Radiohead's is a near-abstract, blurred looped highway adorned with other clues to the record's contents and message.

OK Computer opens powerfully with its most forceful and arguably best track, "Airbag," penned by the band from the ideas of its leader, Thom Yorke. The song commences with an immediate production assault, courtesy of the band and the album's co-producer, Nigel Godrich. Just as with *Heroes*, whose brilliance is enhanced by the production team of Bowie, Brian Eno, and Tony Visconti, "Airbag" and all of the songs of *OK Computer* soar to previously unheard heights of artistic and technical wonder. Both albums are thematically unified masterworks of rock composition, recording, and musicianship.

The conceptual undercurrent of "Airbag" and *OK Computer* goes farther than holding up a mirror to society's emotional gutting in the face of obsessive commercialism, the feeding frenzy to satisfy the hunger of the capitalistic "commodity fetish." Radiohead brings in the world's dependence on the machine and its deadening, defeatist qualities, expressing the idea from several viewpoints and woeful tales. I am reminded of the hard-hitting forces and revelations of the groundbreaking work by Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick in the film *2001*. In that movie, it's not the manmade computer, HAL, that is absolutely threatening to our person and emotions. It is the idea of a human living

out his days in the presence of "The Sentinel," the sleekly constructed, inexplicably perfect machine of unknown origin, a machine about which he will never have any hope of comprehending, leaving him confused and unsure of his meaning and place in the universe.

In 1997, I'd never heard a song by Radiohead, but my younger coworkers at the time were all talking about the power of *OK Computer*. For some reason, I sensed that this album might be "the real deal" offering heights of music I'd longed for since the end of the 1970s. I sat down late one evening and put the CD on for a first listen. As the guitars of "Airbag" soared and pulsated around the room that night, I kept track with the lyric sheet like a boy checking his baseball score card at Yankee Stadium as he witnesses a perfect game. This was exactly what I'd been searching for from popular music for a long time. Everything worked for me, especially the masterful and innovative guitar work of Jonny Greenwood and Ed O'Brien. Colin Greenwood's sparse bass playing in "Airbag" is mixed abstractly and beautifully with drummer Phil Selway's pounding, and the effect transfixes the listener. I later learned that Selway had played a phrase which was looped and reconfigured through various tricks of production giving it an uneven, automatic and unreal feel.

Yorke, sings his guts out about the future during "Airbag." He hits on something about the current world as well, something I'd always sensed around me but had not yet fully realized or been able to articulate. It was a naked exposure of the inter-emotional landscapes of people and how they were shifting quickly because of the currents set loose by technology, those from computers, TV and movies, and by obsessive advertisers trying every trick of the cultural book to sell their wares. And of course, the song was a warning sign about the rising tide of a fairly new thing at the time, called the Internet.

The story of "Airbag" is told in minimal lyrics, just a handful of lines. It's a life life/death/life story taking place during a

World War. The protagonist, Yorke, is in his fast German automobile and is saved from a horrific crash and his demise by the car's airbag. We hear of how in the "deep, deep sleep of the innocent, I am born again" and how "in an interstellar burst, I'm back to save the universe", sung with the powerful lamentation of a lonely soul surviving in a cold, sterile, yet still somehow mysteriously miraculous world. Yorke seems to be relating that we are all born to a fantastic uniqueness, each of us with the mission to save our immediate social and familial worlds, yet surrounded by machine, metal, and flashing neon lights, we forget our purpose, and thus, who we are, very early in life.

Bowie sang these lyrics in 1977 on *Heroes*, "Sons of the Silent Age, don't walk, they glide in and out of life/They never die, they just go to sleep one day"; "Airbag" and *OK Computer* updated and upgraded that sentiment. The lead song on Bowie's masterwork, the well-known '"*Heroes*"' is an in-your-face drama about the Cold War and about the machine emotions of the times. Bowie's lovers kiss amongst the guns blazing in the sky, holding on to each other amid the crazed war machine. In 1997, Yorke is alone, reborn with a flourish of a profound interstellar burst that no one bothers to find significance in but himself. He'll lock himself away until his next fatal car crash and subsequent rebirth.

Radiohead saw the world at that time, saying "here we all are and this is where we are all going." The first line of *OK Computer* and "Airbag" is, "In the next World War" and I took it to mean *today's* World War, *the current,* ever-present World War of people and their deadening machines creeping, seeping in from all directions. Sure, a machine can drive you around and a machine can give you the joy and the art of recording unfathomable, timeless music. Yet, we live in a time when many of us are failing to notice or bother to think about the possibly irreversible emotional price we are paying for the non-stop technological life we've all willingly and complicatedly chosen to lead.

Quotable Quote

"A man can only do what he can do. But if he does that each day, he can sleep at night and do it again the next day".

Albert Schweitzer

Life on a Roll

Qiong Wang

Philadelphia has many tags, the city of love, of brotherhood, and the oldest city in America. In my experience, people in this city seem to have a lot of appreciation for art. From an academic level, the city is the home of many famous art museums including the Barnes Foundation and the Museum of Art. From a street perspective, many strikingly usual wall murals are painted all over the buildings in the center city with awed messages. From every historical building you pass by and every street corner you turn, there is a sense of heritage and era. Unexpectedly, you bump into a modern bank-affiliated coffeehouse offering hot drinks & free WiFi. How interesting!