Children of a Posthuman Realism: Alfonso Cuarón's Posthuman Adaption of P.D. James' The Children of Men

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Abstract

This essay focuses primarily on the way in which Alfonso Cuarón’s use of filmic techniques typically associated with Bazinian cinematic realism reconfigures P.D. James’ dystopian novel *The Children of Men* into a posthumanist critique of anthropocentrism. First, this essay illustrates that James’ novel is inherently humanistic in its construction of the narrative so that the worldwide infertility epidemic that structures the novel becomes a “natural” or environmentally produced contagion for man to overcome and dominate. Subsequently, after a brief exposition of the central tenets of Bazinian cinematic realism, my argument contends that through the use of depth of shot, long sequence-shots, and non-diagetic dialogue that far from replicating a humanistic text about the ascent of man, Cuarón’s film actually deconstructs the anthropocentrically dominated narrative. Cuarón’s use of techniques such as depth of shot, which creates a horizontal hierarchy of images, both human and non-human, creates a situation where the human characters on screen slowly fade into the natural décor in the background. With this in mind P.D. James’ novel, where the overall message is one of hope in the individuality and strength of mankind, is transformed into a posthumanist agenda that seeks to level the hierarchy and the boundaries between the human and the non-human, all the while showing the audience how the two are already interconnected.

Keywords

Posthumanism, film theory, Bazin, Cuarón

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Plaza: Dialogues in Language and Literature

The Children of Men is a dystopian novel by English writer P. D. James, published in 1992. Set in England in 2021, it centres on the results of mass infertility. James describes a United Kingdom that is steadily depopulating and focuses on a small group of resisters who do not share the disillusionment of the masses. The book received very positive reviews from many critics such as Caryn James of The New York Times, who called it "wonderfully rich" and "a trenchant analysis of politics and power that Alfonso Cuarón on the set of Children of Men. Alfonso Cuarón has a knack for disappearing. The Mexico-born writer-director became one of the 21st century’s most acclaimed filmmakers after he helmed his 2001 trilogy of sex and social realism, *Y Tu Mamá también*, and the stunning 2004 franchise picture *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. But after the troubled production and financial failure of his 2006 dystopian epic *Children of Men*, he more or less vanished from Hollywood, only to reemerge with a vengeance for 2013’s *Gravity*, which garnered seven Academy Awards, including Best Director.