

Films all '5 stars'

The skin I live in- Pedro Almodóvar

I am not very familiar with Almodóvar's films but this one is a must see. I purposefully did not read any psychoanalytic commentary on this film, but my take is that the central character [a plastic surgeon] is a highly narcissistic, melancholic and manically defended man [see my paper *Medicine and the manic defence* in this issue of Downunder], who has not been able to mourn the burns disfigurement and suicide of his wife. The violence of the melancholic state of mind is explored through projection into the world, and through his own cruelty. His daughter has just been released from a psychiatric clinic, but is raped at a party in the surgeon's sumptuous country house, El Cigarral [a 'country house' in English] where the surgeon has an illegal plastic surgery clinic. When she is found and woken by her father, she enters a paranoid state of terror towards her father, and has to be readmitted to the psychiatric clinic. The father tracks down and captures the rapist, who he takes to his clinic and performs a sex change and vaginoplasty on him, calling him Vera. 'She' becomes very beautiful, and he has fantasies about her as a replacement object for his wife.

In the beginning of the film, the surgeon observes her voyeuristically through a one-way mirror into the room where she is locked up.

Perhaps needless to say all ends badly.

This is a beautifully made, acted, and imaginative film, which also acts as a critique of the cosmetic plastic surgery industry, and the contemporary preoccupation with the body, and also the sex reassignment 'industry'.

My octopus teacher [Netflix]

On a more hopeful note is this wonderful documentary, about the gradually evolving relationship between an octopus and a free diver off the coast of South Africa. He dives almost every day without a wetsuit, even though the water is cold. He revisits this octopus [a female] over and over observing her bizarre disguises and escapes from the marauding sharks. At one point he is tempted to intervene to protect her, but decides not to interfere.

The octopus loses a tentacle to the sharks, and is somewhat the worse for wear. She retreats to her hideaway, where she begins to grow a new tentacle, and makes a steady recovery.

The most moving scene in the film is when she swims out to meet the diver, and then curls up on his chest like a baby, until he has to surface to breath.

The documentary is filmed by a third party.

Amongst other things we learn about the lifecycle of the female octopus.

A life on our planet by David Attenborough [Netflix]

This plea to nature and a plea for change, is a mix of hope, and unspoken despair at the folly of human beings. Attenborough is passionate about our [once] wild planet. At 93 he would have his own passing in mind, but he is pulling out all the stops to try to prevent the passing of the planet. The documentary is in part a reflection on Attenborough's own life.

It begins in the ruins of the city that had to be abandoned because of the Chernobyl meltdown.

He is always, rational and calm. I'm not sure how he manages to contain any anger he may have! but he is clearly intensely emotionally engaged.

There is as always with Attenborough wonderful film footage of where the wild things are, including footage of some of the, to human eyes, more bizarre inhabitants of the planet.

The documentary ends in the same abandoned city near Chernobyl, with Attenborough reflecting on the resilience of the wild world, and the colonization of this locale by plants and wild animals.

A fine documentary from a good man.