

= Hominid (novel) =

Hominid is a short novel by Austrian writer Klaus Ebner . Taking place millions of years ago , it is a fictional story of a band of extinct hominids who inhabit Central Africa . Referencing the seven days of biblical Creation , the novel takes place in seven days . As the protagonist Pitar leads his band to civilization , tension arises between the clan leader Costello and his rival Re . Over the course of the story , Pitar invents tools , discovers the use of fire , and falls in love with Maluma . The seventh day marks a turning point in the storyline , as the members of the band separate from one another .

The characters ' contemporary language and Pitar 's thorough knowledge of modern @-@ day history , philosophy and science add to the grotesque humor of the novel , while his two friends quote classical Roman literature and Chinese sayings . The book was published by Viennese publisher FZA Verlag in October 2008 . Between 2008 and 2010 , several Austrian and German critics and writers published reviews of the novel .

= = Background = =

Ebner first considered writing a novel in which prehistoric characters have present @-@ day knowledge and a modern language in 2006 . Believing that this topic would not suffice for a long novel , he initially did not pursue the idea . In February 2008 Ebner won the Wiener Werkstattpreis in the categories of short story and essay ? in addition to the prize money the organizer of the award , the Viennese publishing house FZA , offers to the winner to publish a 100 @-@ page book . Hence Ebner wrote and finalized his narrative within four months . The book was published in the October of the same year with the German title Hominide . The publisher introduced the work to the public with a public reading in Vienna .

The novel consists of seven chapters , " Day 1 " to " Day 7 " , with the action of each chapter occurring on consecutive days . The chapters refer to the seven days of the biblical Creation . In comparison with other works of Ebner , Hominid is the first to be about a prehistoric subject . The author had already addressed topics of religious faith before , in the short stories ? Der Schreiber von Aram (The Scribe of Aram) ? and ? Momentaufnahme (Snapshot) ? , and frequently used a satirical style for his narratives .

= = Plot synopsis = =

Hominid takes place several million years ago in the Central African transitional region between rainforest and savanna . The main characters are Australopithecus afarenses , an extinct , mostly tree @-@ dwelling hominid that existed before the use of tools and fire . The story is told through first @-@ person narration by the protagonist , Pitar . In deliberating his social and natural environment , Pitar decides to lead his band to civilization : ? Hence I decided to shed some light on the darkness , to light a candle following the motto Let there be light and so on . ? His linguistic capacity , thoughts and speech correspond to those of modern man , and he also is knowledgeable about history , politics , philosophy and literature . Intermittent comments made by Pitar concerning a particular prospect or artifact that has not been invented or developed yet add to the humor of the grotesque scenario . Pitar 's close friends are Carpediem , who enunciates Latin phrases and quotes the writers of Classical Antiquity , and Lao , who frequently refers to Chinese philosophy .

Although it is difficult to convince his fellow Hominidae to follow him , Pitar manages to persuade the patriarchal leader of the clan , Costello , who has taken command from the recently deceased Thorn . The band builds windbreaks to help them descend more often from the trees , thus exposing them to a higher risk of being attacked by predators on the ground . A rivalry emerges between Costello and another band member , Re , who not only questions the leading abilities of the present alpha but also desires Costello 's females . To alleviate the escalating debate of authority , Pitar tries to implement a parliament to settle disputes peacefully . Costello , however , considers the parliament to be a forum in which he can consolidate his power , citing famous speeches by Winston Churchill and Abraham Lincoln ; the other members ruin this noble idea with their lack of discipline

and ostentatious indifference .

One of the subplots of the novel details the budding love between Pitar and Maluma , a female member of the band . Costello perceives the group of females as his personal harem , but when Maluma falls in love with Pitar she breaks off her relationship with him . On each day , the characters discover new insights and artefacts , but seek rest from their exhaustion by the seventh day . This repose , however , is disrupted by the attack of a saber @-@ toothed cat . Several members of the band are killed , including Costello , thus enabling Re to assume power . Pitar and Maluma decide to leave the band , stating , " We should leave in time , leave Re and his new Reich , which , when I 'm taking into account Thorn 's previous reign , would be the Third over here . " Pitar and Maluma head toward the savanna , an action which alludes to both the expulsion from paradise and the Out of Africa theory . Only odd @-@ numbered chapters narrate the love story , which bookmarks the novel . Writer Karin Gayer mentions in her review that the love story of Pitar and Maluma , and its positioning within the text , offers " a second interpretation of the beginning and the end " .

= = Characters = =

In a conversation with the Viennese regional leader of publisher Arovell , Ebner revealed the hidden meanings of his characters ' names .

Akshaya : The name originates from Hindi (specifically Sanskrit) and signifies ? the indomitable ? . Akshaya is a female character with a firm personality , and belongs to the band although she often acts as an antepole in regard to Costello . In a certain sense she represents the matriarchal form of governance by daring to disagree with the alpha and making her own decisions .

Bongo : Originates from the African people and language and is also used for place names in several African countries , also alluding to Adriano Celentanos film Bingo Bongo and a kind of forest antelope . The novel presents Bongo as a clownish , male juvenile who teases the other members of the band but is protected from backlashes by his youth and humor .

Carpediem : Latin for " seize the day " , literally meaning " pluck the day " , which stems from a poem by Horace . Carpediem is Pitar 's closest friend and uses Latin quotations and expressions .

Costello : English @-@ Italian surname . Costello is the patriarch of the band . Keen on remaining in power , he recognizes that Pitar 's ideas might help him prevail . For this reason he supports Pitar .

Djamila : A female character who belongs to Costello 's harem . Her name stems from the Arabic language meaning " the pretty one " .

Ischa : A female character who belongs to Costello 's harem . Together with Djamila she woos the clan leader . Her name stems from the Semitic languages meaning " woman " .

Konrad : Old High German for " bold or good adviser " . Konrad is a follower of Re and acts as his speaker , also challenging and ridiculing Pitar 's ideas .

Lao : Depending on the intonation , the word is Chinese for " firm , solid " or " old " . It is also an allusion to either or both the philosopher Lao @-@ Tzu , author of the Tao Te Ching , or the Lao people who live in Southeast Asia . The character Lao quotes Chinese philosophers and is a friend of Pitar . When he leaves the band after the attack of the sabre @-@ tooth , he goes in the direction of East Africa and Asia .

Lucy : An allusion to Lucy , the skeleton of an Australopithecus afarensis specimen discovered in 1974 in Ethiopia . Lucy is the mother of most children in the band . At the end of the book she leaves for East Africa with Lao and Maluma .

Maluma : Maluma is an artificial word from synesthesia , representing curvy and smooth shapes . She becomes the loving companion of Pitar . Through Maluma , Pitar discovers the power and the sweets of love .

Manisha : This name stems from the Hindi and Sanskrit languages , signifying " the wise " . In Hinduism , Manisha is the goddess of the mind . Among the clan 's women , Manisha has a similar role as Lao has among the men . She easily holds her own in discussions with the males , and her reasoning is witty and logical .

Pitar The protagonist 's name stems from Sanskrit and means " father " ; its intonation lies on the second syllable : " Pitár " . Pitar narrates the story of which he is the main character .

Re : Italian for " king " , also an allusion to the ancient Egyptian sun god Re or Ra . Re is Costello 's opponent and antagonist . An aggressive character , he perceives Pitar as an enemy because of Pitar 's perceived support for the band 's leader . He repeatedly defies Costello but does not dare to start an open revolt . The attack of the sabre @-@ toothed cat , which kills Costello and some other members of the band , enables Re to become the leader at the end of the novel .

Rhododendron : Greek for " rose tree " , a genus of flowering plants in the family Ericaceae . The character Rhododendron is a male member of the band with an ecological attitude . Rhododendron is only a supporting actor in the story .

Ruth : Hebrew for " companion " . Ruth is a female band member with a distinctive strength of character . When the band is constructing their first windshield , she pushes a fervent discussion about labor law and commences a strike .

Thorn : This name stems from the Germanic languages and is the denomination of the rune Thurisaz ᚚ , pronounced as ʈʈʈ . Thorn is the eldest of the clan and considered a sage . He appears only in the first two chapters , at the end of which he dies . From a dynastic point of view , he was Costello 's predecessor .

= = Major themes = =

The novel addresses hominization from an ironic point of view . Mankind 's evolution from the ape @-@ like Australopithecus afarensis to modern society with history , technology and cultural expression is compressed into only seven days . The strong allusion to faith is contrasted by numerous references to scientific insights . With the evolution of mankind starting in Central Africa , Lucy is the name given to the first skeleton of an Australopithecus afarensis found . The characters mention that Homo erectus would be the hominid species to tame fire . Orrorin and Toumaï represent two of the oldest @-@ known hominin ancestors , while Aegyptopithecus zeuxis is one of the earliest primates . Through scientific references and a distinct ironic tone , Ingrid Reichel makes it clear in her review that the book cannot be taken in by any religion or fundamentalism .

While scholars know of patriarchal and matrifocal ancient societies , very little can be said about a society of a species , which is as remote as Australopithecus . On the basis of examples in today 's chimpanzee and bonobo societies , Klaus Ebner introduced both patriarchal and matriarchal characters in the novel , Costello and Akshaya . Some of the female characters are very strong and self @-@ conscious , such as Akshaya , who is so firm that even Costello retrocedes from her . While political power is controlled by the males , the social structure seems matrifocal and matrilineal , corresponding to the image of prehistoric societies exhibited by scholars .

Another theme is the love story between Pitar and Maluma . While the society of the band is depicted as driven by sexual attraction in a male hierarchy , the relationship between Pitar and Maluma leads them to break away from traditional habitudes . Pitar is not the alpha male , but he starts a love relationship on his own , in which Maluma quits Costello 's harem . The love story demonstrates love as a quite late cultural achievement of mankind . In addition , Karin Gayer emphasizes the significance of Pitar 's and Maluma 's love against the religious component in defining the love story and its positioning within the storyline as another concept " of the beginning and the end " .

= = Style = =

Hominid is a short novel which contains one single and linear storyline . However , it is subdivided into seven chapters , each standing for a narrated day . The satirical character of the book stems from the underlying grotesque scenario , the speeches of Pitar and his fellow hominids , the mentioning of artifacts which have not yet been invented , and the numerous allusions to world history and literature .

Steffen Roye from the German literary magazine Verstärker states in the title of his book review that

Ebner has the characters of his story " talk as if they were modern @-@ day juveniles " . When it comes to allusions , a number of them consist of quotes , usually from classical Latin writers .

Ebner 's writing style is rich in detail , as Ingrid Reichel states , and she pinpoints the " artist of the word " . Similar judgments have been made by other critics when they reviewed the preceding works by Ebner , such as Wolfgang Ratz about *Auf der Kippe* or Julia Rafael about *Lose* .

= = Reception and criticism = =

Heinz Gerstinger thinks the book is a " history of the awakening of the spirit of mankind " . The author has the events glided " into the playful by his gently irony " . Several reviewers underline the narrative 's ironic and satirical aspect , including the names of the characters , Latin quotations and idioms as well as the parallelism between the seven days of Creation and scientific hominization . Ingrid Reichel points out the perfect publication date , just in time for the 150th anniversary of Charles Darwin 's theory of evolution . Similarly to other reviewers who had written about Ebner 's earlier books , she highlights the sophisticated use of a detail @-@ rich language which is " steeped in subtle and sensitive humor " .

Despite many explicit allusions to several world religions , Ingrid Reichel states that the novel is a book for ? readers with humor , for reasoners (?) , for darwinists , on no account for creationists , to a lesser extent for people of faith , but rather for atheists , ? and fundamentalists drop out entirely ? . Another aspect is identified by Karin Gayer when pinpointing the parallel evolution of the patriarchal hierarchy in the narrated society and the alluded social matriarchy , the first resembling chimpanzee communities and the second representing those of bonobos . In addition , she points out the strength of the women characters . She declares that at the time of the *Australopithecus* , neither chimpanzees nor bonobos existed , but " the author is not interested in paleoanthropologic precisenesses ? he is interested in mirroring our society , in exposing human behavior " . She compares Costello with the alpha of a community of chimpanzees and a classical manager , and Akshaya with bonobo females and a modern @-@ day career woman . With regard to these underlying comparisons , Gayer says , " On another level we are struck by the permanent notional commingling of the simian and the human , a composition which leaves us pensive and asks the legitimate question where we , who consider ourselves sapiens in a double sense , should finally classify man . "

The multitudinous allusions to well @-@ known and lesser @-@ known books , movies and sayings cause contradicting receptions . While Heinz Gerstinger and Ingrid Reichel explicitly highlight the comical effect of the insinuations , the German critic Steffen Roye regards them as sometimes " exaggerated " and says , " As the story develops , it becomes more and more like a revue . " The numerous expressions in foreign languages , especially in Latin , remain untranslated in the first edition . In her review , Ingrid Reichel invites the publisher to add a glossary to a new edition . The author subsequently released such a glossary on his own website .