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Close encounters of a human kind

On the need for distinction versus the longing for connection in
Neanderthal – Homo sapiens encounters in science fiction

Introduction

From the nineteenth century onward, Neanderthal research provided inspiration for science fiction, exploring a broad range of ‘what if’ scenarios, suggested by the fossil evidence. Neanderthals coexisted with us more than forty millennia ago (quite recently, from an evolutionary perspective) and we are fascinated by the idea that our ancestors once stood face to face with these familiar strangers. It is this fascination that leads to an urge to novelize, according to Stephen Jay Gould (in Kurtén 1995), “for a meeting of two truly different human groups is more wonderful than all science fiction” (p15).

In their comprehensive review on Neanderthal research, Papagianni and Morse (Papagianni and Morse 2015) claim that fiction writers often base their stories on minority or out-dated interpretations and stereotypes, so that almost nothing they produce approaches plausibility. A reader who knows only the fictional Neanderthal might believe all Neanderthals worshipped cave bears, had rigidly divided gender roles and elaborate rituals, a canine-like sense of smell and used some sort of telepathic form of communication (p187). Although Papagianni and Morse’s overview of the scientific literature is quite impressive, their denigratory comments on Neanderthal science fiction are questionable for two reasons. First of all, palaeoanthropology can likewise be ‘tainted’ or even hampered by views, narratives, images and prejudices which scientists implicitly or explicitly, consciously or unconsciously endorse. In the tension between paleoanthropological¹ theories (where the word ‘theory’ literally

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¹ In this paper, that is part of an interdisciplinary research project entitled *Neanderthals and us*, we use the term ‘paleoanthropology’ rather than ‘paleoarcheology’, as it addresses the narrative of human evolution and the question what makes us human from a philosophical (philosophical anthropology) perspective.

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means something like vision of viewpoint) and paleoanthropological finds, some theories have proved to be fossil-resistant or even fossil-proof, and shifts in theoretical viewpoints not always involved new fossils, but may also be due to a change of socio-cultural climate, a shift in the narratives in vogue (Lewin 1997). Although we look for windows that give access to the past, Neanderthals often served as mirrors that showed us what we wanted to see (Corbey and Roebroeks 2001). Their story has been described as a parable about insiders and outsiders, savages and the civilized, born out of our wish to see ourselves as more decisively set off from the other animals than we actually are (Cartmill 2012).

Moreover, although there are considerable differences between the novels involved, we will nonetheless conclude that in quite a few Neanderthal novels serious efforts are made to stay in tune with the scientific literature. At the same time, we will argue that ‘fiction’ or, more generally, imagination, plays a more significant role in Neanderthal science than Papagianni and Morse are willing to acknowledge. The distinction between the domain of fiction and that of facts is not always that clear-cut. Science is a storytelling practice and palaeoanthropology is more imaginative than we might expect. Bones, stones and DNA do not speak for themselves. Scientists bring them to life, using their imagination to explore possible scenarios or interpretations. After all, it takes imagination to look beyond the limitations of what is currently known, and see what could possibly be. Here, the words of Friedrich Nietzsche easily come to mind, who indicated (being trained as a philologist) that, etymologically speaking, the words ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ have similar meanings (Zwart 2019). Fact comes from ‘facere’ (to make), while fiction comes from ‘fingere’ (to produce with your fingers). Both facts and fictions are fabricated. Facts do not speak for themselves. They have to be interpreted, contextualised, discussed, etc., against the backdrop of an understanding of (a historical narrative about) early human history in vogue at a certain point in time. Both facts and fictions are produced, the former with the help of scientific equipment, but in combination with imagination.

Whereas fossils often raise more questions than they answer, novels can be considered laboratories (Zwart 2008), test-beds for exploring possible scenarios, that may even inspire further research. They may complement the data to construct plausible stories, or question the science and produce an alternative picture. Novels function as spotlights, as they often more explicitly convey stereotypes and ideologies. At the same time, fiction allows us to challenge and rethink the current worldview. It has the capacity to enable its readers to perceive the world and other species in new ways, to step out of the current social configuration and rethink established boundaries (Vint 2012). In this way, literature may function as a complementary source of insight, different rather than deficient, and as a source of inspiration for scientific activities (Zwart 2008).

While we will use academic Neanderthal discourse as a backdrop and frame of reference, we will focus on novels that deal with Neanderthal – *Homo sapiens* encounters. What happens when humans and Neanderthals meet? What differences or similarities are highlighted, which characteristics are valued, what is silenced? How do writers in

comparison with scientists deal with the ambiguity of Neanderthals, being strange and familiar at the same time, human, but not-us? Explicit attention will be given to literary archetypes such as the role of the exploring, conquering Hero and the opposite side of the archetypal coin, the Orphan, who, abandoned and alone, desires to connect with others and seeks a sense of belonging. This captures a basic ambivalence in establishing identity: the desire to distinguish ourselves versus the longing for connection. An ambivalence that is also relevant for scientific paleoanthropological discourse. Like primatology, which according to Donna Haraway is “about the construction of self from the raw material of other” (Haraway 1989), palaeoanthropology is concerned with the identity of our own species. Paleoanthropologists are policing and at the same time questioning the boundary between humans and nonhumans, thereby defining and redefining what it means to be human (Cartmill 1990; Roebroeks 1995). In other words, we aim to contextualize Neanderthal science, by indicating how its guiding questions and concerns are actually part of a broader cultural context. The discussion about Neanderthals, we will argue, eventually reveals the need for a reconsideration of established views concerning the role and place of human beings.

The evolution of the encounter in prehistoric fiction

With the discovery of the first ‘fossil men’ and the publishing of Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (Darwin 1859), the debate during the second half of the 19th century was mostly anthropocentric. How did these findings fit into the tale of human evolution or even human progress? Were these extinct species our ancestors, a missing link between apes and humans, or modern humans with an abnormality, as Rudolf Virchow (1821–1902) argued, who believed that the Neanderthal remains discovered near Düsseldorf belonged to a *Homo sapiens*, whose deformations were caused by rickets in childhood and arthritis later in life.

In 1861, the posthumously published novel by the French botanist and geologist Pierre Boitard (Boitard 1861) shows what is probably the earliest image of prehistoric man in popular culture (see fig. 1). Boitard describes the ‘missing link’ as a horrible and brutal species. Although it is a fictional time travel story, it is also a narrative loosely based on Darwin and aiming to describe scientifically the development of the earth and the existence of ape-like fossil men as our ancestors. Set within a framework of fantasy, to be safe from attacks from religious authorities. Fiction here preceded science, as Boitard died in the year *The Origin of Species* was published.

In H.G. Wells’ short story *The Grisly Folk* (Wells 2016), published in 1921, the Neanderthal as the prototypical beastly cavemen was pushed to the extreme. Wells paints a picture of the meeting between ‘the things that were like men and yet were not men’ and the ‘true men’ that appeared in Europa twenty or thirty thousand years ago. In his story, the Neanderthal is not our ancestor, but a fearsome animal, vanquished by the superior true men. The Neanderthals were stupid, ugly, strong, speechless and solitary



Figure 1: Frontispiece from Boitard 1861.

beasts, who walked with a slouch and ran like a baboon, could not laugh, and preyed on the children of true men.

In the 1950's, the Neanderthal image completely changed. The second half of the twentieth century gave rise to more 'anthropomorphic' interpretations of Neanderthals, although primitive stereotypes continued to exist. A major influence was the acceptance of even more 'savage' human ancestors like *Homo heidelbergensis* and the apish *Australopithecus*. There was tangible evidence of human antiquity and Neanderthals now seemed much more familiar and less threatening (Trinkaus and Shipman 1993). Moreover, the emergence of the Modern Synthesis (Huxley 1942), which combined genetics with Darwinian natural selection and encouraged lumping of taxonomic categories, together with the debunking of the Piltdown man, cleared the way for the Neanderthal as our ancestor again. William Golding's *The Inheritors* (Golding 1955) appeared after the re-examination of the Chapelle-aux-Saints skeleton and the scientific rehabilitation of Neanderthals. It is the first psychological prehistoric fiction written from the point of view of the Neanderthals. Starting with a quote from Wells, who describes the Neanderthals as monsters, the book is evidently a comment on Wells' earlier story. Golding takes us inside a furry, loving, harmless, naive, and childlike being. An endangered species of vegetarians, hunted down by the 'new people'. These thin white people attempt to control the world and kill the 'red devils' (Neanderthals) whom they fear. At the end the last Neanderthal, a baby, referred to as the 'devilish brat', is integrated into the band of modern humans. Although the Neanderthals are

now ‘noble’ instead of brutish savages, the dichotomy ‘same’ and ‘other’ and the relentless enmity between them is unmodified.

A major issue during the 1970s was the question whether Neanderthals were our ancestors or an evolutionary dead-end. Debates between advocates of the ‘replacement model’, which suggested complete replacement of Neanderthals by invading modern humans, and the ‘multiregional model’, suggesting regional populations of hominids evolving into modern humans through gene flow and selective pressure, were intense (Trinkaus and Shipman 1993). Replacement without admixture was the general scientific consensus however, and it was only in 1996 that the first article providing evidence for long term coexistence and interactions between the first modern humans and the last Neanderthals in Europe was published (Hublin et al. 1996). In 1980 two novels appeared that explored this coexistence, *Dance of the Tiger* by palaeontologist Björn Kurtén (the English translation, the original Finnish version was published in 1978) (Kurtén 1995), and Jean Auel’s world-famous *The Clan of the Cave Bear* (Auel 1980), that was based on extensive paleoanthropological research. In both novels Neanderthals are presented as comparable to modern humans, although there are differences in character and behaviour. Kurtén starts by explaining how he wanted to write a novel because he “felt there is much to be told that simply cannot be formulated in scientific reports”, like “what was it like to meet humans not of your own species?”. Kurtén describes how a *Homo sapiens* man, the sole survivor of his tribe, lost and wounded, falls in love with a Neanderthal woman, leader of the Neanderthal clan who rescue him. While for Kurtén the differences between Neanderthals and modern humans are superficial, and the extinction of the Neanderthals is caused by interbreeding causing infertile hybrids, Auel’s Neanderthals are genuinely a separate species, who are more spiritual and more closely connected to the past, doomed to extinction because of their conservatism. Protagonist Ayla is orphaned at age five after an earthquake, and adopted by a Neanderthal clan. As one of ‘the Others’, Ayla is physically and intellectually more evolved than the people of the clan, and she struggles to fit in and confirm to the rigid gender norms. She realizes that the clan is oppressive and incapable of change. As Ayla is cast out at the end of the novel, she sets off to find ‘the Others’. Although *Dance of the Tiger* is a love story, the book was not as appealing to the non-specialist reader as was Auel’s *Clan of the Cave Bear* and its sequels, who are now considered to be the start of a new subgenre, the prehistoric romance (Ruddick 2012).

Separate and superior, a heroic master identity

Although there are many differences in terms of detail, we do notice some key characteristics which all these Neanderthal novels share to some extent. For instance, all novels at a certain point stage an encounter between ‘them’ and ‘us’, between conservative Neanderthals and humans who introduce instances of cultural, behavioural or technical innovation. The division of roles also is remarkably predictable. Humans are explorers or pioneers, entering a territory unknown to them. They seem threatened at first,

but all obstacles (notably the most threatening obstacle, the Neanderthals) are overcome and modern humans emerge from the confrontation as victors. In other words, the humans-Neanderthals encounter follows the hero script. Hackett and Dennell (Hackett and Dennell 2003) analysed well-known works of fiction that focus on the interaction between *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals (*The Grisly Folk*, *The Inheritors*, *Dance of the Tiger*, *Clan of the Cave Bear*), showing that the *Homo sapiens* characters represent the collective hero in a story of struggle and transformation, following Landau's 'hero' narrative (Landau 1984; 1993). This narrative features an initially unassuming hero who departs on a journey of exploration, receives essential aid or equipment from a donor figure, goes through a series of tests and transformations, and finally arrives at a higher (that is, more human) state. The emphasis is on progress in the face of challenges and obstacles, and a sense of purpose. The deficit of Neanderthals is that they do not seem to share this idea of goal-directed progress, which is not only the cause of their own destruction but also serves to highlight the innate superiority of modern humans. A similar narrative structure, with the implicit conclusion that it is better for the world that they died out, could be discerned in academic arguments. According to Hackett and Dennell, the most popular archaeological narratives deal with direct Neanderthal-modern human contact as the primary cause of Neanderthal extinction: such stories appeal to our sense of progress, they explain the nature and purpose of our species, and they reaffirm our uniqueness. We use narrative to separate ourselves from the rest of nature, where the latter includes Neanderthals.

Over the last 20 years, developments in ancient DNA techniques have revolutionized the study of the deep past, making it possible to reconstruct the nuclear Neanderthal genome (Green et al. 2010). This suggested gene flow from Neanderthals into modern humans, implying that, rather than becoming extinct, part of their DNA lives on in people today. Although Neanderthals are now generally included as 'fundamentally human', the quest for a signifying difference, separating them from us continues (Peeters and Zwart 2020). While the details of human origins (e.g. when, where, who) have changed radically over time, the ordering of superior and inferior is more or less left unchanged through the history of the discipline, presenting human evolution as a narrative of the superior *Homo sapiens*, with male domination at its core (Athreya and Ackermann 2020; Villa and Roebroeks 2014). The assumption that domination through destruction is part of human nature is also present in Yuval Harari's bestseller *Sapiens, A Brief History of the World* (Harari 2015; Bayless 2022). He describes the tension between distinction and connection – "They [Neanderthals] were too familiar to ignore, but too different to tolerate" – as a motivation for what may have been "the first and most significant ethnic-cleansing campaign in history" (p18).

According to philosopher and ecofeminist Val Plumwood, who is known for her critical assessment of anthropocentrism, the master story of western culture sees history in terms of conquest and control, appropriation and exploitation, destruction and incorporation (Plumwood 1993). The basis of this lies in a hyperseparated conception of the human, seeing the essentially human as part of a radically separate and higher order of reason, mind or consciousness, set apart from the lower order of naturalness,

where agency and intelligence are lacking and which comprises the body, the woman, the animal and the pre-human. It is a hierarchical conceptual system for sorting, organizing and understanding the world around us, an effective way to position ourselves and orient our research practices, providing a symbolical order, but also an intellectual basis for human-centeredness and domination, making the latter seem inevitable, self-evident and natural. It creates an illusion of autonomy, agency, and isolation. Humans place themselves in the centre as the source of value or meaning, and all others derive their value or disvalue ultimately from their relationship or lack of relationship to this centre. This master identity is gendered, moreover, as the category of the feminine is constructed in a hierarchical opposition to that of masculinity: the terms on the higher side of the binaries being associated with, and serving to define, masculinity, while those on the lower side are associated with, and serve to define, femininity (Freya Mathews 2017). Our ideas and ideals of maleness and femaleness have been formed within these structures of dominance, in which maleness is equated with superiority, and the dominance of the masculine is naturalized and legitimized. While the master identity is gendered, it is not exclusively male, and particularly revolves around a conception of reason on the one hand and nature on the other. It is a dominator identity, that has a pre-established fit with a certain class of men, historically speaking the class of educated white males (Freya Mathews 2017). It depends on the context however, in a palaeolithic context, a female *Homo sapiens* might assume the master identity relative to Neanderthals, who will be constructed as irrational and closer to nature.

Our view of Neanderthals has changed during the last decades. This is partly due to new discoveries, but also to our changing narratives and self-images. Paleoanthropology has been driven by the question “when and why did we break away from the rest of the animal world?” (Lewin 1997), looking for the human mark or spark that separates us. According to Matt Cartmill a large part of what draws people to the study of human origins is the hunger for mythological charters; origin stories that justify our moral judgments about the nature and status and dignity of Man. “We want our origin myths to confirm that human beings are special and tell us what it means to be human” (Cartmill 2002, p196).

The hero archetype

The stories that shape our lives are rarely radically new ones. Most stories are reworkings of myths that are deeply ingrained in human culture, models to understand ourselves and the world around us. The myth of the hero is the most common and best known myth in the world, according to comparative mythology expert Joseph Campbell, whose research was inspired by the work of C.G. Jung, notably his concept of archetypes (Campbell 2008).

Already as a psychiatrist working at the famous Burghölzli mental hospital near Zürich, Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) became interested in correspondences between

experiences of hospitalised patients and ancient religious or mythological motifs, and this resulted in his core theorem: the collective unconscious, the archaic psychic realm of collective ‘complexes’ or ‘archetypes’. The archetype concept guided Jung’s analysis of textual materials, his style of reading, e.g., his interpretation of novels. While Freud and his followers approached documents from a psychopathological perspective (focusing on pathological symptoms of characters or authors or both), Jung apprehends textual materials from a different angle, focussing on the core archetypal ideas at work in them. According to Jung, archetypes can be discerned in the myths of ancient cultures, but also in the dreams, drawings and paintings produced by modern patients, as well as in literary novels, and even in scientific papers. They function like *a priori* templates. They are both *nature* and *nurture* if you like, in the sense that they are key components of our cognitive system, but also key ingredients of our cultural heritage, our socio-cultural environment (Jung 1959; Zwart 2020). The collective unconscious (the aggregate of archetypes) is both a psychic and a cultural concept. Archetypes are congenital mental structures which are activated by experience, by culture. This explains both the tenacious continuity of their basic structure as well as their capacity to evolve. The Mother Earth archetype, for instance, conveys the idea of planet Earth as a living (‘maternal’) body: a superorganism desiring to bring forth and foster life, an idea which fell into disrepute, but resurged in the Gaia hypothesis (Zwart 2020). But we may also recognise the contours of the Mother archetype in views of Africa as the ‘cradle’ or mother continent of humankind, or in Lucy (the Australopithecus afarensis woman whose skeletal remains were unearthed in 1974) as the ‘mother’ of humankind. The hero archetype is a motif based on overcoming obstacles (e.g., overcoming monsters of darkness) and achieving challenging goals. In the case of the hero, the mother is often deceased or absent, so that heroes typically commence their journey as orphans. This applies for instance to Siegfried, the hero in the *Ring des Nibelungen*, the orphan whose mother died and who kills the dragon to acquire the infamous ring. Initially he is a blacksmith apprentice, put to work in a forest smithy to extract and liquify metals from Mother Earth.

Jung saw the hero myth as reflecting a stage of development, guiding the transition to adulthood (Meier 2021). Hero stories can in many ways be seen to present a cultural model of ideal human development (Doty 2000). The archetypal hero, proposed by Jung and further developed by Erich Neumann (Neumann 1954) and Joseph Campbell, is an active, creative, courageous protagonist. He is not aggressive, but nonetheless ready for battle and conflict when challenged, if only to discover that such conflicts are basically confrontations with the unconscious. It is a classic solar hero who symbolises daybreak, crosses thresholds and confronts the monster, the demonic, the instinctive within himself, and even when dark clouds gather, he does not succumb. He does not let himself be dissuaded by his fears and doubts or from feelings of guilt and grief; he lives through them. He is neither afraid of experiencing feelings of weakness, nor does he ultimately allow himself to give in. He endures frustration, loneliness, and rejection and follows his conscience and inner compass, his internalised values. Hero stories follow a separation-initiation-return cycle. Campbell describes how “a hero ven-

tures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder... fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won... the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (Campbell 2008, 45).

Problems with the hero narrative

The hero narrative is problematic in several ways. First of all from a scientific point of view, where the evidence of coexistence and admixture is showing a more complicating picture than that of linear progression while overcoming 'inadequate' Neanderthals. DNA evidence reveals a network of connections, described by paleoanthropologist John Hawks as a "muddy river delta" (Hawks 2016). And recent genetic evidence and archaeological data show that Neanderthals and their modern humans contemporaries were very similar in biological and cultural capacities (Roebroeks and Soressi 2016). The predominant opinion now appears to be that, yes, Neanderthals were people like us, "our equal in humanity" (Papagianni and Morse 2015: p.13).

Furthermore, the hero narrative generally lacks diversity. The hero's journey is a journey to the self, producing the core realization of the most profound human questions, e.g., who am I? It is not a template for gender roles, yet careful examination of the central human agent shows it is consistently 'male'. Heroism is assigned almost exclusively to men. Analysing Campbell's hero, feminist theorists Pearson and Pope note that, while Campbell initially declares that the hero is universal, he then proceeds to discuss the heroic pattern as male and to define the female characters in terms of auxiliary roles, almost always defined in contrast or relation to the active hero. She 'represents' something for him (Nicholson 2011; C. Pearson and Pope 1981).

According to Jung, all humans have a masculine and a feminine side. What characterizes the feminine consciousness is a tendency and capacity for personal relating, in combination with receptivity and openness, while the conscious masculine orientation is dominated by detachment and objectivity. They constitute two halves of a whole, and becoming a whole person entails integrating the unconscious side into consciousness. The two parts should balance each other, but usually, one is developed more dominantly. Most cultures and societies have placed more value on masculine aspects. The dominance of the masculine is so deeply embedded in our culture and language that it is virtually impossible to conceive the world in any other way. Structures of binary opposition have organised our thinking and turned woman into the negative of man.

In *Clan of the Cave Bear*, Jean Auel created the heroine that she didn't have when she was growing up, a woman who is not sitting around for someone to come and save them (Auel 1986). Protagonist Ayla has all the main qualities associated with traditional male heroes, like courage, physical strength, stoicism, independence. This was something that appeared to be difficult to imagine. In 1949, in the major feminist text of the second wave of feminism, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir states that prehistoric woman was submitted passively to her biological fate, like domestic animals, ex-

ploited until their death by men for their labour and reproductive capacities (de Beauvoir 2011). When in 1986 the film *Clan of the Cave Bear* was released, based on the novel, the famed film critic Roger Ebert wrote that the movie “approaches those times with a modern sensibility. It shows us a woman winning respect from a patriarchal tribe, when, in reality, the men would have just banged her over the head real good. It isn’t grim enough about what things were probably like back then.” (Ebert 1986)

As Carol S. Pearson observes, what we imagine immediately when we think of the hero really is only one heroic archetype; the Warrior (C. S. Pearson 1989). In palaeoanthropology this is a well-known archetype, corresponding to Man the Hunter who, according to Lacy and Ocobock is a “Paleo-fantasy” that continues to dominate the literature (Lacy and Ocobock 2023). There is however little concrete fossil or archaeological evidence of gender roles in the deep past, and it does not necessarily correspond to contemporary gender patterns (Fuentes 2021; Nowell and Chang 2014; Coltofean-Arizancu, Gaydarska, and Matić 2021; Lacy and Ocobock 2023; Ocobock and Lacy 2023). Recently, the discovery of ancient female big-game hunters highlights uncritical assumptions about past gender roles (Haas et al. 2020). Another recent example from a stereotyped group in prehistory is the genomic confirmation that the individual buried in a ‘archetypal’ high-status Viking age warrior grave was not biologically male – as had been assumed since its excavation in 1878 – but female (Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2017; Price et al. 2019).

In recent decades a lot of justified attention has been given to rejecting the identity of helpless victims by women, reclaiming power and agency. There has been far less attention however, for reflection on masculinity, and the perils of an identity of heroic masculinity are often less obvious (Kipnis 1994). And although the core pattern of an archetype is tenacious, the archetype nonetheless evolves and continuously changes its shape. According to Meier (Meier 2021), for instance, the hero of today is no longer the shining hero who fights obscurity, who selflessly stands up for the good, but increasingly a negative hero who disrupts. These are narcissistically wounded heroes, who, in Jungian terms, do not confront their shadow but project it onto others, they identify with the demons, are marked by a desire for destruction and revenge as such and are unable to retrieve their values and be transformed. In their quest for identity through heroic autonomy, the current hero is often excessively narcissistic – solitary and self-involved – and lacking connection to his vulnerability (Kipnis 1994). They are immature heroes, driven by the need to assert their individual needs and desires in the world. And although having ego strength is important for the process of individuation, the letting go of it is equally important, being willing and able to sacrifice it for the greater good (Byrne 2000). As described by Robert Segal (in Byrne, 2000, p. 37): “A Jungian hero would return home humbled rather than elevated, wary rather than brash, the saved rather than the saviour.”

Additionally, in contemporary culture, facing climate change and global disruption, the archetype of the exploring, invading, conquering male hero has reached its limits and lost its credibility. It has become a symbol or symptom of something we must strive

to overcome. The 'heroic identity' may once have been functional for the dominance and expansion of Western civilisation, in the age of global ecological crisis it is highly dysfunctional, and ultimately suicidal (Plumwood 2002).

The other side of the story, the orphan archetype

In her famous TED Talk *The Danger of a Single Story*, novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explains the risk of the single story, the one perspective. "The single story creates stereotypes", she contends, "and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete" (Adichie 2009). As was already suggested by Landau (Landau 1993) and Hackett and Dennell (Hackett and Dennell 2003), we need different stories, instead of merely retelling the same hero-centred linear story, narrative structures that perpetuate a masculinity rooted in superiority. Stories that manifest a deeper kind of belonging, broadening the 'us-unit', to include other species, not to mention women, children, and those human groups who have been largely left out of Western accounts. Therefore, the hero archetype is not merely a topic for literary studies, it has acquired global societal relevance. Can our guiding narratives be reframed? Can the story of human history be reframed on the basis of a more inclusive narrative, where otherness is acknowledged as self, in other words where the binary logic of masculine versus feminine, self versus other, human versus not-quite-human is overcome? Now that we have recognised the hidden destructive aspect of the hero archetype, resulting in the undoing of woman, of other species, of 'others', can we become more open to a different narrative which focusses on collaboration and dependence, where difference no longer equals 'negation' and hierarchy?

Archetypal symbols are double-edged swords, and all aspects of the archetype are counterbalanced by their opposites. The hero archetype is inextricably linked to the orphan archetype, they represent both sides of the same archetypal coin. Heroes typically commence their journey as orphans, feeling abandoned and misunderstood, followed by an inflationary stage characterised by arrogance and the conviction that one is something extraordinary (Isaac 2008). We find it interesting to consider this link because the orphan reveals the hero as someone who is vulnerable and dependent, – on woman and other 'others'. Could the figure of the orphan point to other possibilities which are often overlooked in the archetypal hero myth?

In contemporary Western culture the orphan predominantly figures in children's books and films. According to Isaac (Isaac 2008) this might be the only way the independent heroic western spirit can address its inherently vulnerable orphaned condition. These orphan characters are suggested to symbolize the "pain of isolation" (Kimball 1999) and "rootlessness of our times" (Isaac 2008), and to compensate for some sort of cultural imbalance (Babb 2006; Punnett 2014). The orphans are separated from their roots and characterized by abandonment and aloneness. They are longing for home, in search of wholeness, and want to connect, be accepted and understood. There is a feeling of unworthiness, comingled with a feeling of guilt, the archaic guilt for being alive.

In the story of the orphan, there is a strong emphasis on inferiority, on un-fitness. This is already an interesting aspect because it suggests, in Jungian terms, that the hero's self-confidence or even megalomania is actually a compensation or even overcompensation for a primal experience of inferiority, while the hero's autonomy seem to compensate a more fundamental experience of abandonment.

We idealize Western masculinity as embodied in the archetype of the Hero. In their quest for identity through heroic autonomy, heroic males tend to split off their feeling function (Kipnis 1994). According to psychoanalytic theory, male individuality emerges from rejecting his early identification with the mother. This need to disidentify with the mother can become inextricably entangled with a refusal or rejection of all that is considered feminine. Masculinity then becomes confirming that women are what men do not want or dear to be; vulnerable, dependent. The disidentification with the feminine and denial of vulnerability and dependency go hand-in-hand with a fantasy of sovereignty.

Concluding remarks: Changing the master story by identifying the orphan within

In establishing identity, a core conflict involves the need for self-assertion coupled with the longing for connection. By emphasising the importance of connectedness, the figure of the Orphan may function as a counterbalance to an inflated heroic view of early human history. The ambivalence between distinction (the desire to distinguish ourselves) and connection (the need for connectedness) is also at work in the academic literature, albeit less visible. This means that we can use novels to highlight a tension that is relevant for scientific paleoanthropological discourse as well, allowing us to explicate an aspect of science that in academic literature remains implicit but is nonetheless noticeable. Neanderthal novels reveal the shifts that have occurred in our views on Neanderthals in terms of different or similar, deficient or superior, strange or familiar. Stories can therefore reflect and reveal current anxieties and preoccupations, as well as implicit biases underlying our ideas and ideals of human and humanness, allowing us to understand them more fully.

The fascination for Neanderthals that novelist share with researchers is that they, being human but 'not-us' at the same time, provide a way of defining ourselves by contrasting what it means to be 'us' as opposed to 'them'. We try to understand Neanderthals in terms of their humanity, but confirm our own identity by emphasising the difference between us and them. Defining your identity typically means setting yourself apart from otherness, as Hegel extensively argued, quoting Spinoza's famous dictum that "all determination is negation" (Hegel 1812, p122). We determine our identity by contrasting ourselves with something or someone else who is said to *lack* something which 'we' allegedly have. In other words, efforts to identify humanness with some particular features (be it symbolic behaviour, language, innovation, etc.) means *denying*

this distinguishing feature to others. Neanderthals are thus usually seen of interest primarily in relation to ourselves, both in novels as in academia, and the focus of attention is on the encounter of late Neanderthals with early modern humans (Hackett and Dennell 2003).

Our self-narrative aims to explain, but also to justify who we are. The prevailing story is one of struggle and competition, of winners and losers. Our self-image is archetypically masculine; competitive and egocentric. Care, community, belonging have been eliminated from our collective values and institutions. Separation from and domination of nature (and those associated with nature, like women, ancient humans, indigenous peoples) is a mark of Western culture. But ‘masters of the universe’ suffer from a false sense of autonomy and invulnerability, and run the risk of losing their ability to empathise with others. They believe security can be found on the individual level, in tightening control over the hyper-separated and subordinated other (Plumwood 2002). The problem is that the sense of power and autonomy is illusory, and it obscures a real and radical dependency on the Other. Dependency is not a threat but a prerequisite to and component of autonomy, there is no such thing as total independence. To transform our narcissistic search for the self (i.e., seeking confirmation of our view of ourselves as exceptional and superior) into a meaningful quest for identity, we need to relinquish the heroic attitude so prevalent in our culture and identify the orphan within (Isaac 2008). We should not only value power and agency, but also powerlessness, dependency and vulnerability. Rather than on the individual level, we can find security and comfort in the collective, in achieving mutuality based on our interconnected needs.

If we are to survive the Anthropocene, we need a different kind of storytelling. Stories about connectedness, rather than separation, focusing on collaboration and dependence, where difference no longer equals ‘negation’ and hierarchy. We have to retrieve our roots in the sense of connectedness and belonging. And one way of doing so is to develop a more inclusive understanding of early human history. The hero’s autonomy is a response to deprivation and isolation, but rather than trying to secure heroic autonomy at the expense of otherness, we should acknowledge our rootedness and continuous dependence on otherness.

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