



### READING PASSAGE 3

You should spend about 20 minutes on **Questions 1-14**, which are based on Reading Passage 3.

#### **Metropolis**

- a classic science-fiction film

When the German director Fritz Lang visited the United States in 1924, his first glimpse of the country was a night-time view of the New York skyline from the deck of an ocean liner. This, he later recalled, was the direct inspiration for what is still probably the most innovative and influential science-fiction film ever made – Metropolis. Metropolis is a bleak vision of the 21st century that is at once both chilling and exhilarating. This spectacular city of the future is a technological marvel of high-rise buildings connected by elevated railways and airships. It's also a world of extreme inequality and social division. The workers live below ground and exist solely to operate the city's machines in an endless routine of mind-numbing 10-hour shifts: while the city's elite lead lives of luxury high above. Presiding over them all is the Master of Metropolis, John Fredersen, whose sole satisfaction seems to lie in the exercise of power.

Lang's graphic depiction of the future is conceived in almost totally abstract terms. The function of the individual machines is never defined. Instead this mass of dials, levers and gauges symbolically stands for all machines and all industry, with the workers as slave-like extensions of the equipment they have to operate. Lang emphasises this idea in the famous shift-change sequence at the start of the movie, when the workers walk in zombie-like geometric ranks, all dressed in the same dark overalls and all exhibiting the same bowed head and dead-eyed stare. An extraordinary fantasy sequence sees one machine transformed into a huge open-jawed statue which then literally swallows them up.

On one level, the machines and the exploited workers simply provide the wealth and services which allow the elite to live their lives of leisure, but on a more profound level the purpose of all this crazed industry is to serve itself. Power, control, and the continuance of the system from one 10-hour shift to the next, are all that counts. The city consumes people and their labour and, in the process, becomes a perverse parody of a living being.

It is enlightening, I think, to relate the film to the modern global economy in which multi-national corporations now routinely close their factories in one continent so that they can take advantage of cheap labour in another. Like the industry in Metropolis, these corporations' goals of increased efficiency and profits have little to do with the welfare of the majority of their employees or that of the population at large. Instead their aims are to sustain the momentum of their own growth and to increase the monetary rewards to a tiny elite — their executives and shareholders. Fredersen himself is the essence of the big company boss most modern industrialists would probably feel perfectly at home in his huge skyscraper office with its panoramic view of the city below. And it is important that there is never any mention of government in Metropolis - the whole concept is by implication

obsolete. The only people who have power are the supreme industrialist, Fredersen, and his magician/scientist henchman Rotwang.

So far so good: when the images are allowed to speak for themselves, the film is impeccable both in its symbolism and in its cynicism. The problem with *Metropolis* is its sentimental storyline, which sees Feder, Fredersen's son, falling in love with the visionary Maria. Maria leads an underground pseudo-religious movement and preaches that the workers should not rebel but should await the arrival of a 'Mediator' between the 'Head' (capital) and the 'Hands' (labour). The mediator is the 'Heart' — love; as embodied, finally, by Freder's love of Maria and his father's love of him.

Lang wrote the screenplay in collaboration with his then wife, Thea von Harbou. In 1933 he fled Germany (and continued a very successful career in Hollywood). She stayed in Germany and continued to make films. There is a constant tension within the film between the too-tidy platitudes of von Harbou's script and the uncompromisingly caustic vigour of Lang's imagery.

All the same, *Metropolis* is probably more accurate now as a representation of industrial social relations than it has been at any time since its original release. And Fredersen is certainly still the most potent movie symbol of the handful of elusive corporate figureheads who increasingly treat the world as a *Metropolis*-like global village.