Never Let Me Go. Dir. Mark Romanek. Perf. Carey Mulligan, Andrew Garfield. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2010. Film.

If Mark Romanek's *Never Let Me Go* tells us anything, it is that our time on this planet is limited. Based upon the acclaimed novel by Kazuo Ishiguro, Romanek's film chronicles the lives of three friends, Kathy (Carey Mulligan), Tommy (Andrew Garfield), and Ruth (Keira Knightley), as they come to terms with the inevitability of life's passing. The film is told in flashbacks as older Kathy recalls her youthful days spent with Tommy and Ruth at Hailsham, an English boarding school, and it is not surprising that the film explores two of the deepest human emotions, love and betrayal, through the relationship between the three friends.

Given the film's science fiction element, however, in that we eventually learn that Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth are cloned to exist as organ donors, and that their lives will tragically end before they reach their thirties, several questions beg to be asked: why is it not surprising that the thematic concerns of *Never Let Me Go* are love and betrayal? If the three main characters are not "real" people, why do they share similar desires and regrets with the so-called "normal" population to which their organs will ultimately be donated?

Perhaps the film (and the novel) exists precisely to answer these two questions. On the one hand, *Never Let Me Go* is a dystopian view of the dangerous potential of medicine and science, in which we see the negative side-effects of such progressive experiments as cloning and genetic engineering. As viewers, we can only sympathize with Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth, because we ourselves have not been cloned, and because we understand logically that human beings are not being cloned in the way that cloning is depicted in the film. We can imagine what it would be like to be in their position, but we are ultimately observing these characters from an epistemological distance.

In order to bridge this gap between human and non-human, experience and imagination, the three characters behave, essentially, like human beings. They love, they have sex, they deceive, they laugh, they cry, and when they are older, they lament their youth with nostalgic force. In effect, Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth are represented as real individuals with

whom we can relate. This paradoxical representation—to be both like and unlike the audience—is what gives the film its resonance.

This is not the first time that non-human characters have rendered human emotion in the cinema. The intelligent computer HAL 9000, for instance, arguably contains more emotion that the humans in Kubrick's *2001:* A *Space Odyssey* (1968); and in countless animated films, bugs, cars, and toys are given human traits to garner the audience's sympathy. Typically, such narrative devices allow the artist to engage in polemics. Technology threatens humanity, argues Kubrick. Insects and the environment should be cared for, claim John Lasseter and Andrew Stanton, directors of A *Bug's Life* (1998). Similarly, in *Never Let Me Go,* Romanek (and by extension Ishiguro) demonstrates the dangers of progressive science and medicine, thereby opposing cloning, genetic engineering, and others experimental procedures.

As an audience, we are made to feel for Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth because we need to understand what is at stake with their tragic departure from this world. They, like us, experience the grand emotions of love, loss, and betrayal, but unlike those of us who are fortunate enough, their experience is limited to a few years before their bodies will perish after the last of their organs are taken and they have no use for the rest of the population. By making the characters human-like, the creators convincingly convey the potential limitations of medical and scientific advancements such as cloning and genetic engineering.

On the one hand, *Never Let Me Go* can be viewed as a science fiction film in the vein of *Gattaca* (1997), and *The Island* (2005); on the other hand, it aligns with British period dramas like *The Remains of the Day* (1993) and *Atonement* (2007) in its nostalgic depiction of love, loss, and betrayal. *Never Let Me Go* is a fine film that raises pertinent and at times thought-provoking questions about the nature of life and our role in preserving and protecting it.

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