

Oedipus-aurus Rex: A Lacanian Analysis of *Jurassic Park*

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Stephen Spielberg directed *Jurassic Park* in 1993. The film follows two paleontologists, Dr. Alan Grant (Sam Neill) and Dr. Ellie Sattler (Laura Dern) who are persuaded to visit John Hammond's (Richard Attenborough) Jurassic Park, an island that contains a dinosaur theme park. The film investigates the scientific possibilities of creating life and the hazards that come with it, since eventually the dinosaurs eventually break out of their enclosures and wreak havoc. On the surface this can be seen as an allegory of the hubris of mans hegemony of nature, and a cautionary tale of gene patenting. However, more interesting are the deep psychological structures working within the film. Using the theories of Jacques Lacan, *Jurassic Park* will be shown to be a film that functions as psychological alleviation, abating the anxiety of having children for males.

Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) was one of the most significant psychologists to follow Freud. This study's use of Lacanian analysis will involve his concept of "the Real" and the libido. The Real is that which we are severed from by language, i.e. "the domain of whatever subsists outside symbolization," which led Lacan to link the Real with the impossible.¹ In Lacan's structure of the psyche, the Real is connected to that of desire and fulfillment, while the Imaginary is connected to the ego, and the Symbolic with the super-ego. Since the Real is connected to the fulfillment of pleasure, a simple metaphor for this would be the pre-natal state of the child in the womb where all desires are immediately satisfied, and where there exists no repression. Although we have been severed from the Real, Lacan thinks that it still has influence on us. The Real can erupt within our lives in symbolic forms such as hallucinations, as well as anxiety and trauma. The language that severs us from the Real also prohibits our enjoyment of satisfying our desires, which Lacan calls *jouissance*.² The dinosaurs of Jurassic Park will come to be seen as symbolic eruptions of the Real. The libido, popularized by Freud, is the unconscious energy existing within humans, which can be seen as the sexual urge. This is often repressed for various reasons, and doing so it is what fuels the symbolic eruptions of the Real.

Grant and Sattler are introduced in the Montana Badlands, a desert of uncultivable land with little vegetation. This is a sterile world of infertility and repressed or dead libido. Grant and Sattler both work as paleontologists and they are presented digging up dinosaur bones. These objects of their attraction are the fossilized remains of fertile life. They are the skeletons of Grant's libido. This is also a scientific world of knowledge, categorization, and order. This represents language, which is what severs humans from the Real. Grant is introduced irritated and displeased, cut off from being able to satisfy his desires. We soon learn that he "hates computers," which are of course the culmination of categorization and order. We also learn that Sattler wants to have a child, but that Grant hates children. This signifies Grant's impotence, either from fear of being castrated or killed by the son (the Oedipal myth from the father's point of view), and/or a fear of being replaced by the child, resulting in him being ignored by the wife/mother (Sattler). Being an intelligent scientist, Grant knows that by fulfilling his sexual desires, as well as his desire to please Sattler, a child will be produced. Grant embodies the fear of men who aren't yet ready to accept society's expectations of mature fatherhood, who repress their libido in order to stave it off as long as possible.

In the desert, when Grant is lecturing to the other scientists on the violent and power characteristics of a recently dug up velociraptor dinosaur, *viz.* how great his libido used to be, a random young boy (Whit Hertford) challenges him with disbelief and tells Grant that it "doesn't seem very scary. More like a six-foot turkey." Grant proceeds to outline in great detail how this velociraptor would go about killing this boy. To illustrate this, Grant pulls a fossilized velociraptor claw out of his pocket, signifying a fossilized phallic castration-device. This tool no longer functions to achieve pleasure. Grant takes the role of the velociraptor and shows, off screen but clearly below the boy's waist, where he would slice the boy open with the claw. This symbolic castration makes Sattler grimace. Grant shows his dominance and the boy agrees to show respect.

In the next scene we learn that Grant does not wish to have children and that Sattler does. As Grant is doing this John Hammond descends out of the sky within a helicopter; Hammond is dressed all in white and signifies Eros, the fertility god. Grant confronts him in a work trailer, asking who he is. Hammond responds by popping open a bottle of champagne (obvious sexual connotations). When Grant says that they were saving the bottle, Hammond replies, "For today, I guarantee it." This signifies that Hammond is aware of Grant's impotence and that he plans to

cure it. He tries to persuade Grant and Sattler to come to his exotic island which hosts his theme park, but Grant makes excuses not to. However, Hammond eventually wins them over by offering to fund their future excavation projects.

The island that contains Jurassic Park is a land of fertility. It is filled with lush waterfalls and green foliage, a clear contrast from the dry and lifeless desert that Grant and Sattler are coming from. Whereas the desert contained dinosaur bones, Jurassic Park has living dinosaurs. These dinosaurs work psychologically a twofold manner: they are supernatural eruptions of the Real, inspiring trauma as well as *jouissance*. In doing so, they are manifested and fueled by Grant's now living libido. Grant becomes nearly speechless during his first encounter seeing the libidinal dinosaurs. In this scene Grant learns from Hammond that there is a tyrannosaurus, and both he and Sattler experience vast amounts of pleasure, so much so Grant cannot even stand.

The dinosaurs can also be terrifying. This first occurs when the tyrannosaurus breaks out of its enclosure. This happens at a significant part of the film. On the island, three other males have been introduced: Ian Malcolm (Jeff Goldblum), Donald Gennaro (Martin Ferrero), and Robert Muldoon (Bob Peck). Each of these men threatens Grant's dominance in a unique way, and each is either castrated or killed by dinosaurs (i.e. Grant's libido). Ian Malcolm represents charisma, sexual appeal, and obscene potency. We learn that he has been married multiple times and is always looking for a future wife. He goes after everyone, especially Sattler because she is the film's object of the feminine, but Malcolm also can be seen during the first helicopter ride grabbing at even Hammond's legs. The tyrannosaurus breaks out of its enclosure during the scene when Grant and Malcolm are sitting in a jeep and Malcolm asks Grant if Sattler is available. Malcolm is attacked by the dinosaur and later found buried beneath palm leaves bleeding from below the waist (i.e. castrated). Donald Gennaro is a lawyer who represents wealth. During the same scene when Malcolm is attacked, the tyrannosaurus eats Gennaro. Muldoon is a hunter that represents strength. When he is trying to protect Sattler from the velociraptors, they eventually eat him as well.

After the tyrannosaurus breaks out of its enclosure, Grant is separated from everyone else besides Hammond's grandchildren Tim (Joseph Mazzello) and Lex Murphy (Ariana Richards), whom he then instinctually protects. He becomes their surrogate father, accepting the role naturally and maturely. In the scene where the three of them climb a tree to sleep, Lex asks what if the dinosaurs come back when they are sleeping. Grant responds that he'll stay awake and

keep watch. Grant then reaches for his velociraptor claw castration device, which he used symbolically on the boy in the desert and still carries in his pocket. He looks at it and then throws it out of the tree, signifying that he no longer has an immature fear of children.

The next morning Grant, Lex, and Tim are trying to head back to the compound to find Hammond and the others. They come across a nest of hatched dinosaur eggs. This should be impossible since all the dinosaurs in the park are supposed to be female. Grant says enthusiastically and glowing, "Life found a way." This signifies that not only has he reached the role of fatherhood, but also that he realizes that life's reproduction is inevitable.

Grant and the children eventually find Hammond, Malcolm, and Sattler, the only remaining survivors, and they board Hammond's helicopter to fly back to reality. While they are flying the children are curled up under Grant's arms. Sattler and Grant smile at one another in shared understanding: Grant no longer hates or fears children, and so he will no longer be impotent. The film reaches the unconscious of the audience of not yet matured males and functions as psychological alleviation, taking away their fears and hatred of children: in our society it is good to be potent, and to have and love children.

¹ *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. Dylan Evans. 1996. Routledge. London, U.K. Pg. 162

² *Ibid.* Pg. 93.