

ings. The mechanics of cultural change and evolution are reduced to genetic coding and are, in effect, fated.

As the reading list of pre-historic fiction grows it should be considered what is its appeal and raison d'être. Certainly, as a subject for fiction it is not one which expresses an author's personal experiences of life. Though Auel's novel does consider sexual politics which obviously does have contemporary relevance, its main strength lies in its general educational value and in this regard the author is to be applauded for her thorough research and imaginative reconstruction of Neanderthal society. However, does this account for the book's wide readership, or does it have as much to do with a back-to-the-earth and survivalist ethic, which as an aspect of her personal research is stressed in the author's biographic outline. A glance at the critical blurbs adorning the jacket of the paperback edition give some interesting, if somewhat biased, insights into its potential market: "Real Roots", "A good old-fashioned tale with a spunky Stone-Age tomboy

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COMMENT from John Barrett to M. Braithwaite "Bare-faced, but not naked, ape" ARC 1(2):62-3.

As one of the offenders selected by Ms Braithwaite, perhaps I might be allowed to accept fully the criticism levelled by her at my unthinking adoption of current, ideological formulations of asymmetry between male:female.

I say this having just read Pierpoint (1981). In this paper Pierpoint tells us that Levi-Strauss and Turner have "shown the importance of the manner in which man divides up his world, his lands, his goods and his body for the way he organises his society"

named Ayla" and "Our nomination for the year's great escape".

There is a long tradition of 'wild men' in both popular and high western art and literature whose membership runs the gamut from hairy saints to Caliban and King Kong. As a public image, the idea of the existence of non-civilized groups beyond the borders of society has been dually used to define society's own virtues (when opposed to that which is barbaric) and, alternatively, to present a way of life untainted by the vices of society (the concept of the 'noble savage'). With so few physical frontiers remaining for 'wild' survival it seems that the past can also fulfil this social need. Certainly, to some degree, the growth of popular fiction which sympathetically presents a distant past, can be considered as an index of dissatisfaction with the twentieth century present. While it would be a pity if Jean Auel's novel was not given greater attention except in the context of temporal escapism, it remains a very good example of archaeology serving the present.

(p. 47). Indeed, Pierpoint then goes on to 'show' that in the Yorkshire barrows a greater proportion of primary graves contain males than they do women or children. This is then taken further through an analysis of associated artefacts, "the fine vessels (beakers) were placed with males, and the poor quality ones with women and children" (p. 52).

Pierpoint's is an interesting paper and there are a number of ways in which we might approach it. We might ask, for example, whether his Fig. 4.3 does indeed represent the "clear dichotomy" between male and female burial, of which he speaks. We might note that in his

Figs. 4.5 and 4.6 solid circles = male, whilst open circles = women/children/sex unknown/age unknown; a representation thus perpetuating the visible:invisible distinction noted by Ms Braithwaite. However a further, worrying, point is the nature of the original data. I do not know the details of the skeletal identifications which are used in this analysis, but it does seem likely that the sexing of skeletons is a more complex task than we sometimes like to believe. Is it possible that sex identification took place in the light of the position in which the body had been recovered and the 'quality' of the associated grave goods? And if this is so is it not inherently likely that the 'primary' and 'rich' graves would be regarded as male whilst the 'secondary' and 'poor' graves taken to represent the passive and invisible world of women, children and 'unknowns'?

I have not written this letter as an attack upon Pierpoint, nor I hope as an attempt to salve my own conscience. I am sure that Pierpoint would be as surprised to read this as I was to read Ms Braithwaite's original note. But the formation of the past in our own image (whether we like that image or not) is an area which archaeologists, and historians, must identify and investigate. In the catalogue of the current York exhibition "The Vikings in England" there is, on page 106, a drawing in which a Viking woman stands behind, and on one side of, a Viking man. She is to his left, and in the perspective of the drawing shorter than he. His image impinges upon hers. It will, I fear, be some time before archaeologists, let alone the visitors to such an exhibition, recognise the subtlety and power in such a representation.

Pierpoint, S. 1981 Land, settlement and society in the Yorkshire Bronze

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Age. in Prehistoric Communities in Northern England ed. G.Barker, 41-56. Sheffield University, Sheffield.

Roesdahl, E., J. Graham-Campbell, P. Connar and K. Pearson (eds) 1981 The Vikings in England and in their Danish Homeland. The Anglo-Danish Viking Project, London.

REPLY from Mary Braithwaite:

I should just like to add one further comment on the problem of 'androcentrism' in archaeology. John Barrett rightly says that "the formation of the past in our own image ... is an area which archaeologists ... must identify and investigate". The problem is that these images are simultaneously ethnocentric and androcentric - ethnocentric biases are inevitably also androcentric biases, for that is the nature of our culture and language. Gender biases as apparent as those noted by John Barrett are but the tip of an iceberg, although they serve very well as a point of entry into the problems of 'andethnocentrism' (if I might coin a new word). When it is understood that all our theories are based on particular evaluations of the relative significance of different areas and forms of activity in societies, and on particular ways of categorising social action then the problem can be seen as immense. For instance, various contrasts used in the description and understanding of social life, such as public/domestic, hunter/gatherer, are not only rooted in particular (political and cultural) conceptions, but carry value judgements about their relative significance for understanding social structure and change that are rooted in those same political and cultural perspectives. The task of exposing our biases is vast.