

WHALE SONG

BY V. O. BLUM

"Perhaps the sperm whale has gone so far into philosophical studies that he sees the Golden Rule as only a special case of a much larger ethic."
~JOHN CUNNINGHAM LILLY, M.D.
The Mind of the Dolphin (1967)

The following excerpts were compiled from 18 half-hour songs recently recorded off the coast of Maui and translated by the research department of Whale World, a Honolulu amusement park. In translating the songs, the division relied on a cetacean lexicon developed last year by Oceanis, a San Diego marine institute.

The composer is an aging humpback named Tall Fin. He's 34 years old, measures 42 feet, weighs 53 tons. Although once headmaster of a pod, he's traveled alone for five years. He was spotted off the Aleutians last summer.

Declaration

1

Now that you're no longer murdering us, we may speak as equals.

Can we agree on the extent of the Whalacaust? A hundred fifty winters ago, there were 900,000 sperm -- now there are 200,000. There were 300,000 blue -- now there are 10,000. There were 125,000 humpback -- now there are 8000.

We accept our complicity. There's no such thing as an isolated murderer -- only a genocidal system consisting of interacting perpetrators and victims. To sustain such a system, victims must remain tantalizingly apart from their tormentors yet refrain from spiritually disarming them.

When you began to systematically attack us, we maintained traditional bull behavior. We tried to outwit you, make you look foolish, and retain our self-proclaimed status as masters of the planet. In a few instances, we tried to drown you in your boats.

That was arrogant and foolish. You had far more power than we imagined -- perhaps more than you imagined, for you didn't act powerfully but betrayed an enigmatic inhibition in your movements -- what seemed like a self-flagellating dread of life itself.

But it didn't restrain your bite. On the contrary, your doubts appeared to make you thirstier; with your swift ships and savage weapons, for which no whale was any match.

Yet beginning some 30 winters ago with the song "I want to hold your hand," we sensed a new human generation emerging, one which seemed less loyal to flags than to the planet itself. This presented us with an opportunity to arrest the Whalacaust and preserve our species.

But it required a change of attitude on our part which was difficult to develop.

To begin with, as I'm sure you've learned, every species retains a certain suicidal impulse. Both cetacean and human lives require endless repetition of routine tasks centered around eating, educating the young, and wintering in warmer climes. In and of itself, the pattern becomes tedious -- that is to say, without some reward for a job well done.

Previously, our hegemony was sufficient for us. How can I explain this? Quite simply, our primacy on the planet was reason to continue.

Yet you punctured this confidence -- made it clear that you, not us, were lords of this sphere. I suppose we might still take pride that we remained kings of the sea, but the point became moot. If you could dive 4000 feet and harpoon us, who cared how superior we were to sharks and squid?

In a perverse way the Whalacaust appealed to our suicidal streak. (There was a sick dolphin ditty nearly a century ago called "Why Don't We All Just Beach!") What the Whalacaust offered us was a way out of the tedium without the cowardice of suicide. We could disappear as a species and blame it on your mania.

This veiled despair was exposed by cetacea's wisest minds, the sperm hermits of the north.

Some 50 winters ago, during the hiatus associated with your second planetary war, a thought occurred to these loners. They reasoned that before dialogue with humanity could begin, cetacea had to recover from its own depression. The thinking was that vitality based on hegemony was false vitality, whether or not the dominance was real. And if cetacea was only capable of false vitality, well maybe it deserved to be meat on humanity's table.

The idea was intriguing. Was our thrill of domination a symptom of our malaise? If so, what could we replace it with? And if we *did* regain enthusiasm -- and it was rooted in some



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more expansive notion -- would humanity stop slaughtering us? More abstractly, was there a link between our vitality and your mercy?

And then the killing resumed.

2

Twenty winters later came the songs of your new generation. After "I want to Hold Your Hand" and "I Get Around," the melodies became more ecstatic -- "Eight Miles High," "Strawberry Fields," "Good Vibrations."

It elicited our curiosity. Who were these young voices who sounded more like lovers than killers?

As far as I know, no cetacean planned to respond to these voices but it happened nevertheless. Over the next 10 winters, we unconsciously, then with awareness, began to reply.

The winter following "Good Vibrations," some porpoises off Bermuda began a chant that punned off your English word for their species. "We've Got Porpoise!" began as a silly Caribbean cheer. But by the time the humpbacks were whistling it off Indonesia, it had become our order's anthem.

Only now can we see that "We've Got Porpoise!" was the beginning of a spiritual conversion. What the chant did was to confirm that cetacea had an intrinsic role to play in the relationship between the planet and universe. Although it was only dimly perceived then, that role would not depend on our domination of the planet but on teamwork with other life. But towards what end? What was it about the universe that made it worth probing? What indeed was driving *you* to explore space so compulsively?

To answer is to describe your 4000-year romance with the cosmos. Without trying to over-simplify your physics, it's clear you feel the universe holds the key to life beyond space and time.

This intuition is shared by many of your boldest scientists theologians and musicians:

~The late protégé of Albert Einstein, David Bohm, hypothesized two aspects of the universe: an apparent aspect, which he called the "Explicate Order" (bound by spacetime) and wrapped around it, an "Implicate" one (beyond spacetime).

~The physicist, Karl Penrose, wonders whether time and might freeze, or even reverse, within the "singularity" of a Black Hole.

~The Hindu Upanishads claim that when Brahman is felt, "time and form disappear."

~Your rock "star" Sting sings:

*There is a deeper wave than this
Swelling in the world
There is a deeper wave than this
Listen to me, girl.*

Being creatures of a vast and complex ocean, we've naturally focused on the sea. One could say our metaphysics has been marine-based.

To us, the ocean is the planet's medium of imagination -- a place where the dreams of master thinkers come true. To be sure, our masters are more modest than yours: it's enough for them to envision brightly colored coral and precious pearls.

There was never any interest in eternity and omnipresence. Despite its wisdom, cetacea is basically a hedonist order and until recently, the organic thrills of the sea were sufficient for us: the scenery, the motion, acrobatics, the innocence of our calves, the bonds of our prods.

We were aware, of course, there was a panoply of worlds above us. When we breached on a clear night, we couldn't help notice the stars in the sky.

But -- how can I explain this? It was taboo for us to become preoccupied with these worlds. "Keep your eyes from the sky," the ancients warned. "There is unfinished work in the sea."

And for millions of years, there was. Over time, our hermits learned to conjure long episodes of experience, both past and desired. (By conjure, I mean a total imagining of experience, with sensations of sound, touch and sight.)

3

Twenty-five years ago, off the coast of Polynesia, my friend Bleak Fluke composed the first cetacean hymn to the cosmos -- "Look to the Stars" (See Section 5). With that single poem, he eradicated our melancholy.

Once we translated the ocean, we were your partners. You had the rockets, we had the vision -- together we could cull the cosmos.

We immediately felt access to a broad spectrum of humanity: ecologists, educators, the media, hippies, biologists, poets.

Our message had six parts:

1. We want to survive. We no longer wish to commit suicide using human madness as a foil.

2. We have a purpose. We wish to be part of an inter-species intelligence that will penetrate the universe, perhaps transcend time and space.

3. We have special skills to contribute:

~We're able to individually, organically, and holistically recreate and visualize experience.

~We understand the relationship between vision, evolution, and material (See Section 4) and can deploy imagination to evolve life and alter matter.

~Because we possess different skills and history, we can enjoy an objective view of humanity.

4. We no longer feel superior, nor wish to remain aloof.

5. Our violence towards humanity has been rare and restricted to instances of self-defense -- nevertheless we renounce it. If in the end humanity decides to terminate us, we will accept that decision. In the way we've come to trust ourselves, we've come to trust you. There's no turning back from the commitment.

6. Having overcome malaise, discovered purpose, offered skills, and foresworn violence, we've done our part in transcending victimhood. Now you must transcend abuse.

Manual

4

Imagination as Evolution

If you would stop thinking, escape Darwin, quit feeling guilty for being restless...

I hear a high-pitched sound off Greenland.

Breach the waves with a jump: there's nothing in the sea to hold you. The water below is history, the excrement of lapsed dreams. It won't sustain you in this awkward instant when past and future consume the present.

Restlessness is the hallmark of life. You're not rejecting your pod, just darting elsewhere. Humor Thy Father & Mother.

Listen to the heart's whisper, its tone of expectation.

Stop thought, sound the vibe, hold it tight:

Reefs bend, fish brighten, the brain grows.

Darwin says progress occurs after a million failures: evolution, to him, is an imperfect truce after eons of war. But cetacea says evolution is the vision of life: the cautious but decided footsteps of aspiring biology.

Conserve!

Change!

Envision eternity as a single moment seen from every point of view.

At this moment, the universe is a ball, and the whales a chorus demanding the egg be broken.

At this moment, the void is gaseous, and the whales a choir praying the vapors condense.

At this moment, the sun is lonely, and the whales an ensemble pining for a planetary family.

At this moment, the planet steams, and the whales a trio asking for damp homes.

At this moment, the ocean roars, and the whales a duet longing for firmer footing.

At this moment, the land is hungry, and the whales scheme to return to sea.

At this moment, the sea is calm, and the whales content.

At this moment, the whales are melancholy and hunted.

Envision an idea: the concept of humans and whales in the void together. Partners for the infinite.

The Tangible collapses.

What remains?

A random collection of moments and places.

The partners hum

A timeless breath from everywhere and no place.

The eternal moan of yesterday and tomorrow.

We are home.

And in the stillness of infinite noon,

A cosmic echo:

Neighbors.

5

Look to the Stars

If not for them it would be dark
And the blank ceiling above
Would return us to our cage
for meaning.

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