

Book review

***Blindness*, by José Saramago**

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SARAMAGO, José. **Blindness**. Translated by Giovanni Pontiero. London: Vintage, 2012. 310pp.

This novel, launched in the original in Portuguese in 1995 (with the title *Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*), now reaches the English-speaking audience to make it feel awe and concern for the possible fate of the present society.

José Saramago's involving language portrays an awkward, but not at all impossible, situation: a place where everybody is blind, but one woman (ironically, the ophthalmologist's wife). In a society which cannot see, problems common to a supposedly eye-opened society come up: lack of trust, greed, intrigue, dissidence, violence, bribery, rebellion, the old conflict between good vs. evil, coupled with the terrible conditions: no food, no water, no hygiene, no order. Simple tasks become almost impossible, like going to the bathroom (and facing the dirt and the stinking environment and the consequent discomfort and depression). How that society is going to survive is fantastically developed to the reader, who is free to make his/her judgment to assess the events taking place.

The story features the political class, which paradoxically seems to be the blindest of all. The orders delivered to the population who suffers from the unexpected evil of blindness reflect the blindness of the leaders, who can see (to increase the paradox, they could flee from the country, finding refuge somewhere else).

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So, escapism is seen as a simple and effective solution to the powerful ones, but how could more people go away if drivers and pilots were blind as well?

The heroes, the survivors, struggle to find their way in the middle of chaos, sharing their ideas and suggestions to solve immediate problems, and also their hope for the future: no-one in the group focused in the story gives up (although the temptation to do so seems irresistible).

Saramago's novel is timeless, and makes one think of how many allegedly eye-opened societies actually seem so obtuse and myopic, while we see their population suffering terribly in the hands of their leaders. It is not difficult to establish parallels between the fictitious story and the current events taking place in the Middle East, for instance. From 1995, the year of its publication in the original, to our days, we can see that the pertinence of this plot justifies its timely translation.

The translator Giovanni Pontiero did a superb job (even though he passed away while revising his translation, he was aided by Margaret Jull Costa in the task) and the effects devised by Saramago work in their particular way in the final result into English. No doubt, the English-speaking audience has a good representation of this stimulating, intense and somewhat disturbing novel, featuring beautifully and majestically the talent of the 1998 Nobel Prize winner, who passed away in 2010.

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