

To what extent is the
time machine a
critique of the politics
and social conditio...



Herbert George Wells wrote *The Time Machine* in 1895. The novel was written based on Wells' socialist views and how he disapproved and disliked the Victorian class system that separated people either above or below ground, literally. He wanted an equal society. In the novel he exaggerates the class system and what he thinks this segregation could lead to in the future. In the story the reader is introduced to the time traveller who finds himself far off in the future. Upon arriving the setting seems advanced in some ways – there are huge buildings within an exotic environment.

However he sees a 'colossal figure... t was carved out of white marble, in shape something like a winged sphinx' this can link to the technical and engineering advancement at that period, when new structures and big statues were built but it can be reminiscent of the sphinx of ancient Egypt and links to the past rather than the future which already give the impression of some form of regression. Also the actual settings of the future include 'bare hillsides' and 'shrubs and long grass' which gives it rural scenery which is the opposite of the expectation of more progress in development in buildings and an urban landscape.

One of the newly modified beings that the time traveller encounters in the future are called the Eloi – who are initially believed to be the dominant descendants of the upper class. Wells describes their physical appearance as 'Dresden china type of prettiness', page 29. This gives the impression that they are delicate and fragile. Also by saying they are pretty it links more to the upper class of Victorian society, people who could spend more time on themselves to make them beautiful as they have the money and do not have to work for it.

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China is also white which in relation to social conditions in Victorian England could mean that people who had fairer skin were much higher in the social ladder and meant that they were clean and not dirty like the working class which meant that you did not have to do much work as you had enough money. It describes them as being pure something that distinctively separated them from the working class and which they highly thought themselves of. Also the comparison to china makes them seem like they have a high status as it was expensive and working class could not have it.

Wells used them to represent the upper class because he knew that they did not do any work and lived a fairly care-free life whilst others looked after them and they didn't need to lift a finger. In addition the Eloi lived easy in ' a building that had a huge entry and was altogether of colossal dimension' just like the upper class of the Victorian period. When the time traveller first meets them he initially considers that the populace has evolved into a form of communism.

When he first encounters the Eloi (chp.) it leads him to see a vision of man's perfection, but this impression changes fairly rapidly and he refers to this as ' too perfect triumph of man'. However unlike the upper class in Wells' the Eloi lack intelligence which also contrasts the time travellers belief that the future beings ' would be incredibly in front of us in knowledge, art, everything' (page 29) but they are not. He compares them to children several times ' showed him to be on the intellectual level of one our five year-old children'.

Wells makes these people short of intelligence and depend on other beings to help them get through life, which is exactly like the life of the upper class of Victorian period that relied on the working class. In addition, linking back to the landscape, the area could be more rural because the Eloi have no intelligence or power to design and make new advanced buildings. ' Among the ruins of some later day South Kensington' could imply that being in the ruins of buildings is a metaphor for being in the ruins of learning as it has died out along with knowledge and any sort of improved intelligence.

This makes the time traveller rather upset as he is so curious in new things and wants to learn more and gain lots of knowledge and other people in the society he belonged to agreed so he is upset that he is not meeting extremely clever people who are eager to learn. Their weakness and unintelligence indicates Wells' disapproval of the capitalist revolution. Also in contrast to the actual higher class the Eloi were ' frugivorous', which means that ' fruit, was all their diet' unlike the upper class who used to eat lavishly on meat and used meat as another way to portray their wealth.

This can be contrasted by saying how not eating meat is making them weak. However in Wells' futuristic setting there are no other animals left. Wells compares the working class to the Morlocks in the book. They are creatures that live under ground. Wells makes it appear the working class have become so low in status that they end up living under ground. ' Noise of machinery' reinforces the link to the working class who would work in the work houses surrounded by machinery.

This connection can lead to the connotations of pain, punishment and torture which the working class went through whilst labouring for the upper class.

When the time traveller is searching for Weena he describes it as ‘ a descend to the dark underworld’ which can indicate that he is going down (in to hell) and he has to go down to see them and this could link to how the middle class always look down on the working class. It could also relate to how the working class lived in dark and grubby places and in the future they will move from living on the ground to moving below.

This shows that their status in society has not progressed and has deteriorated so as a result it’s been going even below ground level. The Morlocks are living with the machines in the future where as they used to try to make a living from working with them. When he is first introduced to them it compels the narrator to reconsider his initial hypothesis, and to bring out the socially allegorical significance of the division of society into ‘ Haves’ and ‘ Have-nots’. Also in the future they own the machinery in contrast to just working with them.

They are describes as being ‘ ape-like’ and ‘ stooping white creatures’ which shows that they have physically devolved in the future however in Victorian society the middle class considered to be mentally behind and much like apes as humans are more intelligent but the posh people judged the working class as being intellectually behind and less human than they were. ‘ Peculiar cooing sounds from the Morlocks’ can show how they have no proper verbal language which can relate to how the working class received no education so were not very rich in the English language and when they were spoken to they just grunted in reply.

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This also shows they lacked in communication and were isolated most of the time, it also refers to them as animals as birds often 'coo' and this tells us that they are more similar to animals than humans which is how they were seen as in Victorian times. However a repulsive event that occurs in the novel is that the Morlocks are cannibals and feed on the innocent Eloi. This can contrast how in Victorian society the working class were malnourished and only fed on the scraps they could find.

The reader can link how in the Victorian period the working class were treated inhumanely and cruelly and how in the future they will become inhumane by resorting to cannibalism. Wells' makes it seem that this is a result of what the upper class did. It's interesting to see that the Morlocks evidently have more power over the Eloi and also bring fear to them where as it was the complete opposite scenario in Victorian times. We also see how unequipped the Time Traveller is for the Underworld of the Morlocks.

He has difficulty climbing up and down their shafts, and he requires a match to navigate in the darkness. By contrast, he is much at home in the world of the Eloi. This can show that even though he may not be aware of it the time traveller fits in more to the creature that in the past were more like him and feels more comfortable with them than with the Morlocks who, appear to have similar interests as him with the machine but Wells' presents it as no matter what someone's personality is people always stick with people the same status as them.

In addition the time traveller 'instinctively' loathes the Morlocks, much like what someone who was raised in upper class England would naturally do and

disliked the living conditions and the sight of them. Also with them living under ground it can link to how the upper class believed that the lower classes were unhygienic and were filthy because they lived off the ground however now they are living below ground were conditions were very filthy.

Furthermore living in a dirty place can lead to disease and illness and the Morlocks seem like they have deformed in some horrible way and this is because of their living conditions. It could appear that Wells wants to make a point that if we stop being cruel to the working class and give them better conditions then they would not turn into monsters in the future. The drift of the story was that in the future the human race would devolve into two subspecies roughly based on the notion of an " elite" class and a " working" class, which was a pervasive idea in Victorian society of Wells' time.

Wells' belief was that if the upper classes of the Victorian period continued to mistreat the middle class then in the future they will rise against and have more power and it would be quite revolutionary; Wells' point is a social one: unless these divisions are bridged warfare between the two classes is inevitable. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution was significant at that period and wells' used it in a social way. Social Darwinists found much evidence for their elitist theories in England, ' where the gap between the rich and poor had opened up even more with the industrial boom of the early 19th-century'.

Evolution implies that species increasingly adapt to their environments and thus, generally, grow stronger in their complexity; these creatures have simple ' frail' bodies which indicate the future will devolve according to

Wells. The time traveller looks forward to seeing his utopia of advance knowledge, the whole world to expand in learning and surroundings to be full of new technological progression but instead he finds himself in a place that has done the opposite of evolving in terms of intelligence, humanity and landscape.

In society today humans have split into different races and become diverse. Even though there is still a class system, your class isn't as important as it was in Victorian England and does not affect how you live your life as people have become more accepting of others and we live in a more diverse community, were the distinction between classes is much more subtle.