

Where is the literature of the origins of humanity? Where are the epics, the novels, the short stories, the plays, the poems, the songs, the libretti of our foundational ancestral stories?

We have always given homage to historical inventors and explorers. Every child knows Columbus, Magellan, Thomas Edison, the Wright brothers, Alexander Graham Bell, George Washington Carver, Eli Whitney, Johannes Gutenberg, Benjamin Franklin, Henry Ford, Nikola Tesla, James Watt, Louis Pasteur, Alexander Fleming, and perhaps the Lumière brothers or John Harrison. More recently, we might include Steve Jobs and Tim Berners-Lee. And of course we should not forget the ancient Greeks such as Archimedes, Eratosthenes and Thales of Miletus, or the ancient Chinese who made so many first that were not discovered in the west until centuries later.

But these people, living in the last few hundred or thousand years, were alive because their more distant ancestors included some who made even more fundamental innovations that helped their families and tribes survive.

Who has given a voice to, and imagined a name for, the unknown prehistoric ancestors who were the first to reason, to talk, to plan, to build, to organize, to lead? Who was the first fire maker? Who made the first wheel or the first boat? Who was the first to make sharp tools from rock? Who were the craftsmen whose tools and weapons were the best ever made?

Who was the first to notice that plants have seeds that will sprout and grow if planted, and that the best plants produced the best offspring, and that dung and discarded food could act as a fertilizer, and that certain times of the year are best for planting? Who was the first to build fences to keep wild pigs or goats or aurochs or jungle foul? Who noticed that the best animals when bred together tend to produce the best offspring? Who was the first to feed and care for and breed the wolves that hung around the trash heaps, and who was the first to use such wolves as hunting companions?

Who were the best talkers, those with a passion for naming things and for developing the rules we now call grammar? Who were the ones with the best memories for the places that had the most abundant food, or which plants were edible and which not, or how to prepare some plants to be edible? Who was the first writer, able to communicate and store knowledge by making marks in the dirt or on rocks or mud pies? Who were the people with wanderlust, who felt that there was something better elsewhere for their families and were prepared to walk for weeks or months or years to find it?

In short, who were the people whose practices and innovations helped their groups survive and prosper and eventually spread throughout the world?

Of course such developments must have been gradual and probably happened repeatedly in many locations over the millennia. But there must have been some people who were just better at it than others and who taught others in their group. Where is the imagination that could put names and stories to these people? Even if we don't know their names, these people deserve at least as much credit as the post-historic inventors whom we do know and celebrate. Is that not

the purpose of fiction, to describe imaginary events and people? Who could be more important than the people to whom we owe our very existence?

The great historical epics have not done it. They typically relate to heroic deeds of an individual person of unusual courage and unparalleled bravery. But courage and bravery are themselves not always enough in the long run. New ideas were needed, not just tenacity to keep doing the old things.

There have been a few attempts. Among the best known are the 1911 novel *The Quest for Fire* by Belgian author J.-H. Rosny, which is set in Paleolithic Europe (80,000 years ago), with its plot surrounding the struggle for control of fire by early humans. In his 1959 bestseller "Hawaii", American author James Michener traced the history of the Hawaiian Islands from their earliest geological formations through the arrivals of diverse immigrants from other parts of the world. Michener's 1996 novel *The Source* covers 12,000 years of successive civilizations in Israel. *The Clan of the Cave Bear* (1980) by Jean M. Auel has a time-frame somewhere between 28,000 and 25,000 BCE, corresponding generally with archaeological estimates of the Neanderthal branch of mankind disappearing. The Wikipedia article on prehistoric fiction lists more, but many of these are ahistorical fictions that posit magic or dinosaurs coexisting with humans or other nonsense. The real story must have been incredible enough without all that.

Perhaps the greatest problem is that it is difficult to connect emotionally with the story arc of the development of humanity that extends over a few millions years and many millions of generations, whereas we are understandably most interested in stories that span one human lifetime and that deal with historical figures whose names we know. But the pre-historic figures we don't know were just as real; they had families and names and must have experienced the same conflicts and struggles and formed the same attachments that are the basis of most of our stories.

It seems to me that any society whose interests extend to the development of our solar system and of our galaxy should include those who could tell the story of the development of the dominant species on the third planet.

Where is that literature?

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