

Sociological analysis of thoroughly modern millie



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

New York: the place where one's dreams come true. At least, this is how it appears to outsiders. However, upon a closer examination of New York, a harsher truth comes out. As seen in the play *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, the social class one is born into is typically the social class one will stay for one's entire life. The American Dream, the ability to achieve anything despite the social class one is born into, is unattainable through hard work; it is only achieved when one is born into a position of success or achieves success through unconventional ways.

No matter how much honest, hard work one puts in, one will not be able to move from their social class using normal methods. When Millie first arrives on the streets of New York, she expects a place where all her dreams can come true, where she is able to attain wealth through hard work and perseverance. Immediately, her hopes are crushed. After expressing all her hopes for her time in New York, she is robbed and loses her hat, scarf, purse, and shoe. Though she calls out for someone to help her, she does not receive any help until she trips Jimmy. From the lack of help she receives, it is obvious that no matter how desperate a person is for help, New Yorkers will not lend a hand. From this lack of caring, it can be interpreted to reveal that no matter how low a person has fallen, nobody will willingly help them. They will remain at their current position, helpless, unless they do something drastic. Though Millie politely attempts to attract people's attention in order to receive help, she is unable to have anyone slow down for her by simply calling out to them. Clearly, it is demonstrated that a person will forever remain in a set position under normal methods. Society passes such people

by, not allowing them to have an opportunity that will enable them to rise from their current class.

Later on, Millie is seen at a company working with other stenographers. The stenographers all appear the same, and they heavily contrast with Millie's outfit. While Millie's outfit is more modern, theirs is more conservative. This implies that they are older than Millie, which implies that they have been working at the company for a long time, much longer than Millie has. Their uniform appearance also suggests that they have been working at the company for a long time; they have been there long enough for their style to influence one another, eventually making them look all the same. They all work incredibly hard, as evidenced by their incredible typing speed and their promptness at answering the phone. Even so, they are forever stuck at their desks, tapping away. Though they have been there a long time, they are unable to rise to a position of great wealth. Here, it is evident that traditional, ethical methods of working will only permit a person to stay at their social class and not move up.

The few people who move up in the social ladder and achieve their dreams are those who were born into affluence or those who used unconventional means to attain their goals. At the end of the play, it is revealed that Jimmy Smith and Dorothy Brown are both extremely wealthy. They were sent out into the world by Muzzy van Hossmere in order to find good partners. In the end, they both achieved this dream: Jimmy found Millie, and Dorothy Brown found Ching Ho. Though both of them had to act and live like they did not have extraordinary wealth, their wealth still helped them achieve their dreams. For Dorothy Brown, her wealth partially helps her attract her suitors.

<https://assignbuster.com/sociological-analysis-of-thoroughly-modern-millie/>

When Brown first steps into Hotel Priscilla, Millie quickly realizes how wealthy she is. Her appearance is markedly different from the other girls in the play; she is the only one who dresses like a doll. The way she looks sets her apart, just as her extreme wealth sets her apart. Even Millie's boss notices, at one point asking her not to cut her lovely curls. Her appearance is also what makes Ching Ho fall in love with her at first sight. Her wealth shone through her appearance and helped her win a suitable partner.

For Jimmy as well, his wealth subtly helps him win over Millie. At one point, when Millie talks about her boss, Jimmy implores her to stop talking about him. Indeed, he is donning the disguise of a poorer man at this point, but he also has the knowledge that he is incredibly wealthy, which helps him have the confidence to ask Millie to stop talking about her boss. This, in turn, leads to a new point in their relationship where they consider each other in a romantic way. For those who were born in a less fortunate situation, however, they have to devise unconventional ways to rise to a higher social class. In the case of Millie, she planned to become rich not by working hard, but by marrying her boss. She learns the harsh reality of things when she arrives in New York – hard work simply does not make a person rich. In addition, a more sinister character achieves success through horrible ways: Mrs. Meers is both able to secure a considerable amount of wealth and become an actress by selling orphans to a white slavery ring in Hong Kong. Though she previously tried to be a successful actress through conventional ways, Mrs. Meers eventually turns to selling people into slavery, a way that enabled to experience success much more securely and much more easily. It

is clear that dreams are most easily attained when one is born into wealth or when one uses unconventional methods.

In *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, we are able to see the harsh truth about social mobility: a person who was born into wealth stays wealthy, whereas people in lower classes are unable to climb the social ladder using normal, ethical methods. Indeed, the bonds of class are sometimes so tight on people that it drives them to do immoral things for the sake of achieving their dreams. Ultimately, though America prides itself on allowing its members to move social classes easily, it is only an ideological dream. From many people - so the message goes - if they are to be good and moral, they will only be able to stay in their social class or move lower.