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Mini Reviews, Part 3 (film reviews by Mark R. Leeper and Evelyn C. Leeper):

This is the third batch of mini-reviews:

ONE LIFE (2023): This is the dramatized version of Sir Nicholas Winton's story about how he (along with others) saved over six hundred children in a Kindertransport from Czechoslovakia. (The original Kindertransport was for Germany and Austria only.) A large amount of the film is devoted to Winton's life forty years after the war, which means of course, less time available for the actual effort during the war. The story was told in a documentary, NICKY'S FAMILY, made in 2011, and I would recommend skipping ONE LIFE and seeing NICKY'S FAMILY instead. NICKY'S FAMILY is available on Hoopla, Kanopy, and other free streaming services. (Mark's review of NICKY'S FAMILY is available at <http://leepers.us/mtvoid/2013/VOID0621.htm#nicky>.) [-ecl]

Released theatrically 15 March 2024. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4), or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13097932/reference>

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

NO ABRAS NUNCA ESA PUERTA (NEVER OPEN THAT DOOR) (1952): NO ABRAS NUNCA ESA PUERTA is an Argentinian film noir based on two Cornell Woolrich stories. In the first, based on "Somebody on the Phone", Raul discovers his sister Luisa is being blackmailed by someone and has taken all his money and his mother's diamond ring. He confronts her, and ... well, bad things ensue. In the second, based on "The Hummingbird Comes Home", a blind mother is awaiting her son's return, only to discover he is a thief and a murderer. Again, bad things ensue. Without giving anything away, I will say that the film WAIT UNTIL DARK may have been inspired by either this film, or the original Woolrich story. [-ecl]

Released in Argentina 23 May 1952 (Argentina); in the US 30 January 2014. Rating: high +2 (-4 to +4), or 8/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0184782/reference>

MANHATTAN (1979): I'm starting to get more older movies from Swap-a-DVD, and they are often movies I decided I want on DVD to replace the VHS copies. So the latest was MANHATTAN. The artwork is striking, and nostalgic--the title is formed by buildings of the Manhattan skyline, with the Twin Towers forming the "H". Diane Keaton talking about art reminded me of her character in REDS. And there is also a young Meryl Streep in only her sixth movie.

But of course, Mariel Hemingway is even younger: she plays a seventeen-year-old and she was in fact actually seventeen. (This was her third film.) Woody Allen's character is dating her, and it is made clear that they are having sex. (Allen was forty-three at the time; presumably so was his character.) Allen's character also says he is against extra-marital affairs--"People should mate for life"--but has two ex-wives. All in all, perhaps even creepier now than it was then. [-ecl]

Released theatrically 25 April 1979. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4), or 7/10.

Film Credits: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0079522/reference>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/manhattan>

Tubi (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

The problem with Tubi is the ads. I mean, ads per se are very 1960s, but not ads for razors for pubic air, or treatments for vaginal odor. We didn't see those in the 1960s.

One ad (from CSL Plasma) says you can make up to \$700 a month by "donating" plasma. No, if you're being paid it's not donating, and if you're donating you're not being paid. [-ecl]

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

Okay, I'll admit it--it's getting harder to fill this column each week, especially since of late I've been bingeing Somerset Maugham short stories, which I already reviewed, at least partially (in the 01/15/21 issue of the MT VOID).

So I am reduced to including comments on MOBY-DICK excerpted from my "Annotations and Commentary on Moby-Dick". I will spare you the annotations of the "Etymology" and "Extracts" sections, and just give you those from Chapter 1:

CHAPTER 1: Loomings

"Call me Ishmael." Much has been written about this, so I'll merely point out that Ishmael was an outsider. The full story can be found in Genesis, particularly Genesis 16:1–16 and 17:20–21. But though he is often described as an exile, this is not completely accurate. It is true that his mother Hagar was exiled by Sarai (a.k.a. Sarah), but that was when she was pregnant with Ishmael, and she returned before the birth. Later, God says, "And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation." [Genesis 17:20] But God emphasizes that His covenant is with Isaac. So Ishmael is more like a disinherited older son passed over for a favored younger one. Of course, he also got to miss out on almost being sacrificed, so this was an advantage.

The "spleen" was originally thought to be the origin of bad temper. Charles Baudelaire originated the use of "spleen" to mean boredom, sadness, and depression with life.

"The Dark Night of the Soul" ("La oscura del alma") was a poem by 16th century mystic San Juan de la Cruz, but the term in English is usually associated with F. Scott Fitzgerald's line, "In a real dark night of the soul it is always three o'clock in the morning." Douglas Adams wrote a novel titled *The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul*. Since Melville pre-dated Fitzgerald, he presumably have patterned his "damp, drizzly November in my soul" after the original, or references to it.

"Hypos" in "whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me" is an abbreviation for hypochondria, as meaning a morbid depression of spirits rather than a physical illness.

The Cato mentioned is Cato Marcus Porcius (95 B.C.E.–46 B.C.E.), considered the founder of the Stoic school of philosophy. After being defeated in his attempts to defend Sicily and to preserve Rome from the tyranny of Julius Caesar, Cato committed suicide by stabbing himself. He is not to be confused with Cato the Elder (also named Cato Marcus Porcius, 234 B.C.E.–149 B.C.E.) or Cato Publius Valerius, the poet, who lived about the same time as Cato the Stoic.

A mole is a solid structure serving as a pier, breakwater, or causeway.

Some names and places were straightforward: "Manhatto" seems to be Ishmael's poetic version of Manhattan. In Manhattan, he mentions Corlears Hook, Coenties Slip, and Whitehall. The first two are now under landfills, Corlears Hook near FDR Drive and Cherry Street, and Coenties Slip near Pearl and South Streets. Whitehall is still there, at the southern end of Broadway. Corlears Hook was known for prostitutes before and during Melville's time, hence (according to many) the term "hookers".

The Saco River runs through northeastern New Hampshire and southwestern Maine.

There has been much discussion of the "poor poet of Tennessee"; the consensus is that Melville was not referring to a specific poet, but more to a generic poor poet.

Rockaway Beach is a seven-mile stretch of beach in Queens, New York, and is a popular summer destination.

In Greek mythology, Narcissus was punished for refusing Echo's love by falling in love with his own image in a pond. When he realized he could not possess his heart's desire, he killed himself. (In some versions, he is melted by his passion, but the traditional end is that he drowns himself.)

The Van Rensselaers were Dutch settlers who arrived in New York in 1630 as patroons of Rensselaerwyck, near Albany. This was the largest patroonship granted by the Dutch in what were at the time their colonies. The patroonship continued after the transition to English colonies, and did not end until 1839. Though originally the patroons had almost total control over the land and its tenants, after American independence, they lost all their feudal laws and became merely large estates subject to Federal and state laws. Melville was descended from the Rensselaers.

The Randolphs were one of the First Families of Virginia, arriving in 1643.

By "the Hardicanutes" Melville is probably referring to the descendants of Harthacut, a 11th century king of Demark and Eglan. This is a sly bit of humor—it is unlikely the Renssalaers and Randolphs would appreciate being lumped socially with a Viking king of hundreds of years earlier.

Ishmael's talk about "the transition ... from a schoolmaster to a sailor" indicates that he was a schoolmaster before signing on to the Pequod.

A league is three miles. (This means, by the way, that Jules Verne's title *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, the distance is 60,000 miles, and hence is not a depth—as is often assumed—but the total distance sailed.)

Spiles are wooden pegs driven into nail holes on a ship.

Ishmael makes the same sort of error in asking, "Why did the Greeks give it [the sea] a separate deity, and own brother of Jove?" as the coiners of the word "television" and other hybrid words did. He mixes Greek and Latin indiscriminately (Jove being the Latin name for Zeus). This is probably due to Melville's having to leave school at age fifteen to help support his family, and hence receiving only a partial classical education, covering the Romans, but not the Greeks (except as somewhat vague exemplars as culture).

An example of Melville's humor: "Now, when I say that I am in the habit of going to sea whenever I begin to grow hazy about the eyes, and begin to be over conscious of my lungs, I do not mean to have it inferred that I ever go to sea as a passenger. For to go as a passenger you must needs have a purse, and a purse is but a rag unless you have something in it. Besides, passengers get sea-sick—grow quarrelsome—don't sleep of nights—do not enjoy themselves much, as a general thing;—no, I never go as a passenger; nor, though I am something of a salt, do I ever go to sea as a Commodore, or a Captain, or a Cook. I abandon the glory and distinction of such offices to those who like them. For my part, I abominate all honourable respectable toils, trials, and tribulations of every kind whatsoever. It is quite as much as I can do to take care of myself, without taking care of ships, barques, brigs, schooners, and what not. And as for going as cook,—though I confess there is considerable glory in that, a cook being a sort of officer on ship-board—yet, somehow, I never fancied broiling fowls;—though once broiled, judiciously buttered, and judgmatically salted and peppered, there is no one who will speak more respectfully, not to say reverentially, of a broiled fowl than I will. It is out of the idolatrous dotings of the old Egyptians upon broiled ibis and roasted river horse, that you see the mummies of those creatures in their huge bake-houses the pyramids."

In Melville's time, both men and women used a purse to carry money.

"The transition is a keen one, I assure you, from a schoolmaster to a sailor, and requires a strong decoction of Seneca and the Stoics to enable you to grin and bear it." Seneca the Elder (Lucius Annaeus Seneca, 4 B.C.E.–65 C.E.) was a Stoic philosopher eventually forced to commit suicide for his alleged involvement in a plot to assassinate Nero. Stoicism was a school of philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium in the 3rd century B.C.E. and emphasized the suppression of destructive emotions; Seneca and others claimed that "virtue is sufficient for happiness" and so true Stoics would ignore misfortune.

A hunks is a surly ill-natured person, especially a miser. Though it appears plural it is actually singular.

Ishmael says of how to go to sea, "I always go to sea as a sailor, because they make a point of paying me for my trouble, whereas they never pay passengers a single penny that I ever heard of. On the contrary, passengers themselves must pay. And there is all the difference in the world between paying and being paid. The act of paying is perhaps the most uncomfortable infliction that the two orchard thieves entailed upon us. But *being paid*,—what will compare with it? The urbane activity with which a man receives money is really marvellous, considering that we so earnestly believe money to be the root of all earthly ills, and that on no account can a monied man enter heaven. Ah! how cheerfully we consign ourselves to perdition!" The two orchard thieves are, of course, Adam and Eve. But money itself is not "the root of all earthly evils"; the reference is to 1 Timothy 6:10, which says, "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." [italics mine]

Ishmael says, "For in this world, head winds are more prevalent than winds astern (that is, if you never violate the Pythagoean maxim)." This is not the Pythagorean Theorem, but the best-known maxim he promoted in his philosophy: Do not eat beans. (Yes, friends, even Melville made fart jokes!) [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

All truth is not to be told at all times.
--Samuel Butler

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