

J. M. COETZEE

WINNER OF THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

## The Childhood of Jesus

‘Coetzee hasn’t done anything as fine and beautifully executed as this since *Disgrace*.’ *Age*

BOOK REVIEW

Too Much for **One Book**

AYSHA AMIN

Nobel laureate J.M. Coetzee's *"The Childhood of Jesus"* came out in 2013 as a cryptic fable exploring innocence, destiny, diaspora, maternal love and the philosophy of the abyss that is human affection. And it's the kind that polarises the reading population. It's difficult to have a neutral opinion about this book.

The story begins with a heavy vibe of organised chaos. It takes about the first five chapters to reach any stable information about the characters, time and setting. In fact, only at the end of the three hundred and eighteen paged book did I realise that I had read it with the wrong approach. The book is meant to have almost no plot, because it is so cinematic and philosophical. It's a compelling and confounding work of political philosophy wrapped in a less compelling, even seemingly intentionally flat, work of fiction, one that falls somewhere between episodic and unadvancing. The world Coetzee describes isn't real; the main characters have no relation to each other; their quest is implausible.

An elderly man and a boy (neither of their ages or actual names is mentioned) have made a journey to some nondescript socialist city of Novilla on a boat, which is where they met. Both the man and the child have no family and pass through a rehabilitation border where they are given new identities. The man takes it up as his responsibility to look for the boy's mother. And the search is solely based on intuition, since there is absolutely no information about the boy's mother. This search develops new relationships and experiences, and the reader sees the contrasting worlds of an aged man and a

child from their individual perspectives. And this search for identity reflects the general human search for meaning. The boy is sent to a school where he has trouble fitting in and so falls into the threat of being sent to a boarding school for difficult children. It is decided that they must move to a new place or the social welfare authorities would compel the child to live away from his guardians at the school. The story ends full circle with the two main characters, along with the new friends they have acquired throughout the journey, driving to a new relocation centre for another change of identity, as the man says, "Looking for somewhere to stay, to start our new life."

Personally, I found this book odd and digressing in the beginning, but couldn't pull away, and by the end, it actually left a very pleasant aftertaste. The *New York Times* called it a "Kafka-inspired parable of the quest for meaning itself." Most of this South African-born Australian author's work is surrealistic and needs to be read with an open-minded approach and frankly, patience, because things can get very confusing when there are only hints of the time and location at which the story is taking place. But somehow the lack of informational depth is more than compensated by the philosophical weight of the story and the people in it. It's not a coffee table book; I'd recommend it if you're into metaphysics and abstract art.

*Aysha Amin's life is a struggle of meeting the unrealistically high goals she sets for herself while being too lazy to ever do anything. Contact her (she likes to be sent Hungryalist poetry and harsh criticism) at [aysha.amin.27@gmail.com](mailto:aysha.amin.27@gmail.com)*

THE SECOND BEST  
MOVIE OF THE TWO

MASHIAT LAMISA

Remember how good we felt watching *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* back in 2011? Well the gang is back and personally I think it was rather bold of them to bring out a sequel of such a stereotypical movie. Especially with a title having the words "second best" in it.

The Brits are back this year with more romance and less comedy, with Richard Gere joining the gang. The film and the cast still have the charming effect like before but I felt like the plot could be stronger. If you haven't watched the prequel, which was adapted from Deborah Moggach's novel, you might have difficulties figuring out what's what and who's who from the very beginning of the movie. There are too many actors and too much going on all at once.

The director John Madden has done an excellent job on making the whole cast create ripples of sentiment in you. The character Muriel played by the ever-loved Maggie Smith is a character that grows on you, especially by the end of the movie. Like the first *Marigold*, this one also felt like a 2 hour long Indian vacation, where you have to deal with obvious romances, the other guy, subtle jokes and a hit Bollywood number where everyone dance their hearts out.

The sequel starts with Sonny (Dev Patel) and Muriel (Maggie Smith) who wish to open a new hotel in India. Patel's character is no more the adorable, innocent boy he was. Sonny is now nervy and so very annoying at times that you might have a hard time enduring him throughout the whole movie. In between Sonny wanting to become the owner to a second hotel and getting married to the love of his life Sunaina, lots of other romances spring up on screen that will teach you of heartbreaks, moving on and well, life.

The ultimate surprise to me was how Madge's (Celia Imrie) life turned out to be and of course, the whole cast including our very own Richard Gere dancing to a popular Bollywood number at the end. The movie was very heart warming, one that you'd love watching on a lazy Friday with your family. You might even have to hold back a tear or two if you're having a bad time or can relate to the hopeless wanderers that are the characters.

*Mashiat Lamisa is often seen frowning at the sight of people who dislike poetry and tomatoes. She can be reached at [mashiatlamisa@outlook.com](mailto:mashiatlamisa@outlook.com)*

## MOVIE REVIEW

RATING: 7/10

