



The Children of Men

P.D. James

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Told with P. D. James's trademark suspense, insightful characterization, and riveting storytelling, *The Children of Men* is a story of a world with no children and no future. The human race has become infertile, and the last generation to be born is now adult. Civilization itself is crumbling as suicide and despair become commonplace. Oxford historian Theodore Faron, apathetic toward a future without a future, spends most of his time reminiscing. Then he is approached by Julian, a bright, attractive woman who wants him to help get her an audience with his cousin, the powerful Warden of England. She and her band of unlikely revolutionaries may just awaken his desire to live . . . and they may also hold the key to survival for the human race.

The Children of Men Details

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Author : P.D. James

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From Reader Review The Children of Men for online ebook

Lauren (Shakespeare & Whisky) says

"Early this morning, 1 January 2021, three minutes after midnight, the last human being to be born on earth was killed in a pub brawl in a suburb of Buenos Aires, aged twenty-five years, two months and twelve days."

Despite a riveting premise, I did not enjoy this novel at all.

Children of Men struggled to engage me due to an opening act that lasted for the entirety of book 1 ("The Omega"), an unlikeable protagonist and confused thematic messaging.

THE PLOT

"We are outraged and demoralized less by the impending end of our species, less even by our inability to prevent it, than by our failure to discover the cause."

The novel is painfully plodding. Julian, the miracle mother, is not introduced until chapter 6 and the actual action of the novel doesn't occur until past the halfway point. The failure of the novel to properly identify the central plot question results in meandering and self indulgent story telling.

On the periphery of a boring story about a privileged, emotionally dead, intellectual, interesting plot lines are suggested. The harrowing forced suicides of the elderly, exploitive immigration policies, total social ennui.

But these more interesting tangents are buried beneath a *punishingly dull tale* that eventually reveals itself to be a confused reflection on the corrupting influence of power and, bizarrely, a religious parable.

THE WORLD BUILDING

"You desire the end but close your eyes to the means. You want the garden to be beautiful, provided that the smell of manure is kept well away from your fastidious nose."

The world building is by far the strongest aspect of **Children of Men**. The detailed inclusion of geopolitical, psychological and economic impacts of such a cataclysmic event are well- thought out. A number of more recent dystopian writers could do worse than to study James' sophisticated approach.

Unfortunately, like so much else in this beleaguered novel, the world building is under utilised. Broad swaths of the world building could have been cut out without any impact on the central plot.

THE WRITING

"If from infancy you treat children as gods they are liable in adulthood to act as devils."

The prose was very good. Occasionally even poetic. But so many horrifying scenes were written with a cold detachment that left me distanced from the emotion of the moment.

CHARACTERS

"I don't want anyone to look to me, not for protection, not for happiness, not for love, not for anything...."

I have never known what it is to love. I can write those words, know them to be true, but feel only the regret that a tone-deaf man must feel because he can't appreciate music, a regret less keen because it is for something never known, not for something lost."

Despite having finished the book just 40 minutes ago when I got to this section for a moment I couldn't remember Theo's name (the protagonist). He was thoroughly unlikeable. I cannot understand why he was the character chosen as the protagonist. Why, in a story about infertility and a miracle birth, do you position a stuffy, unfriendly man who accidentally killed his only offspring, as the central protagonist?

Furthermore, almost all of the side characters were unpleasant. Julian was an insipid, walking womb and mouth piece for "true faith". Xan was a power drunk, closeted homosexual. Nobody in this novel inspired admiration or affection.

THEMES

The Purpose of Life

"Man is diminished if he lives without knowledge of his past; without hope of a future he becomes a beast."

In her personal life James is a deeply conservative Christian. So it is unsurprising that **Children of Men**, often described as her best work, explores the premise from a slanted lense. Much effort is expended to compare commercialised, "end of days" religions with Theo and Julian's authentic, private beliefs.

The novel is at times scathing of many modern practices; worship of the body, science as god... but James muddies her message by trying to communicate a message by subsuming it beneath the power struggle between two men.

She would have done better to write a more open religious parable. It might not have been to my taste but it would have felt coherent.

A Meditation on Power

"A regime which combines perpetual surveillance with total indulgence is hardly conducive to healthy development."

Upon finishing the novel I was left with a sense of squeamish disquiet regarding Theo's triumph over Xan. Theo had overcome spiritual inertia and successfully protected Julian and her son, the saviour of humanity.

However, rather than end the novel on this hopeful note James has Theo take control of the country and murder his cousin. This outcome is meant to be ambivalent and I can't understand why it was included. It felt like **Children of Men** was telling two oxymoronic stories.

Spiritual, Emotional and Physical Fertility

"Don't romanticize her. She may be the most important woman in the world but she isn't the Virgin Mary. The child she is carrying is still the child of a whore."

In a novel that centred on fertility, James managed to make every female character ridiculous. Whether she was describing the deranged women who christened kittens and nurture dolls, repulsive senile elderly women, psychopathic, ugly female leaders or the devout but brainless Julian... they all felt like paper thin

shells.

Devoid of real characterisation and agency.

Much has been made of the fact that it is defunct sperm that causes the fertility crisis, as if on this fact alone, the novel should be considered a feminist win. That assertion is frankly ridiculous.

I'm baffled by the decision to frame a story of fertility around the memoirs of a privileged male academic who dislikes children, remembers his own daughter with jealousy and guilt, and feels he has suffered no personal loss due to the fertility crisis.

It isn't that it can't be done, or that it offends my political principles, it is just that it *strips so much potential depth and meaning from the story*.

Overall, I regret reading it and wouldn't recommend it, although readers who enjoyed *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* or *The Handmaid's Tale* (both excellent books with similar themes) may find something to enjoy here.

Chloe says

I wanted to love this book, I really did. I have a very large soft spot for the P.D. James mysteries that I'd read and Alfonso Cuarón's adaptation of this book was beautiful, dark and easily the most wrenching apocalyptic film that I can think of. If only the source material lived up to the grandeur of the film.

Don't get me wrong, it's still a remarkably bleak book. It's set in the year 2021 and the last child born to humankind, twenty-five years previously, has just been killed. Somehow every person on the planet has been rendered infertile. Humanity is on track to becoming the sixth mass extinction in planetary history. Theo Faren is a history professor with no new undergraduates to instruct and a cousin who has become the absolute ruler of England. Hoping to make use of this connection, a ragtag group of idealists convince Theo to meet with his cousin in the hope that he can alleviate some of the crimes that are being committed against the less fortunate Britons. One thing leads to another and soon Theo finds himself safeguarding the first pregnant woman in a quarter of a century, trying to keep her from becoming a pawn in the power struggles between his cousin and the revolutionaries.

What a fantastic premise! How could you go wrong with this? I think that, had I read the book prior to seeing the film, I would have enjoyed this book far more. Yet where Cuarón painted a landscape falling into ruin and humans at one another's throats even as they fade into the long memory of history, James gives us empty churches and mad women raising kittens as children. Cuarón's gray and faded world is matched against James' impending eternal Spring, where the sun shines down on a green world recovering from the blight of humanity. Both are compelling views of a world facing a slow death and the sure knowledge that this is *the* last generation of humanity, but I think that I am just drawn more to the bleakness of the film than I am to James' portrayal.

Nigel Mitchell says

I read this novel after I saw the movie, and discovered this novel is one of the rare exceptions where the movie is better than the novel. It's not that it was badly written. It's just that the author had the wrong focus.

The novel is set in a near future where humanity has lost the ability to have children. Worldwide sterility has persisted for so long that an entire generation has grown up without any children at all. England has become a dictatorship ruled by Xan Lyppiatt. The main character is Dr. Theodore "Theo" Faron, who becomes embroiled in a conflict between a dissident group called the Five Fishes and Xan, his childhood friend and cousin. Along the way, Theo discovers one of the radicals is pregnant with the first unborn child in decades.

I know it's unfair to compare a novel to a movie, but I thought the movie's focus on the implications of a world without children worked well. The novel spent too much time on the politics of the dystopian England. It seemed like P.D. James became fascinated with how someone becomes a dictator. There's a lengthy account of how Xan grew up and ultimately rose to power, which I didn't care about at all. The novel eventually boils down to a discussion on power and the abuse of power. Meanwhile, the story of a childless world became pushed into the background. Honestly, I think P.D. James could have cut out the sterility angle of the novel, and ended up with the same book.

That's not to say it was entirely ignored. The novel does delve deeper into the building of the childless world. One of my favorite passages described how some infertile women had been driven insane, and treated dolls as real children. I wish that part had been in the movie.

The Children of Men is a good novel held back from becoming a great novel.

Becky says

"Told with P. D. James's trademark suspense, insightful characterization, and riveting storytelling"...

I have wanted to read this book for a long time. I loved the movie. I thought it was brilliant, exciting, suspenseful and terrifying all at once. It was everything the book should have been... but was not.

What the book was, unfortunately, was big stretches of yawn interspersed by long-jumps of "Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Are we fucking there yet?" and little bunny-hops of "Oh, that's interesting" moments.

As a dystopia, the world that James created is plausible, perhaps even likely, should the events that changed the world come about in our own reality. Mens' little swimmers forgot their floaties, and thus the race is more of a floundering than a sinking, then a dying off. No more babies. Wonder if anyone checked where the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement people were in Omega year 1995, eh? Sprinkling a little sumthin' in the water? Hmmm?

I digress. The world... plausible. But I just really couldn't bring myself to care. It was hard to give a crap about really anyone in this book, including humanity in general. I didn't care about the fact that the whole world was dying because I didn't give a shit that the individuals shown in the book were dying. Everyone was so despicable and shitty. Julian was maybe the only exception, but despite her desire to change things and do something better for the world, I still just didn't care.

I'm supposed to care about a world when the lens I get to see it through is so covered in shit I don't even want to stand downwind of it? A man whose only thought for his 27-years-dead toddler daughter is that she was an inconvenience anyway? Really? He can't find ONE positive thing about his own daughter in almost 30 years?

I *liked* Theo Faron in the movie. He was maybe selfish, maybe not the nicest guy, but he was real, and I liked him. His book character? Not so much. I found it very, very hard to even muster up a little meh for him, even

when he comes around to the "good guys" team. You know... until he takes the One Ring for himself, that is.

Ugh, and don't even get me started on Theo's diaries.

You kind of expect historians to be a little dull. Introverted, selfish asshole historians to be duller still. But wow. Seriously, fucking wow, were Theo's diary entries duller than shit. Do I need a minute by minute recap of how he spent his adolescent summers at his cousin's estate house? No. Please no. Please. Establish the history in a flashback, in a home video, in a memory, in... something, ANYTHING, other than the diary entries of man who has nothing at all better to do with the unlimited vocabulary, time and Bic pens at his disposal than write the most trivial boring bullshit diary that will never ever be read ever. Except by me.

FML.

This book gets this many stars.

Nancy says

Posted at Shelf Inflicted

I went to the library to spice up my life and came across a display inviting me to go on a blind date with a book. Each one was covered in brown wrapping paper with a big red heart. Underneath the heart was a very brief description. The one I picked up said "Receptive and chilling".

It was fun driving home with a book I knew absolutely nothing about. I couldn't wait to get it home, pour myself a glass of wine, strip off its cover, and learn its secrets. To my disappointment, it was *The Children of Men*, a book I read shortly after it came out. I liked it well enough at the time, but found that years later nothing stood out for me but the *Quietus* and the feral *Painted Faces*. I saw the film around 2007 and can't remember a single thing about it, only that there was more action and less reflection and introspection.

In 2021, the world is ending quietly. No babies have been born since 1995, the last one killed when he was just 25. People are getting older, trapped in routines, becoming resigned. Infrastructure is falling apart from lack of maintenance and small towns are losing their population.

Theodore Faron is a history professor who no longer has any children of his own and none to teach. He is keeping a journal to record the last half of his life and lives a solitary existence until he meets Julian and a small group of people who desire to revolt against the dictatorship of England, whose leader happens to be Theo's cousin Xan.

When I first read this book, I found the characters largely bland and uninteresting and much preferred the second half when Theo and the five revolutionaries were on the run.

Now, I found I rather enjoyed reading about Theo's childhood and relationship with Xan, his failed marriage, the people he encounters, his feelings about the events going on around him, and the gradual process of his falling in love.

"A failed marriage is the most humiliating confirmation of the transitory seduction of the flesh."

Lovers can explore every line, every curve and hollow, of the beloved's body, can together reach the height of inexpressible ecstasy; yet how little it matters when love or lust at last dies and we are left with disputed possessions, lawyers' bills, the sad detritus of the lumber-room, when the house chosen, furnished, possessed with enthusiasm and hope has become a prison, when faces are set in lines of peevish resentment and bodies no longer desired are observed in all their imperfections with a dispassionate and disenchanting eye."

I enjoyed this book much more with the second reading. Maybe it's because I am now Theo's age and can understand his feelings much better. Or maybe I have more patience and prefer rich characterization and lovely descriptions of countryside to lots of mindless action. Now that the book is fresh in my mind, I'll think about watching the film again.

Shanon says

I found this story dull. I almost stopped at several times but pressed on based on the high ratings of friends. It wasn't until the final chapter that I really cared what happened. **However**, I have a feeling the story & the message behind it will stick with me a VERY LONG time. So often we refer to a birth as the "miracle of birth" but how often do we really see it as a miracle. Modern medicine and technology has removed so much of the risk for so many people. But the fact that we are still able to have children at all is a miracle. If our world was plagued with an illness, possibly even unknown to us, that prevents insemination how long before we recognized the problem. I found it interesting that when the births in the story started to slow people thought it was a good thing, overpopulation and all. Would we too feel that proper birth control was at work until it was too late? Scary thought really.

I am finding it hard to rate this book. My initial thought was it's a 2 or 3 star. Boring book. But as I think about the ideas contained within it I feel the book deserves a much higher rating. Is it a 4 star or 5 star book? I'm still unsure & will probably waffle back and forth depending on my mood from here on out.

My first sentence of this review totally conflicts with my rating & I realize that. My feelings on this book morphed as I wrote the review to be honest. I've learned a valuable lesson that a dull story can be a moving story. I wasn't necessarily moved by the words, prose, or story-telling as much as the thoughts, feeling, fears & ideas it produced within me while reflecting upon it.

A must read for everyone! *Just don't expect an action packed, read it on the edge of your seat kind of book*

William1.2 says

I have come to realize, years after writing this review, that it is marked by a naïve Lamarckism--a belief in the heredity of acquired characteristics. But I'll let it stand as a reminder of my errors, and how much I have learned since then.

I never was much of a genre reader but at some time in my middle years I was assailed by a love of

dystopias. There's nothing like a vivid tale of the world ending to truly set me at my ease. It did not occur to me until I read Norman Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millennium* why dystopic narratives were so satisfying on an almost physiological level. I realized it was a hardwired need, evolved by centuries of my whack-job millenarian forebears, for apocalyptic solace. These eschatological needs are still within me and going strong. They include a desire for angels as messengers of the apocalypse, an irrational longing for the rewards of paradise, and an overwhelming desire to witness those less pure of heart than myself receive their fiery comeuppance.

Fortunately, unlike my forebears, I have not had to run riot over the Bavarian countryside acting out my delusions by stringing up debauched clerics and those belonging to the so-called hostile faiths, but have been able to sublimate the evolutionary inanities through art. I am happy to report that *The Children of Men* does at times rise to that exalted level.

Here is a world in which men have gone sterile. You just can't find fertile semen anymore. Some women, denied their customary reproductive roles, have gone bonkers. They end up baptizing cats and dolls and such. (Other women, one imagines, are dancing a jig so tickled are they to never again have to risk another perineum tear.) One thing I liked was the image of the world preparing to go on without mankind. For in the vacuum left by the end of human fertility all the other flora and fauna seem to redouble their efforts.

Our hero is Theodore Faron. A sardonic at times bitter retired professor of history at Oxford--there are no more children to teach--who ran his daughter over in a tragic accident many years ago. His wife never forgave him, then she started banging this rugby player half her age. Theo happens to be cousin to the Warden of England, Xan Lyppiatt, a childhood friend, who is running a thuggish police state. During the first half of the story the state is in the process of redistributing its thinning population to central locations for purposes of making delivery of services easier. At least that's the excuse. The first half is all clandestine meetings of the dissidents and background into Theo's boyhood relationship to Xan.

Then it turns into a road story not without parallels, though fleeting, to Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. Though, it should be emphasized, this is not a post-apocalyptic world going-out-with-a-bang novel, like *The Road*, but rather a civilization fizzling-out-with-a-whimper story. Nevertheless there is sufficient violence and craziness and survivalist mentalities employed to keep everyone happy. There is an intimation of the second coming, personal betrayal of the basest sort, and headlong hysterical flight. There is an elegant density of diction that is consistent throughout, and I found that the descriptive sections, especially in the action-packed second half of the book, touch on the beautiful. Highly recommended for thriller lovers. Mandatory for lovers of dystopic fictions.

Bradley says

This novel seriously freaked me out when I read it. I actually sat in stunned and depressed contemplation at my own lack of children and the decisions I believed I held dear at the time.

I didn't care to bring children into this world, and at the time, I hated the world pretty much entirely, so I got struck against the back of my head after reading this and I haven't really been the same, since.

The novel took me on a very disturbing ride with the ultimate death of humanity by way of sterility. The most powerful aspect of the novel was the people's reactions, how their worldviews veered off in strange ways.

Suicides were all very well and obvious, but I think I enjoyed the other paths the mind took in reaction.

I still can't believe that the novel had the effect of changing my mind about my life. I like to consider myself pretty well-read and aware, but sometimes a huge kick in the head can come out of nowhere. I changed my mind. I wanted to live. I wanted children. I hadn't wanted children before.

Very big life choice, no? Maybe it says more about me than the novel. I don't really know. It did surprise the hell out of me.

Melki says

It's been more than a quarter century since a human baby was born on earth. Since that time, the aging population has been just sort of hanging around, preparing itself for the inevitable extinction. Some people develop strong attachments to pets or dolls. Others concentrate on self-improvement with adult education classes. BUT, the secretive and rather sinister council keeps a firm grip on everything, regulating the lives and even the deaths of all citizens.

James tells her tale with third person narration and the use of her main character's journal entries. Though a little jarring at first, it turns out to be an effective mix. Her Theo Faron is a history professor, as staid and stodgy a man as you'll ever meet. It's time somebody changed that stick up his ass and a small group of rebels is just the thing to do it. They approach Theo and ask for his help in essentially overthrowing the council. At first he is reluctant, but then...**A MIRACLE OCCURS!!!** Suddenly, Theo is lifted out of his humdrum life, and, I swear, actually enjoying himself being on the run and in constant danger.

(view spoiler)

The author earned my admiration for deftly using a fairly unlikable character as her protagonist AND for coming up with the concept of having the end of the world come not in the form of a fiery violent collision with an asteroid, OR a terrible plague (Calling all zombies!), BUT with the sounds of creaking rocking chairs, squeaky walkers and carping bursitis complaints as earth becomes a world full of cranky old people.

Genius!

Judy says

Loved the movie and can't wait to read the book.

Well, the book and the movie are definitely two separate entities. They even have different endings. P.D. James' book lacks the action and excitement of the film version and P.D. James does go on about things like the decor of Theo's house and the political makeup of her futuristic England. And I would have liked the main character Theo to behave a bit more honorably. But I enjoyed the rendering of a world in which the last baby was born 25 years ago.

The book did hit home for me as the last of the Omega generation was born about the same time as my 12 year old daughter. I found myself imagining what it would be like bringing up the last of the race, and the heartbreak of knowing that with every milestone my daughter reached, that would be the last time ever. After her, there would be no more.

The most interesting part of the book was the description of how the human population dealt with global

infertility. Women who would never have children start pushing dolls around in prams as if they were babies or having their cats christened.

When I finished, it was a relief to look around and see my neighbor's children playing outside.

Alex says

I was disappointed by the film, finding myself unable to muster sympathy for the characters, but I was intrigued by the basic plot and so ventured out to explore the novel. PD James' original creation follows a plot significantly different compared to that of the movie, but I found it to be no less disappointing. The main character, Theo, was perhaps even less likable, due mostly to his lack of conviction about anything during the first half of the book. I was never able to develop an intense fear of or hatred for the government against which the main characters rebelled; the "Council of England" did seem to ignore a few issues of compromised civil-rights, but for the most part presented fairly logical arguments for their pragmatic approach to governance as the human race aged into its final days. Thus, when the inevitable revelation of human pregnancy was revealed and the protagonists embarked on a quest to evade the government until the baby was born, I was unable to share their feelings of fear and despair, and I cared little when characters died. The book moved quickly, especially the second half, which allowed me to follow its absurd plotline through to its disappointing completion - the story was mostly well-written, save for moments of impending excitement that would be introduced with the sentence, "And then it happened." I commend James for her imagination; the basic premise is indeed quite intriguing. I can't say her execution held my interest, though.

Apatt says

Ugh! I don't like the cover of this book (the one showing on this page). Don't get me wrong, I like Clive Owen, and the 2006 movie is not too shabby but it does not have much to do with the original text apart from the basic premise; and Theo the protagonist of the movie is the polar opposite of the novel's character. The author P.D. James is best known for her crime fiction novels mostly featuring defective detective Adam Dalgliesh who is also a poet. I have only read a couple of these Dalgliesh books and never really cared for them. A "poet-detective" just seems too pretentious and unappealing to me. When I heard that they were filming *Children of Men* I was intrigued though, I did not expect Ms. James to write a science fiction book worth filming, I thought she was one of those mainstream authors who just want to take a stab at sci-fi without really understanding the genre. Anyway, I first read *Children of Men* in 2006 shortly before the movie was released because I prefer to read the original source material before watching the movie. I owe P.D. James an apology, she did a stupendous job. That said this book is more "speculative fiction" than sci-fi because there is very little science in it. It is more of a thought experiment where the author explores the social any individual implications of the basic premise, the sort of thing Ursula K. Le Guin excels in.

Children of Men can reasonably be labeled as a cozy apocalypse or even a cozy dystopia. It has a high concept premise where in the year 1995* women all over the world suddenly became infertile. As extinction events go this is a very polite one, but quite alarming when you consider the implication. Imagine the human race slowly winding down with a global aging and declining population. In the UK where the novel is set this leads to general despair and ennui in the middle aged and older age groups and uncontrollable wildness in the youngest generation. The year 1995 is called Omega, and the people born in 1995 are called "Omegas". These Omegas are generally wild and literally allowed to get away with murder because they

may be the last hope for mankind's continuation.

The event of the novel itself takes place in 2021, 26 years after the year of Omega. The protagonist is called Theo Faron, a disillusioned English gentleman who happens to be related to the Warden of England, a position of supreme power, far in excess of the office of Prime Minister or the President. He used to be a close adviser to the Warden until the day he up and left because he could not stomach the abuses of power. At the beginning of the novel he basically spends all his time just pottering around, not needing to do any work. One day he is approached by a girl called Julian who asks him to contact and petition the Warden about various woes of the British society and the outrageous abuses of power. The petition goes badly leading to the birth of a less than competent group of dissidents. Initially the Warden views these dissidents as something of a joke but soon something momentous happens which causes Theo, Julian and her dissident friends to go on the run.

The England P.D. James depicts in this book is a lonely, depressing place where suicide is common, and even encouraged and facilitated by the government. I won't reveal the plot beyond the basic outline already mentioned so far, I do find the book to be very nicely plotted, melancholy, eventually thrilling and the denouement is more than satisfactory. The prose is exquisitely written and makes me want to pick up some more of those Adam Dalgliesh novels just to read more of her beautifully crafted sentences. The main characters are very well drawn, particularly Theo who is very flawed, sympathetic and believable, someone you can really root for. He starts off as a kind of wishy-washy anti-hero:

"I don't want anyone to look to me, not for protection, not for happiness, not for love, not for anything."

I like how his character gradually transforms by his circumstances as the story progresses. The character of Theo is the polar opposite of the character of the same name portrayed by Clive Owen in the movie version. P.D. James' Theo is a very polite middle aged and middle class English gentleman, kicking ass and taking names is not in his purview, he is rather awkward and bumbling at times though when push comes to shove he does whatever he has to do.

The dialog is also praise worthy with characters getting burned left and right. The switches between the first person epistolary narrative format and the third person narrative seems a little pointless as the narrative point of view is always restricted to Theo and follows the same linear timeline. Still, I am sure James has her artistic reasons and these switches do not impede the readability of the book at all.

Children of Men is one of my favorite dystopian books alongside 1984, Brave New World, Make Room! Make Room! etc. This sub genre continues to be very popular today, though the modern dystopian novels tend to be teen adventures for some reason. *Children of Men* is the real McCoy.

* In my PrintSF sci-fi discussion group I often see someone comment that they don't want to read "old sci-fi" where the author got their prediction wrong and the future setting of the novel is now the past and these old books are not worth reading because the author was so far off the mark. Well, excuuuuuse me! It is not the job of sci-fi authors to predict the future, the whole point is to speculate and explore the implications. *Children of Men* is a case in point, P.D. James certainly was not anticipating global infertility to occur 1995 (the book was first published in 1992). This novel – like many great sf novels – is asking "what if". I shouldn't mind really, it's their loss missing out on so many great books but it's a bee in my bonnet you know.

HFk says

The Children of Men was a really nice buddy read with a internet friend outside the bookish community who has a soft spot for dystopia, something that is rather unknown field to myself. He mentioned wanting to read this book, and I seductively lured my bookish fingers around his mind and suggested us doing a buddy read, something he had no previous experience of. I also asked him to write a few words down of his thoughts for my review, and if I ever get them, I shall add them below my own words. He is very good with his words, oh yes, he is. <--- This is me flirting extremely badly.

I wish I would have ended up liking *The Children of Men* a lot more than I did. The premise for the story is super fascinating; what if humans would lose their ability for sexual reproduction, what if our humankind would face the end of the world without a big bang, slowly withering away without much of a drama?

Best part of this book was the atmosphere of emptiness, hopelessness, coldness, melancholy, indifference. The feeling when there is nothing to look forward to, when there is nothing to fight for, nothing to progress for. There was nothing dramatic in it, it was just a steady flow of subdued desperation surrounding the intellectual, very academic thought-flow that focused to the society criticism, all aspects of it.

The thought-process was quite solid, I felt for a long time it to be exploring all sides of our society, our ways and morals, which could easily lead to the outcomes this book deals with. There is a heavy conservative and religious undertone through the story even when it at times felt as the story took hits and blows towards said worldviews. It was an interesting mix of each, but eventually such a bore festival that took a lot of dedication to go through with.

P.D. James made an interesting choice to tell this story through characters that were hard to feel, and even harder to like. It worked well as it highlighted the state of this world, as much as it described the ways a human changes through life's obstacles.

Intellectual, provocative, celebration of life, sitting in front of a huge questions. But oh so fucking boring while doing so.

Sophia Triad says

Post Apocalyptic, Dystopian, Depressing.

It describes a hopeless, sterile future.

No more children, no more light, no more expectations.

But what if there is a ray of light? What if there is a woman pregnant after more than 25 years without any births on Earth?

"Feel, he told himself, feel, feel, feel. Even if what you feel is pain, only let yourself feel."

When I read Dystopian fiction, I want to read about hope and expectations that oppose the darkness. This is one of the darkest Dystopian books that I have ever read, but it can certainly change the way you think and it can definitely convince you to reevaluate your life and your aims.

I want to fight for a better future. I want my children and my children's children to fight for a better future. Everything is part of the survival game nevertheless.

Maria Thomarey says

3,5 καλο αλλα ποτε δεν τρελενομουν γ'αυτην Τζεημς ...

Althea Ann says

Re-read for post-apocalyptic book club.

I liked this book better, the second time around. I read this the first time quite a while ago, and I think perhaps my age has something to do with the difference in perceptions. It's certainly a piece geared toward older readers. Although it contains violence and tension, it's slow-moving, with a quiet, elegiac feel.

Our narrator, Theo, a lonely academic, is the cousin of the Warden of England. The upheaval of the world's current situation has allowed the Warden, Xan, to seize absolute power. The "current situation" is that no children have been born for over two decades, and no others are expected to be born. Humanity is facing its end.

However, largely, life goes on as per usual, although with fading hope and increasing ennui. Most citizens, concerned with their daily comfort, do not perceive the iron fist concealed within the Warden's velvet glove. Even Theo doesn't see the Warden as any more than the acquaintance whom he used to spend school holidays with, when they were both boys.

But then, Theo is contacted by a tiny group of dissidents with a list of grievances they'd like him to bring to his cousin's attention. And gradually, they win him over to their point of view. (It doesn't hurt that one of them is an intriguingly attractive woman.) The likelihood is that Theo's sympathies won't make any difference. The Warden is in love with power, and not amenable to making any significant changes.

But then, a shocking revelation is made: the intriguing dissident is pregnant.

Where the book takes it from here is into a complex and insightful exploration of human dynamics. It's full of religious allegory, but certainly does not demand that the reader have 'faith' in order to appreciate its depiction of how religious people might behave in the given situation. (They do a lot of dumb and illogical things within the course of this book, but I found it all utterly believable.) And it's more than that: it's about how we see people vs. how they are, about love, loyalty and betrayal, about guilt and redemption, and of course, the seductive nature of power and the erosion of ideals.

I recently read 'The Book of the Unnamed Midwife' and thought that it reminded me of this book (after all, how many post-apocalyptic midwives in a world affected by universal sterility are there in fiction?) but upon re-reading, it's more divergent than I recalled (perhaps the movie version, which is quite different, was beclouding my memories of the book.)

Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says

This is perhaps the only film from the past decade which I can watch eight plus times within a year. Compulsively rewatchable. Perhaps one of the greatest movies ever made. Something. But you mustmustmustmust watch this. It is unbelievably fantastic. Reallyreallyreally great. My enthusiasm is earnest and I won't use the required umpteen !'s required to indicate the urgency with which you must watch this beautiful, hopeful film. [and don't miss Zizek's five minute commentary]

The film is so good that I don't give a shit about the book which may well have its merits but can't be as good of a book qua book as the film is qua film. Please go watch this now. Now!

AMEERA says

3.75

* Very odd what happens in a world without children's voices .

Szplug says

I saw the film adaptation of P. D. James' dystopian tale on television last night - with Caine and Owen reliably excellent - for the third or fourth time; and it reminded me, yet again, how much I'd enjoyed the novel upon which it was (loosely) based. James is one of those middle-aged female British writers - Ruth Rendell/Barbara Vine is another - who put their seemingly endless supply of interesting, somewhat dark stories to the page with a considerable amount of subtlety and elegance stuffed into what otherwise appears to be simple and clean prose. If the general *tone* of a United Kingdom under the sort of eschatologically despotic government depicted initially strikes one as being a bit too placid and routine, perhaps, with the end date of the human race so signally visible and neither the atheistic nor religious segment of the populace able to claim aught but defeat from the definitive sign of a God's grace which either never existed in the first place, or has clearly been removed with extreme prejudice, James actually managed to find the pulse of the weary, apathetic torpor that would be engendered, replete with zero tolerance for any (overt) acts of criminality and a keenly felt desire to ensure that the imminent extinction of humanity was accompanied by a great deal of cheap, mindless *fun*.

James' Oxford don Theo exemplifies this voluntary abandonment from the affairs of the world with a nicely portrayed controlled despair, having had ample encouragement to join the autocratic *Wardenship* of his opportunistic cousin and finding himself no longer welcome when such an influential position would do his band of *Fishies* the most good. Wild tribes of young people having returned to the untamed lure of the forest; machinations surrounding control of the lone and miraculous pregnancy discovered amidst an island of infertility; the cousin-vs-cousin showdown with a crying baby - the noisome sound of the future awakening from a terrifying final sleep - providing the musical score; James handles it all with a professional and assured aplomb. An excellent way to while away an otherwise useless winter day.

Checkman says

Rating: 3.5 Stars

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends

This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

- T.S. Eliot

A dystopian/post apocalypse story. Twenty five years before the story begins the Human race loses the ability to reproduce and there you are. The Apocalypse strikes - only this one doesn't consist of horrific death courtesy of a shattering virus, a planet killing meteor or environmental collapse. Humanity is left to live it's remaining years in relative peace and quiet. A long and quiet terminal illness for the Human race ,akin to being under hospice care, if such a comparison is accurate. With no lack of resources (with the exception of Humans that is) people are left to live on with the inescapable fact that there will be no replacements. Instead of The End coming at us from the front it's quietly following us from the rear.

I like the 2006 movie version of this novel. I finally got around to reading the novel. The movie is an excellent example of Docufiction (fictional Cinéma vérité) and it stands up to repeated viewings. The movie works on many different levels and I'm a fan of the film version. However I understood the novel is rather different so I made a concerted effort *not* to compare it to the film version. It isn't fair to do that.....in my opinion.

The novel is a what I consider to be a classic British Dystopian story. The protagonist (Theo) is ,in many ways, a passive observer of events. Though he does get involved he isn't what Americans would consider a "man of action". Instead of making things happen the British protagonist simply tries to survive while things outside of his (or her) control happens to him/her. See: *How I Live Now*, 1984 and even *The Day of the Triffids* for other strong examples of this type of character. A good example in the movies would be Jim in *28 Days Later*. Many of my fellow Americans don't like this type of character, but I'm okay with it. Perhaps my own life experience has made me realize that more often than not we're just along for the ride no matter how much we would like to think otherwise. I'm not the broad-shouldered heroic type and at 48 years of age I find such characters to be tiresome at times. I'm more tolerant of them in movies, but not so much in print. Go figure.

Theo is not a particularly likeable man. He is selfish and not very caring, but he understands this to be the case. Theo is very self-aware. Yet ,despite those faults, Theo does rise to the occasion which is also believable.....in my opinion. We are imperfect creatures and often capable of contradictory actions. Today's scoundrel could very well be tomorrow's hero.

Regarding the diary entries ,which so many other reviewers despise, I found that I liked the technique. While we think of the dystopian/post-apocalyptic genres to be a suitable setting for full-bore action (*Road Warrior & Terminator*) in reality the slow death of an entire species is both horrifying and boring. So most of the action takes place in Theo's own words because much of such an event would be emotional and intellectual. As a Professor of History Theo can't help, but observe the final chapter in Human history. That's what the diary is. A historian would call his diary a primary source, but of course (as Theo is all too aware) there will be no future historians to read his diary. As a result there is a poignancy attached to the entries.

I do wish Goodreads allowed for half ratings because I give *The Children of Men* 3.5 stars. The author's vision is well executed, her world is plausible and the story is compelling. The protagonist isn't the most likeable of people, but he is believable. All in all it was worth the hours I invested in reading it. If for no other reason than it made me think and that's always a good thing.....in my opinion.
