Man Facing Southeast: Would We Know Jesus If We Saw Him?

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Man Facing Southeast: Would We Know Jesus If We Saw Him?

Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the first paragraph of the essay:

Directed and written by Eliseo Subiela, Man Facing Southeast is a drama-science fiction film released in 1986. The film tells the story of a jaded, divorced Dr. Julio Denis who works at Buenos Aires’ Jose Borda Psychiatric Hospital and Rantes, a patient who mysteriously arrives and claims to come from space. The two develop a close relationship where Dr. Denis takes Rantes on several excursions and even introduces him to his children. He stands facing the southeast sending and receiving information from "home." I initially thought he was an alien, but after our class discussion, I also see the representations of being a sort of Messiah through the film's replication of the Pieta and the crucifixion of Christ. This idea that Rantes was the second coming of Christ has huge implications on society, especially given the outcome of the film.

This the world seen through the lens of faith is available in Verbum: https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/verbum/vol12/iss1/8
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Directed and written by Eliseo Subiela, *Man Facing Southeast*, is a drama-science fiction film released in 1986. The film tells the story of a jaded, divorced Dr. Julio Denis who works at Buenos Aires’ Jose Borda Psychiatric Hospital and Rantes, a patient who mysteriously arrives and claims to come from space. The two develop a close relationship where Dr. Denis takes Rantes on several excursions and even introduces him to his children. He stands facing the southeast sending and receiving information from “home.” I initially thought he was an alien, but after our class discussion, I also see the representations of being a sort of Messiah through the film’s replication of the *Pieta* and he crucifixion of Christ. This idea that Rantes was the second coming of Christ has huge implications on society, especially given the outcome of the film.

Many parallels are made between Rantes and Jesus Christ. Firstly, Rantes claims that he is from space and that he came to earth on a spaceship. Initially, everyone assumes that he is simply delusional. This mystery of origin, for me at least, is reminiscent of Christ’s. He was the Son of God, born into the world through the Immaculate Conception. Therefore, part of him belonged on earth, but his home was also in the sky, in Heaven. Facing the southeast looking up to the sky could mean the “information” he is actually giving and receiving is prayer. Much like Christ, Rantes has supernatural powers that allow him to carry out his mission. He has the power of telekinesis which he uses to feed a hungry woman and child, which in the context of Christ’s likeness, is an act of a miracle. Whereas the doctor had difficulties connecting to patients, Rantes gives them comfort and
assurance from a simple gesture. Images of patients reaching out towards him as he passes by and their devotion to him is a clear parallel to Christ’s disciples which are most evident in two scenes: the orchestra scene and the final one. The scene in which Rantes conducts Ode to Joy has not only the crowd in euphoria, but his patients back in the hospital too. The hospital’s supervisor even asks the doctor whether or not Rantes was with him the entire time, because the patients reported that Rantes led the uprising. The final scene, after Rantes passes away shows the patients, sullen and sad in the form of the circle, centered where Rantes used to stand, mourning his loss, but awaiting his return.

If I believe that Rantes represented the Second Coming of Christ, then I am forced to believe that if Jesus did return to earth we, humanity, would forsake him as we did before. Rantes came to earth with the purest of intentions. He wanted to help the poor, the dying, the hungry, all those who the rest of society have pushed aside or criminalized, and all those we have forgotten. He performed miracles, and to an extent, brought Dr. Julio back to life. Yet still after all he had done, after all he had shown to the doctor, he was crucified all the same; a syringe in place of a cross. So where does this leave us? Like Dr. Julio Denis, we have lost our way. Life has beaten us down again and again and we lose faith in our darkest moments. The values of society (the pursuits of wealth and beauty and the focus on individual desires) are placed on a pedestal and lessons that Christ has taught us of humility and selflessness are pushed to the side. As Rantes points out, he and the doctor have the same brain, yet one of them plays God while the other is locked up and labeled “insane.”

After watching this film, I am inclined to believe that even if we as Christians are waiting for Jesus to return, we would not know it if he did. It is more likely that we would chalk up his “misguided” aims of equality and brotherhood and check him into a mental institution. Perhaps the teachings of Christ, especially in today’s world are too radical for us to accept. Does this make Him the madman or us?