

IS IT JUST TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS THAT IS TURNING US INTO A DEHUMANIZED SOCIETY?

LE 15 OTTOBRE 2010 MARIA TERESA SETTE

Why are we so concerned about the effects of scientific and technological progress, when what we should fear the most is the heart of darkness of a passive and subdued society?

The movie that opened the 54th London Film Festival on Wednesday the 13th is emotionally powerful and beautifully scripted. Throughout it, you can't help but drop some tears (I admit I did) and be totally captured by the intriguing sci-fi plot. Yet, once it ends, it leaves you with an eerie sense of impotence and a big question mark. Why are we so concerned about the effects of scientific and technological progress, when what we should fear the most is the heart of darkness of a passive and subdued society?

Never Let Me Go is an adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's Booker Prize-nominated novel, directed by Mark Romanek and starring Keira Knightley, Andrew Garfield and Carey Mulligan. It is the story of Kathy, Ruth and Tommy, three friends from Hailsham boarding school, where pupils are taught to believe they are special and "creativity, sporting activity and a healthy lifestyle, along with regular medical checks" are encouraged. Despite the strict regime, Hailsham doesn't appear to be different from any middle-class boarding schools in provincial England during the 70s, until a dark truth is revealed by one of the teachers. Pupils are in fact clones created by the government as part of the National Donor Program: their destiny is to become adults, give their organs away and die. These clones happen to think, feel and suffer as any human being do.

The film focuses on the complex triangle of love-friendship-jealousy among the three friends who share the same horrible fate.



The story is about mortality and how people cope with their fate", said Kazuo Ishiguro during the press conference on Wednesday. "I think this story was trying to put a positive light on human nature. To try and say as convincingly as possible that when people feel they are trapped and their time is running out, the things that become important are things like friendship and love, he said.



Yet, what strikes most in the film is not the triumph of human feelings over a society where science has the upper hand over ethics and humanity, but rather the sense of resignation and acceptance of what seems to be a State-enforced monstrosity.

The characters display few signs of rebellion, and we are not allowed to know whether there is any resistance to the system in the outside world. Everything and everyone appears to be absolutely normal. The children don't show any sign of shock or vertigo when they are told the truth about their destiny. Nor do they try to escape once they become adults and are aware of having a "soul" and feelings.

It is this strange normality, which pervades the atmosphere throughout the whole movie, that makes you wonder whether we really need a sci-fi scenario such as a revolutionary medical breakthrough to imagine a world that has lost its sense of humanity. Are muted submission to authority and the lack of critical thinking not enough to generate a monstrous society? Perhaps we don't have an Hailsham school, but we did have Auschwitz.

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