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Extended Essay

The Analysis of Symbols' Effects on the Theme of "Life finds a way" and the System
Criticism in Michael Crichton's Novel "Jurassic Park"

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Research Question: How successfully has Michael Crichton used symbols in his novel Jurassic Park to convey the superiority of nature over humanity and offer a critique to the system?

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1. Introduction

Anthropocentrism is the belief that humanity is at the center of the universe. Humankind is deemed the most important organism and is believed to be superior to other living or non-living entities such as animals, plants, and nature (Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics). Counter-belief that puts nature and ecosystems as a whole over humanity is known as ecocentrism and contradicts anthropocentrism (The Ecological Citizen). The conflict of these beliefs is referenced with the usage of symbols in the novel Jurassic Park by Michael Crichton. Isla Nublar, the fictional Costa Rican Island where the Park is located at, is rather small and has a distinct ecosystem full of prehistoric life which leads the scientists behind Jurassic Park to think they have full control over the island. Weather, terrain, and especially dinosaurs all of which are a part of the Park demonstrate how nature is free from human discretion. The usage of these elements can be seen in the novel when the humans are faced with the unpredictability of nature as they try to take control of the Park.

Besides, the superiority of nature brings out critical themes of the novel such as technology, flawed human nature, and chaos. The novel signifies how lack of respect for nature is bound to backfire and harm humanity. This take is the author's critique to the system. Jurassic Park provides an insight to the inconceivable capabilities of humanity as scientists literally recreate extinct organisms. However, the think-tank of the Park do not understand the responsibility this advancement had bestowed upon them; technology is left to the discretion of scientists which may grace or endanger mankind. Not to mention the companies such as Biosyn and InGen which let greed and pride lead their research to gain profit. Their reckless research does not value life, it only benefits the people in charge (On Being a Scientist: Respectful Conduct in Research). Crichton openly criticizes this unrestrained need to prosper in the capitalist

system. These unsightly acts are described as a “rape of nature” by one of the protagonists Ian Malcolm (Crichton 328). The flawed nature of humankind complements the main theme of nature’s superiority as humans jeopardize their safety in attempts to get ahead of nature.

These themes are passed on to the reader with the utilization of symbols. The Park being built on a remote island is one of the main reasons why this amusement park collapsed before even having an opening. InGen’s irresponsibility during the construction of the Park as well as the rival company Biosyn’s unethical actions were added to the novel in order to convey the author’s criticism to capitalism (Jürgen Kocka).

In this study, the symbols’ conveyance of the superiority of nature over humankind and the critique to the system will be analyzed. Ever since I could remember, I had a soft spot in my heart for dinosaurs. I have countless encyclopedias, novels, and documentary DVDs about dinosaurs. I love any media that contain dinosaurs but I think this book is not simply a novel about extinct creatures. I want to uncover its underlying message. Thus, this study is an excellent experience for me to dive deeper into the context of my favorite book and find out the answer to the following question: How successfully has Michael Crichton used symbolism in his novel Jurassic Park to convey the superiority of nature over humanity and offer a critique to the system?

2. Superiority of nature over humanity

In Jurassic Park, the nature is presented as a supreme entity by Michael Crichton. This is achieved by demonstrating how nature always finds a way to evade human control. Nevertheless, all events contain multiple symbols through which the nature was manifested in the novel. For example, the island, its weather, and the dinosaurs are used to illustrate nature and its capabilities. The Park, as a symbol, is the accumulation of these elements and the dinosaurs represent the power of nature. The Park is a greater symbol composed of other components that convey the themes of the novel. For this reason, the Park symbol as a whole will be considered a single unit that contains all the living and non-living entities in itself such as the staff, scientists, observers, the owner, and dinosaurs. Also, every character has different interactions with the Park. Therefore, individual positions, mindsets and motives of major characters will be analyzed in order to comprehend how this novel addresses the superiority of nature.

2.1. John Hammond

Jurassic Park is under the control of John Hammond, the antagonist of the novel. Although nature is also one of the antagonists of the book since it always hinders human efforts, Hammond is the exemplification of the flawed human nature with his motivation to surpass the abilities of nature. Hammond thinks he is the ruler of the island and he has the authority to control nature. Greed being his greatest motivation, Hammond lets his arrogance control him. He thinks he can tame nature with his latest technology and extreme wealth. Him telling John Arnold “You get the engineering correct and the animals will fall into place. After all they are trainable.” demonstrates how he thinks the recreated dinosaurs will behave like zoo animals (Crichton 162). However, he does not regard his staff when they inform Hammond about the problems

of the Park. Moreover, when the consultants he invited warn him about the potential dangers of recreating nature, he ignores them. His attitude towards criticism can be seen when he calls Ian Malcolm “You arrogant little snot,” for doing his job of consulting (Crichton 106). Hammond ignores experts through the novel and his hubris leads to his downfall.

As an episode from the novel points, after the survivors of the Park manage to restart the generator, Hammond thinks it is a good idea to walk around the facility. Hammond then trips and breaks his ankle on the underbrush. A herd of *Compsognathus* or simply known as compy, which are the smallest dinosaur in the Park, approaches Hammond as they are scavengers and can sense vulnerability of other animals. Even when Hammond threw rocks at them, it is told that “They weren’t afraid. They seemed to know he couldn’t hurt them.” and compys slowly kill Hammond as they jump on him and take small bites (Crichton 450).

Crichton’s choice to kill Hammond with compys serves justice and signifies the dominance of nature over humankind. Firstly, Hammond was killed off by his own creations. Although he thought dinosaurs were trainable, his compys disobeyed him and punished him in the end. The compys represent the inability of humanity to even predict let alone control nature. The usage of compys demonstrates how nature always finds a way as it is suggested throughout the novel. Compys were the first dinosaurs to escape the Park and set foot on mainland. Hammond disregarding this event in the beginning displays how little changes in variables of nature can lead to catastrophic events. He was stripped of his dignity and killed off by compys rather than the iconic predators of the Park such as the *Tyrannosaurus Rex* or *Velociraptors*. Compys, which feed on the droppings of other predators, sensed the rotten core of Hammond. In a way, compys metaphorically cleaned the waste of the Park by getting rid of Hammond and

his ideas. Eventually, the arrogant businessman who tried to challenge nature was overthrown by what he thought he had under control. In the end, Hammond could not even fight off the smallest dinosaurs in the Park. Crichton signified how Hammond has fallen, literally and metaphorically, from his god-like position over nature and the Park. Lastly, it is demonstrated no matter how rich, powerful or smart a person is, they are subjected to the laws of nature just like every other organism. Hammond was mortal after all who was a part of the order of nature just like every other dinosaur he used to own was.

2.2. Dr. Henry Wu

Dr. Henry Wu is the chief geneticist of the Park who was recruited by Hammond with promises of fame. Like Hammond, Wu believes humanity can get ahead of nature with knowledge and technology. Although Hammond is the owner, Wu is the mastermind behind all the living components of the Park. He believes his expertise and Hammond's latest technology allow him to interfere with the work of nature. For example, he views DNA as an alterable substance and he manipulates life by changing extinct genomes.

While establishing the Park, Wu thought of ways to make nature, dinosaurs in this case, dependent on humanity such as making all dinosaurs female and lysine-dependent. His plan was simple, no dinosaur will be breeding without supervision and no dinosaur will survive outside of the Park as they cannot live without their lysine shots. Wu telling visitors "They can only live here in Jurassic Park. They are not free at all. They are essentially our prisoners." reveals how he views dinosaurs and nature in the Park (Crichton 132). The Park and the island represent a prison in which humankind is in control. However, as the novel suggests, life found a way.

He tampered with life by altering DNA sequences irresponsibly and as a result, the amphibian DNA he used caused dinosaurs to change sex and breed freely. Nature punished Wu thanks to his flawed techniques. Even though Wu thought he was a revolutionary by recreating extinct creatures, he fell victim to his flawed creation, Velociraptors which are the deadliest weapon of nature. Although Wu tells Malcom “We don’t want them to survive in the wild.” about the dinosaurs, he could not even survive his own creation (Crichton 132). Wu tried to bring nature under control but life prevailed and brought his end. Wu’s fate demonstrates no matter how hard humanity tries to enchain nature; it always finds a way to evade the efforts of humankind to control everything.

2.3. Dr. Ian Malcolm

Dr Ian Malcolm is a mathematician and chaos theorist who was invited to the Park to as a consultant. He is rational unlike others. He always contradicts those who believe humankind can dominate nature. With his expertise in chaos theory, Malcolm draws attention to the significant outcomes caused by insignificant differences in variables when he says “That’s nonlinear dynamics. They are sensitive to initial conditions: tiny differences become amplified.” (Crichton 85-86). Malcolm utilizes this theory to predict that uncontrollable little changes in Jurassic Park will eventually form a huge disaster. Malcolm believes nature is free from human supervision and will always prevail against humanity. Unlike others, he recognizes the flawed nature of humankind and the possible threats it poses to itself.

Malcolm respects nature and acknowledges the impossibility of controlling it. According to his explanations, life comprises of unpredictable sudden changes. He points out even after centuries of research and with the help of computers, humanity

cannot even accurately predict the weather. These views allow Crichton to introduce Malcolm as the voice of reason in the novel, he acknowledges both the capabilities and flaws of humankind. As Malcolm tells “What we call nature is in fact a complex system of far greater subtlety than we are willing to accept. We make a simplified image of nature and then we botch it up. I’m no environmentalist, but you have to understand what you don’t understand.” to the staff of the Park, he believes in the superiority of nature (Crichton 106). Malcolm’s role in this novel is to remind the reader that no matter how far humanity comes, it is impossible to learn every secret of nature and life.

3. Critique to the system

In the novel, the Park symbolizes the human greed and arrogance as well as the desire to capture nature. Businessmen like John Hammond see nature and life as their canvas which they can experiment on. These people put their desires before anything else. Jurassic Park is the product of this corrupted view. Additionally, the downfall of the Park is Crichton's criticism to these inhumane ambitions. Crichton utilizes the Park symbol and its failure to embody how malignant passions that prioritize wealth before life are bound to collapse and backfire. Ambitious scientists who dream of fame engineer the genetics of organisms like dinosaurs. Using the Park and dinosaur symbols, Crichton criticizes unethical scientific research and the potential threats of tampering with the natural order. In a sense, the novel is a warning against the possible dangers of unsupervised scientific research. The Park is the symbol of scientific endeavor and pursuit of the essence of life whereas dinosaurs are the faulty products of this project due to a lack of ethical considerations. Crichton criticizes both the capitalist system where rich get richer by endangering human life in hopes of profiting and the unethical scientific research that values progress more than the possible dangers and implications of those advancements. Crichton manages to achieve these by the aid of corrupted characters and the ideas they represent.

3.1. John Hammond

John Hammond, the owner of InGen and Jurassic Park, is the incarnation of capitalist system in this novel. He values profit above anything else, even his grandchildren. Hammond's greed blinded him to the point where he ignored the dangers of replicating life. Dinosaurs are capable of destruction and eradicating the humankind from the world; they are the most lethal weapons of nature. Despite the

live threatening nature of these dinosaurs, Hammond only views them as live attractions that will make him money. Crichton's portrayal of greed in Hammond's actions demonstrates the capitalist system.

Similar to its owner, park itself is the representation of capitalist system. The investors, engineers and geneticists behind the park are preoccupied with the profits they will make rather than the possible consequences. The Park is designed to be a consumer product, with its dinosaur attractions curated to maximize profits. The Park not even having a doctor showcases how Hammond does not value human life. Him telling Wu "Personally, I would never help mankind." demonstrates how Hammond only cares about money rather than the favor of humanity (Crichton 231). Crichton depicts Hammond as an evil materialistic businessman which is his criticism to the capitalist system; wealthy businessmen only care about their gains without considering the benefit of humankind.

Throughout the novel, Hammond is described as a reckless businessman who will do anything to achieve his goals even if it means sacrificing the lives of his staff or grandchildren. He is portrayed as a manipulative employer who lies to his staff by feeding them empty promises. He treats his staff as his servants and does not provide them a healthy or safe work environment. One of the employees, Arnold's thought about Hammond was described as "Hammond was like every other management guy Arnold had ever seen. Whether it was Disney or the Navy, management guys always behaved the same. They never understood the technical issues; and they thought that screaming was the way to make things happen." (Crichton 253). It can be seen that Hammond is a typical boss; he always yells at his employees and he does not consider what they are going through. He exploits them without regarding their wellbeing to reach his personal objectives. Michael

Crichton criticizes the capitalist system and the managers with the portrayal of Hammond. Bosses with capitalistic ideologies tend to overlook the human sides of their employees in order to maximize their profit.

Hammond's attitude towards risk also clearly symbolizes his capitalist mindset. Risking the lives of dozens of people for his gains poses no problem for Hammond. He is willing to take precarious steps in pursuit of profit. His view on Jurassic Park portrays his perception of risk. Him telling Malcolm "It was simple" about the Park indicates how he sees nothing wrong in playing god by recreating nature (Crichton 354). He also ignores the warnings of experts and he is determined to continue with his plan. He even yells at Malcolm "Go to hell, you supercilious bastard." when he tells Hammond how dangerous Jurassic Park is for visitors (Crichton 352). Even so, he persists to open up more parks around the world as if Jurassic Park is perfectly operating. The narrator telling "Certainly he had plenty of reasons to live. Other parks to build. Other wonders to create-" demonstrates how he prioritizes money over any possible consequences of his creations (Crichton 449). This quote also showcases how he views Jurassic Park as a "wonder" even though multiple had died prior to his visit. His capitalistic ideologies clearly drive him to disregard the risks while prioritizing his gain.

Crichton criticizes capitalism in his novel as Hammond takes a materialistic approach to every aspect of his Park. Hammond demonstrates how capitalism can lead to the exploitation of others. Hammond views dinosaurs as show stars; they are objects for him. He willingly subjects them to experimentation and captivity just to make more money. This can be seen in the way he refers to the dinosaurs, he calls them "Living attractions." (Crichton 71). This statement displays how he thinks dinosaurs only serve as attractions to the park. Hammond does not consider that

they have feelings just like him. Hammond only sees them as valuable assets he can exploit.

Criticism to capitalist system is evident in the way Hammond treats his employees. While Hammond is a wealthy businessman, his employees are underpaid and forced to work under dangerous conditions. This social and economic inequality induces hatred for Hammond among the employees. For example, Dennis Nedry, the brilliant computer programmer, is responsible for the chaos wreaked upon Jurassic Park. Being underpaid and overworked, Nedry betrays Hammond and takes a bribe from Lewis Dodgson, the head of the rival company, to steal dinosaur embryos. His programming the software for the Park faulty and accidentally shutting off electrical fences are the main reasons why the Park has collapsed. In a way, it is evident that Hammond treating his employees poorly eventually backfired and led Jurassic Park to be shut down. Crichton secured justice by causing Hammond's business to fail due to his greed and urge to save more to himself.

3.2. Dr Henry Wu

Wu and his research represent the unethical scientific research in the scientific community. Crichton criticizes how some scientists are bending the ethos of science to complete their research quickly and earn money. Wu symbolizes how dangerous science and technology can be in the hands of immoral and corrupted researchers. He views DNA and life as an alterable element which can be played with. He pays no respect to nature and his experimenting on live subjects is unethical in the scientific community. Crichton's demonstration of Wu as a corrupt scientist is his criticism to the scientists that do not realize how dangerous science can be.

Wu prioritizes gain over the ethics of research in Jurassic Park. He is manipulated by his employer who also values money over life. Wu is willing to take whatever measures and risks necessary to fulfil his task, even if it means violating the standards of research or putting others in danger. For example, him telling Malcolm “These animals are genetically engineered to be unable to survive in the real world.” demonstrates how he uses his expertise to make dinosaurs dependent on human care (Crichton 132). Wu should have questioned Hammond and his unethical vision but he is trying to make profit. Crichton showcases how capitalism infest the scientific community and the ethos of science.

Wu’s approach to his field is very careless. Blinded by money, he experiments on live subjects without regarding their wellbeing. He is fine with creating genetically engineered organisms, which he has not fully understood. As the narrator explains “The behavior of the dinosaurs had always been a minor consideration for Wu.”, Wu does not consider the possible consequences of his actions (Crichton 384). He creates dangerous predators, Tyrannosaurus Rex and Velociraptors, as star attractions of the Park. He recreates deadly animals for a theme park. This attitude of Wu is perfectly described by Malcolm as “Scientists are actually preoccupied with accomplishment. So they are focused on whether they can do something. They never stop to ask if they should do something.” (Crichton 328). Wu does not stop for a second to contemplate what he is doing; he is just following Hammond’s orders to be famous and get rich.

Even though he is a leading geneticist in his area, there are some concepts Wu knows very little about. Wu generally is not even sure what he is creating. He does not know what will come out of the eggs. His irresponsibility showcases the corrupted side of scientific community, Wu does not take any protective actions to

create a safe research environment. Malcolm, as the voice of reason in the novel, highlights this unawareness by telling Hammond “You create new life-forms, about which you know nothing at all. Your Dr. Wu does not even know the names of the things he is creating.” (Crichton 352). Crichton uses Malcolm to criticize Wu’s work he knows nothing about. Crichton also criticizes how the old notion of science is lost and the modern science is only about making money. Malcolm telling “There is no mastery: old scientists are ignored. There is no humility before nature. There is only a get-rich-quick, make-a-name-for-yourself-fast philosophy. Cheat, lie, falsify- it doesn’t matter. Not to you, or your colleagues.” evidently demonstrates the thoughts of Crichton about the loss of ethos among the scientific community (Crichton 353).

4. Conclusion

In this study, I aimed to analyze the usage of symbols to express Crichton's criticisms while writing a science-fiction novel to answer my research question: "How successfully has Michael Crichton used symbols in his novel Jurassic Park to convey the superiority of nature over humanity and offer a critique to the system?". In Jurassic Park, Crichton used symbols to enhance the themes of flawed human nature, technology and chaos so successfully that the novel seems like a superficial science-fiction novel.

However, it is evident that Crichton's work has an underlying message and criticism to the beliefs and developments in the 80s and 90s when the novel was written. When the storm approaches Isla Nublar and malfunction of the programs wreak havoc on Jurassic Park, humans are faced with what they tried to dominate, the nature. Even before the storm, readers can see the signs of an impending chaos as the writer planted the seeds of the faulty human nature in the beginning of the novel.

Additionally, the slow ascent of the natural components and the dinosaurs against human characters shows the main message of Crichton: Life escapes all barriers, life breaks free, life always finds a way. The Park symbol, representing both human hubris and the freedom of nature, is used as a tool to demonstrate the nature's superiority over humankind. The weather of the park is unpredictable, the surrounding fog is unavoidable, and the vegetation is unfathomable in some instances. These components of the park display nature's secrets humanity can never unravel.

Dinosaurs, which represent the power of nature, are presented as human dependent creatures at first. However, as chaos ensues, dinosaurs break free and exert their superiority to humans as the weapons of nature. Events being the same in small

and large scales helped Crichton to convey his criticism to the reader apprehensively. The Park represents the world in a small scale, Hammond is the capitalist system while Wu is the corrupted scientific community. Consultants symbolize the voice of reason as the rest of the humanity while dinosaurs and the island are the representatives of nature. Crichton depicting Hammond as a boss that treats his employees poorly and values money over life is his criticism towards the capitalist system.

Moreover, Wu being an immoral scientist that violate ethical codes to be famous and gain profit is Crichton's critique to the modern scientists doing research just to do something. The symbols as well as the characters help reader comprehend the hidden message of the novel Jurassic Park which is actually about the flawed nature of humanity. The symbols gave Crichton the opportunity to write a science-fiction novel while warning the readers about the dangers of the human hubris.

As a TOK perspective, this novel explores the danger technology and natural sciences pose to humanity if they are stripped of ethical considerations. Considering this an unresolved question for readers to consider; if Michael Crichton did not use a fictional remote island to locate the Park on or did not choose dinosaurs instead of existing animals, would he be able to convey his criticism and ideas to the reader as successfully?

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