

A Walk Through Deep History: Narrative, Embodied Strategies, and Human Evolution

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Abstract

*Drawing on work in cognitive neuroscience and psycholinguistics, narrative theorists have argued that making sense of stories builds on schemata drawn from our embodied experience of the world. Put simply, as audiences immerse themselves into fictional worlds, they bring their bodies along—and this makes an important difference for interpretation. This essay explores this difference in relation to two prose narratives that seek to connect readers with the ‘deep history’ of human evolution: “Out of Eden” (2013-), a writing project by American journalist Paul Salopek; and *The Inheritors* (1955), a novel by British author William Golding. Both narratives strategically exploit readers’ embodied resonance as they imagine (respectively) the migration of our ancestors and the life of a group of Neanderthals. In this way, Salopek and Golding use embodied experience as a probe into the ideologically loaded question of human difference—and of our position vis-à-vis the nonhuman world.*

Keywords: narrative; human evolution; Neanderthals; embodied simulation; biocultural turn.

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