

WHY SHOULD THE ANIMALS TRUST US?

by James O'Hern

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Amun-Kumutef, Egyptian King of the gods and Bull of His Mother.
Temple of Luxor, The Temple in Mani, R.A.Lubicz p.40

I have spent many pleasant hours in the woods conducting performances of my silent piece, transcriptions, that is, for an audience of myself, since they were much longer than the popular length which I have had published. At one performance, I passed the first movement by attempting the identification of a mushroom which remained successfully unidentified. The second movement was extremely dramatic, beginning with the sounds of a buck and doe leaping up to within ten feet of my rocky podium. The expressivity of this movement was not only dramatic but unusually sad, from my point of view, for the animals were frightened simply because I was a human being.

John Cage, Music Lover's Field Companion

J.M. Coetzee tells us, through his character Elizabeth Costello, that "animals have only their silence left with which to confront us" and that "generation after generation, heroically, [they] refuse to speak to us". Unlike Comte-Sponville, who thought he knew there is nothing behind that silence but an incapacity to speak, Coetzee suggests that their silence should be understood as the response of animals to our behavior toward them. Coetzee's sentence is powerful not because it describes an established fact, nor because mankind has "won" its "war" against nonhuman beings definitively, but because changes are underway that will bring humans to hear the silence of nonhumans once more.

Emilie Hatch and Bruno Latour, essay *Morality or Moralism?*

Quotes from the Archive of [Ensayos](#).¹

As a child growing up in the peyote country of South Texas I was taught to call coyotes by my Mexican Indian mentor, Chispa. From him I learned the rabbit's song.

Yyaha, yya yya, yya ayya, ayyo oviya
ayya yya, ayya yya yyo viya, ayya yya ayya yya
yyo viya

(dreams/he will dream of it/he will become a rabbit)

Swimming all day in the lake, I wanted to become a fish. I entered through the swampy cattails, crawling on my belly through the hot black mud, as would a snake. Under the pier, trying to join their circle of play, I was ashamed to hear my father's footsteps bringing watermelon to feed them. I did not want them to know I belonged to him.

When I was seven I shot my first deer. As he lay dying in the hollow of the dry creek, he was at peace and wanted me by his side. I knelt down and took his head in my arms, crying until he was gone. I never admitted this part of the story to my father.

When I was fourteen, I had to shoot my horse Albert who was old; his teeth had gone so he could no longer eat. He was my first love and, in our ritual of death, I made a vow that I would never forget him.

Venciendo el dolor de perder
a mi único amigo, lo maté.

Le disparé en la boca
y el saltó a la muerte.

Tuve que matar
lo que más amaba en el mundo!

Lo abracé desconsolado
me saqué las botas
y las llené de la sangre
que le salía por la nariz.

[Albert](#), by James O'Hern, translated by Cecilia Vicuña

¹ Ensayos is "a nomadic research program based in Tierra del Fuego (TdF)...Since 2010 Ensayos has brought together artists, scientists and other thinkers and doers to address issues of land use, ecology and ethics at the end of the world."

Later that year, while still mourning my Albert, I went across the river to Nuevo Laredo with a group of older boys to drink a Ramos gin fizz at the Cadillac Bar and pay a visit to the notorious Conchita's, casa de putas, patronized by gunners and pilots from the Laredo Air Force Base and, occasionally, by our fathers.

I don't remember her name but I still feel pangs of love from my first full-on view of a vagina as she took off her panties and lay back splay-legged on the metal spring bed. She guided me through the frightful mystery of proper entry, which I had imagined as going straight in, at a 90° angle, not from down below and up. She seemed truly excited and proud to initiate me into sex, like a conquest of sorts; apparently a tradition of honor for the muchachas de la casa to give this service for free. When I came back a time or two, I was received as part of the family and shown off to the other girls her "cherry".

I left my childhood, put away animal dreams and turned to girls and sex to become a man and make my way in the world. The secret that went with me to Wall Street and big business was the unacknowledged shame of having turned my back on the [Nagual](#) lessons learned from Chispa.

In Gilgamesh, Enkidu, raised by animals, ran naked in the forest scaring the people of Uruk. The temple prostitute, [Shamhat](#), was ordered to tame him and teach him to become civilized. At the watering hole, she lay back under the tree of knowledge, spread her legs and said: "come plow my vulva" which he did for six days and seven nights. Then she said: "you are beautiful, you are become like god". He believed her. After that the animals would no longer speak to him.

Shamhat, emissary of Ishtar, goddess of love, embodies the procreative life-force: cosmic eroticism, spirit and matter united as one. In rituals of divine sex, she is eternal life while the king must lay with her to earn his right to the throne and stay alive for another year. Through sacred coupling, the king renews his vow to govern by the goddess' rules of wisdom, which include duties as divine-caretaker.

For humans, the everlasting life of the goddess is implicit in the birthing capacities of women while, for men, the fear of death at the hands of the goddess is embedded in the act of sex itself.

Shamhat initiates Enkidu into the ways of the world through the sacred ritual of sex. He emerges from this rite-of-passage believing her cajolery but, at the same time, feels his very existence is threatened so he must kill her and seize the power she holds over him.

When Enkidu feels his newfound powers, he denies her part in the divine union and turns away. She shrinks, feeling culpable for coercing him to do her bidding. In that moment, both separate from the goddess, Nature and the wild.²

² Is Shamhat the originator of original sin...the first "Eve"?

Both are caught in the trap of the "[mimetic double bind](#)" or "mimetic violence" (as explained by René Girard and JM Coetzee). ... "desire does not know itself. It proceeds from lack..." The unity of spirit is split into a subject-object relationship and mimetic rivalry develops from the struggle for the possession of what is believed held by the object-other, which leads to an escalating threat of violence.

Fuelled by fear and rage, Enkidu breaks from Shamhat's erotic embrace to challenge Gilgamesh, King of Uruk in battle. Enkidu is defeated but, due to his great courage, wins the King over to become his most trusted companion. Together they destroy the forest and blatantly defy the rules of the goddesses to become our first [warrior-heroes](#).

In the earliest Sumerian sources (clay tablets and god-lists), Nammuⁱⁱ is named as our primeval "[Mother who gave birth to Heaven and Earth](#)". In the [Enûma Elišh](#), the oldest written "creation myth, Nammu is supplanted by Tiamat who is murdered by her offspring the Sun God [Marduk](#) who chops her into pieces and buries her body parts in the four corners of earth."ⁱⁱⁱ

Nammu and Tiamat become the first [desaparecidos](#).

Before the Enûma Elišh, the genealogy of the god-lists had been restructured to acclaim [Marduk as sole creator of the universe](#). As Erich Neumann says in *The Great Mother*^{iv}, a "radical shift in the center of gravity" occurs as "the process of masculinization finally crystallizes"^v and the pre-patriarchal perspective of unity is supplanted by the duality of opposites. Amber Jacobs in [Why Matricide?](#) sees this transition as setting the stage for the "fantasy that the father can procreate alone"; the "mother is reduced to nurse the seed...giving genetic sovereignty to the father."

In Greek mythology, Zeus impregnates [Metis](#), turns her into a fly, swallows her and gives birth to Athena through a vaginal split in his skull. Metis, like Tiamat, is desaparecido, never heard of again. Athena becomes the first motherless-mother, giving birth to a succession of gods and warriors cut off from the memory of who they are and where they come from.

In [The Life of Metis: Cunning Maternal Interventions](#), Amber Jacobs writes:

Turning to Aeschylus's *Oresteia* as my object of study whilst trying to think about the meaning of matricide in western culture and discourses was in some senses an obvious move. It is a foundational ancient myth that tells of a son (Orestes) who murders his mother as a revenge murder for her murder of his father. Clytemnestra, (his mother) had killed Agamemnon (Orestes father) as revenge for her murder of their eldest daughter who he had sacrificed in order to win a war. Father kills daughter, mother kills father, son kills mother. The *Oresteia* attempts to resolve itself around the question of Orestes' crime in the first court of democratic justice set up by Athena. Orestes, the matricidal son is put on trial. The jury is split down the middle – half side with the mother's cause and half with the father. It is up to the goddess Athena to cast the determining vote. Athena votes for Orestes and in so doing condones matricide and implicitly condones the violence against the daughter by the father. Her reason for siding with Orestes is (quote) 'No mother gave me birth. Never bred in the darkness of the womb. In all my heart I am my father's child'...

This new breed of warrior-hero, "cut off from the memory of who they are and where they come from" robotically lash out at the ghost of the memory of their own

mother. Matricide, rape and violence toward women (and "dark people") are justified in the name of the hero's "divine duty" to rid the world of threats of evil lurking in the shadows.

Matricide "constitutes the central act of the heroic lifestyle" and the "theological psychology of the West".

Luce Irigaray quoted in *Thinking With Irigaray*^{vi}

In a way, all of our Western patriarchal system amounts to this: killing without openly committing a murder; that is to say, little by little depriving us of the surroundings that allow us to live, by polluting, annihilating the equilibrium of the environment, destroying the plant and animal worlds, and finally humanity itself.

In *The Beginning She Was*, by Luce Irigaray^{vii}

From the time of Gilgamesh, heroes go forth into battle using the power of violence to seek fame and immortality. To bolster the hero's bravado and inspire him to murder without remorse, the memory of the Mother is erased, the goddess of wisdom supplanted by the goddess of war. However, denial of our true origins presents a formidable challenge requiring evermore-drastic measures; denial of Her very existence. The warrior, caught in a "mimetic double-bind", reenacts her murder again and again but she refuses to die.^{viii} His wild flailing is extrapolated from Enkidu's and Shamhat to the world at large.

How else do we account for the collective insanity that murdered 250,000 women during the Witch-hunts of the Middle Ages and then killed 70,000,000 indigenous people during early [European Imperial colonization](#)?³

I feel guilty and complicit.

As an infant I was blessed with a nebulous bodysense of womb-presence wrapped around me, tethered to the stars with a cosmic umbilical. A gathering of love in the "beads of the chromosomes"^{ix}, a celestial flow that somehow got lost in the wet murk.

I knew my father's rage from inside the womb. His blows of humiliation landed on both my mother and me. I was tied to the yoke of an ongoing battle between my mother and father and could not love her, or be loved by her, outside their field of hate. I still feel the wound but can't get to it. Her distress coursing through my veins, calling me to a mission: to kill my father for her.

Inside her womb I learned to slow my heartbeat to match hers. With Chispa's teachings of the [Nagual](#), I was able to see my mother's pain as the cry of a dying rabbit; her shame and rage converted to an offering in the wisdom of the universe.

But like Enkidu, I turned away from animal dreams in a quest for glory. Having learned 'how to have sex' from a Mexican prostitute and charged with my mother's rage, I entered the gates of Wall Street with the swagger of a hit man. I became 'one of them', caught in the double-bind of desire turned against itself. As Luce Irigaray said

³ The "American Indian Holocaust" was far and away the most massive act of genocide in the History of the world.

...the quest for glory and not the quest for shared flowering of desire or love. The potential of desire has become an aptitude for wounding and killing the adversary.^x

Enkidu had an erection lasting 7 days and 7 nights, the thrusting power of his penis producing exaltation and submission as spoils of war and violence. In a rite-of-passage my penis was granted magical powers like Beowulf's sword. Without knowing it, I had been initiated into the ancient cult of the Penis-King.

"The child's tiny penis becomes a magic phallus, which will ultimately be able to eliminate all inadequacy."^{xi}

After Tutankhamen died, he was embalmed with an erect penis; the embodiment of Osiris/Amun-Ra⁴ who supplanted the Great Mother as the creator of the universe. The Mother is gone, the circle is squared; the Great Round of life and death is replaced by man's everlasting erection.

The Dead King Hunts and Eats the Gods

The planets are stilled,
For they have seen the King appearing in power
As a god who lives on his fathers
And feeds on his mothers;
[...]
The King is the Bull of the sky,
Who conquers at will,
Who lives on the being of every god,
Who eats their entrails,
Even of those who come with their bodies full of magic
[...]
Those who are in the sky serve the King,
And the hearthstones are wiped over for him
With the feet of their women.

Translation from the Pyramid Texts (2,400-2,300 BC),
Barbaric Vast & Wild, Jerome Rothenberg and John Bloomberg-Rissman

Pecker as king! The cosmic gift of love converted into the power of violence. Was this a pact with the devil?

For me, this pull eclipsed the beauty of womb-presence and being one with the animals. I never looked back or gave it a second thought until 1975 when I visited [Altamira](#).

At Altamira I saw cave paintings for the first time. Something in me changed. The great red and black bisons planted a thorn in my side. I say thorn in my side remembering Camilio Jose Cela's story, [The Family of Pascual Duarte](#). How Pascual's life was foretold by one incident. He had this setter bitch named Chispa, half mongrel, half wild.

⁴ Amun-Kamutef, Amun-Ra, Tutankhamen's symbolic precursor, was the chief deity of the Egyptian Empire. Amun-Ra also came to be worshipped outside of Egypt, in Ancient Libya and Nubia, and as *Zeus Ammon* came to be identified with Zeus in Ancient Greece.

He would take her hunting and talk with her, as I did with my horse Albert. One day, Chispa's stare was too much for Pascual, so he shot her.⁵

In bouts of rage against my father, my mother would say "don't you ever forget who you are and where you came from." I never understood what she meant but I took it as a plea to do this for her. After she died, I traced her DNA back 17,000 years to "[Velda](#)", one of the "Seven Daughters of Eve"^{xii}, who lived in the Cantabrian mountains near Altamira during the time it was painted.

The pain of being cut off from our first mother puts us all in the same category: motherless children filled with shame. We carry the genetic memory of an arrow planted in her belly by the sun god, wincing each time the blade is twisted. Torn away from her embrace, we are never to know from whence we came. We are left with the yearning of an abandoned calf, a virus with no ancestry.

The mother condemned for a witch and burnt with dry
wood, and her children gazing on;
The hounded slave that flags in the race and leans by the
fence, blowing and covered with sweat,
The twinges that sting like needles his legs and neck,
The murderous buckshot and the bullets,
All these I feel or am.

Walt Whitman, Song of Myself

What was lost between my mother and the stars, between me and the pain of a dying rabbit, all came back to me in the cave. The bison-bull, father of my fathers that carried her across the sea to Crete where she gave birth to the Minotaur. Signs of her most ancient "rites" recently found in the [Rising Star Caves of South Africa](#); ancestral bones intentionally deposited deep in the belly of the cave 2,000,000 years ago. Her footsteps planted in the mud of [Langebaan Lagoon](#) 120,000 years ago as she prepared to journey "[out of Africa](#)". Since then, a [ritual cave](#) has been found in Kalahari Desert of Botswana where the rainbow serpent danced with her 70,000 years ago.

Twenty years after Altamira, I found her in the [Chauvet Cave](#)⁶. Startled by her giant clitoris^{xiii} dangling from the ceiling in the deepest region of the cave and, painted on it, her vulva open, legs spread, as she received her bison-bull lover 30,000 years ago.

In his book "Wisdom Sits In Places" Keith Basso says, for Apaches, history is not linear, past events described "as they are occurring" creating a vivid sense of what happened long ago ---right here on this spot---could be happening now.

⁵ "It appears, then, "to be Pascual's destiny to kill; to that end, his assignment becomes one he fulfills consistently. Along the way, he also slashes a man in a barroom brawl and stabs to death a mare that has thrown Lola and killed the baby she carried inside."

From a book review of [Real Magicalism in the Family of Pascual Duarte](#) by Stephen Siciliano.

⁶ Since its discovery in 1994, the cave has been sealed off to the public with access severely restricted. In January 2004, Clayton Eshleman (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clayton_Eshleman) and I were granted the rare privilege of an extensive tour of the original Chauvet Cave by one of its discoverers, Jean-Marie Chauvet. A facsimile installation of Chauvet Cave was opened to the public in April 2015.

From the moment I set foot on the metal stairs descending into the entryway way at Chauvet, I was on a spacewalk between this world and the next. I entered the dreamscape dressed in a blue jumpsuit, helmet with a miner's lamp, rubber shoes and a rope harness. I literally peed in my pants as I took the first few steps on the aluminum catwalk.

Stunned by gallery displays of whinnying horses come alive; lions, aurochs, rhinos, and bears, beautiful cave bears with friendly snouts -- menageries floating in and out of permeable walls, unanchored to any grounding; a sense of being among them trotting alongside, wanting to go where they were headed. Suddenly, in the [Skull Chamber](#); amber glow-lit room all on its own, the relic-skull of a cavebear reverently placed on a stone altar. This is the closest I have come in waking life to re-entering the liminal space of my mother's womb.

Floors scattered with bear skeletons, bits of bone stuck into fissures, two humerus bones planted upright.

A bear skull altar in the middle of the Skull Chamber.

Conversation with a bear:

They scratch the wall so I do too.

Finger tracings and hand prints
answer the bear's scratches.

The bear comes back
scratches on top of the handprints
co-creating the temple.

[El Conejo Escriba](#), by James O'Hern,
OYSI Books

When we emerged from the caves we turned our backs on our animal origins like sons today who deny their own fathers. We betrayed the bears and our vulva mothers. We break with the animals so we can kill them without reverence. If you learn to kill animals without reverence, you can kill anything.

Endnotes:

- ⁱ <http://www.fatuma.net/text/R.A.SchwallerdeLubicz-TheTempleinMan-SacredArchitectureandthePerfectMan.pdf>
- ⁱⁱ David Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, p1.
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Thinking with Irigaray*, by Mary C. Rawlinson p. 20
- ^{iv} *The Great Mother*, by Erich Neumann, p.211.
- ^v *The Origins and History of Consciousness, Part 2* by Erich Neumann, pp. 131-134
- ^{vi} *Thinking with Irigaray* By Mary C. Rawlinson, p. 20
- ^{vii} *In the Beginning She Was*, by Luce Irigaray, p.125
- ^{viii} *Ibid*
- ^{ix} George Oppen, *New Collected Poems*, Route, p. 185
- ^x *In The Beginning She Was* by Luce Irigaray, pp. 708 -710
- ^{xi} *Thinking with Irigaray*, p. 134 (Manninen 1992, 4).
- ^{xii} *The Seven Daughters of Eve* by Brian Sykes
- ^{xiii} Described by some as a penis though there are no male figures in the cave.
http://library.ciis.edu/resources/regenesis/31000_chauvet.pd