

UNiversitas: Journal of Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity

Volume 2
Number 1 *Forum Theme: Falling into
Medievalism*

Article 8

3-2006

Crossing the Timeline: Michael Crichton's Bestseller as Social Criticism and History

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Recommended Citation

Bingham, Linda (2006) "Crossing the Timeline: Michael Crichton's Bestseller as Social Criticism and History," *UNiversitas: Journal of Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity*. Vol. 2: No. 1, Article 8. Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/universitas/vol2/iss1/8>

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Crossing the *Timeline*: Michael Crichton's Bestseller as Social Criticism and History

Part of the journal section "Forum: Falling into Medievalism"

Linda Bingham, "Crossing the *Timeline*: Michael Crichton's Bestseller as Social Criticism and History"

Michael Crichton's best-selling suspense novel *Timeline* combines futuristic science with medieval history, resulting in a remarkably successful and thrilling page-turner. By authoritatively blending academic arcana with fabricated scientific innovation, Crichton also convinces the average reader that the science in the novel is based on current scientific knowledge and that the medieval portions of the novel are based on solid historical research, which, for the most part, they are. Given the fantastic premise of the supposedly present-day science of quantum transportation between universes, one would expect the history-based sections of the book to have the stronger underpinnings. But, surprisingly, the plot becomes less believable in the medieval portions; the action in the fourteenth century simply involves too many plot twists, too many feats of derring-do, too many miraculous escapes to be believable.

But "believability" is perhaps a modern literary expectation. The apparent weaknesses of Crichton's novel actually adhere strictly to the literary tradition from which Crichton draws. The plot twists and fantastic deeds do indeed conjure up the genre of medieval romantic literature, and in this guise of an historic chivalric romance, Crichton cleverly manages to call into question many contemporary assumptions. The distance of the plot setting makes his social commentary more palatable.

Crichton structures his plot around several graduate students on a quest to rescue not a damsel in distress but rather their own beloved professor. The story is complete with besieged castles, an insane giant, secret codes and passages, disguises, and, of course, the student "knights" triumphant in the end-all standard devices in an historic chivalric romance.

Critics found plenty to object to in Crichton's novel. Henry Kisor of *The Chicago Sun-Times* complains of *Timeline*'s "weary derivativeness," finding the quantum transport element "to be pale beam-me-up Scottie echoes" and the medieval scenes to be "set-pieces." He is joined by Chris Cobbs of *The Orlando Sentinel*, who remarks that the "plot was old before the Pilgrims set sail a third of a millennium ago." However, this very derivativeness is a reflection of the medieval literary model. Although *Timeline* received mixed reviews from critics, Michael Crichton has, by using futuristic science and the trappings of the chivalric romance of the Middle Ages, managed to comment on several aspects of modern society without being overly didactic in his delivery. Not only does *Timeline* give the reader a thumbnail history of the Middle Ages; it also leads the reader to consider the ethics of technological and scientific discovery, a capitalistic market system, corporate sponsorship of both academic and scientific research, and historiography.

In one of the more favorable reviews, David Klinghoffer, of the *National Review* notes that *Timeline* is "an outstanding craft novel," his criteria stipulates that it should be a mystery, have plenty of plot twists, and a "time lock, a narrative device such that if the protagonists fail to accomplish their goal by the final moment of a predetermined time, then all hell's going to break loose." That Crichton has succeeded in writing a compelling craft novel which stimulates the reader to contemplate (and ultimately question) the validity of our capitalistic society results from his adoption of the medieval chivalric romance genre and his obsession for grounding his fiction in authenticity.

The medieval romance was first developed in France, the setting of much of Crichton's novel. The characteristics of the romance tradition include duels between knights, fights against monsters, improbable and supernatural story elements, and courtly love affairs with the "themes of love and war [. . .] often connected, the martial exploits having a direct influence on [the knight's] love affair" (Abrams, et al. 6). These characteristics also describe plot elements in *Timeline*. For example, Chris Hughes, one of the graduate students transported back to 1357, has the opportunity to play the hero and rescue Kate Erickson, another member of the archaeological team, from brigands ("godins") in the woods. Up to this point, Chris has been a typical medieval courtly lover, mooning about a British heiress and worshipfully admiring Kate's beauty and her prowess as a climber. Upon arriving in the past, Chris is forced into participating in a real jousting tournament in which he becomes a comical character who is promptly knocked from his horse (Crichton 258). Moreover, Chris further humiliates himself when he vomits after regaining consciousness (263-265). Later, when Marek, Kate, and Chris are forced to jump from the wall encircling Casteldard, Chris, the wimp, is the only one who hesitates, saying, "It's pretty far down [. . .]. I don't want to break a leg" (313).

This "unknightly" behavior in medieval France reflects Chris' poor horsemanship and immature behavior at the archaeological site in the present. However, when Kate later examines Chris' jousting wounds and considers his behavior, it is obvious that he is acquiring a new maturity:

She pulled his doublet down farther, saw more purple bruising on his back and his side, beneath his arm. His whole body was one big bruise. It must be incredibly painful. She was amazed that he wasn't complaining more. After all, this was the same guy who threw fits if he was served dried cèpe mushrooms instead of fresh ones in his morning omelette. Who could pout if he didn't like the choice of wine. [. . .] She almost felt as if she were sitting next to a stranger. (332)

In addition, when Kate is attacked by "godins" (peasant robbers) in the woods, "an apparition, a bloodred knight on horseback" comes to her rescue (403). This knight is Chris, drenched in the blood of a horse. After Chris rescues Kate, she notices that he "seemed so confident and amused, and she had the feeling that she had never noticed, never been aware, that he was quite an attractive man, that he had a certain genuine appeal. But of course, she thought, he had saved her life" (403). Obviously, Chris's martial exploits affect Kate's perception of him as a person worthy of her attention, just as in the medieval romances.

It is natural that Crichton should look to the chivalric romance with all of its defining characteristics since, as Theodore Steinberg points out in his book *Reading the Middle Ages*, post-modernism "accepts shifting perspectives, and apparent contradictions are all perfectly ordinary, as long as they lead to morally acceptable positions" (3). Steinberg elaborates on his comparison between post-modernism and medieval

romance when he states, "The medieval commentator [. . .] knows where he wants to end up-with a moral or religious truth-and he is willing to take any road that will get him there" (4). Crichton uses his novel in the same manner, making his points about morality, ethics, and truth in modern culture. David Lampe also sees *Timeline* as a "modern gothic novel" in which Crichton uses the characters and plot of the novel to comment on "modern scientific and capitalistic assumptions," a typical medieval ploy (Lampe, 90).

A. Keith Kelly confirms that "reaching back into history to comment upon current events" is actually quite medieval (Kelly,12). Most medieval writing did this, yet we don't condemn medieval writers as being derivative. Instead, "it is an accepted part of the tradition of medieval writing that authors use the past to comment upon the present, and in so doing they reveal truths about both" (13). Weighing in with further explanation of this technique, Caroline Jewers notes, "By clothing modern issues in medieval garb, a filmmaker [or in this case a novelist] may take advantage of certain tropes and ideals that are associated with the Middle Ages" (Jewers 10). Crichton is using these tropes, ideals, and stylistic devices to accentuate the medieval elements of his novel and as vehicles to express his anxieties about corporate power in our world today.

The foremost creator of the adventures by which a knight proved his "worthiness through noble character and deed" is Chrétien de Troyes (Abrams, et al. 7). He popularized the medieval romance genre, especially the stories of King Arthur, using short rhyming couplets as his verse form of choice. In the early *Timeline* section titled "Corazon," Joseph Traub, the old man found in the desert in New Mexico, speaks nothing but rhyming couplets, possibly Crichton's indication to his readers that the storyline (and style of that story) will be headed back to the land of the *langue d'oc* troubadours.

Not only has Crichton modeled his story on medieval romances; he has referenced some of them rather pointedly. For example, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, perhaps the best of the English romances, is certainly alluded to in *Timeline* with Chris and Kate's encounter with the mad knight of the Green Chapel, complete with a beheading contest. More specifically, Chris can be compared to Sir Gawain in this instance. According to the medieval poem, Gawain was the youngest of King Arthur's knights with the least amount of battle experience. Chris can easily be viewed as Gawain's modern counterpart since he is the most inept member of the Professor's team. The incident at the Green Chapel creates an opportunity for Chris to redeem himself by defeating the Green Knight, however clumsily.

David Lampe also sees this episode as a "typical postmodern pastiche" (91). However, in claiming that Crichton's "characters are not based on historical or mythical prototypes," Lampe does not seem to recognize that Chris can be viewed as Gawain's counterpart. Whereas Sir Gawain's quest in the medieval poem is a test of virtue, Chris' quest is a test of his mettle. Chris' courage is rewarded when Kate puts a hand on his shoulder after the rescue from the Green Knight, pronouncing him her hero (Crichton 423). From this point until the end of the novel, Chris is a different person. He is no longer the awkward, slightly immature boy. Instead he becomes a brave knight. This change is symbolized by the emphasis on the color green, the color of growth and renewal. In both works the Green Chapel brings about the renewal (or redemption) of its heroes. In fact, in Crichton's novel, Kate's arrival at the scene of the Green Chapel also brings her a sense of renewal (baptism?) as the waterfall washes away all of the mud from her clothes and body, leaving her feeling "somehow new" (406).

Crichton is not, by any means, the first author to juxtapose the past with the present. In fact, it was an accepted and expected practice for medieval writers to depend on what Geoffrey Chaucer called

"auctorities" and writers of the past in order to comment on events of their own time. Lampe writes in his comparison of three time-travel books that "Crichton seems to champion the past as a means of exposing the limitations of the present" (93). Just as Barbara Tuchman, in her non-fiction book *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century*, compared the chaos of the fourteenth century to that of the 1970s, Crichton has used the same historical era to comment on American society at the millenium. Lampe's essay also discusses Mark Twain's and Ford Madox Ford's use of the chivalric model and suggests that "'historical fiction' tells us as much about the awareness and values of the author and his age as it does about the past it presents" (84). It is strikingly clear that Crichton's portrayal of the corporate giant Robert Doniger and his associates indicates Crichton's distrust of corporations and anything they influence or control. In fact, Jeff Zaleski finds, in interviewing Crichton for *Publisher's Weekly*, that Crichton is on "a continuous and passionate search for the truth. [. . .] He vigorously researches each subject he tackles, and his subjects have increasingly concerned issues in which he feels truth is bastardized" (S8). Throughout *Timeline* it is obvious that Crichton is concerned with making the setting of his novel and several of the historical characters as authentic as possible and that he does not trust the ethics, or, rather, the lack of them, of corporate America, especially as they relate to science and truth.

Crichton's allusions to the *Sir Gawain* poem further indicate his concerns about modern ethics. Steinberg points out that since "*Sir Gawain* is an Arthurian romance, [. . .] we must recall that in many Arthurian works, the Arthurian court is a troubled place, full of rivalries and a variety of unchivalric behaviors" (151). Considering Crichton's anxieties about our society at the millennium, the world of Arthur's court seems an apt analogy for him to use, just as others before him. One of those others is Mark Twain. In examining Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Derek Pearsall shows that "Twain's determination to provide a comic spoof of Arthurianism is gradually eroded by his own recognition that the ridiculous world of chivalry had an idealism and humanity that the modern world [Twain's world] of commerce and profit has destroyed" (139). Crichton's Professor Johnston, when transported back to 1357, is thought to be a magician just as Twain's Hank Morgan, transported to 529, also is thought to be a magician. Pearsall sees Twain's Yankee as personification of "the efficiency and the inhumanity of the new machine age" (143). Again, it is perfectly logical that Crichton should follow Twain's lead and call on the Middle Ages to comment on the modern scientific age.

Though Crichton does not mention the medieval book *The Romance of the Rose* in his bibliography, one wonders at the similarity of Robert Doniger's name to that of the character Dangiers in the medieval poem. Theodore Steinberg, in a discussion of *The Romance of the Rose*, indicates that Dangiers "translate[s] into English as something like Danger or Rebuff. Literally it means something like dominance" (76). This would certainly apply to the Doniger character, and would also indicate that Crichton, after his wide research into the time period, has further medievalized his story with allegory.

Further evidence of this allegorical technique can be found in Crichton's character Sir Guy de Malegant. Though technically translating as "bad glove," the name alludes to Chrétien's *Lancelot* character Maleagant, suggesting evil incarnate (Dyer). Richard Barber points out in his book *King Arthur: Hero and Legend* that in "The Knight of the Cart," Maleagant, the villainous knight who abducts Guenevere, is "violent, without respect for his beloved" (61). He is an apt allusion for Crichton's character.

Crichton gives brief descriptions of the characters John Gordon, Diane Kramer, and Robert Doniger, the CEO and executive staff of ITC, the company experimenting with quantum transportation. Doniger's history points out his ruthlessness, while his cold-blooded reaction to Traub's death confirms his ethical

sterility. He is more concerned with what he sees as his three significant problems: 1) getting more capital, 2) keeping the public from knowing what is going on at ITC, and 3) finding out how Traub got into the transit room. The conversation among these characters also makes the connection with the archaeological site in France where the Professor and his assistants are working. Doniger, in all his ruthlessness, is Crichton's personification of the present scientific age and the "doppelganger" of Lord Oliver de Vannes, who holds the castles in fourteenth century *Timeline* (Adams 717). Perhaps another connection between the present and the fourteenth century can be seen in the secret underground rivers and passageways in the medieval scenes as compared to ITC, Doniger's company, which is located mostly underground for secrecy. Like some medieval alchemy, the quantum transportation must be hidden from the world, which would not understand its significance or would question its morality.

As well as being interested in ethics, Crichton also is concerned with truth and authenticity. He includes an introduction to his novel which compares the scientific theory which was current at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century to the state of science as we approached the turn from the twentieth to the twenty-first century. He points out that most of the technology which we take for granted today seemed fantastic and improbable a century ago. Based on sound scientific theory, his comparison of the science current at both of those times makes the idea of quantum teleportation seem plausible. The footnotes in the introduction, citing his genuine scientific sources, add to his credibility. In fact, it is difficult for the non-scientific reader to tell exactly where fact ends and fiction begins in his scientific discussion. In the final section of his introduction, Crichton draws the reader further into his fictional world by introducing ITC, the fictitious company from the novel, into his discussion of quantum research being conducted by familiar companies such as ATT, IBM, and Cal Tech (xii).

It is also in this final part of the introductory material that Crichton foreshadows the ending of the book, causing David Klinghoffer to complain that Crichton "basically gives away the ending." This give-away is an "excerpt" from a non-existent book called *The Hundred Years War in France* and appears immediately following the introduction. This pseudo-excerpt introduces two of the primary characters from the medieval action in *Timeline*, mentioning that Edwardus de Johnes was an advisor to Lord Oliver de Vannes. Eventually the reader will understand that this advisor "who could vanish in a flash of light" is actually the Professor (Edward Johnston) from the archaeological site (Crichton xiii). However, Crichton manages to maintain suspense throughout the novel despite this excerpt because of the extensive research he has explained in the introduction and the medieval structure with the characters performing daring and spectacular deeds while on a quest. While this excerpt sets up the story, it does not detract from the suspense. Crichton achieves the semblance of authenticity by meshing his fiction with what appears to be a scholarly work.

Two of the characters mentioned in this pseudo-excerpt are actually historical. The first is the French brigand Arnaut de Cervole, also called the "Archpriest," who figures prominently in the medieval portions of *Timeline*. According to Barbara Tuchman, the real Arnaut was from the Périgord in France. After being captured and ransomed during the war, he gathered a band of 2,000 men, then pillaged and plundered throughout southern France during 1357, the time period and setting of the medieval portions of *Timeline*. Tuchman also explains that Arnaut was aided by a lord of Provence, Raimond des Baux, another character in the medieval portions of *Timeline* (173).

The first section of *Timeline*, titled "Corazon," may seem to have little to do with the plot of the story other than to serve as a sequence of scenes allowing Crichton to begin his story *in media res*. In fact,

Richard Dyer of *The Boston Globe* questions whether "this [is] simply a case of a first draft that changed course midway, without ever turning back to fix up the beginning." He points out that the novel seems to change course after the opening in New Mexico. However, Crichton himself seems to deny this apparent lack of planning in an interview with Michael Ellison of *The Guardian (London)* when he states, "This book I wrote three times over" Dyer argues that in "Corazon" Crichton "elaborately introduces characters," gives those characters personalities and reasons for the plot to return to them, but then it never does. Admittedly, these characters do present possible alternative plot lines. However, even without following up on those plot lines (again a medieval ploy), this section clearly serves a purpose for Crichton's plot.

"Corazon" takes place in New Mexico (the land of aliens and ships from outer space), setting the stage so that the upcoming action will be more believable. More importantly, however, as Jenny Adams points out in her article, "Marketing the Medieval: The Quest for Authentic History in Michael Crichton's *Timeline*," it also gives Crichton the opportunity to broach the concept of authenticity through the characters of Dan and Liz Baker and their argument about driving out of their way to purchase authentically handcrafted Navajo rugs rather than the cheaper (and, in Liz's mind, less desirable) mass-produced Navajo rugs sold in Sedona. In fact, the rug that Liz is hoping to buy was made in the 1920s by a particular weaver, thus making it an historical artifact. Typically, Crichton makes the details of this argument as authentic as possible in his fictional work by basing Liz's desire on an actual weaver and style from the twenties (Adams 721). In addition, Adams suggests that the Bakers' argument gives a "fairly simplified version of the story's first two points" (707). These points are that "historical artifacts are commodifiable" and that "the desire for (and thus the value of) an historical artifact derives primarily from the object's relative claim to authenticity" (707). So it would seem that Crichton has a deliberate purpose for the somewhat involved argument between these two characters who will disappear after the "Corazon" section.

Another reason for the lengthy first section is to allow foreshadowing. The problems with the old man found in the desert (Joseph Traub), his red fingers, his shirt with the jagged alignment of the plaid, the copy of the monastery blueprint, and the ceramic square found by Baker all add to the reader's apprehension of what they might hint. Further, this setting allows Crichton to reaffirm that his pseudo-science is real when the young boy in the hospital is the first to understand that Traub is saying "quantum foam," indicating that the science described in the book is realistic (authentic) enough so that a nerdy young boy would be familiar with the concept (18).

Adams further claims that "*Timeline* reveals the author's anxiety about the nature of academic knowledge and its relationship to tangible products" (705). She finds that, throughout his book, Crichton questions whether academic research can ever be truly authentic or reliable when it is driven by corporate interests. Adams traces Crichton's argument as follows: "First, the products of history and/or historical research are easily commodifiable [. . .]. Second, the consumption of these products, usually in the form of historical artifacts, is motivated by a desire for authenticity [. . .]. Third, [. . .] the novel [. . .] argues that the process by which something is defined as authentic is arbitrary and up for grabs" (706). This being the case, historical research can be influenced by the ultimate use and monetary worth of its findings. Therefore, the only pure knowledge or research is that which comes from a lack of interest in and a freedom from the marketplace. For Adams, Crichton's concern is that most historical research is funded by corporate America, which cannot be trusted. Corporations will ultimately find some way in which that research can be sold to the consumer, or they will influence the research to benefit themselves in other ways.

After the "Corazon" section, Crichton flashes to France where Andre Marek, an assistant professor from Yale, gives ITC's Diane Kramer a helicopter tour of the archaeological site in the Dordogne valley. Once more, Crichton has achieved verisimilitude by placing his story in an authentic area (the Périgord region of southern France), one which actually has seen many archaeological digs. As explanation, Marek tells Kramer, "In medieval times the Dordogne was the military frontier [. . .]. This side of the river was French and the other side was English. Fighting went back and forth. Directly beneath us is Beynac, a French stronghold. [. . .] And over there, [. . .] you see the opposing town of Castelnaud. An English stronghold" (43-44). Both of these are actual castles with surrounding villages which are popular tourist sites in the Dordogne valley today.

Adams asserts that, because Dr. Johnston and his knowledge, reputation, and experience are being exploited and driven by Doniger in the present and Lord Oliver in the past, this indicates that there can be no pure historical knowledge (717). Any knowledge, past or present, is suspect if it is connected with the corporate (capitalistic) world. An illustration of this can be found in Crichton's contrast between the academics and Kate's stockbroker friends. The stockbrokers, connected to the market by cell phone even as they are vacationing in France, appear to be interested only in money and superficiality. In contrast, the academics indicate that they are passionate about historical authenticity rather than anything as mundane as the market. The archaeological team members are careful not to contaminate their findings at the excavation site. They diligently examine and note all that they discover, avoiding any easy, but unsubstantiated, conclusions. Everything is based as accurately as possible on facts and artifacts. However, even though Crichton has made the academics the heroes of his story, Adams finds that the authenticity for which they strive is ephemeral. The very act of trying to recreate the past authentically, to produce (or reproduce) the past, negates its authenticity (710). She sees further evidence in the novel of this lack of true authenticity in the fact that the time travelers do not actually go to the other multiverse; instead, copies of them appear in the medieval world. They are not their authentic selves when they arrive in 1357 (711).

An example of the corporate world corrupting academic research is given early in the novel when Diane Kramer flies to France to encourage the team of academics to work faster so that ITC can move forward their ultimate plans of an "authentic" super-tourist site. This trip also moves the plot forward since Kramer reveals information about the buildings on the site that the team has not yet determined. For example, when discussing the monastery ruins, Kramer knows where the refectory was located although it has not yet been established by the archaeological team. She also suggests rebuilding a Castelpard tower, the foundation of which the team is unaware because it is located in an overgrown area and had not been revealed even by "SLS, radar, infrared, or UV" technology (Crichton 79). In looking for the ruins of this tower after Kramer's mention of it, David Stern, the project technologist and trained physicist, falls into the bottom of it. The archeologists' suspicions are increased when an email of the monastery diagram sent by the Gallup police officer arrives showing greater detail than the team has been able to authenticate. Questions arise, leading to the Professor's announcement that he will be heading to New Mexico to get his questions answered at ITC headquarters.

While the professor is gone, Andre Marek is in charge. It is often through this character that Crichton informs his readers about the Middle Ages. Marek is the quintessential medievalist, speaking several languages used in France and England during the Middle Ages, among them the Occitan of the early troubadours. According to Crichton, Marek, an assistant professor of history at Yale, is "one of the new breed of 'experimental' historians, who set out to re-create the past, to experience it firsthand and

understand it better" (41). He practices with a broadsword, imitates jousting with his homemade quintain, trains with the long bow, and is familiar with period dress. Through his discussion of Marek's attempts to obtain lances made in authentic medieval fashion, Crichton again presents the difficulties in striving for authenticity:

Making the quintain had been simple enough; it was much more difficult to get a decent lance. This was the kind of problem Marek faced again and again in experimental history. Even the simplest and most common items from the past were impossible to reproduce in the modern world. Even when money was no object, thanks to the ITC research fund. (74)

Thus, even someone who has a fetish about authenticity still has difficulty in achieving it.

Marek is obviously the perfect knight even in his modern persona. He is the archaeological site's equivalent to Sir Galahad, the Arthurian knight on a quest for the Grail, or in Marek's case, a quest for truth and authenticity. In addition, he can be seen as Chrétien's Lancelot since he also jousts with Malegant and ultimately rescues Lady Claire just as Lancelot rescues Guenevere. In his description of Marek, Crichton foreshadows Marek's fate and makes that fate acceptable to the reader when he comments, "But his detailed knowledge of the past put him oddly out of touch with the present" (72).

As mentioned above, Crichton accentuates the differences between the academics and Kate's stockbroker friends who are all not only ignorant of medieval history but seemingly proud of it. When they are all having a relaxing evening in Sarlet, another restored medieval town which actually exists, Marek gives a thumbnail history of the region from 40 B.C. through the Hundred Years War, which also gives Crichton the opportunity to inform his readers, who may be just as ignorant as the brokers, of the time period in which most of the novel takes place. Crichton undoubtedly agrees with his character when he writes, "Professor Johnston often said that if you didn't know history, you didn't know anything" (85). Calling people like these "temporal provincials," Crichton further points out to the reader:

. . . the truth was that the modern world was invented in the Middle Ages. Everything from the legal system to nation-states, to reliance on technology, to the concept of romantic love had first been established in medieval times. These stockbrokers owed the very notion of a market economy to the Middle Ages. And if they didn't know that, then they didn't know the basic facts of who they were. (84-85)

This brings up another of Crichton's concerns. In the *Publisher's Weekly* interview, Crichton asserts, "I think [. . .] there's a perception that we live in an unprecedented world. It's about time for people to start to recognize that almost everything has a history; not to know that is to be struck by everything freshly, in a foolish way" (qtd. in Zaleski). Obviously, one of Crichton's goals in this novel is to correct that perception in his readers.

Though the principal reason for reading *Timeline* is for entertainment, it appears that the reader's entertainment (and the accompanying profit to Crichton) is not the sole reason that he writes. He also uses the novel to publish his own beliefs about society, something that he has done with most of his works. Crichton himself admits to having a higher purpose than just entertainment. In an interview with Lloyd Sachs of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Crichton states, "It's the uses of history, what it means, how it is distorted, that has interested me for a long time." He explains this more explicitly when he tells Richard

Brooks of the London *Sunday Times*, "I chose to set *Timeline* in the 14 th century because we know enough about it to make it plausible and realistic. But I also wanted to counter this notion that medieval times were Dark Ages. The 14 th century was a time of great enlightenment and discovery." Just as a typical medieval writer, Crichton knows where he wants to end up, what truths or morals he wants to convey. What Crichton actually does is create a romance in the medieval style, complete with a moral.

Early in the novel, the Professor has to deal with a French reporter who questions the legitimacy of the research the Yale team is doing. She is particularly suspicious of the team's connection with Doniger's company, ITC, and with that company's acquisition of xenon (gas) and niobium (metal), as well as real estate around various other archaeological sites. As the Professor explains after the interview, "[. . .] what she really doesn't like is corporate sponsorship" (Crichton 59). This seems to also be one of the principal concerns of Crichton himself throughout the novel.

Crichton's use of medieval models allows him to accomplish his goal of social commentary while still entertaining his readers. By placing his story in both the Middle Ages and a futuristic present, Crichton's concerns about corporate and scientific responsibility, ethics, and truth are presented in a more acceptable form of criticism than might be possible otherwise.

Crichton himself comments in an interview in *The Guardian (London)*, "I prefer to do books that address issues[,] but you can't do that constantly or you become a scold . . ." (Ellison). In *Timeline* Crichton can address those social concerns without seeming to preach, while at the same time alerting his readers to those concerns.

Though critics might complain that Crichton's allegories (minimal as they are) are not consistent, this is also an element of the medievalism of his book. Steinberg points out that medieval "allegories are not constant and must therefore be examined in their context" (8). Other critics have complained that Crichton's characters are undeveloped. However, Crichton's academics are given the opportunity to grow and mature because of his use of chivalric romance as a model. Both Chris and Marek change because of their quest to rescue the professor, something that is often found in the medieval romance. Caroline Jewers explains in *Journal of Popular Culture*, "Chivalric romance [. . .] is most often a literature of self-improvement through physical trial and combat, leading to [. . .] marriage" (42), a phenomenon we see in Chris, Marek, and Kate in the epilogue of the novel. Jewers points out that "as a genre it [chivalric romance] extols the virtues of prowess and faithful love, and material gain" (42). However, Crichton uses the genre to extol the virtues of prowess, faithfulness to an ideal of authenticity, and a questioning of material gain.

Critics have also asserted that Crichton's science is illogical (Kipen). Again, in the medieval and fantasy genres, this makes no difference. Readers are willing to accept the illogical (for example, the fact that the characters can go back to a particular place and time but have only one ceramic marker and limited time to return) because of the suspense created by the plot line. Just as play-goers willingly suspend their sense of reality while viewing a play, readers of these genres will suspend their logical expectations if the author creates enough tension to drive the plot. Crichton's storyline, particularly the medieval portions, provides this tension.

Though *Timeline* is a craft novel or modern gothic romance rather than serious literature, it is deservedly a bestseller of the suspense/fantasy genre. Crichton's editor comments to Linton Weeks of *The Washington*

Post, "I think sometimes people don't give Michael the credit he deserves for the things he gets superlatively right." Among the things Crichton gets superlatively right are his facts, based on thorough research, which contribute to the "authenticity" of his tale and the creation of a compelling thriller. What Crichton has done with *Timeline* is to demonstrate that many of the human problems we have today have always existed. For example, as Jenny Adams points out, Professor Johnston is under pressure to perform in the way that a more powerful person wants whether that person is Doniger in the present or Lord Oliver in the past (717). The interference in science, ethics, and academia by powerful people and institutions has always been and continues to be a problem. However, Crichton has also written a warning to all readers in Doniger's last speech to prospective investors:

The purpose of history is to explain the present-to say why the world around us is the way it is. History tells us what is important in our world, and how it came to be. It tells us why the things we value are the things we should value. And it tells us what is to be ignored, or discarded. That is true power-profound power. The power to define a whole society.

The future is in the past-in whoever controls the past. Such control has never before been possible. Now, it is. (480)

Both Lord Oliver and Robert Doniger come to ironically appropriate ends. Each is disposed of in the manner by which he would have disposed of the protagonists. Whereas finding Lord Oliver in "Milady's Bath" and Doniger transported to a plague town in 1348 is poetic justice, Crichton's warning to his readers is all too clear. We must make sure that we guard against these powers taking complete control of our society.

Finally, in Crichton's "Epilogue," we find his last word regarding authenticity. Though Marek seems to be the ultimate medieval knight with his knowledge of medieval weapons, customs, and languages, when he chooses to stay behind and marry Lady Claire, the self which is staying behind is the facsimile (the transported version) of the genuine Marek. Upon visiting the medieval tombs of Andrew d'Eltham (Marek) and Lady Claire, the Professor considers that " . . . however much Marek loved it, it could never be his world. Not really. He must have always felt a foreigner there . . . " (488). Thus, again the ubiquitous problem of authenticity arises.

In his book, Crichton has attempted to be as realistic as possible, given the genre, and has tried to take his (lay) readers along with him. He has based his story on factual history where possible. However, where he departs from factual information, he does so in order to make the story enjoyable, exciting, and believable for the reader. Richard Utz, in his essay "'Mes souvenirs sont peut-être': Medieval Studies, Medievalism, and the Scholarly and Popular Memories of the 'Right of the Lord's First Night,'" considers the proprietary role that scholars and academics maintain in presenting the 'real' middle ages. This role would require them to critique *Timeline* by pointing out what Crichton gets wrong about the middle ages. Utz finds that perhaps the tension between scholars' concerns "about the varying levels of historicity" of texts such as this and "the popular craving for the enjoyment of the 'real' middle ages" is a healthy, and often enlightening, one (7). Consumers of popular medievalism require a "verisimilar" portrayal of the middle ages, including many of the trappings of the time even though these trappings may be a matter of "collective/cultural memory" rather than historical fact" (7).

Michael Crichton has used typical medieval literary models in order to create a platform for his views about society today. A critical reader can find many problems in logic in the novel, such as the fact that Marek's tomb can be found in our universe when he actually went back to a different multiverse. However, because Crichton has structured his work according to medieval models and alluded to other medieval literature, the modern reader can more easily accept his inconsistencies as well as his social commentary.

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