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Child Review: A Powerful Message Lost in Genre

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How far can love push us beyond the boundaries of morality, and when does the desire to save someone become an excuse for cruelty? With a child's life at the centre of an increasingly disturbing moral dilemma, Cyrus Neshvad's Child raises questions about innocence, sacrifice and inequality.

Yet, while its premise carries considerable weight, does the film's storytelling give these questions the depth they deserve?
At the heart of Child is the desperation of parents Anne and Gregg, whose desire to save their seriously ill son draws them into increasingly disturbing territory. Their predicament confronts us with an uncomfortable question: can the instinct to protect our own justify almost anything? Organ trafficking and the exploitation of children are hardly unfamiliar subjects, nor should their gravity alone be mistaken for cinematic depth.

The more compelling question is what happens when the preservation of one life comes at the expense of another. Parental love makes the situation emotionally understandable, but does it make the resulting choices defensible?It is this distinction between empathy and absolution that gives the film its strongest moral dilemma.
The subject matter also invites a broader examination of human rights, bodily autonomy and the unequal distribution of power. How can we speak of freedom and human dignity when the most vulnerable risk becoming expendable to those with greater resources? And why should children bear the consequences of decisions made by adults who are supposed to protect them?

There is a disturbing contradiction at the heart of a story in which the desire to preserve one child's innocence becomes entangled with the exploitation of another. The question is not simply whose life can be saved, but whose life is considered worth saving in the first place. Child raises these issues, although the seriousness of its subject matter is not always matched by the depth of its exploration.

What interested me most was the potential to examine the gradual erosion of morality: the point at which desperation begins to change not only what people are willing to do, but how they justify doing it. Selling one's soul is rarely a single, decisive act. It is a succession of compromises, each one made easier by the circumstances that precede it. The most compelling version of this story would allow us to follow that process closely, understanding how its characters arrive at their decisions without necessarily absolving

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them of responsibility. Yet Child is less convincing in developing this psychological complexity.

It asks how far people will go for their loved ones, but does not always give sufficient weight to the moral journey that takes them there.
Neshvad is at his strongest when he allows suspense to emerge from the parents' desperation. His Oscar-nominated short had already demonstrated his ability to distil tension, and Child similarly finds its footing when it leans into the conventions of the thriller. Here, the threat feels inseparable from the characters' predicament, and the tension comes not simply from what might happen next, but from how far they are prepared to go.

The film is most compelling when it trusts the audience to sit with that uncertainty, allowing fear and moral discomfort to build alongside one another. In these moments, Neshvad demonstrates how effectively genre can serve a story rather than merely provide its atmosphere.
That tension becomes less assured when the film moves towards more overtly nightmarish horror, drawing on haunted-house and monster-film conventions. I appreciate films that use genre to communicate difficult social realities, but here the transitions do not always feel earned. Rather than deepening the psychological and ethical conflict, these shifts can pull the story away from the human desperation that gives its strongest moments their emotional weight.

The problem is not that Neshvad experiments with genre, but that the different approaches do not always complement one another. A film exploring the erosion of morality needs its tonal shifts to intensify that process, rather than distract from it.
At just 75 minutes, Child attempts to navigate several different genre traditions while carrying the weight of a complex ethical dilemma. Its ambition is clear, but the storytelling does not always allow its ideas to develop organically. The issue is not necessarily the runtime itself, but the lack of a sufficiently cohesive build-up to support the film's thematic ambitions.

The suspenseful sequences demonstrate what the story could achieve, yet the movement between thriller and more fantastical horror prevents that tension from consistently accumulating into a deeper emotional experience. The result is a film that feels more compelling in its individual moments than in the way those moments ultimately come together.
There is also an interesting gendered dimension to the film's central dilemma.Mothers are frequently portrayed as willing to cross any boundary to protect their children, an idea that can make for powerful storytelling but also risks turning self-sacrifice into an expectation.

How do we distinguish between devotion and the belief that love grants someone permission to do anything? And when a mother's desperation becomes the driving force of a story, does the narrative

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examine the consequences of that devotion, or does it risk making extreme actions more palatable simply because they emerge from maternal love? These questions complicate the familiar idea that there is no limit to what a parent would do for their child. Love may explain desperation, but it does not erase responsibility.

Visually, the film's washed-out imagery, gloomy landscapes and blue-grey hospital sequences contribute to an atmosphere of hopelessness. The performances and moments of emotional strain help ground the story in recognisable human fear. Yet atmosphere and subject matter can only take a film so far. A disturbing premise does not automatically produce a profound examination of the issues it depicts, just as effective individual sequences do not necessarily make for a cohesive cinematic experience.

Ultimately, Child is a film about the limits of empathy, not simply the lengths parents will go to save their child. Its most interesting questions concern the point at which understanding another person's desperation becomes an excuse for overlooking the suffering they inflict. Neshvad demonstrates a clear ability to build tension, and the film's underlying themes deserve attention. However, its inconsistent genre choices and underdeveloped narrative prevent it from fully realising its potential. For me, the distinction lies between a film that has something important to say and one that finds the most compelling way to say it. Child has the former, but does not always achieve the latter.

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