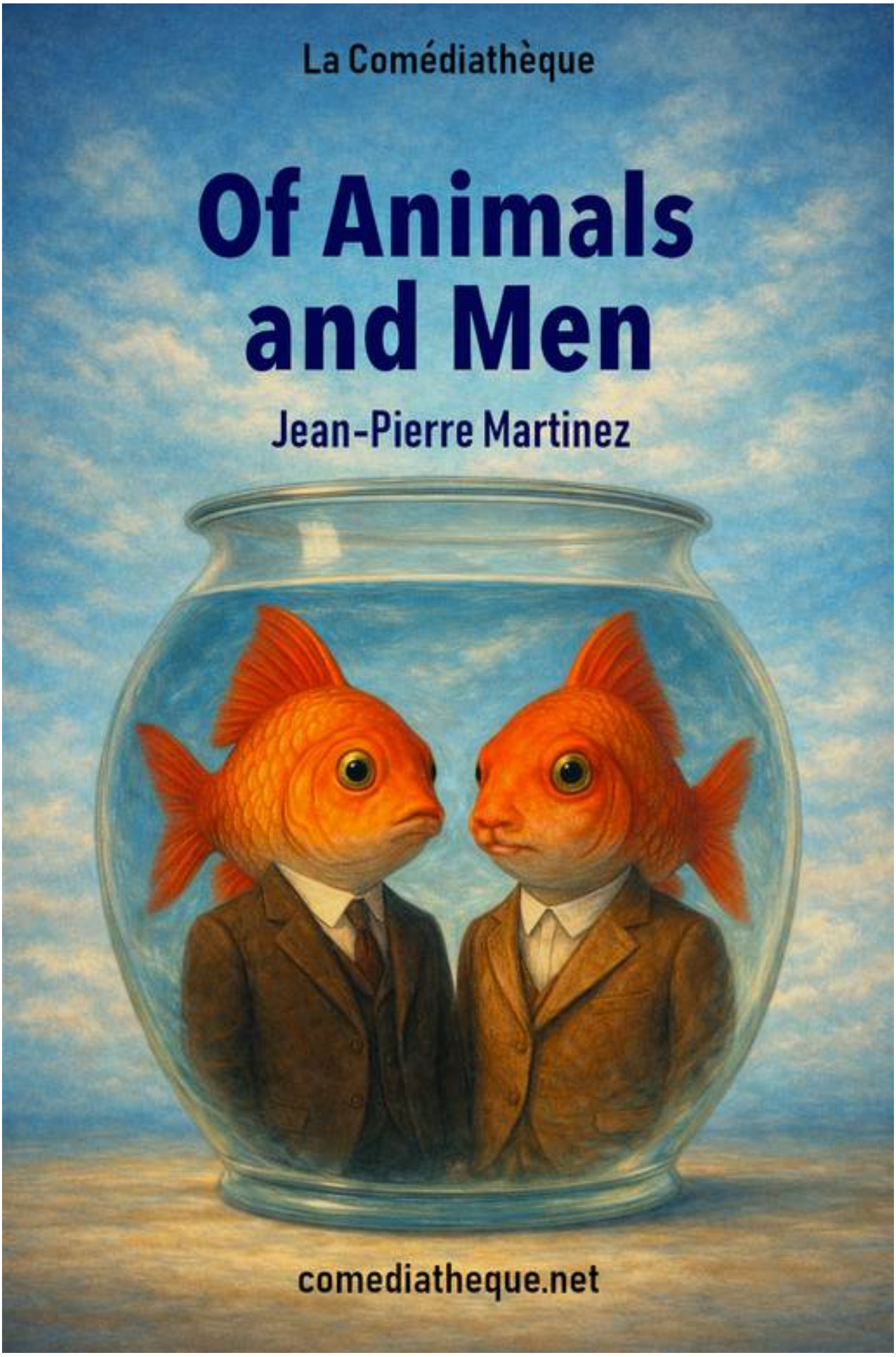

La Comédiathèque
Of Animals and Men
Jean-Pierre Martinez
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Of Animals and Men

Jean-Pierre Martinez

Translation by the author

Contemporary fables about the world as it is… and, above all, the ways it goes wrong.

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1 – The Termites

One – So that's it…

Two – Yes, it seems so.

One – We thought it would never happen here.

Two – No.

Pause.

One – Do you think we could have done something to stop it…?

Two – Can you stop the tide from rising…?

One – That's true. It was like a tide.

Two – A human tide.

One – It rose very slowly.

Two – Over a very long time.

One – Inexorably.

Pause.

Two – At first they called it 'making the unacceptable respectable'.

One – Then they called it 'letting everyone speak their mind'.

Two – Even freedom of expression.

One – And somehow, the right to be stupid became the dictatorship of stupidity.

Two – It began with censorship.

One – It continued with self-censorship.

Two – Keeping your head down.

One – So as not to put yourself in danger.

Two – They'll do what they did elsewhere, you'll see. They'll start by breaking the law.

One – And then they'll change the law.

Two – We won't be able to say anything anymore. We'll only be able to repeat.

One – Repeat what others are already saying.

Two – Without even thinking about it.

One – Even thinking will become dangerous.

Two – Even existing will become dangerous.

One – We'll have to erase who we are.

Two – We'll have to erase everything.

One – They'll start by reading our mail.

Two – They'll end up reading our thoughts.

One – Until the day we're no longer really human.

Two – Until the day we've become animals again.

One – Social animals.

Two – Until the day we become termites.

One – Feeding on the beams of their own house.

Two – Until the roof collapses and buries them.

One – Then all humanity will have disappeared.

Pause.

Two – Can the current still be reversed?

One – The tide always goes out in the end, doesn't it?

Two – And what if this time it wasn't just a simple tide? What if it were…

One – A flood of murky water, brought on by political climate change.

Two – Then there's nothing left to be done…

One – When the mud has finished covering the city, the rats will come out of the sewers and invade the streets.

Two – They're already roaming freely on social networks.

Blackout.

2 – The Goldfish

One – Do you remember what I said to you yesterday?

Two – No. What did you say?

One – Well… that's just it, I don't remember.

Two – Oh, right…

Pause.

One – And what I said to you a moment ago, do you remember that?

Two – No. Did you say something?

One – I don't know anymore.

Two – No, I don't see…

Pause.

One – And what I've just said to you now, this very second, you do remember that at least.

Two – No, what did you say?

One – I was asking you if… I don't know anymore…

Two – Neither do I.

Pause.

One – Honestly, what's the point of talking when we don't even know what we're saying?

Two – I don't know… To feel less alone, I suppose…

One – Yeah…

Two – At the same time, we're goldfish. We're not supposed to talk, are we?

One – No, you're right.

Two – Let's shut up, that'll be better.

One – Yeah… *(Pause)* Especially since they're watching us…

Two – Oh yes, that's right… They're watching us.

One – Who are those two? They look as though they're watching us…

Two – Their faces look vaguely familiar, but… I don't remember.

One – Or maybe it's our reflection in the bowl.

Two – Yes, maybe.

Pause.

One – Hasn't this bowl shrunk a bit…?

Two – Since when?

One – I don't know.

Two – Yeah, maybe…

One – Or maybe we're the ones who've grown.

Two – Maybe…

One – Weren't we smaller before?

Two – I don't remember anymore…

Blackout.

3 – The Rough Riders

One – Hello.

Two – Hi.

One – I'm a sadist.

Two – Pleased to meet you. I'm Jack.

One – Er… No, I mean… I'm a sadist… Are you a masochist?

Two – A masochist? You mean, er… No… Why?

One – Oh no, sorry, I… Looking at you like that, I thought that…

Two – You think I look like a masochist…?

One – No, no, not at all… Well, maybe a bit, don't you?

Two – Well, no…

One – OK, OK… I got it wrong… So you're a sadist too.

Two – A sadist? No, why?

One – Well… if you're not a masochist, you're a sadist, aren't you?

Two – Oh yes…? And why's that?

One – Because we're in a sadomasochist club, for a start…

Two – We're in a sadomasochist club?

One – Well yes… You didn't know?

Two – No… I thought it was a normal club… I mean… just a club…

One – You did see the sign at the entrance.

Two – The Whip…?

One – And that didn't ring any bells?

Two – There is a racecourse just next door…

One – You thought it was a club for jockeys.

Two – Not only that, but…

One – Are you a jockey?

Two – No. But I like horses. I bet on the races now and then. In fact, I just picked the first three finishers in the right order. I came here to celebrate…

One – In a sadomasochist club…

Two – I'm telling you I didn't know!

One – You must have noticed the clientele had a slightly unusual style, though, right?

Two – Slightly unusual…?

One – The leather, the chains, the moustaches…

Two – I thought it was a bunch of bikers out for a night.

One – Yeah…

Two – I didn't know… It happens, doesn't it?

One – Or maybe it was a Freudian slip…

Two – A Freudian slip…?

One – Maybe deep down you knew perfectly well what you were getting into and you felt like giving it a try.

Two – Giving it a try? Trying what?

One – Have you ever tried it?

Two – No…

One – So how do you know you wouldn't like it, if you've never tried?

Two – There are loads of things I've never done and have absolutely no desire to try, I can assure you.

One – Oh yes? Like what…

Two – I don't know… Skydiving, for instance.

One – Well, you don't know what you're missing.

Two – Have you ever been skydiving?

One – I'm a parachutist.

Two – Oh yes… But a parachutist…?

One – A parachutist.

Two – Oh right… And so, er… But you too, there must be things you've never done and don't feel like trying, surely?

One – Such as?

Two – I don't know… Voting left-wing, for example…

One – I've tried that already, actually…

Two – Oh yes…? And then… You didn't like it?

One – Let's just say I found it very disappointing.

Two – I see… So you turned to… sadomasochism.

One – When you've never tried…

Two – OK…

One – A quick little spanking, doesn't that appeal to you at all?

Two – A spanking…?

One – With a small whip, if you'd prefer.

Two – Come to think of it, that would remind me of my youth.

One – When you were young, did you go to sadomasochist clubs?

Two – No, but I went to an ordinary state school. They did that in class, in front of everyone, with the parents' consent. The teacher held the whip, and I got the spanking.

One – The teacher whipped you with a whip…

Two – It's true that, when you think about it now…

One – There you are! I knew you were a masochist.

Two – I think I'd better be off.

One – Come back any time. If one day you feel like trying again…

Two – OK… I'll… I'll think about it…

One – That's it, think about it…

Two – I should probably go.

One – See you soon, Jack.

Blackout.

4 – The Sloths

One – Ah, you're there… I didn't hear you arrive.

Two – And yet it took me quite a while to get to you. I was on the branch just above. I set off twenty minutes ago…

One – Did you have something urgent to tell me?

Two – No, but… I was starting to worry…

One – And why's that?

Two – You haven't moved for two hours. What are you thinking about?

One – I was wondering how we managed to survive for millions of years.

Two – Oh, yeah…?

One – And even today, how we manage to live past fifty.

Two – It's true. I wonder about that too sometimes. Well, not very often…

One – We move incredibly slowly, you can't say we're very bright, it takes us nearly a month to digest what we eat…

Two – We only eat leaves, I don't know why. When there are so many other things far more nourishing than leaves.

One – The world changes, but we always stay the same. We haven't evolved at all to adapt to our environment…

Two – They say Man descends from the ape, and the ape descends from the tree… We only come down from the tree once a week, and that's to defecate.

One – I can't even remember why we do that, actually.

Two – Why do we only defecate once a week?

One – Why do we have to come down from the tree to do it?

Two – I don't know.

One – Especially since that's precisely when we're most vulnerable.

Two – Yeah… On the other hand… our flesh is pretty much rotten, we're covered in algae and parasites, we smell bad…

One – That's true… We're not exactly very appetising.

Two – That must be why we've survived all this time.

One – Humans say it's better to arouse desire than pity… For us sloths, it would be rather the opposite.

Two – Yeah, when you can't run fast and have nothing to defend yourself with, it's definitely better to inspire disgust than desire.

One – Even tortoises move faster than we do.

Two – And at least they can always retreat into their shell.

One – Have you ever raced a tortoise?

Two – No… A snail, yes. The snail won. I wasn't in very good shape that day…

Pause.

One – Right then, shall we go?

Two – Where to?

One – Down there, to defecate.

Two – Is that today?

One – It's tomorrow, but since it takes us a whole day to come down from the tree…

Two – You're right…

One – You'd better not be desperate for the toilet, then, eh?

Two – No…

Blackout.

5 – The Hydra

One – Did you hear? In Afghanistan, women are being forced to live in rooms without windows…

Two – Without windows…?

One – So as not to risk being seen by the neighbours.

Two – It's mad… when it would be enough just to close the shutters.

One – Even in the United States, abortion rights are being challenged in one state after another.

Two – To think that America used to be the land of freedom…

One – And in Europe it's no better…

Two – We naïvely thought that progress only went in one direction, and that light would eventually dispel the darkness.

One – But all over the world religion is rearing its head again.

Two – Religion… it's like that monster from Greek mythology. You cut off one head and three grow back.

One – Yeah… The three monotheistic religions.

Two – Monotheistic religions are the worst. The Greeks had one religion, but several gods. At least you had a choice. And it all stayed in the family…

One – Today there are several religions, but it's your community that imposes its own on you from birth.

Two – You're only entitled to one god per person…

One – And since each of those three gods claims to be the only one with the right to exist…

Two – It always ends in wars of religion.

One – In our country, atheism is the most widespread position, yet we're the ones told to keep quiet.

Two – A century ago, in France, one religion dominated. Being anticlerical meant challenging the establishment and the privileged classes.

One – Today, criticising religion is treated as racism or contempt for ordinary people.

Two – And yet Marx was already calling religion the opium of the people.

One – It's true that at the time opium was a luxury reserved for the elites.

Two – And until a few years ago, cocaine was the preserve of show business.

One – Yes. All those drugs were expensive. Communion wafers are free.

Two – That's what allowed them to flood the market.

One – Communion wafers might seem less dangerous than LSD at first, but apparently they damage your brain cells too.

Two – And apparently they're even more addictive.

One – Unfortunately, religion hasn't stopped cocaine from becoming widely available either.

Two – It's a double punishment…

One – So there's no hope left…?

Two – Never lose faith in freedom… You throw it out of the door and it comes back through the window.

One – That's probably why in Afghanistan they've decided to brick up the windows.

Blackout.

6 – The Pigeons

One – See those two pigeons on the branch?

Two – Yes.

One – Do you think they're a couple?

Two – Maybe.

One – I don't know if they have their nest around here or if they're just passing through.

Two – I don't know.

One – In a few seconds they'll take off and we'll never see them again.

Two – Yeah…

One – We'll never know where they went, or why.

Pause.

Two – At the same time, we don't really care, do we?

One – Did you see? It looks like they're looking at us…

Two – Yes.

One – Do you think they're asking themselves the same question?

Two – What question?

One – When are we going to take off from here, and why?

Two – I don't know… *(Pause.)* Right, let's take off…

One – OK. Where to?

Two – I don't know…

Blackout.

7 – The Bear

One – What are you reading?

Two – I'm not reading, it's… it's a method…

One – A method…

Two – A language-learning course…

One – I didn't know you could take lessons in how to use your tongue…

Two – To learn languages! Foreign languages…

One – Ah, right… Is it for your next holiday, then? Spanish? Italian?

Two – Russian.

One – Russian…? Is that a joke?

Two – No.

One – Do you want to go on holiday to Russia?

Two – No.

One – Then why do you want to learn Russian?

Two – Why not? Russia's a big country. And there's all that Russian literature.

One – You can read Tolstoy in translation…

Two – Yes, but that's not quite the same… Besides, it might come in useful one day.

One – Useful for what?

Two – I don't know… If they ever invaded us…

One – So you're already learning the language of the occupying army.

Two – At least I'd understand what they were saying.

One – And you're not afraid of being accused of collaborating once they've gone?

Two – At worst, I'd be able to read War and Peace in the original…

One – Have you even read it in translation?

Two – No…

One – Do you really think the Russians could get all the way here?

Two – The German army managed to march through Paris.

One – That was a shorter journey. They only had the Rhine to cross.

Two – Napoleon invaded Russia, after all.

One – And look how that turned out. The Berezina is narrower than the Rhine, but it's a lot further away… And why is there a bear on the cover of your book?

Two – It's the symbol of Russia: strong and unpredictable. Best to be prepared. You should learn it too.

One – It's not happening tomorrow, is it?

Two – No, but you don't learn Russian in a week…

Blackout.

8 – The Doves

One – What's that noise outside…? It's unbearable… It's even scaring the pigeons away…

Two – They're doves…

One – It sounds like… military music.

Two – Ah yes, maybe…

One – Yes, that's it… military music.

Two – Yes, a brass band…

One – Military music… It's unbelievable…

Two – What is?

One – Music and military… it sounds like an oxymoron, doesn't it?

Two – A what?

One – Two words that don't really go together. Not like Michelle and Ma Belle, you know.

Two – Michelle and Ma Belle…?

One – The Beatles song!

Two – Ah, yes…

One – Music is more of a pacifist thing, isn't it?

Two – That's true…

One – They say music soothes the savage beast.

Two – Yes…

One – So music shouldn't go with war, should it?

Two – No.

One – Still, it's true that military music… makes you instantly want to kill someone.

Two – Starting with whoever composed that masterpiece…

Blackout.

9 – Man’s Best Friend

One – Can I sit with you?

Two – I'm standing…

One – Can I stand next to you?

Two – If you shut the fuck up…

Pause.

One – It's mad…

Two – Didn't we say you were supposed to shut up…?

One – According to the latest research in quantum physics, 99.99% of an atom is made up of emptiness.

Two – You don't say…?

One – That would mean we're almost entirely made of emptiness too.

Two – Well, in your case, that doesn't surprise me all that much.

One – It's frightening, isn't it?

Two – Right now, it's my glass that's half empty. *(He drains his glass.)* There. Now it's one hundred per cent empty. Are you buying the next round?

The other takes the glass and examines it.

One – Ah, I think there's still a drop left at the bottom. So it's only 99.99% empty. Which means it's just as full as you are. I think adding one more drop would make it overflow.

Two – Quantum physics… You read books on quantum physics, do you? I've never even seen you open a newspaper.

One – I saw it on my Facebook feed.

Two – You'll see, before long it'll be enough to read all that bullshit on Facebook to win the Nobel Prize for Mathematics.

One – There is no Nobel Prize for Mathematics.

Two – There isn't a Nobel Prize for Mathematics?

One – No.

Two – And why isn't there a Nobel Prize for Mathematics?

One – Because Mrs Nobel cheated on Mr Nobel with a mathematician. Well, that's what I read on Facebook…

Two – And what did Mr Nobel invent, apart from the Nobel Prize?

One – He invented dynamite.

Two – Dynamite?

One – Dynamite.

Two – Was that before or after he found out he'd been cheated on?

One – I don't know…

Two – Must've been after.

One – Goes to show, when you're motivated…

Two – Yeah… Mind you, you've been cheated on too, and you've never invented anything…

Pause.

One – Did you know sloths only come down from their tree once a week?

Two – No, and I couldn't give a fuck.

One – And do you know why?

Two – You know, they say of some animals that all they're missing is speech. Well, you're exactly the opposite. If only you'd shut the fuck up, you'd be the perfect companion…

Blackout.

10 – The Badgers

One – Did you see that? There's a badger sitting on a chair in the middle of the roundabout.

Two – A badger…? Have the protesters come back, then?

One – Who?

Two – The ones who used to block the roundabouts.

One – A badger! Don't you know what a badger is?

Two – Well… yes. There's one right in front of me.

One – I'm talking about a real badger, for fuck's sake!

Two – A real badger…? And it's just sitting there, on a chair?

One – In the middle of the roundabout.

Two – And why would anyone put a chair in the middle of a roundabout?

One – I'm telling you there's a badger sitting on a chair in the middle of the roundabout, and you ask me who put the chair there?

Two – And so…?

One – When a wise person points at the badger, the fool looks at the chair…

Two – Another one of your Chinese proverbs. You sure you didn't just make that one up?

One – It's a free adaptation…

Two – Right… And what's that badger doing, sitting on a chair in the middle of the roundabout? Directing traffic?

One – It's dead.

Two – It's dead?

One – Of course it's dead! Otherwise it wouldn't just sit there on a chair in the middle of a roundabout.

Two – Which brings me back to my question: who put the chair there?

One – And more importantly, who put the badger on the chair?

Two – And even more importantly, who killed the badger?

One – Why do you think it was killed?

Two – Because it's dead! Do you know many badgers that die of natural causes sitting on a chair in the middle of a roundabout?

One – And this obsession with building roundabouts as well…

Two – What?

One – What's the point of this roundabout? It used to be a crossroads and no one ever complained.

Two – There were quite a few accidents.

One – Yeah…

Two – Several people were killed.

One – Maybe… But never a badger!

Two – You're right… It's a pretty strange story…

Blackout.

11 – Birds of Prey

One – It's not exactly cheerful, all this…

Two – No.

One – There's so much misery in the world.

Two – So many wars.

One – Children dying of hunger.

Two – Earthquakes.

One – Floods.

Two – Tornadoes.

One – Even here, at home, you read so many horrors in the newspapers.

Two – Accidents.

One – Crimes.

Two – Rapes.

One – Drownings.

Two – Indigestion.

One – And yet we go on living quite peacefully.

Two – Yes. It doesn't keep us awake at night, that's for sure.

One – And it doesn't spoil our appetite.

Two – What good would it do to starve ourselves?

One – None at all, obviously.

Two – So we might as well keep stuffing ourselves.

One – Want some more?

Two – Thanks, but I can't swallow another thing…

One – I hope it wasn't what I said that put you off your food.

Two – Don't be silly… You've already served me three times.

One – Do you think we're too selfish?

Two – What can we do about it anyway?

One – I don't know. Nothing, probably.

Two – We can think about it from time to time.

One – I think about it, then I forget.

Two – That's life.

One – That's how it is.

Two – And as for everyone else… the truth is, we couldn't care less.

One – We don't even care about the neighbours.

Two – Or our friends.

One – Or our family.

Two – And they don't care about us either.

One – That's how it is. That's life.

Two – It's sad, but that's how it is.

One – Is it sad?

Two – Well… yes…

One – Anyway, we're glad it's not happening to us.

Two – Yes, very glad.

One – Come on, let's finish it all.

Two – After all… it's not Sunday every day.

One – Is it Sunday today? I thought Sunday was yesterday…

Two – Oh yes, maybe…

One – In the end, Sunday or Monday, what difference does it make?

Two – That's not going to spoil our appetite.

One – For us, every day's Sunday, isn't it?

Two – I don't care about you either. Now, here's to my health!

Blackout.

12 – The Butterflies

One – Hi.

Two – Hello.

One – Are you new around here?

Two – Yes. Aren't you?

One – I am. I've been here since yesterday.

Two – Same here.

One – So… do you want to fuck?

Two – I'm not sure. Isn't all this a bit rushed? Tomorrow, maybe…

One – Tomorrow we'll be dead. We're butterflies. We only live for a day or two. And since we've been here since yesterday…

Two – Oh… right… OK…

One – So?

Two – You could at least take me out to lunch first, or… I don't know… buy me a drink…?

One – I'd like to, but…

Two – But what?

One – We don't have mouths. Or a digestive system. We're only here to reproduce, and then we die.

Two – Are you sure?

One – Absolutely.

Two – Right.

One – Yeah, I know… Butterfly love isn't very romantic, but still…

Two – Yeah…

One – I could do a mating dance for you, if you like.

Two – And then we kiss…?

One – We don't have mouths, I'm telling you…

Two – OK, forget the mating dance then…

One – Great… I'd actually worked out a little dance routine, but I don't think I've quite perfected it.

Two – Your place or mine?

One – We're butterflies, I'm telling you.

Two – All right then, let's make some little butterflies.

One – Yeah…

Two – What now?

One – They won't be little butterflies, you know…

Two – What will they be, then?

One – Larvae.

Two – Oh right… You really have to be motivated, don't you…?

One – It's to perpetuate the species.

Two – Well, if it's to perpetuate the species, then… Let's do it…

Blackout.

13 – The Scavengers

One – When I think of all those poor people who have nothing to eat…

Two – Again…?

One – While we're here stuffing ourselves.

Two – On the other hand, sometimes we don't really know what we're eating, do we?

One – That's true… We don't know what to eat anymore.

Two – Fish is full of mercury.

One – Meat is loaded with antibiotics.

Two – Vegetables are soaked in pesticides.

One – Even chocolate, apparently, is full of heavy metals.

Two – Not to mention tap water.

One – Or even mineral water, because of plastic bottles.

Two – Yeah… I can't remember who said you dig your grave with your teeth.

One – It's a Chinese proverb, I think.

Two – It's incredible how many stupid proverbs the Chinese have come up with.

One – You dig your grave with your teeth… Go and tell that to people starving to death in Africa or elsewhere.

Two – We still have to eat something, that's for sure. We're not going to let ourselves starve.

One – Yeah… If we have to die of something, we might as well die with a full stomach.

Two – Shall I serve you some more?

One – Gladly…

Blackout.

14 – The Hens

One – It's not very warm this morning, is it?

Two – No. You could say we're freezing our feathers off.

One – Look, I've got goose bumps.

Two – Me too.

One – At the same time, that's normal. We're hens.

Two – That's true.

One – Still, I wonder if I haven't caught a chill.

Two – Free-range, as they say… It's nice, but… when it's minus five outside…

One – You almost end up missing battery cages.

Two – Who do you think passed that virus on to you?

One – Yesterday a flock of migratory birds passed through, remember? They came and pecked at our grain.

Two – Those migrants really think they can do whatever they like.

One – Yes… You never know where they come from…

Two – And they're full of diseases.

One – And you, how are you feeling?

Two – All right for now. But don't come too close, just in case.

One – Oh, anyway, sick or not, if it's bird flu…

Two – What?

One – They'll cull the whole herd, won't they?

Two – Yeah… *(Pause.)* Do you really call a group of hens a 'herd'?

One – What else would you say?

Two – I don't know.

One – They'll cull the whole herd, you'll see.

Two – And meanwhile, the migrants will already be sunning themselves, getting their feathers nicely browned.

One – They won't catch a cold, that's for sure…

Two – Sometimes I wonder if I wouldn't rather have been a wild bird.

One – You always have to exaggerate.

Two – Yeah…

Blackout.

15 – The Old Crabs

One – Did you hear the fishmonger this morning, at the market?

Two – What?

One – When she saw us coming, she said, 'Morning, you old crabs!'

Two – 'Morning, you old crabs'?

One – A bit familiar, don't you think? Even for a fishmonger.

Two – I didn't hear that.

One – 'Morning, you old crabs!' I know I'm getting on, but calling me an old crab…

Two – I'm telling you I didn't hear anything. Besides, we didn't go to the fishmonger this morning.

One – Didn't we?

Two – We bought a chicken.

One – Oh, right? Are you sure?

Two – The one we ate at lunchtime.

One – Then it must have been the poulterer.

Two – 'Morning, you old crabs'… Wait, I remember now. Are you sure she didn't say 'Morning, you lovebirds'?

One – 'Lovebirds'?

Two – The poultry seller! Why on earth would she call us old crabs?

One – Oh… maybe I misheard…

Two – Yes… You have been going a bit deaf lately.

One – 'Morning, you lovebirds' sounds rather nicer, doesn't it?

Two – Yes…

One – But are you sure?

Two – What day is it today?

One – Thursday.

Two – There you go. It's Thursday, not Friday. No fish today, my little chicken.

Blackout.

16 – The Carp

One – It's incredible… Apparently scientists have managed to create matter out of nothing.

Two – Oh yeah…?

One – You don't seem surprised.

Two – Playwrights have been doing that for a long time already.

One – What do you mean?

Two – Creating a play out of nothing.

One – Nothing?

Two – You take two characters who don't exist, put them facing each other, and wait…

One – But characters who have something to say to each other?

Two – Even if they have nothing to say… that can be the subject of the play.

One – The subject? What subject?

Two – Two characters who have nothing to say to each other.

One – But something happens, surely?

Two – Not necessarily. That can be the subject too.

One – Two characters who have nothing to say and nothing happens?

Two – Yes. I think that could perfectly well be the subject of a play.

One – Right.

Two – It's a very contemporary subject. The difficulty of communicating… Having nothing to look forward to… All that…

One – All that… out of nothing?

Two – No, it's… it's a very good subject for a play, I assure you. I've even got the title.

One – Oh yes?

Two – The Carp.

One – The Carp…?

Two – Carp aren't exactly famous for conversation, are they? Perfect for a play about two characters with nothing to say…

One – All right… But when you say a play… you mean a boring play.

Two – That's the risk… with creation ex nihilo.

One – Right.

Two – Besides, I'd point out that… ex nihilo nihil fit. Nothing comes from nothing.

One – OK.

Two – I'd even go further: ex nihilo nihil fit, in nihilum nil posse reverti. Nothing comes from nothing, nothing can return to nothing.

One – OK…

Two – What scientists have done isn't creating matter out of nothing, but creating matter out of light.

One – Right…

Two – In other words, even in the theatre you can make something out of nothing… but you have to be a bright spark.

One – Right…

Blackout.

17 – The Bees

One – Hi. Are you a forager too? I've never seen you outside.

Two – No, I'm a nurse.

One – Right… That explains it then.

Two – Being a forager must be nice, though. At least you get to see the world.

One – Yes, well… it depends on the weather. Sometimes I'd quite like to stay warm inside the hive as well.

Two – And how's the pollen harvest going? It's peak season, isn't it?

One – Can't complain. We're collecting pollen from chestnut trees at the moment.

Two – Chestnut? I thought it was lavender.

One – So did I, but yesterday morning I woke up and when I went outside, the lavender fields had been replaced by a chestnut forest.

Two – Sometimes I wonder if the hive moves on its own at night.

One – On its own, do you think?

Two – I don't know…

One – In any case, it's well organised, this hive. Everyone has their job.

Two – Yes… Do you think there are hives that are less well organised?

One – I don't know, it's the only one I know.

Two – Either way, there'll be plenty of honey again this year.

One – Yes… Listen, I wanted to ask you something, since you're often inside the hive.

Two – Yes…?

One – Where does all the honey we make actually go?

Two – Why do you ask?

One – I don't know. We produce kilos of honey, and we're fed some kind of vile molasses.

Two – I don't know… It's like the lavender fields. You wake up one morning and all the honey's gone. Replaced by molasses…

One – I like honey. I'd quite like to eat some from time to time. Have you ever eaten honey?

Two – No…

One – Sometimes I wonder if we're being made fools of…

Two – They…? Who exactly?

One – Well… I don't really know, that's just it…

Blackout.

18 – The Migrants

One – Where on earth are we going to go on holiday this year?

Two – I don't know… It's getting harder and harder to find a country that isn't a dictatorship…

One – Finland…?

Two – And where you can still find a bit of sunshine in the summer.

One – In Franco's day, people went on holiday to the Costa Brava, and it didn't bother them that much.

Two – Those were dictators who hadn't been democratically elected. You could hope things would change one day. What bothers me is going on holiday to a country where people have deliberately chosen a dictatorship.

One – Like the people in our own country, you mean?

Two – You're right… We're not going to deprive ourselves of a holiday either…

Blackout.

19 – The Predators

One – If aliens landed on Earth right now, what would you say to them?

Two – I'd say… go straight back home. There's nothing here we could teach you. We had everything we needed to be happy. And yet a tiny minority of privileged people has turned everyone else's lives into hell.

One – Oh right…

Two – And if you decide to stay and colonise us, don't worry. Nothing you could possibly do to human beings hasn't already been done by other human beings.

One – OK…

Two – And if you want to destroy the Earth and wipe out Humanity, don't worry about that either. In any case, before long we'd have achieved the same result all by ourselves, without any outside help.

One – So that's what you'd tell them…?

Two – Yes… And you?

One – I don't know… I'm looking for mitigating circumstances…

Blackout.

20 – The Toads

One – Life's unfair, really…

Two – What?

One – We toads are stigmatised, aren't we?

Two – Oh yes…? What makes you say that…?

One – Well… I don't know anyone who'd choose to come back as a toad, do you?

Two – Yeah… That's probably why they invented that story.

One – What story?

Two – The one about the toad who turns into Prince Charming.

One – As long as you can find a princess willing to kiss a toad. That doesn't leave us with much hope, really.

Two – True.

One – Do you think it's ever actually happened, a toad turning into Prince Charming?

Two – What I do know is that sooner or later every Prince Charming turns into a toad.

Blackout.

21 – The Crows

One – Are you all right?

Two – Yes… why do you ask?

One – I don't know. Sometimes I get the feeling that something isn't quite right.

Two – No, no, everything's fine…

One – They say all crows look alike, but I don't know… you've always seemed different to me.

Two – Oh yes…?

One – I don't know… something in the way you caw. Even in the way you fly…

Two – You think so…?

One – Am I wrong?

Two – No.

One – Then what is it? What's your secret, Babac?

Two – You won't tell anyone?

One – I swear.

Two – I'd barely hatched when I was adopted by humans.

One – Really?

Two – I never knew my parents. From what I later understood, the tree our nest was in had been cut down by a woodcutter. My parents fled, and I fell at the foot of the tree. It was the woodcutter who took me home.

One – That's incredible… And then?

Two – They fed me by spoon. I slept safely inside the house.

One – Did they put you in a cage?

Two – No, I was completely free.

One – You could have flown away.

Two – They were all very kind to me. And besides, where would I have gone? I didn't know any other crows. I didn't even know I was a crow.

One – You didn't know you were a crow?

Two – I'd never seen other birds. I didn't even know I could fly.

One – You didn't…?

Two – To get around the house and the garden, I just hopped about. I didn't need to fly. I didn't even know what it meant. My humans didn't fly either…

One – So what happened?

Two – I lived like that for a few years. I was quite happy.

One – And after that?

Two – One day I hopped a little higher than usual to get onto a table, flapping my wings at the same time. And I realised I could fly. At first it was just to reach a wall. Then a tree. And little by little I began to fly like a real crow.

One – So you left?

Two – Not straight away. I was happy with them. And I didn't know where to go. Sometimes I'd leave for a few hours, but I always came back. Then I started leaving for several days…

One – And then?

Two – I met other crows and realised that my place wasn't with humans.

One – That can't have been easy…

Two – No. I had to learn everything. To learn how to feed myself, for a start. And then unlearn everything I'd learnt in my foster family. Because I soon realised that for other humans, I was just a crow like any other. That I couldn't expect anything from them, and that I risked being shot if I got too close.

One – I knew you weren't like the others…

Two – Yes…

One – And you never missed your foster family?

Two – I did. Sometimes I still think of them. But I had to leave them to live my life as a crow. I think, deep down, they understood that very well. And I thank them for never having put me in a cage.

One – And your real parents…?

Two – I never saw them again. Years later I went back to the place where my tree had been cut down by the woodcutter. It was no longer a wood, it was a wheat field. That day there were lots of crows in the sky. And down below there was a man painting a picture.

One – A picture?

Two – A painter…

One – Oh yes, I've seen one of those before… And what was he painting?

Two – The field… with the crows.

One – Then maybe you're in the painting…

Two – Maybe.

One – Hold on… See that toad over there?

Two – Yes. There are actually two of them.

One – You wouldn't happen to be a bit peckish…?

Blackout.

22 – The Prey

One – Are you all right?

Two – Yes…

Pause.

One – You don't look all right.

Two – Yes, yes, I'm fine…

One – Right…

Pause.

Two – They've arrested the neighbour…

One – The neighbour?

Two – The one on the left.

One – How do you know he's on the left politically? We stopped talking politics a long time ago. Especially with the neighbours…

Two – The flat to the left of ours, on the landing.

One – Ah yes. The neighbour on the left… And so… they arrested him.

Two – Yes.

Pause.

One – Why did they arrest him?

Two – Who knows…

Pause.

One – So they arrested him…

Two – Yes…

One – Right… it's…

Two – That's how it is.

One – And how do you know?

Two – I saw a black car parked in front of the building. Then I heard noise on the landing. I looked through the spyhole. They rang his doorbell. He opened the door, and they arrested him.

One – And then they took him away…

Two – When I saw them arrive… I thought they were going to ring our doorbell. I'm a bit ashamed to admit it, but… when I saw they were ringing the neighbour's door, I felt relieved.

One – I understand that…

Pause.

Two – Do you think they'll arrest us as well?

One – Why would they arrest us?

Two – Who knows… Because we knew the person they've just arrested, maybe.

One – Did you know him?

Two – No… Well, I said hello to him once or twice.

One – You maybe shouldn't have.

Two – How was I supposed to know…?

One – Know what…?

Two – That they were going to arrest him.

One – Still, you don't get arrested just for saying hello to someone.

Two – You think…?

One – I don't know… I don't say hello to anyone anymore, just like that…

Two – You have to say hello to people you know.

One – They don't say hello to us anymore either, I'll remind you.

Two – That's true.

One – In fact, we don't know anyone anymore.

Two – No. Everyone we knew, they've arrested.

One – And now they're starting to arrest people we don't even know.

Two – It makes you wonder why they haven't arrested us yet.

One – We haven't done anything wrong, have we?

Two – No. Well, I don't think so… Do you think we've done something wrong?

One – I don't know.

Two – Even if we've done nothing wrong…

One – If they look hard enough, they'll find something, that's for sure.

Two – Maybe we'd be better off moving…

One – Where would we go?

Two – I don't know.

One – And they'd find that suspicious.

Two – Suspicious?

One – If we move, it means we've done something wrong.

Two – In any case, they'd end up finding us.

One – Moving house is all very well, but we'd have to move into somewhere else.

Two – I think the neighbour on the left had only just moved in.

One – That's why we didn't know him.

Two – And that's probably why they arrested him.

One – Probably…

Two – You're right, it's better if we stay here.

One – Yeah… This isn't the time to draw attention to ourselves.

Pause.

Two – And you, are you all right?

One – I'm fine…

Two – You don't look all right.

One – Yes, yes, I'm fine…

Two – Right…

Blackout.

23 – The Parrots

One – Do you really mean what you're saying?

Two – Do you really mean what you're saying?

One – No, I was genuinely asking whether you really meant what you were saying…

Two – Oh, sorry…

Pause.

One – So?

Two – Whether I mean what I'm saying?

One – Yes.

Two – And what exactly did I say?

One – I don't know. I think you were repeating what I'd said.

Two – And you? Did you really mean what you were saying?

One – I don't know. I was just repeating what I'd heard said.

Two – That's incredible… So we don't really mean what we say?

One – No…

Pause.

Two – At the same time, we're parrots. We're not supposed to think, are we?

One – At the same time, we're parrots. We're not supposed to think, are we?

Pause.

Two – Do you really mean what you're saying?

Blackout.

About the author

Born in 1955 in Auvers-sur-Oise (France), Jean-Pierre Martinez first took to the stage as a drummer in several rock bands before becoming a semiologist in advertising. He then worked as a television screenwriter before returning to the stage as a playwright. He has written around a hundred scripts for television and 123 plays, some of which have become classics (*Friday the 13th, Strip Poker*). His plays have been performed in more than 100 countries and translated into around 50 languages.

Amateur and professional theatre groups looking for plays to perform can download Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays for free from his websites :

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

https://comediatheque.net/

However, performance rights, which constitute fair compensation for the author's work, are a legal obligation. Whether you are an amateur or a professional, you must request authorization to perform the play and pay the corresponding royalties for the production.

Jean-Pierre Martinez is represented by the Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers (SACD).

To get in touch with Jean-Pierre Martinez and request authorization to perform one of his works, please use the contact form on his websites.

Jean-Pierre Martinez recently returned to music, writing original songs inspired by his poems and plays.

With **Jean-Pierre Martinez Music**, he extends that creative universe through original songs: short stories in musical form, humorous or melancholy, in which each song sometimes becomes a miniature theatrical scene.

https://jeanpierremartinezmusic.com/

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

Monologues

Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air
Short Stories

Comedies for 2

A Thwarted Vocation
EuroStar
Heads and Tails
Him and Her
Is there a pilot in the audience?
Last chance encounter
New Year's Eve at the Morgue
Not even dead
Pentimento
Preliminaries
Running on empty
Russian Roulette at the Kremlin
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Dressing Gown
The Joker
The Rope
The Window across the courtyard

Comedies for 3

A brief moment of eternity
A simple business dinner
An innocent little murder
Cards on the Table
Cheaters
Crash Zone
Fragile, Handle with care
Friday the 13th
Horizons
Ménage à trois
One small step for a woman, one giant leap backward for Mankind
The Ways of Chance

Comedies for 4

A Cuckoo's nest
A hell of a night
A Skeleton in the Closet
Back to stage
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Crisis and Punishment
Déjà vu
Family Portrait
Family Tree
Four stars
Friday the 13th
Gay friendly
Hangover
Happy Hour
How to get rid of your best friends
Is there a critic in the audience?
Is there an author in the audience?
Just a moment before the end of the world
Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall
One marriage out of two
Perfect In-laws
Quarantine
Requiem for a Stradivarius
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The Fishbowl
The Perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists
The Worst Best Man Ever

Comedies for 5 to 6

All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
Dead End Boulevard
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools
The Castaways of New Year's Eve
The President's Draw
The Rebels
Traffic Jam on Graveyard Lane

Comedies for 7 or more

At the bar counter
Backstage Comedy
Blue Flamingos
Check to the Kings
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
False exit
In flagrante delirium
Just like a Christmas movie
Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey
Music does not always soothe the savage beasts
Neighbours' Day
Nicotine
Of Vegetables and Books
Offside
Open Hearts
Reality Show
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
Such a lovely village
The House of Our Dreams
The Jackpot
The Performance is not cancelled
The Most Beautiful Village in France
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches

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Backstage Bits
Blackouts
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Dramedies
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Funny Stories
Him and Her
Killer Sketches
Lockdown Shorts
Lost time Chronicles
Memoirs of a Suitcase
No Sense Off Limits
Now and then
Of Animals and Men
Open Hearts
Open Letters
Park Bench Shorts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stage Briefs
Stories to die for

All of Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays can be downloaded free of charge from his websites:

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

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