

Chaplin's modern times analysis essay sample

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When it comes to comedy in cinema no one does it better than Charlie Chaplin. Although many years have passed since he blessed us with his last offering, Chaplin's unblemished legacy still endures on. It could not be farther from the truth that action speaks louder than words when it comes to him. Whereas his films lacked in speech, he overcompensated by being brilliantly funny. And so his legacy grows stronger each passing day and every successive generation is mesmerized by the comic genius that was Charlie Chaplin.

In modern times, Charlie Chaplin is indifferent to change both in the film industry and in the economic landscape of the American society. He was particularly not thrilled with the concept of talkies in movies, as he believed talkies were a threat to the comical nature of soundless film. Although the first talkie movie, *The Jazz Singer*, had been created less than a decade before this movie, he had not yet adopted the concept. It was therefore the first time he used sound in film, which proved to be very successful and made *Modern Times* one of the best movies in film history.

Shot in 1936, during the great depression in America, Chaplin used this movie to highlight the plight of average Americans during the depression era. As the number of jobless people ballooned, the number of jobs reduced significantly and the prospects of getting jobs were next to none. To add to the issue of joblessness, companies were reverting to technology, as a way of cutting costs and increasing taxes. Therefore, Chaplin's *Modern Times* film analysis proves that it is a social commentary on effects of economic depression, albeit with a comical twist.

From the onset of the movie, we can see that Chaplin pokes fun at the capitalist system and even likens humans going to work to sheep. As the movie begins, there is a herd of sheep crowding together. The scene suddenly switches to a large group of workers exiting the subway and rushing into the factory, where the president of the Electro-Steel Corp is in a serene office reading the paper. He inspects his workers through a closed circuit television set and is constantly ordering Section 5, where The Tramp is located, to speed up the assembling process. In this scene Chaplin arouses the notion that capitalism has less regard for human life. They are pushed to work at the speed of machines, which is detrimental to humans. Just like sheep, who have no form of control over their affairs, so do common people in a capitalist system.

Their daily routine is not much different from sheep's. They wake up early in the morning, rush to work for the rest of the day and go home in the evening. They spend most of their lives building wealth for the few at the top, while the majority wallow in poverty. A capitalist system has no regards for human's welfare- it is more concerned with the profits and will do anything within its power to attain the highest levels of profits. We see workers in Section 5 being pushed by the factory's president to speed up. We also see Tramp's free smoking time being interrupted by the president in the bathroom.

In a bid to further reduce workers' free time, an inventor introduces a feeding machine, where Chaplin is used as the guinea pig. The dehumanizing nature of this experiment shows the company's utter disregard for human

lives. Eventually when the pressure becomes too much for workers, errors and accidents are bound to occur, which may have dire consequences on them. This is vividly captured by Tramp who gets pulled into the wheels of a machine. When he is pulled out, he goes through what may be considered professional hazard. He goes into a mental breakdown wrenching everything, including a colleague's nose. He is subsequently taken to a mental hospital.

Once the system realizes that a worker is unfit for the strenuous work, it throws him out like the Tramp, who is relieved of his services by the company after his mental breakdown. As the working conditions become too much to bare, the workers will eventually down their tools and take to the streets to revolt. The workers in this movie do exactly that, where the Tramp is arrested by the police when they mistakenly take him to be the leader of the protest. While the sole responsibility of the police is to protect the rights of people, they are used by the same system that has no regards for the rights of its workers.

Technology, which is one of the proponents of capitalism, is attributed for the mass unemployment in Modern Times. The situation is so terrible that Tramp does not want to leave the jailhouse, as he is assured of three meals a day and a place to live. Gamin (played by Paulette Goddard) is forced to steal to support her father, two sisters and also poor children. It is through her stealing expeditions that she meets Tramp. Soon the two lovebirds are entangled in a series of mishaps in order to survive the turbulent economic times of the great depression.

The concept of a good life was foreign to people born during the great depression, which lasted a decade. When Tramp and Gamin try to visualize what good life should be, they misrepresent everything. They assume that milk will be brought to their doorsteps by a cow and that grapes would grow on their doorway. Although these are exaggerated depictions of what normal life would be like, they push Tramp to work even harder to pursue them.

Luckily, he gets a job as a watchman, thanks to a reference letter from the sheriff. However, the pay is not sufficient enough to sustain him and Gamin and they are forced to eat and seek shelter at night in the department store, where he is working. Things go well until three men show up to rob the place. One of them turns out to be Tramp's former colleague in the factory, who is forced to steal food in order to survive, because the factory had been closed.

Although we can survive without machines, it becomes apparent in this movie that machines cannot work without us. It may be assumed that the factory was closed after the workers revolted. When Tramp gets back to work at the factory when it is reopened, he is arrested again by the police when the workers' strike again. Even after the factory was closed the first time, the conditions have not yet improved to attract a better workforce. However, the situation is so bad that Chaplin goes back to the same deplorable conditions in the factory to earn a living. Unfortunately, he is sent back to jail after he accidentally knocks a police officer with a brick on the head.

One of the landmark scenes in the movie is at the café, where Chaplin works as an entertainer. It is among the few instances that sound is incorporated into the movie and is also the first and the last time that we hear Tramp's actual voice in film. It was a special occasion that Chaplin christened with a funny song that consisted of creative nonsense and multi-lingual improvisations, after he forgot the lyrics. Charlie Chaplin was opposed to the idea of sound because of the limiting nature of language. His films had a universal appeal and communicated well without the use of voice. He did not want to lose his ability to make people laugh, as he believed that " a day spent without laughter is a day wasted".

As the situation kept getting worse and the police constantly frustrating their efforts to survive, Chaplin ends this movie with a message of hope. And while Gamin is pessimistic about their paths, Chaplin is sure that everything is possible with faith and sheer will to achieve. Charlie Chaplin's Modern Times is a prophetic testament to the draconian nature of capitalism, which is still prevalent today. With his growing popularity at the time, Chaplin knew his influential position and took it upon himself to critic anything that he thought undermined the divine nature of human beings.

While he approached every critical issue with a comedic approach, everyone knew what he meant. Modern Times is therefore one such statement.

Influenced by his trip to Ford Motors Company in the 1920s, he grew quite concerned by the lack of regard for human lives by the capitalistic system that prides itself in the size of the profits. He was particularly afraid of the power and wealth wielded by the few at the top, who controlled everything

including humans, whom he compares to sheep in this system. Despite the challenges he goes through in the film, he is still optimistic that nothing lasts forever. And true to his words, or rather his actions, the Great Depression eventually ended in 1939.

References:

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