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Mini Reviews, Part 9 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

Here is the ninth batch of mini-reviews, more 2024 films of the fantastic:

MEMOIR OF A SNAIL (2024): MEMOIR OF A SNAIL is an Australian claymation film--a very Australian claymation film. There are references to Vegemite and Chiko Rolls, and the film assumes the audience realizes Perth is on one side of Australia and Canberra on the other, and that the outback lies between them. (They do flash a map at one point, for the benefit of non-Australians.)

But more than that, Gilbert's plight seems to be an echo of that of First Nations people. He loses his parents when they die, rather than being kidnapped from them, but then he is sent far away, to live with a family with a totally different culture (in Gilbert's case, a really extreme Christian fundamentalism) and to be stripped of his past and molded to their culture.

The storyline in fact is very familiar in what one might find in ordinary live-action films. Two twins are separated when they are orphaned. They are separated both in distance (opposite sides of the continent) and in environment. Gilbert (as I said) ends up in a super-strict ultra-Christian family, while Grace ends up with foster parents who go to key parties (are most viewers even going to know what these were?), nude cruises, and so on.

Again, as in live-action films, Grace meets Pinky, an eccentric old woman who teaches her about life, similar to Gloria Dump in BECAUSE OF WINN-DIXIE, or any number of Magical Negroes, although thankfully the filmmakers of MEMOIRS OF A SNAIL do not make her a First Nations person.

I like the fact that many real books show up, with characters reading THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK, THE GRAPES OF WRATH, and a lot more I cannot remember. The books often refer to the characters' situation or state of mind, but this is not hammered at you.

Two good quotes:

Pinky says, "I feel older than I look, and I look like a testicle."

And a character quotes Kierkegaard (without attribution): "Life can only be understood backwards, but we have to live it forward."

Some of the snail shapes seem to be references/homages to the spiral shapes in another claymation film, THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 25 October 2024.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt23770030/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/memoir_of_a_snail

THE SUBSTANCE (2024): In an early scene in THE SUBSTANCE, we see a hospital technician whose skin is so perfect he looks like an android, while the skin on Elizabeth's face is photographed to show every wrinkle (and probably had a bunch added either by make-up or CGI).

There is a lot of symbolic imagery: Elizabeth goes to an aging part of town, she travels through a seeming "birth canal" to a brightly lit room resembling a hospital (delivery) room. The transformation scenes seem to have been inspired by CAT PEOPLE, AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON, and other shape-shifting movies. There's also some David-Cronenberg-style body horror, and even an homage to a Hitchcock transformation sequence.. And a sleazy producer named Harvey.

The ending is perhaps a bit overdone.(and illogical--there seems to be spontaneous creation of matter involved).

There have been many films about aging actresses (but none about aging actors, so far as I know). But until recently, the aging was inevitable. Nothing was going to solve Norma Desmond's problem. Now of course technology has stepped in. The idea that technology can solve the problems of aging actresses was also treated in THE CONGRESS with Robin Wright. The two would make an excellent double feature.

This yet another film that starts out with no sound, making you think your streaming is messed up. I suppose it's a ploy to get everyone back into the theaters, but now that they have sunk to the level of the audience singing all with WICKED (and not just showings dedicated to that), it's not going to work with me. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 20 September 2024.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt17526714/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_substance

THE ANIMAL KINGDOM (2024): There is a new disease. The doctors cannot cure it, but they hope to stabilize it. Lana, Francois's wife and Emile's mother, has this disease. It doesn't seem to have a name, but we've seen it before, albeit without any scientific basis. She (and others) are mutating into other species. And now Emile is too. As I've said, we've seen this with werewolves, and in films such as THE REPTILE, but the explanations as supernatural, rather than (presumably) scientific.

I'm sure this is supposed to be an analogy to something, though I'm not quite sure what. In one sense, it's about accepting what you are and enjoying that freedom. On the other hand, Emile reminds me of Leon Carridos. There is a sense of being in the closet. Ultimately, I suppose, it is the fear of the outsider: both the outsider's fear of being found out, and the insider fear of the outsider themselves.

But scientific basis or not, this is ultimately a fancied-up werewolf movie. [-ecl]

Released streaming 15 March 2024.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt16606592/reference>

What others are saying: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_animal_kingdom

Amazing Prediction (prediction by Mark R. Leeper):

Back in the 01/04/02 issue of the MT VOID, we ran the following:

This issue of the MT VOID is brought to you in part by THE HOMECOMING.

Coming in February: Homer's THE HOMECOMING. For the many avid fans of Homer, the wait is over. Homer has finally completed the third book in the Odysseus Saga. Odysseus has fought, he has wandered, but sometimes greatest challenges can be found at home. Read Homer's THE HOMECOMING from Penguin Classics.

"It's like nothing Homer ever wrote before. THE HOMECOMING is a real departure." --Rosetta Stone, Harvard Department of Classics

Well, now it's 2024, and on December 6, THE RETURN was released (there's always a title change or two along the way), described in the IMDb as follows: "After twenty years Odysseus finally returns to Ithaca, where he finds his wife held prisoner by suitors vying to be king and his son facing death at their hands. To win back his family and all he has lost, Odysseus must rediscover his strength."

Way to go, Mark!

[-ecl]

The Lydeckers: Pioneers of Practical Effects (YouTube link from Gregory Frederick):

[Here is] a link to a YouTube video which has a very cool behind the scenes view of 1940-1960s film, serial and even TV special effects from the Lydecker brothers. They did some really neat miniature effects with explosions, etc. If you don't want to watch the whole thing watch from 33:19 to the end. The woman (who is a film preservationist) in the YouTube put together a very funny greatest hits of the same actor used in many films and serials getting into major explosions and crashes which were done by the Lydecker brothers.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xb4JDf8K5J0>

[-gf]

THE METAMORPHOSIS (letter of comment by Gary McGath):

In response to [Evelyn's comments on THE METAMORPHOSIS](#) in the 12/06/24 issue of the MT VOID, Gary McGath writes:

[Evelyn writes,] "Even with the first sentence, the book is a puzzle. "One morning, when Gregor Samsa woke from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a ..." what? "Horrible vermin"? "... monstrous verminous bug"? "monstrous vermin"? "... monstrous cockroach"? "... beetle"? "... giant insect"? (David Wylie, Ian Johnston, Stanley Corngold (and Google), Michael Hofmann, Vladimir Nabokov, and unknown, respectively) The original German is "ungeheuren Ungeziefer", which is no help, because "Ungeziefer" is not a strictly defined entomological term."

I'm not a native German speaker, but "monstrous vermin" seems closest to me. Definitely not anything that suggests a particular species. [-gmg]

This Week's Reading (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

A few weeks ago in my review of Peter Manseau's THE JEFFERSON BIBLE (MT VOID, 11/15/24), I mentioned THE THOMAS JEFFERSON BIBLE edited by Henry E. Jackson. I now have read that, or at least Jackson's (lengthy) introductory comments, and I have more to say. In particular, I want to address a few quotes from Jackson.

"No two Presidents of the United States more effectively exhibited Christian principles in operation than did Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, and yet none were so bitterly criticized by conventional Christians."

Well, Jefferson's reputation has taken a dive since then, as his actions regarding slavery clearly did not reflect his lofty writings on equality. (For that matter, many of his own writings did not reflect his lofty writings on equality--see his comments on the intellectual abilities of Blacks in NOTES ON THE STATE OF VIRGINIA.)

"If you were asked to name one or two good books which deserved first place in each of these groups, what books would you suggest? Under the first group you could readily suggest several: 'Social Environment and Moral Progress,' by Alfred Russel Wallace; 'Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure,' by Edward Carpenter; 'The Rising Tide of Color,' by Lothrop Stoddard."

I don't know about the other two, but THE RISING TIDE OF COLOR has not aged well at all, and is now perceived as racist, white supremacist, and anti-miscegenation. One quote, "if the Negroes have separate schools, they shall be good schools; ... if they have separate train accommodations, they shall have good accommodations," led black audiences to laugh in disbelief.

"To say that Mary's conception of her baby was immaculate, is not only to insinuate but to assert that every other mother's conception of her baby is maculate. Whereas every child conceived in love is an immaculate conception, for wherever love is, God is."

Among other things, Jackson doesn't understand what the Immaculate Conception refers to. It is *not* the Virgin Birth; it is rather than *Mary* was conceived without original sin.

"Look at the preamble of the Declaration. The three basic rights which it treats--'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness'--are not these subjects exactly paralleled in the teaching and thought of Jesus? First--'life'; said Jesus, 'I have come that they may have life and may have it in abundance.' Second--'liberty'; said Jesus, 'Ye shall know the truth and the truth will make you free.' Third--'the pursuit of happiness'; said Jesus, 'I have spoken to you that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full.' From the standpoint of undistorted facts, is it not obvious that these causes were common to Jesus and the author of the Declaration?"

This is, I thinking really stretching the analogies.

"As Carlyle's wish for a truthful portrait of Jesus can never be satisfied, although Leonardo da Vinci's probably comes nearer to it than any other ..."

Except of course, da Vinci's is definitely Caucasian, and Jesus wasn't. For that matter, I am not sure if Jackson is referring to the portrait in "The Last Supper" or "Salvator Mundi". In the latter, Jesus is also dressed in Renaissance era clothing, and making the sign of the cross. One is reminded of the "St. Columba Altarpiece Adoration of the Magi" by Rogier van der Weyden, in which you see the Three Wise Men at the manger, and on the back wall of the manger is hanging a crucifix!

See <https://broadview.org/the-many-faces-of-jesus/> for other comments.

"The two marks of man, which distinguish him most from animals, are: first, his power to think; second, his capacity to love."

Of course, not we're pretty sure that some animals can think, and that some animals can love. (Of course, this involves trying to define "thinking" and "love", and lots of luck with that.)

"It is safe to trust yourself alone with Jesus. As soon as we acquire the courage to apply the democratic principle to education, then it will be possible to put into everybody's hands at least the teachings of Jesus printed by themselves alone as they are in the Jefferson Bible. They could even be put into the curriculum of the public school."

Welcome to Oklahoma. Except there it's not the Jefferson Bible, it's the Trump Bible. Ack, ptui. [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

What convinces masses are not facts, not even invented facts, but only the consistency of the illusion.
--Hannah Arendt

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