

INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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THE DOLPHIN – HUMAN BOND

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Content

Abstract	1
Keywords	1
Introduction	1
Ancient dolphin-human relationship	2
Humans – a cetaceanlike species.....	3
Ancient representation of cetaceans	5
The companion.....	5
The healer.....	6
The fortune teller.....	7
The saviour.....	7
Conflicted Relationship.....	9
Appendix: Closing remarks from the author	11
Literature	13

Abstract

This fictional essay about a cetacean professor - in a future where dolphins are on the top of the world - studying the ancient human – dolphin relationship points out the dichotomy between the image of cetaceans and their treatment these days. On account of seeing one's own through the eyes of another species we try to gain a new perspective and understand the human – dolphin relationship.

Keywords

#dolphins #human-animal interaction #fiction #future #representations

Introduction

This essay is a summarization of the first sessions of a seminar held by Prof. Fi. Seta. Tilikum this Trias about the ancient dolphin¹ - human² relationship. We used data collected and restored in the last 1.5 years from ancient sites like Oyash (humanly known as Los Angeles), Irminger (Büsum) and Agulhas (Osaka). We decoded these historical texts with the ITR/OTR and used them in an attempt to let humans speak for themselves, rather than speaking for them. This present study tries to interact on the same wave with humans and strives to not judge humans according to values and norms developed by cetaceans³.

We try to establish a give-and take relationship between researcher and subject, that's why this version is translated into human songs so they can also learn something about and from their history. We are aware of the fact that we cannot just apply our terminology, cosmology and our categories on this cetaceanlike species so there will be misinterpretations and translation mistakes, but we see this paper as a pool to connect with each other and exchange feelings.

¹ We use the word dolphin which was used for our kind by humans – hereby we refer to the whole group of cetacean species

² How they called themselves

³ Cetaceancentrism

Ancient dolphin-human relationship

So long and thanks for all the fish
So sad that it should come to this
We tried to warn you all but oh dear
You may not share our intellect
Which might explain your disrespect
For all the natural wonders that
grow around you

Text of a moving history around 1980 h.t.

This song from an ancient moving history called “The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy” predict some of the events happening the following 757.’’ years on earth. Once the dominant species – in a time called Anthropocene – humans could not cope with the changes in the environment and are nowadays one of the few remaining beings remaining on land. In the Cetaceanocene⁴ only three percent of the earth are covered by landmass compared to the one third in the Anthropocene. Humans could not easily adapt to the process of change and instead of working together they started fighting each other⁵ – this incident is one of the reasons why still a lot of cetaceans think humans have no social sense and we are superior to them. So, while humans killed each other and destroyed most of their natural habitat, cetaceans further evolved and built their underwater empire. Because of their barbaric behaviour humans were seen as ignorant and backwardly. In our use of songs, we conceptualized humans as objects – we reduced them to their biology and saw their comportment as a malfunction of nature. We asked ourselves the question do humans have a soul? In other words, do they have feelings, thoughts, and a social sense? Until 24.3’’’7 we would have thought no.

With the development of the ITR/OTR the research done on species living on land took a big step forward and Prof. Fi. Seta. Tuarteko decoded some human sounds as singing. Since then we gone a long way and are now able to communicate with this primitive species. However more interesting for us are the historic findings from the Anthropocene – a time where dolphins and humans interacted with each other. The relationship between both species was shaped by certain representations of dolphins, the deep times of human abuse of cetaceans and the special bond with have with them based on our similarities.

⁴ Scholars discussing the actual starting point of a time where cetaceans are the dominant species on earth – some (for example Makaioaioaio) say as early as 65.’’’7 some (for example Kohanaohan and Nakaiikai) would start at around 998.’’3

⁵ For a more detailed information about this time see Takuuak

Humans – a cetaceanlike species

In this section we relay also on ancient human data. There the possibility is high for translation mistakes but we still think this data is important to show us an emic perspective of the historic dolphin-human relationship.

For one thing dolphins and humans are quite different, then again, we have fairly much in common. In the past and the present there is plenty evidence for intelligence, self-awareness, and emotional complexity in humans.

They even have bigger brains, in relative size, than dolphins and even though its structure is different its complexity is quite similar. Humans studied our ancestors and recognized a remarkable range of cognitive skills like “passing the [...] Gallup test of mirror self-recognition, program-level imitation, language-like skills, vocal learning, (common in birds, but relatively rare in mammals) mental representation, metacognition, exceptional memory, behavioural innovation, and tool use with marine sponges (Sergeant & Mann: 152). In their belief system the human kind was the crown of creation so when ancient “neuroanatomical techniques have demonstrated convincingly that the cetacean brain, especially the neocortex⁶, are at least as complex as that of other terrestrial mammals, including human and non-human primates” some humans⁷ were dedicated to establish an understanding between humans and cetaceans (Marino 2013: 97). This recognition was an important step for the human – dolphin relationship in order to interact on the same wave.

Due to the large complex brain and their cognitive abilities some human scientists draw the conclusion that the dolphin sense of self is not unlike their own. There are also similarities in lifespan - Dolphins and humans both have remarkably high life expectancy with long youth stages (Smolker 2002: 48). Even our behaviour is sometimes alike – for example humans also self-harm them sometimes and they have the particularity to call for someone with a distinctive tune⁸ too.

⁶ The most relevant structure to intelligence and cognitive complexity (Marino 2013: 96)

⁷ For example Rachel Smolker, John Lilly, and Lori Marino to name just a few of them

⁸ Humans call someone specific by their name see Foer (2015).

We both have complex sociality and cultural traditions - like cetaceans, humans “live in large, highly complex societies with differentiated relationships that include long-term bonds, higher order alliances, and cooperative networks that rely extensively upon learning and memory” (Marino 2013: 98). Similar to us human individuals take on different roles in the society to simplify decision-making processes and working processes. Humans have different productive abilities and needs and therefore they specialize best in their work and share the work products. Humans also know the system of reciprocity. For us the sharing of food is self-evident, as we do it often and without further thought. But sharing food is costly, especially if you don’t have much of it (Smolker 2002: 49). This challenges our view of humans as a self-serving species.

Another attribute that most sets them apart from the of other non-cetacean is the “transmission of learned behaviour from one generation to the next” – culture (Marino 2013: 98). In ancient times culture was a “behaviour trait often considered a hallmark of being ‘human’” (Sergeant & Mann: 153) – by humans. None the less culture - behaviour that develops through social learning - was always one of the fundamental pillars of cetacean society. Like the “largest delphinid, the killer whale (*Orcinus orca*), [who] exhibits clear examples of vocal culture, with pod-specific dialects and interclan (but not intercommunity) whistle similarity that is believed to be used to maintain group cohesion” humans use different regional dialects to communicate within their area and show their affiliation to their group (Sergeant & Mann: 161).

As shown above even though our genealogical streams divided and flew in different directions a long time ago, the human species is still one of those closest to us in social and emotional complexity. We are not that different - in ancient human stories about the origin of cetacean’s humans and cetaceans actually are the same: legend has it that humans (Tyrrhenian pirates) were transformed into dolphins⁹. In addition to Cheryl Joseph a human scientist who once said: “Given sociology’s premise that the human beings are social animals whose behaviours are shaped by the individuals, groups, social structures, and environments of which we are part, it seemed both logical and timely to enjoin the discipline with the study of other animals in the context of human society” (DeMello 2012: 20) – cetacean beings are also social animals whose behaviours are shaped by the individuals, groups, social structures, and environments of which we are part, and we should now study humans in the context of cetacean society and with consideration of the history of the dolphin – human relationship.

⁹ See the *Haliutica* from Oppian, 1098

This seminar could be one small step bringing the two species closer together again. Therefore, it is important to learn from the past – we will get to know different ancient representations of the dolphin to better understand the human – dolphin relationship and we will also look at the mistakes that were done. The consideration of the human abuse of dolphins is not intended to spark rage again against humans, this time we are the more powerful species and we should not repeat the horrors.

Ancient representation of cetaceans

In this section we learn something about the different illustrations of cetaceans in the Anthropocene. We gathered them in groups with one main figure.

The companion

„They call him Flipper, Flipper, faster than lightning,
no-one you see is smarter than he,
and we know Flipper lives in a world full of wonder,
flying there under, under the sea!
Everyone loves the king of the sea,
ever so kind and gentle is he,
tricks he will do when children appear,
and how they laugh when he’s near!”

Text from the moving history “Flipper” 1964

One of the most often used figure is that of the dolphin as a friend of humans (mostly children), like in the famous moving history “Flipper”, where single parent Porter Ricks and his two sons Sandy (15) and Bud (10) experience adventures with their kind and gentle dolphin friend Flipper. There are also ancient Greek stories about children befriending a dolphin (Montagu 2003: 32). “Uncommon euphoria, happiness, beauty and love – these are what the human being sees and feels when meeting friendly dolphins at sea” (Servais 2005: 215). The image of the kind and friendly dolphin is probably associated with our anatomic smile which is a conciliation signal in the primate culture. Also because of eye-contact – another non-verbal interaction linked to loving closeness – the smiling dolphin is seen as a kind friend (ibid.: 224).

Another reason for the ancient figure of the dolphin as a comrade are the incidents where dolphins assisted fishermen. “In the Mediterranean from the earliest days, as recorded by Aelian in his *On the Characteristics of Animals* (VI, 15) to the present day, torchlight fishing with the aid of dolphins has been a traditional way of fishing” (Montagu 2003: 37) and there are plenty more examples¹⁰ of the ancient figure of the dolphin as a comrade.

¹⁰ Aborigines catching mullet with the help of porpoises, the pink-bellied river dolphin helping Trapajós in the Amazon or the killers of eden assist whalers in hunting baleen whales

As we can see our ancestors - used to hunt together and share food – saw ancient humans as partners to surf the same wave and hunt and share food together. They met them on equal terms.

The healer

Furthermore, there is the ancient figure of the dolphin as a miraculous healer. It is strongly connected to a concept called animal assisted therapy – some kind of occult practice where it is believed that dolphins possess special powers to heal all sorts of diseases. Therefore, they were kept under incetacean circumstances, due to their distinct need for harmony they still helped the ill humans. Often, they were autistic humans, humans suffering from neurological damage, disabled humans, or humans with depression.

The effects of the encounter with the altruistic dolphins would manifest for example in a “consistent increase of sustained attention span during dolphin-child encounters” of an autistic child, that autistic “children were calmer and more self-sufficient” or “no longer displayed abusive behaviour” (Smith 2003: 240 ff.). All these stories about therapeutic sessions often have the rhetoric of a miracle – dolphins somehow caused the observed improvement. Yet there are no concrete research results that prove that kind of healing power. It is verified that our “ultrasound frequencies in the region of 2,000 Hz, high above human hearing, nevertheless have a calming and pleasurable effect on human brain waves, possibly by triggering the release of endorphins” and we have different methods to make diagnoses¹¹ (Peterson 2003: 17). But these wondrous powers of dolphins, humans experience - for example the encounter of a human called Bill who stated that this “wild creature was looking not at my body nor even at my expression, but right at the pain in my soul” - could be ascribed to our echo sounder on the basis of the unfamiliarity with it (Servais 2005: 216).

In addition to that it is probably possible that because we are not as judgemental as humans and accept and respect all kind of beings – in contrast to humans – humans felt they could just be themselves around us, which releases the heavy burden of trying to fit in. As told by Tricia “the dolphin reacted to what people fell inside. It did not matter in physical terms whether they were fat or thin, old or young, ugly or beautiful, rich or poor. [...] The dolphin would not judge them by human standards, but by the standards of an intelligent being without possessions living in harmony with the environment” (Servais 2005: 216).

¹¹ We can recognize for example if someone is pregnant

The fortune teller

In a lot of human representations of cetaceans they see us as strongly connected to the environment. As shown in the song text of the ancient moving history “The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy” dolphins tried to warn humankind because they knew the end of the world was coming and they also criticize the human’s behaviour towards nature. We are constructed by ancient humans to have special qualities, one of them is the “will to save mankind from ecological disaster” (Servais 2005: 226).

Dolphins are seen as closer to nature, and therefore helping humans reconnecting with the environment – we have something to teach them. Our “animality is not figured as a regression from humanity but as a progression towards better humans” (Servais 2005: 212).

Some individuals, those who interact with humans are “constructed as ambassador dolphins [which are sent] to humans because they have important messages to deliver to them. The content of the messages has to do with ecological wisdom and survival” (ibid..218). Given the fact that now humans are on the brink of extinction because of the aftermath of their actions, this exaggerated metaphor is quite ironic.

Still we cannot foresee the future, we just had the better adaptive strategies and we respect and appreciate the environment - in which we live and which nurtures us – more.

The saviour

In addition to the motive of the friendly dolphin as a companion there is also the image of the dolphin as the saviour – which has two significances.

First, there submerged quite a religious cult around dolphins - “the big meetings of associations like ICERC [for example] sometimes closely [resembled] religious ceremonies devoted to the glory of the dolphin” (Servais 2005: 213). This could be drawn back to the view of dolphins as miraculous healers (as described before), being worshiped for their wonders. This behaviour of humans can be compared to other radical religious movements like the Hygge cult, the offering to the Instagram goddess or the sacrifices of food to the best-before date during that time. The salutation “may the spirit of the dolphin be with you”, which was used on these meetings, has strong similarities to the holy blessing “may the forth be with you” (ibid.:213). So, on the one hand the motive of the saviour is of a religious hope for healing and liberation of some sort, on the other hand it is about the dolphin being an actual marine life saver.

There are countless ancient stories about humans being saved by dolphins on the sea. There is the famous saga about Phalanthos, a son of Apollo (a Greek god) who was shipwrecked and

then “he was taken on the back of a dolphin, which set him down near Mount Parnassus, where he founded a temple to his father Apollo, and called the place Delphi after the dolphin” (Montagu 2003: 30). Another famous one is about Arion, a blessed musician who was saved by a dolphin who took him upon his back because he loved the music, he made. Our appreciation of music was already known in ancient Greek times, yet humans still couldn’t find a way to communicate with us.

There are also reports of humans being saved in times where they were more technically advanced. There are records of “the experience of six American airmen, shot down over the Pacific, who found themselves in a seven-man raft being pushed by a porpoise toward land” or the story of Mrs. Bliss of Stuart which fell from a boat was directed to land by a dolphin (ibid.:36).

This neighbourly assistance of dolphins was highly doubted by some humans. Dr. George G. Goodwin of the Museum of Natural History for example stated that everything feasible moving “on or near the surface of the sea will attract [a dolphin’s attention]. His first action on approaching the subject of his curiosity is to roll under it. In doing so, something partly submerged, like the body of a drowning person, is nudged to the surface of the water. The sea does its part and automatically drives floating objects towards the beach” (ibid.:37). This perception is kind of necessary for them with regards to the abuse of dolphins in the Anthropocene. Since humans are familiar with the concept of reciprocity, if they admit that dolphins intentional save them, humankind owe a great dept to the cetaceankind and should give something back. There is a human psychological perspective – called Behaviourism – that “in its original form, suggested that all behaviours are simple mechanical responses to external stimuli and should not be mistaken as deriving from internal thoughts or feelings” (DeMello 2012: 351). Humans deprive animals of the possession of mental life (thoughts or feelings), all they do is react to stimuli. The acknowledgement of intrinsic motivation of animals other than human is so hard for the “top of the evolution” because then they would have to reconsider their whole actions and belief system: that man has to subdue the earth and dominate it because of his unique position - as the only species that thinks and feels – in the creation.

This “belief that humans are the preeminent thinkers, doers, and feelers on this planet” was challenged by many – the neurophysiologist John C. Lilly¹² for example campaigned for the

¹² Although he was fighting for dolphin rights, he also abused dolphins for his research in order to evidence his beliefs

establishment of a cetacean nation to attain rights for dolphins. He “laid the foundation for making the possibility of interspecies communication accessible to people and providing hope that what Loren Eiseley calls our species ‘long loneliness’ may someday be solaced” (Lilly 2003: 78).

It is also worthy to mention the dozens of stories where dolphins rescued humans from being culled by sharks – because “sharks are no match for the dolphin kind” (Montagu 2003: 36). This situation is different from the rescue of humans from drowning, because here most dolphins probably acted out of self-interest – we really enjoy to tease sharks.

What these stories all have in common is the display of dolphins deliberately doing something good to humans. In the next section we engage with the conflicts in the relationship between dolphins and humans.

Conflicted Relationship

In this section we address problems of the ancient dolphin – human relationship – how and why humans abused cetaceans.

We still live in a world of prey and predators and in ancient times cetaceans were hunted for their meat and often also seen as competitors for fish by humans. Quite some of our relatives also died as a result of ancient fisheries practices, but these physical violations of cetaceans are nothing against the psychological abuse¹³. It was a more insidious form of abuse and exploitation – humans hold cetaceans in “captivity for entertainment, research, military purposes, and even ‘therapy’” (Marino 2013: 100).

At the beginning scientific research about cetaceans was done with dolphins held in captivity, but after realising that the results of those experiments were often not representative of cetacean’s reality and the psychological constraints and trauma associated with captivity came to be known a new paradigm on research with dolphins established. Research then was done with the collaboration of wild dolphins who choose to interact with humans on their own terms.

As shown before the dolphin was seen as a miraculous healer, swimming with cetaceans was promoted to can cure various psychological and physical diseases. The healing promises of this occult practice were not supported by reputable evidence and there were no controlled health

¹³ Here some of the baleen family might disagree, because at some point they were extinct in the Anthropocene, but this is about the dolphin – human relationship and while on both sides we had to lament losses at some point the psychological abuse is a trench between both species.

and safety working standards for dolphins (ibid.:101). Dolphins were also forced to work with the military. The ancient “United States Navy has maintained dolphins [...] in order to use them in defence manoeuvres, mine detection, and to develop better submarine and sonar weapons” (ibid.:101). But the worst conditions of employment - it was actually slavery – had cetaceans working in the entertainment industry. Under the cover of education and conservation¹⁴ thousands of dolphins suffered for the commercial amusement of humans. There they were cramped into tanks with a possible swimming distance of approximately 15ft/1877Hz in company with completely strangers¹⁵, sometimes even from a rival clan. Captivity impacted “social relationships, [degraded] autonomy through the imposition of an enforced schedule of activity and behaviour, [caused] boredom produced by a relatively sterile and unchanging environment, [induced] frustration, and [inhibited] incentives and abilities to carry out natural behaviours such as hunting and traveling” (Marino 2013: 102). It led to aberrant behaviour such as “unresponsiveness, excessive submissiveness, hyper-sexual behaviour, self-inflicted trauma and mutilation, compromised immunology and excessive aggressiveness” (ibid.) and resulted in a much shorter lifespan and a higher mortality rate.

The question why humans abused cetaceans is much more difficult to answer. First of all, there is the process of othering - the perception of the self is related to the construction and demarcation to the other – the other (cetaceans) are less valuable because the “human mind is evolutionary prepared to include members of [their] in-group in [their] moral circle. Those that appear to be part of an out-group are held outside [their] moral concern” (ibid.:104). Humans don't care about the abuse of dolphins because they don't see them as equals. This is linked to the deprivation of the possession of mental life of animals, though different processes animals are turned into objects (DeMello 2012: 354). If cetaceans or any other animals have no thoughts and no emotions than abusing them and exploiting them is morally alright¹⁶.

But how do these positive representations of cetaceans on the one hand and the negative treatment of cetaceans on the other hand fit together? Right now, we can just speculate about these contradictions. Some argue that due to the everlasting smile of the dolphin (they looked

¹⁴ There is no evidence that these displays are educational or result in increased conservation attitudes or efforts. (Marino 2013: 101)

¹⁵ Whole social groups were destroyed by kidnapping babies from their clan and mothers in captivity often weren't allowed to keep their babies.

¹⁶ Specicism - refers to the moral discrimination of creatures by their species affiliation. This implies that the life of a living being that doesn't belong to a particular species, such as the species of ancient humans isn't worth as much.

like they had fun) and our different communication systems (dolphins didn't complain or scream), most humans didn't realise the pain those captured dolphins were going through. Some hardliner say they never respected us and never will see more in cetaceans than a commodity. Others argue that humans apparently love dolphins so much they couldn't let them be free.

However, it is also important to appreciate the efforts of those who did fight for the right of dolphins. They are one of the reasons we should not abandon humankind, but rather rebuild a dolphin – human relationship where we meet as equals.

Appendix: Closing remarks from the author

Since I was little, I had a deep fascination for the sea and dolphins in particular, while my sister got her favourite cartoon character painted on her bedroom wall, I wanted to get a painting of two dolphins jumping out of the water on my wall. I also had a dolphin snow globe, a dolphin wind chime and dolphin bed linen. My favourite movie was free willy and of course I loved the Flipper TV series. The perception of an animal is embedded in a cultural context, dolphins are shown as friendly and lifesaving companions since 600 B.C.¹⁷ in the occident. Nevertheless, I can't explain where this particular fascination and love for dolphins comes from. I agree with Servais that the enchanted human - dolphin encounter "cannot [be] described as the mere imposition of symbolic meaning on meaningless organisms" (Servais 2005: 211). When I was sailing in the bay of islands in New Zealand and dolphins started to swim next to the boat it was a magical moment and according to Servais "it is now clear that what is experienced in the human-dolphin encounter (love, euphoria, happiness) is both perceived and believed" (Servais 2005: 227).

It was also because of the Flipper TV series that I learned about the abuse and exploitation of dolphins. Ric O' Barry once trained bottlenose dolphins for the TV series Flipper, and today he fights for the freedom of these animals. Through his work¹⁸ I became aware of the effects of captivity on dolphins and the dark secret of a cove in Japan where dolphins are caught for marine parks and also slaughtered for meat. So, when we were discussing the text "Management by Totemization: Whale Symbolism and the Anti-Whaling Campaign" from Arne Kalland in our seminar I was mad about his text, partly because he was right about some

¹⁷ The story of Arion of Methymna

¹⁸ In particular his documentation "The cove"

points in his text. On the other hand, I could not understand why he couldn't realise that dolphins (and whales) are special to humans (me). Then I was wondering why they are so special for me and wanted to find out more about human-dolphin interactions. This paper is about what I learned about it.

I also tried to take an utter new and alien perspective with this assignment, which turned out to be quite difficult. It is hard to express yourself as someone else – chronology, cosmology or categories everything could or should be different. Who knows for example if dolphins themselves see them related to whales or if they differentiate between themselves on the basis of sex? And even though I tried to show a possible different view, I'm still a human, so my considerations about a dolphin's thoughts are limited to my human way of thinking. “No human can ever truly get inside the brain of an animal [...] and animals cannot answer questions if we ask them how they feel, which forces us to interpret their behaviours”, which we do in a human way (DeMello 2012: 358).

This transmission of human characteristics to animals is called anthropomorphism. By giving animals human emotions, motives, and intentions to a certain extent, we can draw analogies and gain insight into their world and their experience.

I wanted to show that it is important to consider the possibility that we are not superior to other animals. “As philosopher Jeffrey Masson (1995) writes, we should not be limited by humans as the reference point; but we need not also assume that what we humans have – emotions and a mind – animals cannot have (DeMello 2012: 354).

This thought is maybe easier to accept on the example of dolphins, because they are so humanlike on the one hand but rather different¹⁹ on the other hand. They “do push the boundaries for known capabilities of nonhuman animals and blur the constantly shifting line distinguishing *Homo sapiens* from all other animals” (Sergeant & Mann: 153). They could function as a bridge between species in a world where living beings live and interact on equal terms with each other.

¹⁹ In comparison with apes for example

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