

# Snails in Modern Cinema: From Speed Dreams to Slow Memoirs

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## Abstract

This article explores the depiction of snails in modern cinema, focusing on films released after the 1990s in which the creatures play central or symbolically significant roles. It examines two major works: *Turbo* (2013), a family-oriented animated film that transforms a garden snail into an unlikely speed champion, and *Memoir of a Snail* (2024), an award-winning stop-motion feature in which snails serve as metaphors for grief, self-protection, and healing. The article analyzes narrative themes, visual approaches, and audience reception, comparing how each production uses the snail to subvert expectations and create emotional resonance. It also notes smaller snail appearances in other contemporary films. The study concludes that modern cinematic snails, though rare, have evolved into powerful narrative devices capable of carrying both light-hearted and deeply introspective storytelling.

## Introduction

In the history of cinema, snails are seldom granted center stage. Yet when filmmakers choose to focus on them, these unassuming creatures often carry meanings far beyond their biological reality. Since the 1990s, a small number of films have placed snails in prominent narrative or symbolic roles, transforming them into unexpected vessels of humor, ambition, melancholy, and self-discovery.

Two films stand out in this modern period: *Turbo* (2013), a computer-animated adventure from DreamWorks that reimagines a snail as a racing champion, and *Memoir of a Snail* (2024), a stop-motion tragicomedy by Adam Elliot in which snails serve as potent symbols of emotional retreat and resilience. Despite their very different tones and target audiences, both works engage with a shared fascination: the contrast between the snail's perceived slowness and the inner lives—whether comedic or tragic—that such a creature might contain.

## 1. *Turbo* (2013): A Snail's Need for Speed

### *Overview and Plot*

*Turbo* tells the story of Theo, a garden snail with an impossible dream: to compete in the Indianapolis 500. After a freak accident involving a car's supercharger, he gains the power of incredible speed. Determined to prove himself, he sets out to challenge the human-dominated world of professional

racing.

### ***Snail as Underdog Hero***

In this narrative, the snail becomes a classic underdog—an archetype of perseverance and transformation. His shell, far from being a limiting burden, is reframed as part of his unique identity. The metaphor is clear: even those dismissed as the slowest or least capable can defy expectations and achieve greatness.

### ***Narrative and Cultural Significance***

The film leans into the humor of its premise, contrasting a creature known for its lethargy with the adrenaline of motorsports. At the same time, it builds a heartfelt message about ambition, belief in oneself, and the value of persistence. While primarily aimed at families, Turbo subtly challenges audiences to reconsider the meaning of “limitations,” both for snails and for people.

## **2. Memoir of a Snail (2024): Retracing Emotional Trails**

### ***Overview and Context***

Memoir of a Snail is a stop-motion feature by Australian filmmaker Adam Elliot. It follows the life of Grace Pudel, a woman shaped by loss, isolation, and a lifelong sense of being an outsider. Her solace comes from collecting snails—both living and ornamental—which become intertwined with her personal identity.

### ***Story and Symbolism***

Grace’s relationship with snails is deeply symbolic. They represent her desire for safety and her instinct to retreat from a harsh world. At moments of distress, the imagery becomes literal: Grace is shown curling into a snail’s shell, visually embodying her emotional withdrawal. The snail motif captures themes of fragility, protection, and the slow, deliberate process of healing.

### ***Artistic Craft and Production***

The film’s production reflects a dedication to tactile, hand-made artistry. Created with clay, wire, paper, and paint, the sets and characters carry a distinctly human warmth. This visual approach reinforces the narrative’s emotional intimacy and grounds its surreal elements in material reality.

### ***Themes and Emotional Resonance***

At its core, Memoir of a Snail is about loneliness and the ways people shield themselves from further pain. The slow movement of a snail mirrors the incremental pace of Grace’s recovery, while its shell becomes a metaphor for emotional boundaries. By the film’s conclusion, the snail’s journey—forward,

never backward—becomes a quiet affirmation of resilience.

### ***Recognition and Reception***

The film earned critical acclaim on the festival circuit, including a major award at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival. Critics praised its rich textures, layered storytelling, and emotional depth, noting that it successfully blends bleak realism with moments of humor and hope.

## **3. Comparing Two Snail Narratives**

Though *Turbo* and *Memoir of a Snail* diverge sharply in tone and intended audience, both subvert common assumptions about snails. In *Turbo*, the snail defies physical limits, becoming a symbol of unbounded ambition. In *Memoir of a Snail*, the creature's natural traits—slowness, vulnerability, self-containment—are embraced as strengths, enabling survival in a difficult world.

## **4. Other Appearances of Snails in Post-1990 Cinema**

While the two films above remain the most prominent, snails have appeared in smaller roles elsewhere. In the psychological thriller *Deep Water* (2022), a pet snail becomes an unusual narrative detail, offering moments of quiet amidst tension. These appearances, though brief, demonstrate how filmmakers continue to find symbolic potential in the snail's distinct form and behavior.

## **Conclusion**

Though relatively rare, depictions of snails in modern cinema have shown remarkable versatility. In *Turbo*, the snail is reimagined as an unlikely champion, embodying speed and ambition. In *Memoir of a Snail*, the creature becomes an emblem of vulnerability, introspection, and endurance. Both films reveal that the snail, far from being a mere curiosity, can serve as a powerful metaphor for human experience—capable of carrying stories of both exhilaration and profound emotional depth.

## References

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