

Latterday Disney

NEVER CRY WOLF (1983) dir. by Carroll Ballard

THE JOURNEY OF NATTY GANN (1985) dir. by Jeremy Kagan

NEVER CRY WOLF is a true story based on the autobiographical

THE MT VOID

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account of famed nature writer Farley Mowet. Totally unprepared, Mowet sets out in the frozen Canadian wilderness to study wolves and their affect on the caribou population. Mowet finds himself wanting to vindicate the wolves of the accusation that they are destroying the caribou population and goes to great lengths to prove his point. Incredible photographed sequences and more than a little humor make this a very enjoyable film. Out of a possible 4 stars Maltin gives it 3, Scheuer gives it 3 1/2, calling it "a superb nature drama."

THE JOURNEY OF NATTY GANN takes place during the Depression and is the story of a young woman's odyssey across country in order to be reunited with her father. On the way she befriends a wolf and a young drifter played by John Cusack (of SAY ANYTHING). Like many classic films THE JOURNEY OF NATTY GANN is predictable but absolutely flawlessly told. Maltin and Scheuer both like the rich 30's atmosphere of the film and each gives it three stars. Scheuer says "This journey is well worth taking."

2. I was leafing through a magazine and noticed an advertisement for a new car model. I will not mention the name of the car, but I have to quote what they said in the ad. Now, please ignore for the moment that whoever wrote the ad does not even know the difference between a sentence and a sentence fragment. A year or so ago I might have editorialized about that, but the world has gone into a decline since last year. The pseudo-sentence I read about this car said, "A new car so perfectly suited for today's families that it has been named the Official Car of the new Disney-MGM Studios Theme Park." This is a statement so perfectly suited to our country's inability to think logically or to recognize what is a s_e_q_u_i_t_u_r and what is _n_o_n that I had chicken for lunch today but only a salad the day before.

3. The bells are ringing.... Yes, the marital (*not* martial!)

month of June has resulted in 2% of our club getting married this year! Our inestimable Lincroft librarian, Lance Larsen, has finally settled down and gotten married; next thing he'll be cutting his hair and acting like a normal person! And two people from Middletown, Dale Skran and Jo Paltin, are tying the knot (noose?) this Sunday. Congratulations to all (and anyone else we haven't heard about yet)! [-ecl]

Mark Leeper
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The mass media is supported and sustained by commercial entities. And corn flakes and Shakespeare are simply not kissing cousins. Leonard Bernstein and living bras are incompatible. And you cannot sustain adult, probing, meaningful drama when the proceedings are interrupted every twelve minutes by a dozen dancing rabbits with toilet paper.

--Rod Serling

STAR TREK V: THE FINAL FRONTIER

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Capsule review: This is the most flawed of the Star Trek movies. But it also has the courage to say something controversial and for once something that is not pat. For reasons I cannot say here without spoiling plot, I see this as a film of subversive ideas. For that reason I have surprised myself by liking the film a lot.
Rating: +2.

Okay, what can I say? I have heard a lot negative about S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k_V. Maybe my expectations were lower for this film than for others in the series. And there is a lot that i_s wrong with S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k_V. There is a lot that it does not deliver that others in the series did. The special effects--which are rumored not to have been done by Industrial Light and Magic because Shatner's and Nimoy's salaries--are not as perfect as in the other films. Well, fine. The effects are not jarringly bad and did not get in the way of the story. There are a lot

of silly and even stupid scenes. There is a rescue at the beginning like something out of S_u_p_e_r_m_a_n that irritated me. If you have seen the coming attractions you have seen Jimmy Doohan doing a silly pratfall. There are serious style problems. This is not going to be one of the more popular Star Trek movies.

But when it is all over, S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k_V has said something about the nature of religious inspiration and the need to question it. It did not use its science fiction merely to give us an interesting backdrop for a swashbuckler. S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k_V is more subversive than L_i_f_e_o_f_B_r_i_a_n, and I suspect more subversive than T_h_e_L_a_s_t_T_e_m_p_t_a_t_i_o_n_o_f_C_h_r_i_s_t. (I say I suspect because I have not had an opportunity to see T_h_e_L_a_s_t_T_e_m_p_t_a_t_i_o_n_o_f_C_h_r_i_s_t. It seems somebody thought the ideas in it were too dangerous. Luckily there are some relatively safe havens for free thought and science fiction is one of them.)

On a remote desert planet a messianic figure, a Vulcan named Sybok, comes out of the wilderness with a religious mission, a mission that requires a starship. It is not difficult to guess what starship he is going to get. His plan, though convoluted, is perfectly logical. Meanwhile, we are treated to some very sappy scenes of the Enterprise's merry men on shore leave at Yosemite National Park. These would have been well left on the cutting room floor. Rest assured the plot will soon have Klingons, ship capturings, a mission to where no anything has gone before.

There is a lot in this film that the filmmakers will have a hard time living down. Nichelle Nichols, who by now looks like a grandmother, attempts an absurd erotic dance against what looks like an

astronomically impossible backdrop. There are slapstick scenes in elevator shafts. There is a sort of encounter group session in space that is pitifully cliched. There is bad camerawork at times. Then there is the puzzling question of David Warner's role. It was too big to be a cameo and too small to be considered a major part. An actor of his stature is unlikely to have signed up for such a small role, so one wonders if there was more that was cut. And the music is entirely retreaded from previous films. For much of the film, I was seriously disliking it. But when it was all over, I liked what it seemed to me the film had said. It did for me what I want science fiction to do for

me. So I give it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

[SPOILERS FOLLOW] I am certain I will be asked by someone what I consider to be the subversive message of S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k_V. If I have to put it in a few sentences, it would be this: Religious inspiration is not to be trusted. You can feel what you think is the light of your god filling your life and it can be a delusion. It is possible that all religious fervor is self-delusion that feels good but has not one iota of truth. You cannot trust your feelings, however powerful they are. God, if He exists, must be amenable to logic. You have the right and the responsibility to question politely what seems to be the word of God. If it does not make sense to you, you have the responsibility to deny it.

Certainly the "god" in S_t_a_r_T_r_e_k_V is a false god and the believers in this god are wrong, but who has more reason to believe in their own god than the believers in the film? What makes it more reason? What is sufficient reason? The film is ultimately saying that reason is more important than faith.

DEAD POETS SOCIETY
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: Robin Williams plays an unorthodox and charismatic teacher branded as dangerous in what is basically a retelling of T_h_e_P_r_i_m_e_o_f_M_i_s_s_J_e_a_n_B_r_o_d_i_e told sympathetically to the teacher. Fundamentally good, but it has some problems with its narrative style.
Rating: high +1.

There are lots and lots of films about schools but very few films really about the teaching process and the influence of a teacher on students. Perhaps the best is Ronald Neame's 1969 film T_h_e_P_r_i_m_e_o_f_M_i_s_s_J_e_a_n_B_r_o_d_i_e, which managed to tighten up the narrative of the Muriel Spark novel (one of the rare occasions a film adaptation improves greatly on the novel, incidentally). Neame's film tells the story of a teacher who broadens her students' world but at the same time molds them into her own likeness. Having myself been greatly influenced by a very charismatic high school teacher who I think greatly affected my world view, I find T_h_e_P_r_i_m_e_o_f_M_i_s_s_J_e_a_n_B_r_o_d_i_e hits very close to home for me, though because I liked this teacher a lot I sometimes try also to see the film from a point of view sympathetic to Miss Brodie. What does the story become then? It becomes something very much like Peter Weir's new film, D_e_a_d_P_o_e_t_s_S_o_c_i_e_t_y.

The year is 1959. The setting is Welton Academy, a very posh and expensive prep school dedicated to bleaching any sort of non-conformity out of its students and programming them to be successful, if unimaginative, social leaders. The new English teacher is one John Keating, played with as much control and and reserve as Robin Williams could possibly put into a performance. But even Williams's most reserved character could never fit in as a teacher at a place like Welton. His Keating uses unorthodox efforts to get his students to feel the emotion of the they read, and he gets them to live lives that will allow them to feel their own emotions and the emotions of the great poets. Keating's class is a good show, but we know from the beginning it is a show that will not outlast the season. As in G_o_o_d_M_o_r_n_i_n_g,_V_i_e_t_n_a_m, which had a very similar story line: we admire the non-conformist, but we know he will not be around for long. D_e_a_d_P_o_e_t_s_S_o_c_i_e_t_y is his story and the story of his students while he is there. In particular, it is the story of a group of friends who form the Dead Poets Society and sneak out to the woods after hours in order to read poetry and discuss life.

And it is in the film's depiction of these meetings that Weir's film lets us down the most. We hear a little poetry and we see the lives changing, but the connection between the two is never clearly drawn. What poems are influential and why--a very major question of the

film--is never really explained. We never really see why the meetings transcend being bull sessions that have occasional poetry readings. The real value of these meetings, so central to the film, is never clear. Similarly, we are told one of the members has written a very controversial article for the school newspaper but we are given only the vaguest idea of what the article said. And because the exact influence the teacher and the poetry has had on the students is left as vague as it is, when the film starts following the lives of the students outside of school hours it rapidly loses interest for me. I found myself not really caring whether one of the students would or would not work up the courage to kiss his current heartthrob. I found myself just looking at the nice, misty, snowy photography, and waiting for something of interest to happen.

Another problem with the script is that, while Keating is clearly played for sympathy, he is not entirely such an ideal teacher. Early on he has his students cut an article on poetry analysis out of their textbooks and destroy it before they had read more than the first paragraph. And the enthusiasm that he can get from his students for this sort of an action reinforces his similarities to the dangerous Miss Brodie and other dictators in history who have been more dangerous. One final complaint: in 1959 the sort of regimentation that the film complains about may have been a problem. If anything this country's schools have the opposite problem of insufficient discipline today. Weir is preaching to the choir.

This review has concentrated mostly on the negative aspects of a basically good film. Enough reviewers will be telling about the film's good points. I was concerned that these flaws might be less likely to be mentioned. In a field of films about drugs, car chases, and plastic monsters, D_e_a_d_P_o_e_t_s_S_o_c_i_e_t_y is a good choice, albeit flawed. I rate it a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

