



ANIMAL MAGNETISM

BY

Barbara Yoshida

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor EZRA NEIGHBORS writes...*

What do René Descartes, Thomas Conway Sir Richard Owen, Lazzaro Spallanzani, Ernest Hemingway have in common?

*Well, besides palm-colored skin and Y chromosomes, they are all competing for the love of Sheila in *Animal Magnetism*. Playwright Barbara Yoshida dances brilliantly in topics every neuroscientist, neurolinguist, psychologist, philosopher, housewife, or reader of *FOTD* would eat up; the uniquely human idea of universal language acquisition, and the primal urge of desire. Yoshida toys with this and many more fascinating ideas in an absurdist display of *Game Shows*, *Circus Acts*, and world-renowned philosophers, scientists and fucking Ernest Hemingway. All the goings for a fascinating scope into the playwriting mind of Barbara Yoshida.*

Five Stars

ANIMAL MAGNETISM

by Barbara Yoshida

All peoples have language. Not all peoples are human.

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CHARACTERS

THE HARE	A gender fluid Leporid, in human form
SHEELA NAGIG	A college graduate; feminist; not shy about sharing her opinions
RENÉ DESCARTES	Long, curly dark hair and dark moustache, period attire; wears a mortar board
THOMAS CONWAY	Heavy-set; bald; wears a white lab coat; has a mouse hand-puppet on one hand
SIR RICHARD OWEN	Young, middle-aged, or older man with a British accent; wears a 19th-century suit with a large, silver cross around his neck and a large collar with "FIDO" written on it
LAZZARO SPALLANZANI	Tall and lean; lugubrious; bald with sunken cheeks and dark circles under his eyes; stoops; wears a coat with sleeves too short for his arms; has a bat above his head
ERNEST HEMINGWAY	Dark and handsome; <i>very</i> charismatic and loaded with sexuality; intense eyes; impressive build; dark hair and moustache as a younger man; grey hair, white moustache and beard as an older man; no glasses; wears a safari shirt; carries a turkey leg

All roles are identity-flexible.

ANIMAL MAGNETISM

Scene 1.

A light comes up on SHEELA, center-stage, holding a trophy. Game-show music fades in. After a moment, a large chair is wheeled on. THE HARE is seated on it, holding a starter's pistol. The chair stops next to SHEELA.

THE HARE stands and walks to a curtain upstage, then gestures and the curtain rises, revealing SPALLANZANI, OWEN, CONWAY, and HEMINGWAY, sitting on child-size bicycles; DESCARTES is on a child-size tricycle. They all have targets on their backs. THE HARE raises the pistol up, the men take their marks, and THE HARE fires the gun. The men begin racing in a circle around SHEELA and THE HARE. After three times around, some of the cyclists collide in a heap, blocking other cyclists and allowing DESCARTES to get ahead. THE HARE waves a checkered flag as DESCARTES crosses the finish line. He slows to a stop in front of SHEELA, and the other cyclists return upstage. THE HARE takes the trophy from SHEELA.

THE HARE

(Handing him the trophy.) René Descartes, you've won the challenge, so you get the first question.

THE HARE *hands an envelope to SHEELA. Music recedes as SHEELA pulls a card from it and reads quickly.* THE HARE *returns to their chair.*

SHEELA

Do animals have language?

DESCARTES

(Standing.) *Cogito ergo sum.* Man thinks, has a consciousness of himself. Animals don't think, so how can they have language? Wittgenstein said, "If a lion could talk, we could not understand him."¹

SHEELA

What does that mean?

DESCARTES

Our experiences are so different, we wouldn't understand a lion, even if he spoke English.

CONWAY

(Loudly, from upstage.) Wittgenstein's lion has language. He's just not talking. His consciousness is beyond what we can comprehend.

DESCARTES

¹ Alexander Stern, *The Fall of Language: Benjamin and Wittgenstein on Meaning*, 2019.

(Dismissing CONWAY with a smirk.) I have no desire to talk with animals. Whatever they say is probably not that interesting. That doesn't mean I don't like animals. Some of them are cute and cuddly. Like me! *(Authoritatively.)* Sheela, if you choose me, you'll be famous as my consort. Pretty sexy, don't you think?

DESCARTES *winks and leers at SHEELA. He inclines his head, a tiny smile on his lips. He raises his eyebrows a couple of times.*

THE HARE

Ask him another question, Sheela.

DESCARTES *begins to remove his shirt to classic, strip-tease music.*

SHEELA

So tell me, what do you do when you're not philosophizing?

DESCARTES

(Taking off his pants.) Kick back. Drink a couple beers. *(Wearing only underwear, socks, shoes, and his mortar board.)* You like the way I look? Got a brain and a body.

SHEELA

Do me a favor and stop dancing! It's really not very interesting.

DESCARTES *stops dancing as strip-tease music recedes.*

DESCARTES

What do you like to do?

SHEELA

You could call me an animal activist. I follow up animal cruelty complaints with my colleagues. Does that bother you?

DESCARTES

I think you're hot. But you need to loosen up, babe. Let me take you out for a beer. Listen, animals aren't worth the bother. They're like machines. But I like 'em. Some of my best friends are animals! Especially the birds and bees—get it?

CONWAY *gets off his bicycle and strides purposefully toward DESCARTES. HEMINGWAY follows on his bicycle and witnesses what happens.*

CONWAY

(Angrily.) You're deranged! I don't care about your philosophy. And Sheela doesn't, either. You don't know anything about animals!

DESCARTES *gets off his tricycle. DESCARTES and CONWAY stand, facing off.*

DESCARTES

Showing off for Sheela? You challenging me to a duel?

CONWAY

(Shouting.) Sheela deserves better than you!

DESCARTES *reaches off-stage, grabs a rhinoceros mask, and puts it on; CONWAY reaches off-stage, grabs a lion mask, and puts it on. CONWAY starts chasing DESCARTES. They circle around SHEELA.*

THE HARE

(To SHEELA.) This could get interesting.

DESCARTES *steps into CONWAY. DESCARTES' hand comes out of nowhere. Palm first, it slams into CONWAY's chest. Unprepared, CONWAY steps back, loses his balance, and falls to the floor. DESCARTES looms over him, his finger stabbing down.*

DESCARTES *and CONWAY hand their masks to someone off-stage.*

DESCARTES

(To CONWAY.) Who are you to speak to me like that?! *(Sneering.)* And you won't even defend yourself. Just like an animal!

SHEELA

Settle down, Descartes. There's no call for that.

DESCARTES *bursts into tears. THE HARE crosses behind CONWAY and picks him up. CONWAY walks to his bicycle upstage. HEMINGWAY rides at his side. THE HARE returns to their chair.*

THE HARE

Descartes, you're out.

DESCARTES *mounts his tricycle, wiping his eyes, dejected, and slowly starts riding off. A target is painted on his back. When it's visible, SHEELA gives a thumbs-down gesture to THE HARE. THE HARE fires and DESCARTES topples. The tricycle's momentum carries him offstage with a comically loud crash.*

SHEELA

(To THE HARE.) This is the father of modern philosophy? Animals are machines? How arrogant! Next, he's gonna say women don't have the ability to reason, only men! Makes my feminist hackles rise. There's no way I'd have sex with him!

THE HARE

You're not afraid of being incomplete without a man.

SHEELA

Of course not! I want the intellectual challenge, a worthy adversary. Someone I can spar with.

THE HARE

You'll have to choose someone. (*To the cyclists.*) All right, who's next?

Game-show music swells. OWEN crosses downstage to SHEELA. Game-show music fades out.

SHEELA

(*Taking another card from THE HARE.*) Sir Richard Owen, what an honor. I like your necklace. Must be a heavy cross to bear! (*Opening the envelope.*) As a famous naturalist, do you think animals can think?

OWEN

I don't care if they can think or not. What matters is animals don't have souls. So it's a sin to kill a human, but it's okay to kill an animal.

SHEELA

Do you believe everything the *Bible* says?

OWEN

Doesn't everyone? Choose me! Choose me! I will honor your soul as much as your body.

The image of a saint is projected above.



Subdued hymns fade in. OWEN takes a box of communion wafers from his pocket and a bottle of wine from another pocket. Munching a wafer, he pulls the cork from the bottle and takes a swig.

Have a wafer, my dear. (*Extending the bottle to SHEELA.*) Have some wine. Stigmata merlot, 2005. A good year!

SHEELA *takes a sip of wine. Music fades.*

You a Catholic?

SHEELA

I believe in God, but organized religion's too patriarchal. Buddhism might be okay. I like the idea of karma and reincarnation.

OWEN

Hoo boy.

SHEELA

I didn't know you were so religious. You do believe humans evolved from apes, right?

OWEN

(*Taking the bottle from SHEELA.*) Our bodies did, but not our minds. After we split off from the apes, God gave us larger brains.

SHEELA *steps back, hands on hips. OWEN peers warily, and SHEELA holds him in her gaze.*

SHEELA

God created humans with these "superior" minds, in the last 10,000 years?

OWEN

(*Taking a sip of wine.*) Precisely. We developed philosophies, wrote poetry, composed symphonies.

SHEELA

Hoo boy.

OWEN

You rather talk about animals? I know that's what you care about. (*Pontificating.*) Here's the thing. In the behavior of animals, we can see the moral lessons God has hidden there.

The projection of the saint changes to a large reproduction of The Beaver, from a 19th-century Bestiary.



(*Gesturing to The Beaver.*) The beaver is a perfect example. His testicles are valued for their medicinal properties. When hunters close in, the beaver bites off his testicles and throws them at the hunters to save his life. The moral is obvious: To live chastely as God commands, we must cut off all vices and throw them in the devil's face. (*Grinning maniacally.*) If you choose me, sweet girl, no biting, but you can nibble gently!

THE HARE

Don't be fooled, Sheela, he wants to see your beaver!

OWEN

I need to know: are you a virgin?

SHEELA

And I need to know: is it only the missionary position with you? Or will you give me oral pleasure when I want it?

OWEN

You want me to talk dirty?

THE HARE

Hoo boy. That's it. Time's up.

OWEN *mounts his bicycle, turns, and starts riding off.*

HEMINGWAY

(*Taunting OWEN.*) "Our *nada* who art in *nada* . . . Give us this *nada* our daily *nada* . . . deliver us from *nada*, *pues nada*. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee."²

² Ernest Hemingway, *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place*

SHEELA *gives a thumbs-down gesture to THE HARE. THE HARE fires at the target on OWEN's back and OWEN topples. The bicycle's momentum carries him offstage with a comically loud crash.*

SHEELA

(To THE HARE.) He'll allow me to nibble his balls? Randy old bugger.

THE HARE

And he's not sexy, is he?

SHEELA *imitates gagging, sticking her finger in her mouth and leaning over.*

SHEELA

If he believes everything the *Bible* says, you can imagine what he thinks about women!

THE HARE

(To the cyclists.) Next!

Game-show music swells. CONWAY crosses downstage to SHEELA. Game-show music fades.

SHEELA

(Taking another card from THE HARE.) J. M. Conway. You're a biologist. (*Opening the envelope.*) Do animals have language?

CONWAY

Prairie dogs have different calls for a human, a coyote, and a hawk. Their calls have a syntax, and that reflects an underlying grammar.³

SHEELA

You gotta tell me more!

CONWAY

Mice sing.

THE HARE

Continue.

CONWAY

Their songs contain syllables with different intervals of time between, depending on which mouse is singing.⁴

³ Con Slobodchikoff, *Chasing Dr. Doolittle: Learning the Language of Animals*

⁴ Ibid.

Mickey Mouse Club music comes up as CONWAY stands and manipulates the hand puppet to sing along.

Who's the leader of the club
That's made for you and me?
M – I – C
K – E – Y
M – O – U – S – E!

Music fades.

Look, it's not whether animals can reason, but can they suffer? Emotions and feelings are well developed in many animals. So you better believe they can suffer!

THE HARE

Tell me about it!

CONWAY

The heart's the thing. It's where we find sympathy, the ability to share the being of another. The sympathetic imagination has no limits.⁵

SHEELA

Animals have language and emotions, so they must know there's some power or force larger than themselves.

CONWAY

Jane Goodall says chimps sit and stare at waterfalls, with what seems to be awe and wonder. Isn't that a kind of spirituality? Being amazed at things outside yourself?

THE HARE

I'm impressed! Chimp brains are similar to humans, so why not?

CONWAY moves closer to SHEELA and wraps his hands around hers. He lifts the hand with the puppet. The mouse puppet speaks for him.

CONWAY

(High, squeaky voice.) You need someone who's sensitive to how animals feel.

SHEELA places a hand gently on CONWAY's shoulder and kisses him on the cheek.

(Spreading his hands in a pleading gesture, in normal voice.) Sheela, I'm your man! I've spent my life workin' with animals and I'll be a kind and considerate partner. *(High, squeaky voice.)* Crown me your king!

⁵ J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*

THE HARE *gets up and walks toward CONWAY. He backs up, then mounts his bicycle and exits.*
THE HARE *returns to their chair.*

THE HARE

Maybe that's what you need—a scientist.

SHEELA

I'm attracted—physically—but I don't trust it. Is it just the biological urge to procreate? He's smart, sensitive, and not macho. I could go for him.

THE HARE

You could be his little prairie puppy!

SHEELA *sticks her tongue out at THE HARE.*

But he's not man enough for you, is he?

SHEELA *turns her head to look directly at THE HARE and frowns, puzzled.*

(To the cyclists.) Next!

Game-show music swells. SPALLANZANI crosses downstage to SHEELA. The cartoon bat above his head flops around on a wire; it needs to be comical.

THE HARE

(Cynically.) This should be good.

Game-show music fades out.

SHEELA

(Taking another card from THE HARE.) Lazzaro Spallanzani, I've heard about your experiments. *(Opening the envelope.)* You thought bats used their sense of taste to navigate in the dark?

SPALLANZANI

(Standing.) But removing their tongues didn't give us any useful data. *(Wringing his hands.)* So we stopped up their nostrils to see if it was their sense of smell.

SHEELA

But they couldn't breathe, so that wasn't it.

SPALLANZANI

(Wringing his hands.) Then we burned their corneas with a hot wire or just pulled their eyeballs out and cut them off.

THE HARE

Guess they weren't using their eyes.

SPALLANZANI

(Wringing his hands.) Finally, we plugged their ears with hot wax. Sure enough, they bumped into things!

SHEELA

(Cynically.) You must be so proud.

THE HARE

Our Lady of the Beasts, have mercy on us.

SPALLANZANI

If you choose me, my dear, I'll give you a private tour of my lab. *(Conspiratorially.)* We can play hide-and-seek—discover how well you see in the dark!

THE HARE

That won't be necessary.

SHEELA

We'll be in touch.

SHEELA waves bye-bye. SPALLANZANI mounts his bicycle, turns, and heads for the exit. When the target on his back is visible, SHEELA gives a thumbs-down gesture to THE HARE. THE HARE fires and SPALLANZANI topples. The bicycle's momentum carries him offstage and after a pause, a comically loud crash is heard.

SHEELA

(To THE HARE.) So cruel! My god, who chose these guys?! I can play hide the sausage in the dark? Really?!

THE HARE shoots back a knowing look.

THE HARE

A nasty man. Moving on. Final suitor!

Game-show music swells. HEMINGWAY crosses downstage to SHEELA. Game-show music fades out.

SHEELA

(Taking another card from THE HARE.) Ernest Hemingway. A wild game hunter! *(Opening the envelope.)* Rumor has it you talk animal talk.

HEMINGWAY *stands, pulls the turkey leg from his pocket, and tears off a big chunk with his teeth.*

HEMINGWAY

(Chewing, irritated.) You know, you have to truly understand the animal. It's a kind of intimacy, a silent communion with it. But my bear talk is kinda rusty now. *(Winking at SHEELA and scratching his chest hair.)* Maybe I am a bear.

SHEELA *rolls her eyes.*

THE HARE

Oh, brother. The bear shit's getting deep.

HEMINGWAY

(Tearing off another chunk from the turkey leg and chewing.) In caveman days, they had an attentiveness we've lost—attuned to every nuance about an animal's behavior. Through hunting, I've tried to get that back. *(Intimately.)* If you choose me, Sheela, I will introduce you to your animal nature. *(Raising his voice.)* I'll pin you to the wall and satisfy your hunger with savage fury!

SHEELA

Yeah, yeah. But what about putting animal heads on the wall?

HEMINGWAY

Always hoped to get a greater kudu bull. Makes a great trophy 'cause of its spiral horns.

SHEELA *turns toward HEMINGWAY and makes a face, wrinkling her nose and frowning.*

SHEELA

Kill an animal for its horns?! Holy crap!

Projected above are three very large reproductions: Rousseau's The Dream, Boucher's Odalisque, and Gérôme's A Roman Slave Market.



An animal head on the wall, a painting of a naked woman.... Same thing, right?

HEMINGWAY's head swivels in SHEELA's direction. SHEELA points to the projections.

HEMINGWAY

Hold on, I don't think—

SHEELA

(Cutting him off.) Your animal trophies are just objects of male desire, like paintings of women as sexual objects. Look at the men leering at the woman being auctioned off!

HEMINGWAY *laughs, without humor. He sighs theatrically.*

HEMINGWAY

I knew it. Fucking feminists! What does that have to do—

SHEELA

(Cutting him off.) When you put a tiger head on the wall, you take away everything about the animal that matters. You reduce it to an object.

HEMINGWAY

(Guardedly.) What's wrong with admiring an animal for its beauty? Or a woman.

SHEELA *can't believe she's hearing this and laughs outright. Then she gets serious.*

SHEELA

(Crossing her arms under her breasts in a defensive posture.) To you, an animal on the wall is beautiful. All I can see is death. What's beautiful is the way an animal moves—the way it hunts or uses cunning to escape the hunters.

Waltz music comes up as HEMINGWAY reaches out, putting one arm around SHEELA's waist and taking her other hand in his. He starts moving her around. SHEELA looks at him with a puzzled expression. They stop dancing as music fades and stand, facing each other.

SHEELA

How do you feel about zoos? Would you like to be in a cage?

HEMINGWAY *lifts his arms in a hopeless gesture, then lets them fall, in frustration.*

HEMINGWAY

Zoos might be the only way to prevent total extinction.

SHEELA

You may have a point, but my activist friends say you're wrong.

A large reproduction of Baryé's Jaguar Devouring a Hare replaces the three paintings.



THE HARE

(Gesturing to the image and shuddering.) Okay, Hem, but I gotta ask: *(Steely and sharp.)* You've shot hares, right?

HEMINGWAY

(Standing upright, triumphant.) Last week we bagged over 400 hares. A real corker! But I never hunt 'em in March. The mad March hare, right?

THE HARE

Am I bewitched? Something uncanny about me? I am not right. Hare meat is too dark, almost black, hard to digest, and there's way too much blood. It's melancholy meat—breeds incubus if often eaten, and causes fearful dreams. *(Pause.) (Pointedly.)* It's unlucky to kill hares, Hem. Something bad always happens.

The projected Baryé image fades to black.

SHEELA

You been warned, Hem.

HEMINGWAY *reaches out, lifts SHEELA's hair, and gently kisses her on the back of her neck. SHEELA gazes at HEMINGWAY in a new way, her face soft and compassionate.*

HEMINGWAY

(Calmly.) Look, Sheela, we have always needed animals. When ancient man butchered a wildebeest, he said, "I am not that animal, but that heart, that stomach is like mine." Animals defined us.

SHEELA

Sure, but ancient man didn't kill an animal *(Punching each word.)* for — its — beauty. Or for some aphrodisiac from a rhinoceros horn!

The ghost of DESCARTES, upstage in his rhinoceros mask, can be seen walking across the stage. HEMINGWAY reaches off-stage, grabs a bear mask, and puts it on. He growls, then hands his

mask to someone off-stage. HEMINGWAY closes his eyes, balls his fists, and curls his lips in distaste. He comes in close, his face mere inches from SHEELA's face.

HEMINGWAY

(Snarling, his voice lowered to little more than a hiss.) Where in hell did you get that? That kind of mental conversation is the gen – u – wind shit.

SHEELA

(Stunned, like she's been slapped.) What did you say?

HEMINGWAY *turns away for a beat, and doesn't answer. Then he turns to face SHEELA.*

HEMINGWAY

(Forcefully.) Hunting is about how to be a man! I like to shoot and I like to kill. *(Punching the words out.)* The discipline. The patience. The concentration. *(Gruffly, with scorn.)* When we get that tiger skin—

SHEELA *laughs and throws her hands up. Then she gets serious.*

SHEELA

(Aggressively, contemptuously.) So you can "honor" it—a rug to walk on?! I'm not gonna let you get away with that! The male gaze all over again, straight from the nineteenth century!

HEMINGWAY

(Standing up straighter, puffing up his chest, defiant.) Don't blame me! Just 'cause I'm a man, that doesn't mean—

SHEELA

All those animals you've killed, just for fun! You arrogant prick!

HEMINGWAY *grabs SHEELA's arm and turns her around to face him. Putting his other hand on her neck, he pulls her toward him, pressing his body against hers. HEMINGWAY kisses her roughly. SHEELA yields, then pulls free and storms off. SHEELA exits.*

HEMINGWAY

"And so she yields to me. For I am rough and woo not like a babe."⁶

Exit music.

THE HARE

Time to go, Hem!

⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew*, Act II, Scene 1

HEMINGWAY *stuffs the turkey leg into his pocket, mounts his bicycle, and exits.* SHEELA *enters and walks across the stage with THE HARE as they talk. Exit music fades.*

That's it, you've met them all now.

SHEELA

It's down to two.

THE HARE

You love the fact that Hem is all about the primitive experience. It's deeply masculine.

SHEELA

I admit, the super-masculine type makes me feel more feminine. Is that so wrong?

THE HARE

Are you afraid of your own animal nature? The way it's drawing you toward him? A power you can't control?

SHEELA

I'm afraid of being overwhelmed by him—of losing myself. He's very dominant. So strong and sure of himself.

(Fade to black.)

Scene 2.

Lights come up on THE HARE in the center of a circus cage, holding a whip and a chair. CONWAY and HEMINGWAY squat on circus tubs inside the ring, facing THE HARE. A long stick, a pole with a basketball hoop, and a basketball are in the ring. CONWAY wears his lion mask and a lion skin with its paws draped around his shoulders. HEMINGWAY wears his bear mask, a furry body suit, and a tutu. The large chair is inside the cage.

The sound of a calliope can be heard as SHEELA enters the cage, closes the door, and sits in the large chair. Calliope music fades out. THE HARE crosses to CONWAY.

THE HARE

(To CONWAY.) "O! the blood more stirs
To rouse a lion than to start a hare."⁷

(To CONWAY and HEMINGWAY.) You two animals ready?

⁷ William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Act I, Scene 3

THE HARE *cracks the whip as SHEELA speaks.*

SHEELA

(To THE HARE.) This is gonna sound weird, but sometimes you meet someone, and you lock eyes and you just know. You've met before and you have something to work out in this life.

THE HARE

(To CONWAY.) Look her in the eyes. Conway! Look right in her eyes! Good boy. (To SHEELA.) Really? Past lives?

CONWAY *waves an arm at THE HARE.* THE HARE *cracks the whip.*

SHEELA

You hold hands and you feel a jolt of energy—a *frisson*, in French. Chemically, it's elevated oxytocin levels—the “cuddle hormone.” Fosters emotional bonding.

CONWAY *opens his mouth, lip-synching to the MGM lion's roar as a video of the MGM lion is projected above.* HEMINGWAY *glares at CONWAY with disdain.*

THE HARE

(To SHEELA.) Giving yourself to a man means not only the risk of losing yourself. You also have to let him in. He's different. And differences can be threatening to who you are.

SHEELA

They are different! It's scary. But I'll take the risk. I'm more afraid of being bored to death! Besides, my animal nature is pulling me! The drive to nurture—I'm a born caretaker.

THE HARE *turns to SHEELA, spreading her arms wide in disbelief.*

THE HARE

(*Exasperated.*) Oh, come on! (*Crossing to HEMINGWAY.*) Okay, Hem. Let's see you impress Sheela.

HEMINGWAY *gets down, stands on his hands, walks a few steps, and returns to his tub.*

SHEELA

Socially and emotionally, I am a primate. Right now, my monkey brain is drawing me veeeeeee-ry strongly to the opposite sex!

CONWAY

(*Rubbing his belly.*) Monkey brains! My favorite!

CONWAY *bites the air, licks his lips, and makes a smacking sound.*

THE HARE

(Cracking the whip.) Settle down, Conway. Settle down. *(Turning to SHEELA.)* You want to be equal with men, right? So act like it! Follow your head instead of your body.

SHEELA

You mean the way men say emotions are irrational, the realm of women and animals, men are more cerebral? Bullshit! Mind and body are . . . one thing. Can't separate 'em.

THE HARE *pulls a bratwurst from their pocket and puts it on the end of the long stick. They walk toward CONWAY and hold the bratwurst above his head.*

THE HARE

Here, Conway. Quick! Come right here, quick!

CONWAY *stands on top of the tub, arms out to the sides. He grabs the bratwurst with his teeth and gulps it down.*

Atta boy. Good boy, Conway! Sit down, Conway.

CONWAY *sits down.*

(Turning to SHEELA.) Your animal nature is telling you who to choose?

SHEELA

No! My primate biology drives me to pair-bond and nurture. But who I choose comes down to desire. *(Frowning.)* And I'm attracted to the kind of man I've been told all my life is desirable.

THE HARE

What?! You don't have to listen to that. Just choose for yourself.

HEMINGWAY *growls loudly, jumps down, and advances on THE HARE.*

(Holding the chair in front, to HEMINGWAY.) Get back!

THE HARE *moves toward HEMINGWAY with the chair, driving him back to his tub.*

SHEELA

I should be able to do that. I believe it's possible. Change my perspective—be attracted to a body builder. Or find a woman desirable and make love to her. Am I just lazy? Afraid to change?

THE HARE *moves closer to CONWAY. CONWAY swipes the chair with a "paw," knocking it from THE HARE's hand. THE HARE steps back, cracks the whip, and CONWAY growls.*

(To THE HARE.) My preferences feel hard-wired. I can't help it. Sexually, I'm drawn to men, not women. And a certain kind of man. I'm not gonna apologize!

THE HARE

Maybe you're her kind of man, Conway. Let's see what else can you do. Sheela's gotta make a decision soon. Here, Conway. Come here. Quick!

CONWAY *jumps down and moves on all fours to the center of the ring.*

Good boy. Now lie down.

CONWAY *lies down.*

Who's a good boy? Now roll, Conway, quick!

CONWAY *rolls over.*

Aaaalright, go to your place. On your place, Conway, quick!

THE HARE *advances with the chair, cracking the whip.* CONWAY *slowly gets on his tub.*

Now sit down, Conway. That's a good boy.

CONWAY *sits.*

SHEELA

(To THE HARE.) We can't ignore biological sex—it's everything! Our sexual behavior was forged over millions of years! And with a variety of partners, I might add. Chimps and bonobos know all about that!

THE HARE

(To SHEELA.) Don't talk to me about sex. Breed like rabbits, isn't that what you say? We hares have no problem with sex! (*Crossing to HEMINGWAY.*) One more chance to show what you can do, Hem.

HEMINGWAY *pulls the basketball hoop forward, grabs the basketball, and starts shooting baskets.*

(To SHEELA.) You gonna take his name if you get married? Pander to the patriarchy?

SHEELA

You know what? That kind of feminism burns my butt. We need to be more inclusive, not less. I gotta do this my way.

THE HARE

(To HEMINGWAY.) Okay, Hem, go back and sit down.

HEMINGWAY *drops the basketball and turns to SHEELA.* THE HARE *cracks the whip.*
HEMINGWAY *ignores it and moves forward, toward SHEELA.*

HEMINGWAY

(To SHEELA, *swaggering.*) You're cock-eyed beautiful, you know that? Let's hie us to a spaghettiery. We can call each other Coney. I'm the male Coney and you're the female Coney.

THE HARE

(To HEMINGWAY, *brandishing the chair.*) Get back to your place!

HEMINGWAY *backs up a few steps.*

HEMINGWAY

Come on, Sheela, there's no contest! Conway's pathetic! And he's a coward!

CONWAY *starts circling around HEMINGWAY.*

CONWAY

Coward?! Who you callin' coward?

HEMINGWAY

You wouldn't even fight Descartes! And you cower in front of the whip! You're a coward!

Circling around HEMINGWAY, CONWAY starts swiping at HEMINGWAY's back. HEMINGWAY tries to swipe back, but he can't reach. THE HARE cracks the whip, but they continue. SHEELA stands and moves forward. CONWAY pounces on HEMINGWAY's back and they crash to the floor. THE HARE takes out her pistol, points it at the ceiling, and fires.

(Blackout.)

Scene 3.

Lights come up on CONWAY and HEMINGWAY, standing and facing SHEELA, center-stage. They wear their circus attire, without the masks. THE HARE stands to the side. SHEELA hands a red rose to HEMINGWAY. CONWAY exits. The rose has very large thorns. A spotlight highlights the blood dripping from HEMINGWAY's hand. A recording can be heard of a loud drip, drip, drip.

(Fade to black.)

Scene 4.

Lights come up on HEMINGWAY, center-stage, curled up in a fetal position inside a large rectangular cage with jail-like bars. THE HARE reclines on top of the cage, holding a dish of raw, ground meat. SHEELA stands to the side.

HEMINGWAY

Whoa, I must have drunk more than I thought.

THE HARE

(*To HEMINGWAY.*) Am I animal? Am I human? The Celts⁸ call me the walker between worlds. (*Shakespearean voice.*) “I shall go into a hare, with sorrow and sigh, and meikle⁹ care. I am in a hare’s likeness now, but I shall be in a woman’s likeness even now.”¹⁰

HEMINGWAY

Why am I in this cage?

SHEELA

(*To THE HARE.*) Go ahead, tell him.

THE HARE

(*Irish accent.*) A man was going to go hunting for hares. As he set out, he met a hare in the road. It was going to be a bad journey, and he knew he should turn around and go home. He went to shoot at the hare, and the hare spoke and said, “You wouldn’t shoot your old grandmother, would you?”

SHEELA *stares at HEMINGWAY with a look on her face that says, “You got the rose, but”*

SHEELA

(*To HEMINGWAY.*) I chose you. But you show no remorse, no desire to change.

THE HARE

(*Lip-synching to soundtrack of Shirley Collins singing.*) “If all you young men were hares on the mountain, how many young girls would take guns and go hunting?”¹¹

⁸ pronounced *kelts*

⁹ *meikle* = Gaelic word for *great*; pronounced *muckle*

¹⁰ Isobel Gowdie, a Scottish woman who confessed to witchcraft at Auldearn near Nairn in 1662 (from the second confession)

¹¹ Davy Graham and Shirley Collins, “Folk Roots, New Routes,” 2005, A Wing & A Prayer Ltd.

Soundtrack fades. SHEELA walks up to the cage, takes the dish of meat from THE HARE, and squats in front of HEMINGWAY.

SHEELA

What does the cow say?

HEMINGWAY

Moo! Moo!

SHEELA

What does the rooster say?

HEMINGWAY

Cock-a-doodle-do!

SHEELA

And what does the piggy say?

HEMINGWAY

Oink! Oink!

SHEELA slides the dish of meat through the bars into HEMINGWAY's cage, then steps back. HEMINGWAY stares at the meat and then at SHEELA.

SHEELA

Here you go, big guy. Dinner time!

(Blackout.)

END

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:

It is shocking to hear that there are scientists who are renowned and yet persist in clinging to the dualism that goes back to Descartes—an outdated belief that the mind and body are separate—and the idea that humans have superior brains so they are “higher” than other, “lower” animals. The more we learn about the incredibly diverse ways different species adapt to their environments, the more we have to acknowledge that some of them are more evolved than we are. (Darwin applauds!) Other species have developed senses we barely use to gather information we cannot perceive, and at a speed that leaves us in the dust. And whether we want to call it language or not, the fact that they have very sophisticated methods of communication is undeniable.

Although our attitude toward animals is a main theme in this play, Sheela’s conflict is at the center: What kind of feminist is she? And how can she square her feminist intellect with choosing a man based on her animal lust?

*I salute Ed Yong’s newest book, *An Immense World: How Animal Senses Reveal the Hidden Realms Around Us*—essential reading to find out the latest discoveries about animal behavior and evolution. Absurdist dramatic influences include Albee’s *The Zoo Story*, and Guare’s *The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year*. And when Descartes wears a rhinoceros mask in *Animal Magnetism*, it’s a nod to Ionesco’s brilliant play, *Rhinoceros*. My gratitude goes to S. M. Dale, dramaturg.*

AUTHOR BIO: Barbara Yoshida is an American writer and visual artist, living in SoHo, NYC. She began writing theatrical plays in 2019, starting with *Language Games*, and adding *Intuitive Leap* and *Animal Magnetism* to create *The Hare Trilogy*. *The Language Games* and *Intuitive Leap* playscripts have both been published by FOTD. In 2020, NYC site-specific performance company, Peculiar Works Project, produced a 17-minute film version of *Language Games*, which was presented in NYC’s Rogue Theater Festival and which has since premiered in several short film festivals, receiving awards for Best Women’s Empowerment, Best Experimental, and Best Arthouse Film. *Intuitive Leap* and *Animal Magnetism* have also been filmed and *The Hare Trilogy* recently previewed at The Gene Frankel Theatre in NYC. Yoshida’s playwriting followed two decades of assisting Peculiar Works Project with dramaturgical support. Other writing includes her monograph, published in 2014:
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