

Oscars 2013: Did Scientology ruin The Master's hopes for the Oscars?

[Joseph Harrison](#) asks why, despite being easily one of the best films of 2012, *The Master* has been largely overlooked in this year's academy awards

Thursday 14 February 2013



Paul Thomas Anderson's *The Master* was undoubtedly one of the most profoundly affecting films of 2012. Although it was partly based on the formation of the Church of Scientology by L Ron Hubbard, its focus ranged from the consequences of war on the mental health of soldiers, alcoholism and depression, and perhaps most poignantly, the intense and inexpressible love shared between the two principle figures. The acting was simply sublime, subsumed with gravitas but also exquisitely poised and nuanced. An initial interview scene between Philip Seymour Hoffman and Joaquin Phoenix resonates in the mind long after the end of the film due to the impactful nature of the actors' performances that present real and tangible emotions for the viewer in a way that very few other films were able to do in 2012.

Therefore, it is perhaps surprising when one realises that *The Master* has done relatively poorly in the Oscar nominations. Philip Seymour Hoffman and Amy Adams are nominated for Best Supporting Actor and Actress respectively, and Joaquin Phoenix is nominated for Best Actor, but no credit was given to Paul Thomas Anderson for his directing or script, both of which were phenomenal, and the film failed to appear in the Best Film nominations list. Also, unforgivably, Jonny Greenwood's haunting yet mesmerising sound track was denied its rightful nomination in the Music, Original Score category. This is perhaps more shocking when considering the fact that Anderson's previous film, *There Will Be Blood*, which *The Master* stands beside resolutely and proudly, was nominated for 8 awards, and for all of the most sought after categories.

In a year of excellent films *The Master* still manages to hold its head above the water and more frequently than not push others beneath the surface. It seems obvious, therefore, that it is the film's 'sensitive' subject matter that has caused it to suffer in the eyes of the Academy. It is perhaps inevitable that a film that openly discusses or reveals the more unusual or cruel practices of a Church, or more accurately of an organisation that bears resemblance to a Church, so well routed within Hollywood society, is going to be side-lined in favour of less politically volatile films. No doubt the Academy or Hollywood in general would wish to avoid incurring the wrath of an organisation that houses so many of its successful stars, but this does not detract away from the fact that *The Master* has been cheated of its nominations. It is evident

that Anderson's film has been hampered since its inception because of its subject matter. Harvey Weinstein, the manager of the studio that produced the film, said in a [BBC article](#) how he and Anderson were repeatedly told to abandon the project by colleagues and how a certain religious organisation was putting pressure on the studio to stop production.

The Church of Scientology, of course, denies all these claims, and the very fact than the film was still made is indicative of the waning influence of the Church in Hollywood. However, it is not unreasonable to presume that a film that has such a subject matter, even if it is still only loosely based on actual events, is going to be denied the publicity it deserves through nominations in the Oscars. Of course, the Oscars have never really been truly representative of the best films of the year, often opting for big names rather than better films, but it does seem curious that a film that has both big names and critical worth has been left by the wayside. When looking at the current Best Picture nominations, *The Master* contends with the best of them, and there really does seem to be no other reason for its scarcity other than the zealotry of certain individuals in Hollywood. The film is undeniably excellent if slightly hard-going and despite its relative absence from the award ceremonies is essential viewing.



5 comments

phil pipieri

14 Feb '13 at 9:37 pm

I must agree with you about the outstanding performances by the actors and the the oversight of no nomination for script, direction, nor art direction..

However, I'd disagree with your associating any of the cult actors with influence on The Academy as there really aren't that many of them left, and those who are, have never, and probably will never, win an Academy Award. They just don't have the talent that media and manipulation can't buy!

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Boots Johnson

14 Feb '13 at 11:44 pm

I think the film was outstanding to people familiar with Scientology. To most people it was confusing. That is why it is not up for best picture, script or director. Take the scene of Opening Procedure by Duplication. To someone not familiar with the cult, those actions would just seem insane. They wouldn't know that that is what Scientologist actually do. It is only meaningful if you know that people actually do that.

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Luke

15 Feb '13 at 5:20 am

I dont know why you think the script was so good... i think it was poor... the acting makes up the difference... (especially Phoenix)

The flow isn't that great either... it spits and specks not to mention the lack of a good flow.... it simply wants to "fit in" lots of digs at scientology in one film... not tell a good a story... there is a difference... unless you just hate scientology and want the digs dug so badly... the directing good... i dont know about oscar-worthy though...

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karl

16 Feb '13 at 12:59 am

I am sorry but the movie is just very poor. nobody likes it but the scientology critics. just look at the boxoffice mojo how poorly it goes in the theatures although all the promotion it got. It is just very very

lame.

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Pedro

25 Feb '13 at 10:21 am

Very poor!? That's clearly an understatement. Not only 'The Master' is a direct critic on Scientology and such similar entities, but also some sort of essay (despite its lightness) on returning soldiers from WWII — check John Huston's 1946 documentary. Not saying that it should win (it's the Oscars, for chrissake...) but it's clearly a notable effort. I mean: 'Argo', really? FFS.

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