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PHEASANT PLUCKER

LILY BEVAN

SAMUEL FRENCH

samuelfrench.co.uk

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

LILY BEVAN

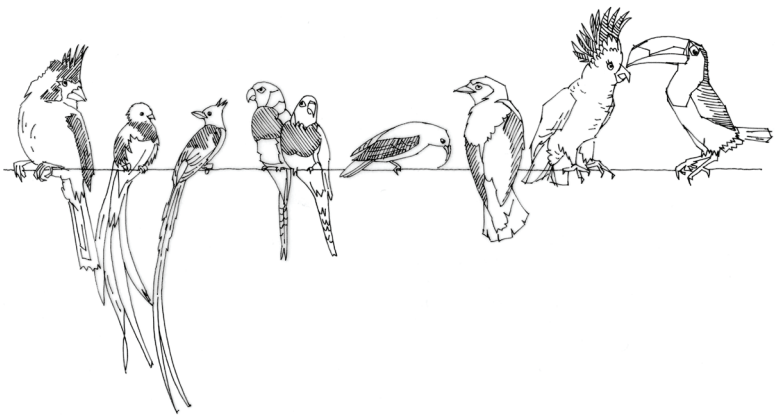
Lily trained at RADA and studied Social and Political Sciences at Jesus College, Cambridge. Acting credits include: *A Voyage Round My Father* (Donmar Warehouse); *Kindertransport* (Shared Experience, Hampstead Theatre and National Tour); *The Miser* and *The Hypochondriac* (Belgrade Theatre, Coventry); *Dr Who* (BBC) and *Rumpole of The Bailey* (BBC Radio).

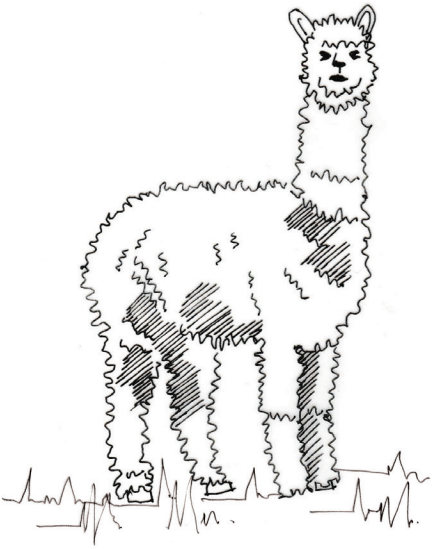
Writing credits include: *Talking to Strangers* (co-written with Sally Phillips, BBC Radio 4), *Mock Tudor* (Pleasance Edinburgh, Theatre 503), *The People of the Town* (RADA), *A Stab in The Dark* (Calder Theatre, Latitude Festival), *Avocado* (co-written with Bekah Bunstetter, Kings Head Theatre, Playwrights Horizons NYC), *Café Red* (Old Red Lion Theatre, Trafalgar Studios) and *Stephen & The Sexy Partridge* (co-written with Finnain O'Neil) Old Red Lion Theatre/ Trafalgar Studios.

Directing credits include: *The Death of All Elephant Elders* by Bekah Bunstetter, Finborough Theatre – nominated Best Director, Off-West End Awards. Lily was a semi-finalist for the Funny Women Awards 2015.

Lily attended the Royal Court Young Writers Programme and the Emerging Writers Group at the Bush Theatre, studied screenwriting at NYU and performing with Philppe Gaulier in Paris.

Lily is a trained yoga teacher with a liking for extended metaphors, has a BAGA 4 in gym, and blogs for The Huffington Post UK and USA.





FOREWORD BY EMMA THOMPSON



Lily Bevan is one of the finest, funniest and most original writers I know.

I have been reading, watching and sometimes even performing her work for a few years now and it gets better and better.

I feel a strong kinship with it and with her because of writing and performing my own material for television and for the Edinburgh Festival quite a long time ago. There are so many memories. Bear-baiting, warm gin, mud wrestling but principally, naked fear. The show I wrote was a review – comic monologues, songs and the like and it featured some very odd extras. I played a gorilla at one point. Lily plays a falcon. You can feel the audience re-organising its mind around the unfamiliar. It's edgy work but exciting when it comes off.

Women's comedy is different to the male archetypes. It follows different rules and rhythms. I am not sure how much has changed in the comedy world since I was a girl, if I'm honest. I know it is still a struggle to find your place in amongst all the male voices and I also know it requires courage to shoulder your way in and be different – *Pheasant Plucker* comes from one of those brave new talents. It's hilarious and wonderfully surprising.

Enjoy.

Emma Thompson
New York, April 2016

Pheasant Plucker premiered at Underbelly in August 2015 as part of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

It then played at The Bush Theatre, London, in November 2015 as part of RADAR Festival.

Pheasant Plucker Creative Team

Written & Performed by
Lily Bevan



Director
Hannah Eidinow

Assistant Director
Lois Jeary

Assistant Producer
Emma Pritchard

Stage Manager
Sarah Tryfan

Stage Manager, Underbelly Weeks 3 & 4
Tom Clutterbuck

Designer
Simon Wells

Marketing
Suzanna Rosenthal

PR
Gaby Jerrard PR

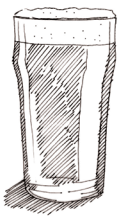


Musician/Narrator
Luke Courtier

Movement Director
Polly Bennett

Illustrator
Eleanor Brough

To Peter, Jane, Sophie, Lorna and Sarah.
And to Emma, for the Edinburgh pint just at the right moment.



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Featuring monologues from the BBC Radio Four series *Talking to Strangers* produced by BBC Studios.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

My first series of monologues was called *Avocado* co-written with New York playwright Bekah Brunstetter for the Kings Head Theatre in 2009. Since then I've enjoyed writing monologues as a special glimpse inside a character's thoughts.

Pheasant Plucker introduces us to Harriet, an inquisitive falconer, whose time has come to go and see the world.

Ever since playing a Rentokil exterminator for my final RADA showcase I've been on the lookout for new writing for women with a bit of urgency and daftness.

Pheasant Plucker required a lot of previewing in London before it flapped up to Edinburgh, and the creative team were integral to its support and development. One of my favourite things is collaboration and connection, the best thing about working alone was in fact getting to work with a team of brilliant people.

Very many thanks to them: Sarah Tryfan, Hannah Eidinow, Lois Jeary, Eleanor Brough, Luke Courtier, Simon Wells and Tom Clutterbuck, Polly Bennett and Emma Pritchard. As well as the people who read and listened and gave great feedback including Lorna Beckett, Jeany Spark, Jim Rastall and Will Rastall.

I have enjoyed this. I have never fully understood it. Let me know if you do.

FURTHER THANKS TO

Jess Search, Beadie Finzi, Isabel Shapiro, BRITDOC, Laura Rourke, Maggie Service, The Black Swan, Sally Phillips, Sam Bryant, Polly Bennett, Jessica Swale, Blanche McIntyre, Polly Findlay, Gaby Jerrard, Suzanna Rosenthal PR and team, The Museum of Comedy, Chris Thompson, Michael Sheen, Madani Younis, Rob Drummer, Lizanne Crowther, Bush Theatre Team, RADA, The Leicester Square Theatre, Marina, Vikki and Fi at Underbelly, Underbelly Daisy Team, Lorna O'Leary, Jim Keegan, Nicholas Barter, Geoff Bullen, Bekah Brunstetter, Monobox, Emma Anacootee-Parmar, Sarah Wolf, Bryony Fraser, Rosie Sheehy, Alice Robinson, Miztli Neville, Gaia Wise and Pat Myers.

Poster/Book Cover Photography by Lily Bevan shot by Bronwen Sharp

Design by Matthew Smith at Desk Tidy Design

TIPS FOR PERFORMANCE

The *Pheasant Plucker* script could be used in different ways. There are nine characters within. It could be done in its entirety as a one-woman show, running at about fifty-five minutes, with one performer playing all parts. It could be used to pick out separate monologues. It could be done by a cast, with one actor playing each character.

Accents: accents are suggested in the character list. I use them, often highly fallibly, to knock me out of my own vocal rhythms and jig myself about a bit. Use them, change them or ditch them.

Staging: *Pheasant Plucker* was originally performed with a projector and a series of about a hundred slides. These images acted as a backdrop, suggesting location, ambience, cock balloons etc. Projectors are common in Edinburgh shows due to quick turnaround, but there are lots of other ways to stage the show. I organised my costumes and props in and around a silver birch tree to impart a hint of Harriet's field in the countryside. Mainly because I like silver birch trees.

Costumes: I used small bits and pieces of costume for different characters, Harriet wore yellow wellies (making her distinct), Irenie wore a tweed blazer, Jester wore a feathered gilet, a cardboard beak and smoked a fag. But you can do anything you fancy, or none at all.

Narrator: for Edinburgh I performed the show alone. For the Bush I had a narrator who was a musician, my mate Luke, who sang links between the scenes. You can cut these lines or keep them, record them to be played as sound cues, or cast an actor or musician.

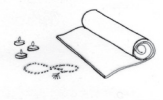
Where possible I have put avian references in the music/text/set/costumes - a bird chorus. A song often used through my show was *King* by Years & Years which had come out that Summer. We played it in pre show, Harriet sings it, Narrator sings it and the final dance duet was danced to it. Do use it too, or avian themed songs might work too, like *Wind Beneath My Wings*.



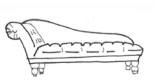
CHARACTER LIST



HARRIET – From Norwich, a falconer, wears yellow waterproofs and wellies and a falconer's gauntlet.



YOGA TEACHER – Soothing gentle voice, has been told that using metaphors is the best way to teach yoga.



THERAPIST – In the text the therapist is unseen, but could be played by an actor where some lines could be added.



PALM READER – Australian, rambunctious, likes to work the "hen do" circuit.



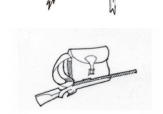
REMI TICTOC – French, an expensive nutritionist.



DANIEL SACHET – A debonair actor of a certain age.



TUDOR PHEASANT PLUCKER – Harriet's grandmother – very game.



IRENIE – Extremely posh, quite hard to understand at times, jolly, jolly.



JESTER – Cockney, a falcon, smoking a fag, very laissez-faire.

NARRATOR/ MUSICIAN – Optional (see tips for performance).

Pre show. A projector with slides (please see back of book for slide list).

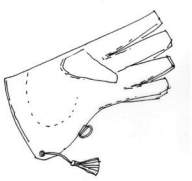
Slide: "Pheasant Plucker" by Lily Bevan

A field.

A silver birch tree. A few props and costumes hang on its branches. Grass. Leaves.

A **MUSICIAN** *sits on a grassy knoll and sometimes sings narration.*

Pre-show music recorded or by **MUSICIAN**



Music: soaring anthemic American prairie type music.

HARRIET *enters the field wearing wellies, waterproofs, a falconer's gauntlet, and shiny 80s sunglasses. She acknowledges the crowd of spectators, then glances at the sky. (Slide 1)*

HARRIET Yip. Yip.

Ladies & Gents. Eyes to the skies.

Jester should have been back by now. But I can't see him. Which is unusual. Yip Yip.

Now what I'm going to do is lure him back with a nice piece of steak. *(***HARRIET** *takes a steak out of her bag)* I'm going to circle the steak around my head, throw it up into the air, and Jester will swoop down and catch it in his beak, but keep your eyes peeled as my falcon is fast. *(Throws the steak up, it flops down, she looks*

up, no) Unusual. Jester is a peregrin falcon. Latin name – Falco peregrinus.

Sometimes he just doesn't want steak. I've got a rat on a string. I'm going to chuck the rat up.

HARRIET *takes a small rat tied to a string out of her bag and circles it around her head*

Yip Yip.

Falco peregrinus. Known in the USA as the duck hawk. But he is not a duck. And he is not a hawk. He is a falcon. And his fastest speed is 242 miles per hour. Faster than a Lamborghini. Slower than a ringwraith. At a guess. Only one country you will not find him in. (*To audience*) Can you guess? New Zealand.

Yip Yip. Unusual.

Harriet and Jester, we're a team. He's called Jester because he likes to play tricks and be naughty. I tell him little jokes: "Hey Jester, when should you buy a bird? When it's going cheap." I sing him little songs (*sings, badly and loudly).* I'm wearing these sunglasses so that he doesn't peck out my eyes. I've got this little hood so I can blindfold him so if he tries to peck out my eyes he can't see where they are.

Yip Yip.

He might be confused by the sun, or he's lost track of time, or he's using his height, the higher he goes, the faster he can fly back in, he might be trying to kill me?

Excellent eyesight... he could see and kill me even at night, in snow.

(*loud call*) HO. No.

We have peregrin falcons nesting in Norwich Cathedral and a favourite spot is the roof of Anne Summers on Diss High Street.

Let's all bring him in now. Give me a ho... Everyone 123 Ho!

I mean falconry is a weird life. In a way. I could sort of do without this. I'm here in this field 24/7 – last week I ate one of his frozen rats thinking it was a Calippo, I never go on dates, I only wear yellow... it's just Jester Jester – you know – hey ho no he's fucked off. Maybe I'm glad, maybe I'm glad he's fucked

off... maybe I should fuck off and do the things normal people do... become a people person and not a bird person.

I'm from this family of bird handlers dating all the way back to medieval pheasant pluckers…it's just birds, birds, fucking birds…everywhere I go I see birds…hey ho yip no. (Stop)

Fine Jester. You're not the only one who can spread their wings, go on an adventure. I'm throwing down the gauntlet.

HARRIET *throws down the gauntlet. (Slide 2)*

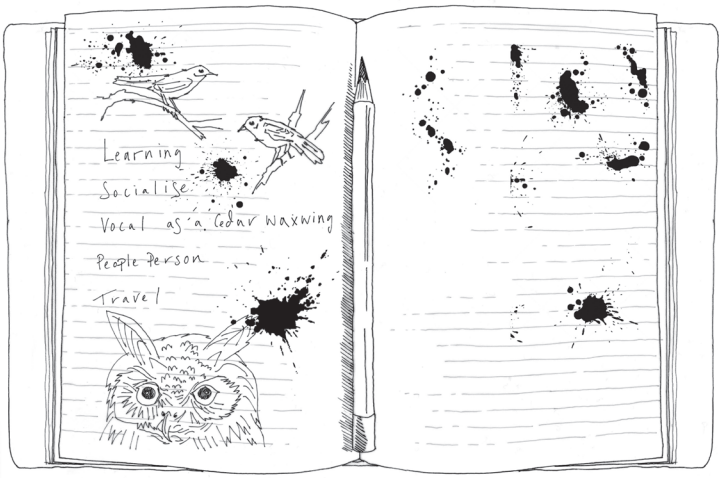
I could be as free as a falcon, as agile as the sharp-shinned hawk, as vocal as the cedar waxwing, as sociable as the yellow-rumped warbler, as bold and perky as the tufted titmouse.

Where the shit is he?

It's ok for birds. No bus stops. No Brexit. No smear tests. Owls can do that thing where they turn their head all the way round. Wouldn't I like to do that? Yes, actually. Do I like being a bi-ped on £11 an hour, not I do not. But this is what I do and this is how he treats me.

You feathery bastard! Fickle friend! Traitor! You've shown me up in front of these people. God, he's probably hanging out by the pussy willows laughing his tits off.

HARRIET *makes a list in a diary of her plans.*



I'm going to fly the nest to pastures new…become a people person, not a bird person. I'm going to go to London, where people are all sane and sorted out, right? I'm going to read *Time Out* and do Groupons and find some classes, and go to yoga, get healthy and meet experts. See what's out there – yip yip *(swearing – V sign)* Jester…yes, thank you Jester.

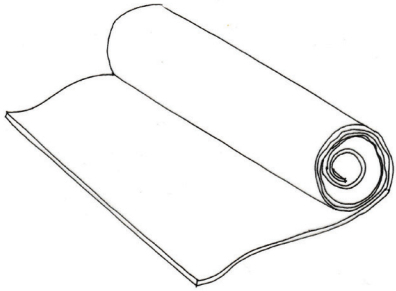
First stop. Yoga class…

Train sound as **HARRIET** *crosses stage.*

MUSICIAN

Sings.

YOGA CLASS,
"PEOPLE PEOPLE" DO YOGA CLASS,
IT SLOWS YOU DOWN WHEN YOU'RE GOING FAST,
GET A REALLY NICE SHAPED ARSE,
SIGNING UP FOR YOGA CLASS.



HARRIET *is in the yoga studio. Class is beginning. (Slide 3)*

Music: yoga chanting.

YOGA TEACHER Namaste. Welcome to yoga class. I see we have some new yogis here tonight. Harriet, welcome. So let's begin with a deep collective breath, inhale through the nose and exhale on a HA – HAAA. Inhale and exhale on a HM like the shop HMMM. Peace is your birthright. Peace is your birthright. Peace is your birthright. *(Approaching an audience member, taking their hands, gazing into their eyes)* These are your hands. Let's begin in child's pose. This is a pose…that's like a…tiny adult.

Forehead to the floor and being very careful to *mumble mumble (***YOGA TEACHER***'s face on the floor, so becoming unintelligible)* if you don't do that – you are likely to end up *paralysed.*

Arms resting by the sides…like…like a fork and knife either side of a plate. Beautiful.

And breathe. Each breath entering the lungs deeper. Deeper. Inside. Like…a vole, a vole into a hole. That's right. Just listening to the sound of my voice. Like Simon says but without Simon. Just you and the mat. Not Matt – like a guy called Matt. The mat. Not Matt or Simon or anyone. Just you. Following a simple set of movements, of ideas, like a set of chess you've inherited. Or a set of badgers, all the same, all different. But badgers.

Which are movements.

So, slowly coming up onto all fours, into a basic table shape. The back is flat. Flat like a table. Or a bobsleigh. Or a shed

roof. Some shed roofs – some are not. Keep it simple. Think of the back strong and straight like a… Scandinavian sofa, like a block of cheese, like a hardback copy of *Wolf Hall*. Moving through a couple of cat/cow stretches – moo, hiss – but don't make the noises, it's weird.

Keep breathing.

Raising the hips high like Jesus, spreading the fingers wide, pressing them into the mat like olives and coming into downward facing dog like a cat. Release the neck. Release the neck. Release the neck like a prisoner being released from prison. Maybe after a couple of appeals. But still served sixteen years. How the world will have changed. Smart phones. What are they? Flat whites. Tiny little coffees. Things have seriously changed…says the prisoner…the neck.

Let it flow.



And raising the right leg toward the ceiling. Imagining there is no ceiling, just sky and space. And Jupiter and Saturn. Space. Foot reaching up up, and yes, aliens! With eyes for skin, and tails at the front, and wisdom. Foot up, up there. And down. And the left – just keep it in the room.

Feel the difference.

Lowering full body down to a plank. Plank like a plank of wood, like metal. Engaging the core. Thinking of cores, and of pips, and of stones, like an avocado. Thinking about how it's hard to peel an avocado, isn't it? And it's hard to choose a ripe one. And it's sad when you think you have a ripe one and you get it home and the bastard is rock hard. Or stringy. And you think "Fuck me – I paid one pound sixty-five for that!". Plank.

Breathe.

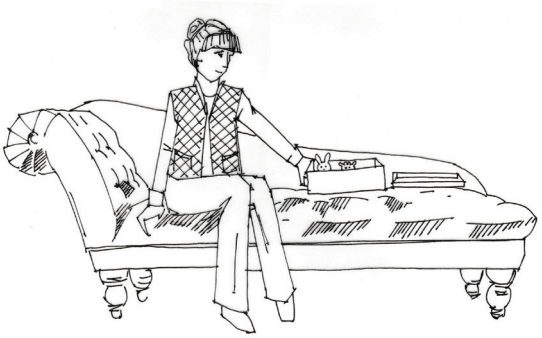
Putting the palm of your foot by the palm of your hand or something. Coming into pigeon like a pigeon. We're going to hold here for four breaths – or nine or five.

Shining the heart forward. Sending your light and energy to… Whales. The big fish, not the small country. But, also, yes, the tiny Celtic country. And…sending the warmth of the heart to the polar ice caps. No don't. They're melting.

MUSICIAN

Sings.

PIGEONS
HMMM.
CAN'T EVEN TOUCH THE TOES
OH BUGGER OFF PIGEON POSE.
WHAT DO LONDON PEOPLE DO?
WHEN THEY WANT TO SELF IMPROVE?
THERAPY.
IF YOUR HEAD IS ON THE BLINK,
BOOK RIGHT IN TO SEE A SHRINK.
THERAPY.



HARRIET *sits in a therapist's office. (Slide 4)*

THERAPIST'S VOICE "Come in Harriet. You sit over there. Let's begin with a bit about your background."

HARRIET *rummages in a box of stuffed animal toys, choosing, and pulls out a toy farmyard animal. These toys are a collection of anthropomorphic animals, dressed in human clothes, which the therapist encourages clients to use to reenact real life scenarios from their lives.*

HARRIET *(to* **THERAPIST***)* This one's my mother.



(Slide 5: a toy farmyard animal woman)

This was our house.



(Slide 6: a toy house)

My mother… has three brothers.



(Slide 7: three toy farmyard animals)

This is my father.



(Slide 8: male toy farmyard animal)

He has all kinds of friends.



(Slide 9: many toy animals)

Friends from other countries.



(Slide 10: exotic animals e.g. toy kangaroo and koala)

We used to travel.



(Slide 11: a toy holiday camper)

This is me.



(Slide 12: a toy owl)

This is one of my mates.



(Slide 13: a toy frog)

(Slide 14: back to toy owl. Owl wears a little orange gilet and no pants)

Is it weird that I'm an owl but my parents are goats?

And my friend is a really weird-looking frog?

Is it ok to feel a bit embarrassed?

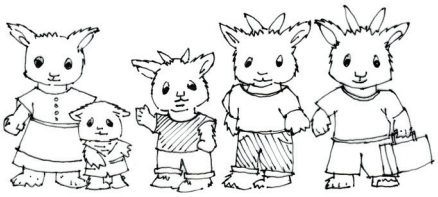
And like, kind of disloyal?

It's good I can be an owl as I am a bird person, I am quite small and I do wear a gilet. Though I wear pants.

There's no real reason that I chose my mother to be a goat. She should be a bird really. But. You don't have that many.

Well, maybe it was about the pastel clothes…

(Slide 15: toy farmyard animal family)



In the eighties my mother wore a lot of eighties colours – so the goat's clothes are right. My father didn't wear blue postman overalls. But he did wear blue jumpers, so the blue overalls are evocative.

Do you mind me saying I am not sure about this?

I've spent one hundred and thirty-five pounds worth of therapy time re-enacting my problems with animals, and I'm feeling more worried and ashamed about doing this – than anything else that's ever been wrong.

I just thought it would be fun to do some therapy. It's not supposed to be fun, is it? I feel a bit sad about why Jester left but now messing around with the owls and the goats is making me feel a bit sad and completely mad.

Hey, how do you tell the difference between a weasel and a stoat? A weasel is weasily recognised. A stoat is stoatally different.

To the audience.

She's not laughing.

She's gesturing at the box. The characters reminded me of the Sylvanian Families toys I played with as a child, which were manufactured in Japan – but set in an imaginary 1970s middle-class English village. First there were rabbits, foxes, and mice, then they were joined by penguins, elephants, kangaroos. They all live together and enhance each others' lives. They could teach us a lot about harmonious immigration. Mr Farage needs to go to Japan and work for Sylvanian Families. Or maybe Mr Farage just needs to go to Japan so he isn't here.

The Sylvanians have middle-class, successful family businesses, white-collar jobs, large, multi-storey plastic holiday homes, and they go sailing, camping and horse riding. Horse riding is weird when you think about the scale of it.

I am not from the horse-riding class at all. My heritage is the bird-handling class originally. Bumpkins. Crones and pheasant pluckers.

I don't want to live in a Sylvanian Families utopia, but what will my future be? I want to visit a mystic. A palm reader!

A soothsayer – as wise as an owl, deep and full of gravitas…

MUSICIAN

Sings.

MESSING AROUND WITH TOYS,
IT'S ALL JUST A LOT OF NOISE.
ENOUGH OF THE PAST.
LOOK TO THE FUTURE.
CRYSTAL BALLS.

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