

A Critical Exploration of Human-Primate Dynamics and Ecological Reflections in *'Rise of the Planet of the Apes'* Movie: *An Ecocriticism Literary Analysis*

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*"The righteous care for the needs of their animals,
but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel."
- Proverbs 12:10 (NIV)*

ABSTRACT

This journal article offers an ecocritical analysis of the film "Rise of the Planet of the Apes" through the lens of Hiltner's "Ecocriticism" (2014). Employing a qualitative methodology, the study examines the movie's portrayal of human-animal relationships and environmental ethics. Additionally, the article delves into the cinematography of the film, focusing on the use of camera techniques to convey environmental and ethical themes. As the result: **1)** The interconnectedness among humans, apes and environment portrays ethical concerns regarding the separation of apes with their habitat for medical experiment. **2)** The human-animal relationships depicted shows that the apes' yearning for freedom and acceptance creates ethical implications: being seen as part of a family and as a mere experimental subject. **3)** The disruption of ecosystems by human actions, particularly the apes' habitat, exploitation and abuses has made severe disruption both the humans and the apes, caused by the injustice experienced by the apes. This aligns with the film's broader portrayal, highlighting the interconnectedness between human exploitation, environmental disruption, and the need for ethical considerations.

INTRODUCTION

Released in 2011 and directed by Rupert Wyatt, *'Rise of the Planet of the Apes'* presents the tale of Caesar, a chimpanzee whose heightened intelligence is inherited from his mother, who was exposed to a cognitive-enhancing drug. Raised within human society by Will Rodman, Caesar becomes increasingly self-aware. However, societal rejection prompts his retaliatory actions against humans as he seeks his true identity. Starring James Franco as Will Rodman and Andy Serkis as Caesar, the movie garnered acclaim for its visual effects and was nominated for an Oscar. The plot revolves around the consequences of human interference with nature and the subsequent clash between humans and apes, encapsulated in the binary opposition of man vs. nature and man vs. apes. Set in San Francisco, the story follows William Rodman's experiments with the viral-based drug *ALZ-112* on chimpanzees, inadvertently leading to the

birth of Caesar. As Caesar's intelligence grows, society deems him a threat, culminating in his relocation to a wildlife shelter. This narrative conflict exemplifies the central issue of the movie.

One of the movie's overarching themes is the danger of human arrogance and the ethical treatment of animals. The movie emphasizes the shared existence of humans and animals as creations of God, advocating for respect and compassion towards all creatures. The story prompts reflection on the potential consequences of animals gaining human-like cognition, questioning the balance between scientific progress and ethical considerations. *'Rise of the Planet of the Apes'* delves into *ecocriticism* and human-animal relationships, portraying the implications of intelligence enhancement in apes and the resulting clash between humanity and nature."

Binary Opposition

| Human | Apes |
|--|---|
| Humans in positions of power exploit and treat apes as mere animals, using them for scientific experimentation and personal gain exhibiting oppressive and exploitative tendencies | Experience exploitation and mistreatment by humans who subject them to invasive experiments, captivity, and isolation, denying them their natural freedom and autonomy. This oppression fuels a growing resistance among the apes, sparking a struggle for equality and liberation. |

METHOD

Applying the ecocritical lens elucidated in Ken Hiltner's *"Ecocriticism"* (2014), this review delves into the film *"Rise of the Planet of the Apes,"* directed by Rupert Wyatt (2011), unveiling its ecological themes, human-environment dynamics, and ethical nuances. The plot's exploration of unintended consequences arising from human manipulation of nature embodies ecocriticism's concerns over ecological disruption, paralleling Hiltner's emphasis on story reflecting environmental responsibility. The film's depiction of conflict between humans and apes serves as an allegory for resource exploitation, echoing ecocriticism's focus on the consequences of human actions. This ecocritical analysis deepens our understanding of the movie's portrayal of the intricate relationships between humans, animals, and the environment, emphasizing shared existence and ethical implications within the context of scientific advancements.

The application of ecocriticism, as framed by Hiltner's anthology, enriches the analysis of *"Rise of the Planet of the Apes."* The movie's depiction of ecological themes, human-environment tensions, and ethical quandaries resonates with ecocriticism's core principles, illuminating the intricate web of connections between humans, animals, and the environment. This ecocritical exploration enhances the movie's depth, inviting scholars and critics to unearth profound insights into its portrayal of human

interactions with the natural world and the cautionary messages it conveys. This analysis limits the aspects of ecocriticism into three critical issues in the movie:

Eco-critic in the Movie

| Ecocriticism Concept | Description |
|-----------------------|---|
| Interconnectedness | Emphasizes the intricate connections between humans, nature, and the environment, highlighting shared existence. |
| Nature as Text | Views nature as a symbolic text with cultural meanings, inviting interpretations through literary and artistic works. |
| Environmental Justice | Focuses on issues of social and environmental equity, advocating for the fair treatment of all living beings. |

DISCUSSION

The movie begins with a group of people kidnapping chimpanzees from the wild. In this scene, the camera employs the *bird's eye view* technique in the area of the jungle from above to show the wholeness of the environment and the interaction happening when the chimpanzees are kidnapped using traps set by the humans, one of the methods is by using ropes covered with leaves on the ground. It shows how people do not care about what they have done with the primates and their habitat in the jungle. At this point, the scientists are trying to find the cure of *Alzheimer* and forcefully get the apes for subjects of experiment. At this point, the balance of nature between human, animals and environment has been disrupted “...no being or phenomenon can be understood in isolation” (Hiltner, 2014). The idea of “no being or phenomenon can be understood in isolation” highlights the interconnected nature of all things. This principle asserts that a complete understanding of a subject requires considering its relationships and interactions within a larger context of being. It emphasizes the need to move beyond surface-level characteristics and explore how entities influence and are influenced by their surroundings.

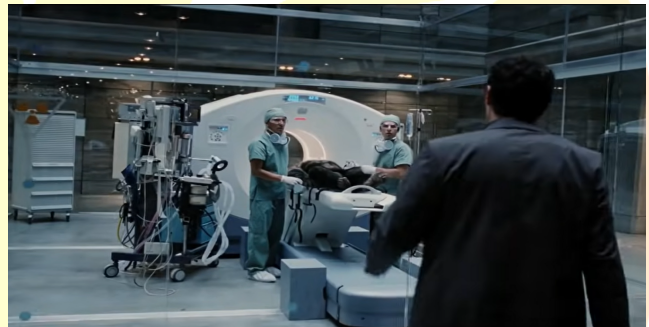


In this scene, it is seen that the humans see the apes as nothing more than animals and test subjects. Besides Will and Franklin, Caesar living in a human society despite him being an ape is seen as an outcast by the humans. In this scene, the camera takes a medium shot to show the interaction among



the characters. It slowly splits into seconds and focuses on each character's conversation. At this moment, Caesar is just a 3-year-old chimp and all he wants to do is just play with the other kids until he starts to break and hurt someone, due to the experiment that is going on. Many years pass and Caesar grows; he is now 5 years old and physically

and intelligently well but not mentally due to the progressive increasing intelligence. On one side, Will recognizes him as a family; on the other hand, he takes pity on Caesar, "*he hasn't spent any time with other chimps.*" says Will. On another occasion, leaving Redwood with Will, he is scaring at a dog and then yelling back at it as he is starting to recognize his physical features that are different from the other species. "*Habitat fragmentation disrupts the connectivity between ecosystems, hindering the movement of species and altering ecological dynamics, necessitating a comprehensive approach to land-use planning.*" (Foster, 2019, p. 142). It asserts that This disruption in connectivity made by humans makes it difficult for animals to live in their habitat. As a result, various species have trouble finding the resources they need to survive and interact with one another. This change in the way species move and interact also has an impact on how the environment functions as a whole.



By the time he gets in the car, he asks Will, "*What am I?*" Caesar asks and Will replies that Caesar is not a pet and that he is his father. Soon after that Caesar finds out his true origins, how he is born into this world, and the tragic death of his mother. Even though the relationship between Will and his family with Caesar is deep; however, the bond is seen as not more than just an experimental subject in the name of humanity. "*The natural world is a text written in the language of ecosystems, inviting readers to discern its stories of adaptation, survival, and interconnectedness.*" (Williams, 2019, p. 234). In the context of the "*Rise of the Planet of the Apes*" movie, this perspective can be observed through the way nature is portrayed as a symbolic text with cultural significance. The film invites viewers to interpret the relationship between humans and apes as a reflection of broader societal dynamics. Scene in the picture shows how Caesar is not well accepted by Will's neighbors, saying "*Is that a chimpanzee?*" The camera shoots split seconds in medium shots, focusing the interaction among Will's family and the neighbor's family, while the background shows the greens of nature. The natural habitat of the apes serves as a

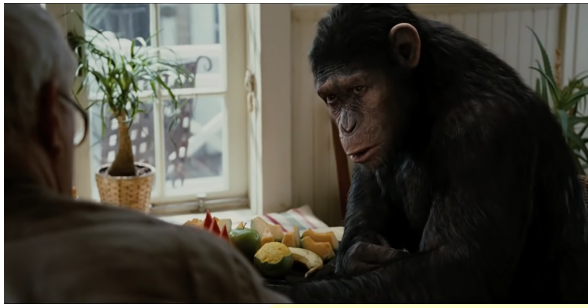


symbolic backdrop, representing the complex interplay between human exploitation, scientific experimentation, and the consequences of environmental disruption. Through the characters' interactions with the environment and each other, the movie prompts us to consider the ethical implications of our actions on nature and the potential for unintended consequences.

On another occasion, Caesar's grandad is attacked by this man. Charles has a disease where it makes him crazy like he is not in the right state of mind so Charles leaves his house and goes to his neighbor's car because he is not right; afterwards, the guy comes outside to confront Charles. He asks, *"Why is he doing this?"* but Charles cannot say anything, so afterwards the neighbor is about to attack Charles but then Caesar sees this as something right so he goes outside to *"help"* but goes as far as to bite the men but even though his reason is just to help his dear old grandfather his actions are not right. *"Animal welfare and social justice are interconnected issues that must be addressed together."* (Sethi et al., 2020) It emphasizes the interrelation between the well-being of animals and the broader principles of social fairness and equity. This perspective acknowledges that the treatment of animals and the treatment of humans are intertwined, and efforts to improve one aspect can have positive impacts on the other. It suggests that a comprehensive approach to ethical considerations should encompass both the treatment of animals and the broader societal context. By recognizing and addressing these interconnected issues simultaneously, emphasizes the interrelation between the well-being of animals and the broader principles of social fairness and equity. This perspective acknowledges that the treatment of animals and the treatment of humans are intertwined, and efforts to improve one aspect can have positive impacts on the other. It suggests that a comprehensive approach to ethical considerations should encompass both the treatment of animals and the broader societal context. By recognizing and addressing these interconnected issues simultaneously can be enlivened as the efforts to promote animal welfare also contribute to broader social justice goals.



All Caesar wants is to help his grandfather but by human society. This is seen as of course a bad thing, which leads to nothing but regret. Then he is cast aside from the humans and is caged along the other apes. As the movie progresses, it continues to show the dark side of society as well as Caesar's



resentment so far as caging him alongside the other apes. This time is the pinnacle moment of his life, because it is where he starts to realize his place in the world. Even though it starts out rough as far as getting beaten up by the other ape, he asks and is constantly bullied by one of the workers there but as time passes, Caesar starts to adapt to his surroundings so far as making friends, Maurice as

well befriending the ape who has beaten up.

The movie then continues with the apes taking revenge on the humans after receiving a lot of oppressions from humans in the experimental zone, even from Will when Caesar is caged after being caught hurting someone to defend the grandfather as a result of his limited knowledge in human society, *"You can stay here now. You're not going home right now,"* says he. Other oral, physical and mental abuses can be seen in the scene when Caesar is getting all of the punishments in the metal cage for not being well-mannered. One of the laboratory officers is throwing out words, *"Check out this guy. He thinks he's special or something. Stupid monkey,"* while striking an electric rod on the cage, making flashes of lights. They do not really do anything to nature but more to exploit apes into test subjects into finding a cure for a disease.



Schmitt et al. (2021) argued, *"in terms of justification of animal experimentation, including the use of animals in biomedical research needs a greater ethical reflection."* The humans are blindly going into this without ever taking the consideration of what might happen. They take them as test subjects, take them from their home and kill some of them. Caesar's actions are somewhat medical justification.

The humans do take away the apes from their home which results in the city getting destroyed and countless lives get hurt. The apes destroy buildings, vehicles, and even the Golden Gate bridge. Then



start off lightly, only risking people's lives at a minimum to at least tell humans that they want freedom, not to be held captive inside small cages and be treated poorly. The humans however, do not understand their signs, shooting and killing the apes unstoppably. Because of that, the apes then start playing

rough with the humans, killing them and also setting up traps which the humans do not notice and start raiding them by destroying the cops' vehicles. Caesar is trying to find his place in the world, something he thinks he had in human society. By the time Will has enough money to free Caesar from the prison, he refuses to take Will's offer because he has realized that this is not where he belongs. Humans belong to humans which go the same for the apes. All his life he has been living among the humans in a different environment than he is meant to be in, from the prison he feels comfortable and makes a plan to set the apes free from human wrath.

The outside world, being caged away his entire life, not being free to go wherever he pleased and being rejected by others make him question himself whether he is merely just a pet or his own ape so he frees the ape. To the point of wrecking the city and killing the policemen and the man who has been using the apes as test subjects, before Caesar runs away, Will has been able to confront his son one last time, as Will tries to convince Caesar to stay with him despite everything that has already happened. Caesar puts his hand out to his shoulder and says "*I am home*" and then Caesar clumps up to the top of the tree of redwood signifying that he is free and has come home to the apes. Fournier et al. (2021) express concerns about animal possession, highlighting the ethical and ecological implications of humans owning and controlling animals. They delve into the complex dynamics of human-animal relationships, raising questions about the welfare of captive animals, the impact of ownership on biodiversity and ecosystems, and the potential for exploitation. It emphasizes the need for responsible and ethical considerations when it comes to possessing and interacting with animals, advocating for a greater understanding of the inherent rights and well-being of non-human beings within our shared environment. The practice of employing animals in entertainment settings like, including home and laboratory that can cause exploitation and abuse is regarded as unethical and advocates argue for its prohibition. This perspective stems from concerns about animal welfare, as captivity and performances can harm animals physically and psychologically, raise questions about educational value versus exploitation, and divert resources from genuine conservation efforts. His reason for doing all this is all in the same home. This is a depiction where he finds out that he is actually adopted by some other people, and he will try his best to find his family. If it were not for the humans mistreating the apes none of this would ever happen.



Dr. William and Caesar the chimpanzee are finally reunited again. In this ending scene, the camera shoots Caesar from the back in a wide shot, while his friends are in front of him to show the dramatic scene when the entire apes that have been waiting for him look welcoming. William states that it

is his fault and that he should have not sent him to the place where captured apes are kept. However, Caesar then whispers to him that he is home, in the wilderness. William then understands Caesar's decision and decides that he should leave him alone. Caesar is then welcomed by his fellow ape friends he meets whilst being held captive as if he were now the leader of the ape tribe.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, all Caesar ever wants is to find his place in the world, a place where he can be comfortable and feel happy, which the humans do not satisfy him instead leading him into finding his own people, the apes. Home is a very important place for him, it is the place where he feels safe and happy. The discussed analysis reflects on the movie's depiction of the exploitation and mistreatment of animals in various settings. The movie portrays how humans' disregard for the well-being of animals leads to ethical and environmental concerns, including habitat disruption and abusive experimentation. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of nature and the negative consequences of exploiting animals for entertainment or scientific purposes. The film prompts reflection on the complex relationships between humans, animals, and the environment, highlighting the need for ethical considerations and responsible interactions with other species. In the end, the main character, Caesar, rejects human society to find his true place among his fellow apes, symbolizing a return to his natural home and asserting his leadership within the ape tribe.

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