

The disadvantages of capitalism



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, the unnamed narrator, commonly referred to as the Time Traveler, creates a device that is capable of time travel, and proceeds to meet two humanoid species of the far distant future. The Time Traveler's adventure is commonly accepted by readers as that of a Victorian era man who experiences thousands of millennia through the boundless exploration of time. This initial interpretation fails to incorporate Wells' underlying themes of evolution of humanity, class division, and the effects of capitalism to the Time Traveler's current culture. If this key aspect of the Time Traveler's account goes unnoticed, readers will be ill-equipped to fully comprehend Wells' ultimate analogy, the struggle between the capitalist and laborer. The relationship between the Eloi and Morlocks, the two divergent species of the author's future, is a representation of the characteristics and future projections of the 19th century Victorian era, presented through an early rendition of science-fiction. In this essay, I will analyze the analogy of the Eloi and Morlocks, displaying Wells' latent argument about what will happen to mankind if capitalism persists to take advantage of workers for the benefit and welfare of the privileged.

As the Time Traveler observes the relationship between the Eloi and Morlocks, and studies the two species' behavior and physical traits, he develops several theories as to why humankind has veered off into a completely different breed from one another. He discovers that humanity has evolved into two different species because of the "gradual widening of the present merely temporary and social difference between the Capitalist and the Laborer" (40). The Time Traveler is not merely claiming that humanity had evolved and changed from what he knows it as, but it changed

because of the broadening social inequalities between the upper and lower classes during the Victorian era. This theme is crucial to comprehend the purpose of the book, which revolves around this general idea of class suppression and societal clashing. To understand this representative class struggle between the Eloi and Morlocks, one must understand the beginnings of their respective races. The Eloi are descendants ultimately of the elite because they inhabit and control “considerable portions of the surface of the land” (40). The Morlocks, or the lower class, “lost its birthright in the sky” (40) and had to take residence underground, while maintaining production of commodities. Thus, according to the Time Traveler’s social Darwinist perspective, humanity devolved into separate branches of contrasting species, which are also a physical embodiment of upper class-lower class differences, because of their gradual change in location, but fundamentally because of their class contrasts. The fact that the Eloi don’t produce and work for their own goods furthers the idea that they are elitist and comparable to the upper class of 1890s England. The Eloi displayed “no machinery, or no appliances of any kind, yet they were clothed in pleasant fabrics” (34). The only logical reason for where the Eloi acquire their goods from would be the Morlocks, with their use of “big industrial machines” (44). Therefore, the Morlocks are socially dominated by the elitist Eloi.

Most critics agree that the Morlocks are socially subordinate to the Eloi because they have their goods constructed by the Morlocks. The bourgeoisie, or those with a higher social status, control the surface areas of the land, which maintains their power. This interpretation ignores the possibility that the Morlocks could, in fact, be the dominant species. “The Morlocks at any

rate were carnivorous” (44), and given that “ horses, cattle, sheep, dogs, had followed the Ichthyosaurus into extinction” (23), the only other food source based from flesh would be the Eloi. This inference signifies that the Morlocks rely on the Eloi for food. The Eloi might have once been the descendants of the selected gentry, but have now become the means of sustenance. If this understanding of the relationship between the two humanoid species is continually overlooked, the audience would skirt Wells’ message of the dangerous effects of capitalism and how it would negatively shape human progression. Proponents of this argument would likely claim that the Morlocks are, indeed, above the Eloi because they support them, only for a source of food.

Up to this point, I have established the social relationship between the Morlocks and Eloi, and noted this relationship’s similarities to a class struggle. To continue, I will relate this class struggle to Victorian England’s society and Wells’ predictions for the future. Wells’ novel suggests that it is only a matter of time before the lower working class becomes differentiated, stating that “ Even now, does not an East-end worker live in such artificial conditions as practically to be cut off from the natural surface of earth?” (40). This quote invokes the 1890s England familiar to the Time Traveler, referencing towards the East-End, known to consist of slums and to house London’s poorest. This theory, that society in the future is only a continuation of the Time Traveler’s culture, is furthered by the Time Traveler in his description of the degradation of the Eloi’s familial unit, articulating that “ we see some beginnings of this even in our own time, and in this future age it was complete” (25). This is not the only type of comparison that

the novel draws between the societies of the 1890s and of the future era. The Time Traveler acknowledges how the past has affected the future in that “Ages ago, thousands of generations ago, man had thrust his brother man out of the ease and the sunshine. And now that brother was coming back – changed.” (47). The main character’s claim highlights the similarities of the two respective time periods, making not just connections of two societies, but of three separate species. Again, Wells is creating connections between the two time periods in order to present his ideology, through a work of fiction. The Time Traveler does not leave his comparisons without interpretation; he argues that “the Upper-world man had drifted towards his feeble prettiness, and the Under-world to mere mechanical industry” (62). This scenario exhibits Wells’ ultimate message; the negative characteristics of capitalism have completely destroyed society as he knew it. Humanity lost what made it human, and in turn, devolved into devoid creatures of little intellect or culture.

The identification of a class struggle between the Morlocks and Eloi, and the comparisons that the Time Traveler draws between his society and of the future’s highlights the idea that capitalism, the current societal norm of Victorian England, will lead to the decline of humanity on such a scale that creates two inferior species to the original. How would H. G. Wells react to modern society, with its increasing inequality of wealth? If he acted accordingly to his ideologies presented in *The Time Traveler*, he would most likely continue his same reasoning and discussion. The issues that H. G. Wells discussed roughly 100 years ago are still pertinent today. The *Time Machine* is focused on social disparity and impartiality, problems that are still

troubling society. Although it is improbable that this disparity will result in two divergent species, Wells' story highlights the problem of class differences in attempt to mend the growing rift between the upper and lower classes in order to prevent this figurative catastrophe.