

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANS AND ANIMALS IN THE ABORIGINAL MYTHOLOGY THROUGH THE PRISM OF ANIMAL STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

Aim. The aim of this article is to analyse Aboriginal myths and discover the relationship between animals and humans in the beliefs of the indigenous Australians. The article attempts to explain how animals are described when compared to people and vice. Furthermore, the author endeavours to establish what the relationship looks like and how it is presented.

Methods. As Aboriginal myths and mythologies have been evolving for hundreds and thousands of years, it is not possible to analyse every single myth. Hence, in order to narrow them down, only the myths presented by Alexander Wyclif Reed will be analysed. The analysis will be conducted from the perspective of Animal Studies, with a particular focus on the contemporary ecological views presented by a contemporary representative of an ecological turn and animal rights scholar, Peter Wohlleben. The analysis will focus on three main aspects: parenting/motherly love, instincts, feelings and emotions.

Results. The analysis shows that animals were of the utmost importance in the Aboriginal everyday life and most of the time were treated on a par with humans. Just like the Aboriginal point of view, contemporary attitude to Animal Studies attempts to alter the view according to which animals are devoid of feelings and intelligence.

Conclusions. Animals seem to have a crucial role in every aspect of Aboriginal everyday life, including religious and social. They were not perceived as lesser or worse; conversely, Aboriginals considered them to be as intelligent and significant as the Aboriginal people themselves.

Keywords: Animals, people, Aboriginal mythology, Australia, myths

INTRODUCTION

Animals seem to have always played an important part in human lives, regardless of the era or the place in which they lived. When people were still in their primitive stages of development, animals provided them



with food: people would either follow them to new places where more plants grew or kill them for food and make use of every part of their carcasses. Various tribes also used animal pelts and skins as clothes and bones to produce weapons, jewellery or objects of worship, repurposed animal tendons for strings and chords. Some of the more developed prehistoric cultures gave animals a new role to play – in mythologies which provided people with plausible answers to questions about the existence of the world and ways of behaving in it. Thus, animals were a significant and integral part of those answers.

I would like to present a brief overview of the use of animals in mythologies created by various ancient cultures. In Ancient Greece animals were associated with gods: Athena – the goddess of wisdom and the arts – was symbolized with an owl, a bird which, due to the continuing influence of ancient Greek cultural tradition, is therefore considered to be a symbol of intelligence and wisdom even today. Hera, the goddess of women and marriage, was always described as very proud. Parandowski (2004) writes that her chariot was pulled by several peacocks: animals which are believed to be paragons of pride, hence the idiom: as proud as a peacock. She was also associated with cuckoos – yet another animal. Greek mythology often presented instances of metamorphosis: gods were shapeshifters themselves or could change other people's forms. Athena changed Princess Arachne into a spider, Artemis – the goddess of hunting – transformed a hunter Actaeon into a deer which was later trailed and killed by his own dogs. On the other hand, Zeus metamorphosed into a white bull in order to seduce and then kidnap a human princess. These transformations not only evoked sacrifices offered to gods, but also proved that the power of the gods and goddesses was infinite. But Greece is not the only mythology where animals are so crucial. Egyptian Gods were also strongly connected with animals, but in a slightly different way: they were usually described as human-animal hybrids, similar to people, whose heads were, however, substituted with those of animals. Horus was depicted with a head of a falcon, Anubis with a jackal's head and Hequet was presented either as a woman with a frog head or as a frog itself (Jordan, 2004). There are, of course, numerous examples which could be provided here, such as Auðumbla and Fenrir in Norse mythology – the former of which is „the proto-cow, involved in the origin of the races of gods and giants” (Lindow, 2002, p. 63) and the latter of which is a wolf whose role was to kill Odin during Ragnarök (Lindow 2002); Airavat in Hindu beliefs or Jaon-Ren in Chinese mythology. It only makes sense that in Australian Aboriginal mythology and beliefs, animals also play an important role, too, given how diverse the Australian fauna is.

In this paper I aim to analyse Aboriginal myths and investigate the relationship between humans and animals in the mythology of the indigenous people(s) of Australia. I will attempt to answer:

- How animals are described when compared to people.
- How people are perceived when compared to animals.

- What the relationship looks like and how it is presented.
- How the Aboriginal point of view differs from the contemporary ecological views presented by a contemporary representative of an ecological turn and animal rights scholar Peter Wohlleben.

It should be noted that Australia was inhabited by a plethora of tribes and most of them had their own belief systems: the myths and stories in the North varied from the ones in the South; those in the West were different from the ones in the East. Hence, it is not possible to analyse all the existing beliefs and extant myths in one paper. For this purpose I will only focus on the mythical stories gathered and presented by Alexander Wyclif Reed in his *Aboriginal Myths. Tales of the Dreamtime*.

THE DEFINITION OF MYTH

There is no one universal, general definition of myth. Scholars such as Andreas Joles, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Carl Gustav Jung, Sigmund Freud, Émile Durkheim, Mircea Eliade and many, many other have tried to put forward or contribute to the creation of various definitions of the term. In those attempts such definitions as ethno-religious, literary, structural, archetypal, psychological, sociological or even political have been proposed. The contemporary researcher Chris Baldick (2001) defines myth as follows: „a kind of story or rudimentary narrative sequence, normally traditional and anonymous, through which a given culture ratifies its social customs or accounts for the origins of human and natural phenomena, usually in supernatural or boldly imaginative terms” (p. 163). In the introduction to his book, the Polish scholar Marcin Klik (2016) writes that the term was initially used only in ethnography and the history of religion, and started to be used/researched in other fields in 1960s. It must be emphasized that philosophers, philologists, historians and scholars of both literature and religion have been trying to articulate the definition of the term, but one which would distinguish a myth from:

- National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), data on suicides from 1967 to 2014;
- A legend – both of which introduce kings, queens, priests and knights, but, while in legends it is historically proven that such characters existed;
- A fairy tale or a fable – in which the characters do have amazing adventures and journeys, but which does not focus on the way the world was created and which would explain why it works the way it does;
- A utopia – which may oftentimes put forward similar ideas, but which can be differentiated from a myth on three main points: a) utopias usually have authors, unlike myths which are anonymous; b) utopias concentrate on the events taking place in the future, myths focus on

the past, and more often than not the events presented in them start with the beginning of the world, sometimes even before that; c) while myths explain the order of the world, in utopias this order is usually criticised;

- Fantasy per se – which, again, is created by an author and does not usually explain the existence of the surrounding world; conversely, the universe evoked in fantasy is full of riddles, and even if it were to explain the world, myth was initially spread by word of mouth and existed only orally while fantasy is written down (Klik, 2016).

One indispensable element of myth which seems to be implicitly present in all definitions is archetype. which is defined as follows: „a symbol, theme, setting, or character-type that recurs in different times and places in myth, literature, folklore, dreams, and rituals so frequently and prominently as to suggest (...) that it embodies some essential element of ‘universal’ human experience” (Baldick, 2001, p.19).

Archetypes are essential elements of human experience of the sacred (Meletinsky, 2014). Thus, for the purpose of this paper I will consider myths as sacred stories. This definition, however, bears certain burden since – as stories – they were mainly spread orally which may have resulted – and probably did – in constant changes/alternations in terms of syntagma. Also, when dealing with aboriginal mythology, we must take into account the distortions inherent in the process of cultural translation bound up with the colonial history of Australia. This influences today’s perception and study of those myths: stories that are often replete with themes which are not plausible from the point of view of current state of affairs, e.g. even though there are no bears in Australia, there are some myths which try to explain why they look and behave the way they do – yet this is just a mistake in the cultural translation field. Most importantly, however, the researchers of Aboriginal cultures, languages and religions observe that no attempt to comprehend the function of Aboriginal cultural contexts or mythologies can exist without referring to the so-called *Dreaming* or *Dreamtime* (Capell 1952; Berndt 1951).

DREAMING/DREAMTIME

It seems to be of utmost importance to comprehend what Dreaming/ Dreamtime is as the term is an integral part of Aboriginal mythology and culture. The notion of Dreaming/Dreamtime will be explained later on, after a very brief introduction to the history of the Aboriginal peoples in Australia. It is not known where Aboriginals came to Australia from or when. There are some conjectures: in the introduction to his book, King (2010) writes that Australian Aboriginals may have come from New Guinea and once they settled in Australia, they remained solitary for mil-

lennia and their culture was believed to be the longest incessant one; it flourished on the smallest continent, they created their own belief system which was called Dreaming or Dreamtime. King says that faiths that are contemporarily known (Judaism, Christianity or Islam) are far younger than Dreaming.

Their peaceful lives were interrupted by an abrupt appearance of Europeans who came in 1788 to found a penal colony. Captain Arthur Philips along with his eleven ships landed and settled in present day Sydney (King, 2010). Europeans divested Aboriginals of their lands and belongings, and started the policy that could be referred to as the genocide of the indigenous peoples because of which thousands of Aboriginals lost their lives, numerous tribes were annihilated and with them, the myths and sacred stories of the Dreamtime vanished.

It is not easy to simply define or describe what Dreaming is. Moreover, Mudrooroo distinguishes between Dreaming and Dreamtime:

Dreaming, in the sense of dreams, or the state between waking and deep sleep, is a state when revelations or instructions are received from the ancestors. Thus myths, songs and ceremonies are received in this state. This is the literal meaning, for the concept of dreaming has been expanded into a deep spiritual and metaphysical concept, and in fact Dreaming and mythology may be seen as one and the thing: the deep mental archetypes and wisdom images which we receive to guide us when the conscious mind is placed in a state of quiescence. Dreamings are those archetypes symbolised as ancestral beings who came before and continue to live on in the present generations. These eternal archetypes, sometimes equated with totems are part of the spiritual identities of Aboriginal people. (Mudrooroo, 1994, p. 50)

On the other hand, Mudrooroo (1994) write that Dreamtime is the time of creation and is to mean or symbolise that Aboriginal people(s) are all connected not only to one another, but also to everything that lives and exists, which, on the other hand, began its existence with the spirit ancestors that appeared during that time. Basically, as Mudrooroo writes the Dreaming is an ever-lasting process in which everything is being created while Dreamtime is „the long ago period“ (p. VII) during which the process started: the world emerged and along with it animals, people, rites and ceremonies, both fauna and flora started to develop. Since 1788, most of the myths have been lost and forgotten, but those that have remained present how the ancestors established the relationship(s) between all the species. The author appends the phrase „all species of creation“ which is employed by the critic to refer mainly to animals and humans. This paper aims at discovering the „kinship system“ on the basis of Alexander Wyclif Reed's *Aboriginal Myths. Tales of the Dreamtime* (1978) and Peter Wohlleben's conception presented in his work *The Inner Life of Animals: Love, Grief, and Compassion: Surprising Observations of a Hidden World* (2018).

ANIMAL STUDIES AND PETER WOHLLEBEN'S TAKE

It may be illuminating and riveting to discuss some of the Aboriginal myths from the perspective of Animal Studies in general and in the light of Peter Wohlleben's ideas in particular.

Animal Studies derive from the so-called Environmental Studies which focus on the relationship between people and the environment in general. Animal Studies are a little more precise: they focus on the relationship between humans and animals. Several of the most recent works in the field were written by Peter Wohlleben's.

Peter Wohlleben is a German forester born in 1964 in Bonn, West Germany. In recent years he wrote four books focusing on ecological themes: *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate – Discoveries from a Secret World* (2015), *The Inner Life of Animals: Love, Grief, and Compassion: Surprising Observations of a Hidden World* (2016), *The Secret Wisdom of Nature: Trees, Animals, and the Extraordinary Balance of All Living Things – Stories from Science and Observation* (2017) and *Can You Hear the Trees Talking?: Discovering The Hidden Life of the Forest* (2019). The readers of the *Guardian* would be familiar with the following passage from Richard Kerridge's (2017) review of Wohlleben's second book: „Environmentalists hope that such books will bring new scientific and ethical perspectives to a public audience. Wohlleben writes in support of the new biology that challenges the old idea that plants and many animals are little more than mechanisms.“ As Sharon Elizabeth Kingsland (2018) writes in her review of Wohlleben's first book, that despite becoming an instant best-seller, it arises a lot of controversy. Kingsland is right for all of his Wohlleben's works seem to be very controversial as the potential reader may sometimes be slightly vague. She writes that „the book's 76 endnotes point the reader toward many authoritative scientific publications as well as scientific news reports, mostly from the past decade, that appear to support the claim that he is simply conveying, in language accessible to the laymen, the factual findings of science“ (p. 2). Even though the quote refers to *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate – Discoveries from a Secret World*, the other of Wohlleben's works have been received similarly. Hence, judging from the reviewers' reactions, it can be readily noticed that Peter Wohlleben introduces very controversial and revolutionary themes in his writings, yet referring to scientific resources makes his works approachable and easy to understand for non-academics, thus vouchsafing support for these new perspectives in Environmental Studies and Animals Studies. In the introduction to his book, the author writes that:

Currently, there's a great deal of scientific research on the inner lives of animals, although it's usually so narrowly focused and written in such a dry, academic language that it hardly makes for gripping reading, and, more importantly, rarely leads to a better understanding of the subject. (Wohlleben, 2018, p3)

In *The Inner Life of Animals: Love, Grief, and Compassion: Surprising Observations of a Hidden World*, Peter Wohlleben attempts to discredit the belief

that animals differ from people in terms of being (un)able to feel and experience emotions and feelings such as love, fear or pain. He points out that if we – people – cannot be certain how our friends and family members respond to being physically hurt, let alone the rest of the human race, how then can we be sure of the animals' response? Wohlleben presents and describes a lot of examples of animal behaviour(s) which may resemble people as well as be associated with them. For the purpose of this paper, those behaviours will be divided into three groups: parenting/motherly love, instincts, feelings and emotions, as these three have so far been believed to distinguish humans from other species. All of these distinct areas are, however, somewhat connected and overlap.

Biologists, scientists and philosophers have been trying to define the concept of love for centuries: what that is, when and how we know we love and whether or not animals are capable of loving the way people are. Wohlleben focuses on a very particular „type“ of this feeling – motherly love. In a following way, he considers what occurs when a human woman becomes a mother:

Shortly before a child is born, the hormone oxytocin flows through the mother's system, which helps her develop a strong bond with her child. In addition, large quantities of endorphins are released, which dull pain and reduce anxiety. This cocktail of hormones remains in the mother's bloodstream after the birth of her child, ensuring that the baby is welcomed into the world by a mother who is relaxed and in a positive mood. Nursing stimulates further production of oxytocin, and the mother-child bond intensifies. (Wohlleben, 2018, p. 10)

Since people are mammals and all or at least almost all mammals are born the same way, why can human mothers experience and acquire parental love this way and other species cannot? The author argues that some of the observed animal mothers' behaviours are shockingly similar to the ones that can be seen in human mothers. Wohlleben also provides examples: one connected with squirrel mothers that, when in jeopardy, let the young bind their necks – which of course makes it hard for the mothers to breathe – and carry them to a safer spot, a sacrifice that may sometimes end with the mother's death; the other refers to sows that having given birth themselves, help their daughters deliver piglets. By providing such instances, Wohlleben indicates that animals are not only not that distant from people, they are also very similar in that manner. He extends this idea even further, as he proves that some animals – just like people – can adopt children. Moreover, similarly to people who take up human children for adoption, but also adopt representatives of other species, animals too can adopt the young of either the same or different species – a behaviour which, despite everything, is very humanlike, or conversely, shows that humans are not exceptional and very much like other species.

The next area that can be clearly discerned and which strongly connects with the previous one focuses on instincts, some of those instincts also push

animals to tricks and trickery – a feature so often associated with people. Wohlleben writes that instinctive behaviour is used „to describe actions that are carried out unconsciously without being subjected to any thought processes” and argues that both people and animals act on instincts, contrary to what has been so far a widespread belief that only animals use their instincts. He claims that people – just like animals – perform certain acts without deliberation, e.g. when one touches a hot object, they „instinctively” take the hand away. Humans are also comparable to animals in that: like them, we are not always able to control our instincts, be it simple cravings or sexual desires. Wohlleben notices that in order to fulfil those desires, animals are able to come up with various kinds of tricks. One example he provides concentrates on the rooster which pretends to have found food in order to lure hens so as to copulate with them. Another one depicts a bird that – having noticed it is being observed – attempts to mislead the observer as to where the acorn is going to be hidden. In giving such examples, Wohlleben tries to point out a couple of facts. Firstly, that animals’ and humans’ instincts are not that different, hence animals themselves are also not that different from humans. Secondly, that not only should the way animals are perceived be elevated „to a higher level”, but also that the boundaries between people and animal species be taken down.

Finally, the third area that is worth looking into is feelings and emotions. The author states that:

Basically, then, emotions are linked to the unconscious part of the brain, not the conscious part. If animals lacked consciousness, all that would mean is that they would be unable to have thoughts. But every species of animal experiences unconscious brain activity, and because this activity directs how the animal interacts with the world, every animal must also have emotions. (Wohlleben, 2018, p. 15)

Wohlleben states and exemplifies that animals are capable of such feelings and emotions as gratitude, altruism, timidity, curiosity, pain, embarrassment, compassion, and they also experience grief and mourn. He points out that the aforementioned emotions are believed to be strongly associated with humans, yet should be ascribed to animals as well, thus making the line between people and other species fade even more.

In his book, Wohlleben attempts to present and depict in as simple a language as possible all that we do not know about animals: he proves that they are more similar to people than one could expect, and invokes an ethical dimension when emphasizing that not only are animals no worse than humans, but may also be considered better in certain aspects. He writes: „there must be a Creator who has planned and implemented a design where everything is finely tuned and in balance” (p. 73) which takes into consideration the fact that both humans and animals were created by some higher, more powerful being – a way of thinking that is shared with Australian Aboriginals and illustrated by their beliefs.

ABORIGINAL MYTHOLOGY

An earnest interest in Australian Aboriginal mythology starts with Alexander Wyclif Reed (1908-1979). He was a very prolific writer interested in Maori and Australian Aboriginal legends, fables and myths. In one of several books on Aboriginal myths he authored, entitled *Aboriginal Myths. Tales of the Dreamtime* (1978) he gathered various remaining myths of the indigenous peoples of Australia. The book consists of three parts: The Great Father, Totemic Ancestors, Creation Myths, each of them comprising several tales. A detailed analysis of every Aboriginal myth is impossible due to the paucity of space, therefore this part of the article will briefly present an overview of four themes bound up with: a) the representation of All-Fathers, b) the creation of the world and other phenomena pertaining to the environment, c) the creation and representation of animals, d) the creation and representation of people. Each topic discussed with a view to scrutinizing the relationship between humans and animals. Such a division will hopefully make this analysis clear. It has to be noted, however, that some of the themes will overlap.

Modrooroo (1994) explains that All-Fathers were Aboriginal deities that are believed to have been already existing when the ancestors appeared. All-Fathers are also said to bear certain resemblance in terms of features, traits and qualities. In Reed's collection of myths two main All-Fathers can be found: Baiame and The Rainbow Snake. The former of the two was a god-creator, he was the one to create animals. He did not have any body because he had no need for it, unless he wished to show himself to his creations, in which case he resembled his own creatures: while creating animals, he gave all of them a part of himself. While creating the Australian fauna, Baiame used himself as a model for all the various species inhabiting the region. Having created animals, he later created a man who was warned to never eat or attack animals so as not to be punished. People, however, were so hungry that they could no longer refrain from killing one of the forbidden animals. The punishment was the death of one of their own. This shows that in Aboriginal mythology Baiame is represented as valuing his earlier creations more than the latter ones: he was ready to let people starve instead of allowing them to consume an animal. The second All-Father is the Rainbow Snake which, as the name suggests, was an enormous serpent whose skin had all the hues of a rainbow. Mudrooroo writes that it was the most or one of the most significant deities in Aboriginal belief systems and which was responsible for the mystic healing rites and powers of shamans; it was the Rainbow Snake that gave them the powers and it was the Rainbow Snake that protected these powers and rites.

It may come as no surprise that the most important deities in Aboriginal myths are not only associated with animals, but are sometimes presented as animals. This might also be connected with the fact that in being afraid of the gods' ire ancient peoples would abide by the rules imposed by mytholo-

gical beliefs. Therefore, if gods are to be associated with power and wrath, it seems logical that their representations were symbolically associated with various dangerous animals that inhabited the same region. This may be exemplified by a myth depicting the Rainbow Snake devouring women, and later be killed by men (Reed, 1978). The myth thematises the environmental characteristics of Australia which is replete with multifarious types of serpents, most of them venomous. The Aboriginal worshippers learnt to both fear and respect these creatures, two feelings which may have contributed to the rise of the archetype of the Rainbow Snake and establishing its position in the mythology.

Some of the myths in Reed's book focus on the creation of the surrounding world: moon, stars, as well as rivers. In almost all of them animals are either ascribed the vital part or at least appear and play some role: cockatoos and brush turkeys are associated with the existence of the Southern Cross; the myth in which an enormous fish is being hunted by a man and by trying to escape creates a river, explains how the Murray River came to be. However, there is also a myth about a conflagration started by one of the animals. This proves that animals were believed to be significant and powerful enough to not only contribute to the general creation of the world, but also to its cataclysmic destruction – they were believed to have enough power to be deadly dangerous—not only to their own species, but also to others, including humans.

As far as the creation of animals is concerned, Reed writes that myths „which explain how birds, mammals, insects, reptiles, and fish came into being must be as numerous as the various tribes that inhabit the land” (p. 81). Most of the collected myths are strictly connected with animals' behaviour, ways of living or appearance. Although coming from various parts of Australia, the myths are not that different in terms of animals' significance in their inhabitants' lives and similarities in ways of describing various species. The tales presented in the myths explain how dingo were created, why bats are black, why cranes' legs bend the other way, why emus do not fly, why mopokes live at night, why tortoises have a „chipped” carapace and wagtails are so small, and why dogs eat their food raw. The realisation that so much thought is devoted in Aboriginal myths to the existence of animals is especially interesting: significantly more attention was devoted to representing fauna than to portraying humans.

According to one of the myths, after being created by Baiame, most of the animals were dissatisfied with their appearance:

Kangaroos grew ashamed of their tails, not realising that without them they would lose speed and mobility. Fish became impatient of their confinement to water, birds craved the loss of wings in return for the agility of kangaroos, insects demanded an increase in size. (Reed, 1978, p. 32)

This part of the myth demonstrates how human-like animals are thought to be in those tales: not only are animals credited with a capability of being satis-

fied or not, but they are also represented as invested with a voice to express their thought and concerns. After that session, Baiame is said to have gathered the animals in one cave and reassigned some of the animals' features to a new creation – a man. This leads to the last theme – the creation of man.

There are several myths which concentrate on the act of creation of man, but very few which would explain the human appearance. Reed writes Baiame gave life to an animal that was able to walk on two legs. This shows that indigenous peoples of Australia did not perceive themselves as superior, they thought they were not only a different species of animals, but also, despite the fact that humans could use tools and act the way they do, they would admit that „he [the man] was less than the animals“ (p. 13) because they lacked „the affinity with Baiame, and which was present in birds, animals and even insects“ (pp. 12-13). However, it has to be noted that according to some of the myths, before animals acquired their distinctive features, they were humans somehow invested with those traits and only then were transformed into animals without losing the attributes. This demonstrates that even though in mythological thinking people were created by being reassigned some animal characteristics and this resemble animals, the animals were also created to be similar to humans.

CONCLUSIONS

While analysing Aboriginal myths, one immediately realises how important animals must have been in the cultural and religious life of Australian Aboriginals. The aim of this paper was to explore the ways in which the relationship that humans had with animals are presented in the Aboriginal mythology and how these representations relate to the perception of animals in the contemporary environmental thought, in particular Wohlleben's variant of Animal Studies. Four problems have been addressed in the present text. There is no need to answer the first three questions separately.

How are animals described when compared to people? How are people perceived when compared to animals? What does the relationship look like and how is it presented? What must be noted is that in the mythology of Australian Aboriginals animals were not perceived as worse in any sense, they were perceived or considered a different species which co-existed with Aboriginals who respected them and felt deeply related. It seems that the indigenous peoples followed Baiame's words:

These are all my creatures, great and small, plant and animals, on land and in sea and sky. My creatures made for you to care for. They will supply all your needs. They share in small measure the life that is in me, and now in full measure in you who are man and woman. (Reed, 1978, p. 14)

In Aboriginal culture, whose teachings were inseparably connected with mythology, the animals were treated as an essential part of human survi-

val, but they were also more than just that. They were not just animals. It is amply demonstrated in myths where most of the animal names are capitalized, while seldom do references occur to „the Man” or „the Woman” spelt with initial letter capitalised. The relationship between humans and animals was considered sacred: it was animals that contributed to the existence of the world and humans themselves. Animals served not only the purposes mentioned in the introduction to this paper (providing them with food, clothes, weapons), but they also served as major mediators between deities and human beings, functioning as support in religious rituals.

How does the Aboriginal point of view differ from the contemporary ecological views presented by Peter Wohlleben? Wohlleben’s views share an affinity with Aboriginal ideas and beliefs. Both points of view attempt to wipe out or re-draw the line between animals and humans, they try to prove that animals are more than just species devoid of intelligence, feelings and emotions, but should be treated on a par with humans. In both perspectives it is emphasized that animals are not that different from humans, and that humans are more similar to animals than they seem to think and be able to accept. Both worldviews, the mythological and environmentalist struggle against speciesism (discrimination suffered in regard to belonging to a particular species).

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