

SURVIVING HOLLYWOOD:

ON SCREEN AND OFF

by Carole Lieberman, M.D.

“OH, I’m gonna die. I know, we’re all gonna die.... But, I’m gonna die today!” These lines spoken by actress Sandra Bullock in the movie *Gravity*, are perhaps the most chilling and haunting of any Oscar nominee for Best Picture. Why? Because astronaut Ryan Stone (Bullock) captures our unspoken fear of mortality and dares to confront us with it. Indeed, all the nominees for Best Picture reflect our struggles to survive in today’s unpredictable, greedy, and dangerous world, where death could be lurking around the next corner. This theme is reflected in taglines for *American Hustle*: **“Everyone hustles to survive,”** *Captain Phillips*: **“Out here survival is everything,”** *Dallas Buyers Club*: **“Dare to live,”** and *Gravity*: **“Don’t let go.”**

Astronaut Stone continues, “I’m still scared. I’m really scared. Nobody will mourn for me, no one will pray for my soul.” Indeed, many of us feel ‘lost in space’ down here on earth. We are estranged from each other and worlds apart, just as astronauts floating without a tether.

This was brought home to us in the movie *Her*, where Theodore (played by Joaquin Phoenix), heartbroken and damaged by a failed marriage, falls in love with a female Operating System who seems to love him back. Swept up in this fantasy, he plummets to earth, after discovering she’s ‘in love’ with countless others and she abandons him. Not surprisingly, for a time when our economy is on life support, financial survival is also a theme amongst Best Picture nominees.

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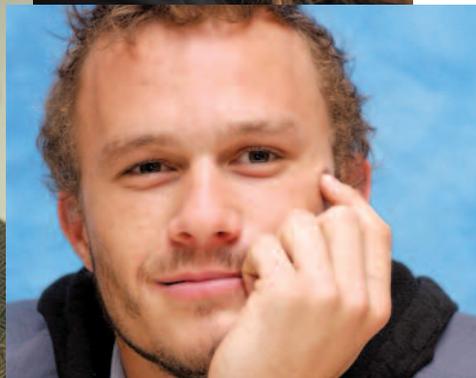
Greedy sharks circle the waters: from con artists to criminals, brokers to Big Pharma, slave masters to Somali pirates...even nuns. In *Philomena* (based on a true story) the title character (played by Judi Dench) is on a lifelong search for her son, only to learn that nuns betrayed her by stealing and selling him when he was a toddler.

This brings us to the classic conundrum: does life imitate art or art imitate life? Is our collective unconscious, preoccupied with modern struggles to survive, affecting Hollywood’s creative focus, or are these top movies affecting our view of how cruel and cold-hearted our world is? The answer is: both. Characters die, vanish or are destroyed in all of the movies nominated for Best Picture, while the same is happening to Hollywood stars in real life, and too many by their own hand.

Philip Seymour Hoffman, who won Best Actor for *Capote*, died recently from an apparent heroin overdose and misguided ‘tough love’ advice. Ironically, one of the actors with whom he competed for this Academy Award in 2006, was Heath

Ledger for *Brokeback Mountain*. The medical examiner in that case reported Ledger’s 2008 death as an accidental overdose from prescription medication abuse.

Recently as well, Julia Roberts’ half-sister, Nancy Motes, committed suicide, leaving behind a note blaming Julia for driving her to do it. One can



only imagine how hard it is to not be jealous of a sibling’s fame and fortune, on top of childhood sibling rivalry extending into adulthood. But the award for biggest elephant in the room goes to Dylan Farrow’s allegations against Woody Allen for sexual abuse. Although, it’s disturbing to believe that someone who’s spent so many years in psychoanalysis could do such a thing, Dylan’s words do ring true.

Unfortunately, life doesn’t only imitate art on the movie screen. It imitates ‘artists’ described in news reports of drugs, divorce, suicide and sexual abuse. When life gets to be a struggle — and it becomes a struggle for each of us occasionally — it’s important to remember the lessons we learn from movies, and find inspiration from both REAL and REEL life characters, like Ron Woodroof (played by Matthew McConaughey) in *Dallas Buyers Club*, based on a true story. Valiantly struggling to survive a life-threatening illness, ignorance and bureaucratic corruption, Ron leaves us with the lines, **“I only got one life. I want it to mean something.”** And isn’t this the Hollywood ending we should be striving for and imitating?

America’s Psychiatrist, Carole Lieberman, M.D., was recognized for her talents by The Academy of Television Arts and Sciences who awarded her three Emmys. Described as “One of the nation’s top therapists,” her bestselling books and award-winning multi-dimensional career attract an international audience. She hosts “Dr. Carole’s Couch” — a popular weekly Internet radio show that can be heard on voiceamerica.com where she unlocks the door to healthier relationships. For further information on her books, media appearances or private practice visit: www.drcarole.com www.badgirlsbook.com.

