
Marxist Criticism of The Time Machine

The Time Machine is a 1960 science fiction film that was produced and directed by George Pal. Based on an 1895 novel of the same title by H.G. Wells, the film portrays an inventor's journey into the distant future and his findings. As George, the inventor, leaves his Victorian English home in the year 1900 and arrives in the year AD 802,701, he finds that civilization as he knows it has been completely lost. Soon, he discovers that humankind has evolved into two separate species: the Eloi and the Morlocks. As Matthew Taunton notes in an article titled "Class in The Time Machine," "H. G. Wells was a committed socialist and also a scientist with an active interest in evolution" (par. 1). Therefore, the film's presentation of the disappearance of modern civilized standards in this future society and the presentation of the power divide between the Eloi and the Morlocks is best viewed through a lens of Marxist criticism to understand the political commentary being made.

The film opens with a scene which depicts a series of clock faces drifting through nothingness and ending with a shot of Big Ben, a notable English landmark. This opening scene symbolizes both the concept of time and modern civilization, and it helps introduce viewers to the subject of the film. The film begins in medias res, and viewers are introduced to the main character, George, as he stumbles into a dinner party in his own home. His appearance and demeanor are sharply contrasted with that of his friends and colleagues who are gathered around the dinner table. While his friends and colleagues appear to be the epitome of modern civilization, George enters the film with the dirty appearance and the frazzled demeanor of a wild man. The film then utilizes a flashback to show viewers how and why George ended up with his clothes in shreds and his knowledge too great to comprehend.

Soon, viewers see George alone in his workshop preparing to make his journey into the future. As he sits inside of his time machine that has an appearance which is reminiscent of a sleigh, George watches the days, nights, weeks, months, and years pass him by through a window. He observes the change of time by the changing clothing styles of a mannequin in a storefront across the street. He makes a few brief stops in 1917, 1940, and 1966. Seemingly enthralled by the ability to traverse time and the changes that he witnesses in civilization, George continues on his journey into the future until his time machine reads the year AD 802,701.

When he stops his time machine, he begins adventuring around in his foreign surroundings, and he soon discovers a group of alarmingly passive men and women by a river. These men and women are all small in stature with tanned skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes, and they are sitting idly by as a woman drowns in the river. George rushes to rescue the woman, Weena, and he is amazed at the passivity of the people he has encountered. He cannot comprehend why they would sit indifferently as a woman drowned before their eyes. This is the first interaction that

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George has with the Eloi, one of the two species of humanity in this future civilization.

The passivity of the Eloi, in accompaniment with their small stature and fair appearance, helps viewers understand the political symbolism in the film. The foundation of the political statement becomes even more secure when George discovers the second species of this future civilization, the monstrous, ground dwelling Morlocks. Based on the premise that there is an exploration of socialism and evolution in the subtext of H. G. Wells's novel, the two species, the "surface dwelling Eloi and their subterranean counterparts, the Morlocks," can be viewed as representations of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie (McLean 13). In the film, the Morlocks are depicted as blue-skinned monsters who feed on the submissive Eloi. This may be viewed as a symbol of the bourgeoisie benefitting from the proletariat workforce.

George also discovers that all of the accomplishments made and lessons learned by past civilizations have been lost. All of the books have turned to dust, and the Eloi have no memory of history. The Eloi are completely unconcerned with their past, present, or future, as is highlighted in their passivity towards Weena's drowning. The Eloi seem merely to exist. They do not show any grand sense of humanity. The passivity of the Eloi may be viewed as a representation of the proletariat's submissive position in society. The proletariats provide the bourgeoisie with the work force needed to thrive and gain power, but they never reap any of the benefits. Similarly, the Morlocks benefit from the passive nature and obliviousness of the Eloi in order to maintain their power.

The Time Machine is a film which lends itself to Marxist criticism because of its depictions of the power divide between the Morlocks and the Eloi. Based on the knowledge that H. G. Wells was interested in both socialism and evolution, the film's setting of the distant future seems to purposely allow for commentary on both subjects. Patrick Parrinder, author of *Shadows of the Future: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction, and Prophecy*, notes that "the two scales, those of historical time measured by the rise and fall of cultures and civilizations, and of biological time measured by the evolution of devolution of the species, are superimposed upon another" (42). It is because of this futuristic setting that the film is able to depict the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in such a unique yet definitive manner.

Works Cited

McLean, Steven. *The Early Fiction of HG Wells: Fantasies of Science*. Springer, 2009.

Parrinder, Patrick. *Shadows of the Future: H.G. Wells, Science Fiction, and Prophecy*. Syracuse University Press, 1995.

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