

Homo Sapiens

Chantal Bilodeau

Inspired by Elizabeth Kolbert's *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (2014).

Note: Whenever possible, please take a real photo of the actor and audience during the show and email it to me. I will collect these photos of *Homo sapiens* from around the world and post them on my website.

Feel free to change "In a mall in New Jersey" to a mall that's geographically close to you.

(A and B walk onstage. Upon seeing the audience, they literally jump out of their skin.)

A: Whoa.

B: Holy Shit.

A: What are they? And why are they staring at us?

B: Stand back. They may be dangerous.

A: If they were dangerous, there would be a fence, no?

B: Let me scan them.

(B takes out an electronic device—a phone or a tablet—and "scans" the audience.)

B: *(Reading the result)* *Homo sapiens.*

A: No way! These are *Homo sapiens*?

B: That's what it says.

A: I thought they were extinct!

B: Apparently not.

A: They're adorable. *(To audience)* Hello. *(To B)* Do you have any food? *(Searches pockets)* Oh, I have some chocolate.

B: *(Reading from the device)* They were the dominant species for 200,000 years until about 1,500 years ago. The prevailing theory is that they precipitated the sixth mass extinction and caused their own demise. *(Sees A approaching audience)* Careful.

A: *(Offers a piece of chocolate to an audience member the way one would offer food to a wild animal)* Here. Look. It's chocolate. 70% cacao. It's very good... *(To B)* Did you see? It ate it!

Chantal Bilodeau (playwright) focuses on the intersection of science, policy, art, and climate change in her work. Her plays have been presented in a dozen countries, and she is a recipient of the Woodward International Playwriting Prize as well as the First Prize in the Earth Matters on Stage Ecodrama Festival and the Uprising National Playwriting Competition. She is working on a series of eight plays that look at the social and environmental changes taking place in the eight Arctic states. In 2019, she was named one of "8 Trailblazers Who Are Changing the Climate Conversation" by Audubon magazine. chantal@artsandclimate.org

B: You're lucky it didn't eat your hand too. Didn't you see the "Do Not Feed the Wildlife" signs?

A: They're harmless.

B: Until they're not.

A: Come on, they're our ancestors! Our kin. If it weren't for Homo sapiens—the "wise humans"—there would be no *Homo evolutis*—the "evolved humans."

B: You can say the same about lions, crocodiles, and sharks, but they would still eat your hand and everything that's attached to it.

A: Can you take a picture?

B: Seriously?

A: I'm telling you, they're harmless.

B: *(Thinks it's ridiculous)* Fine. But if something happens, I *will* tell you "I told you so."

(A joins the audience.)

A: Can I squeeze in here? *(Sits next to audience member)* Don't worry, I won't hurt you. *(To B)* See? They're perfectly nice. *(To audience)* Hi. *(Pets someone's hair)* You're very cute. *(Scratches someone's chin as you would a cat)* Hello, big guy. *(To B)* I think they like me.

B: Sure, they do.

A: Ready.

(B takes a photo.)

B: Got it.

A: Take another one just in case.

(B takes a few more shots.)

B: All right, can we go now before the park closes? I want to see the blue-winged frog exhibit.

A: Where did they find them? Does it say?

B: *(Reading from the device)* In a mall in New Jersey.

(Beat.)

A: What's a mall?

B: It's a big concrete structure where people used to buy stuff.

A: What, like food?

B: No, just stuff. You know, things.

A: Why?

B: I don't know. For fun.

A: That's weird.

B: Let's go. Did I tell you I'm thinking of getting a frog as a 3D tattoo?



Figure 1. *Homo Sapiens* performed by the Ad-lib Alchemists at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, as part of Climate Change Theatre Action 2017. (Photo courtesy of Chantal Bilodeau)



Figure 2. Homo Sapiens performed at Georgetown University as part of Climate Change Theatre Action 2017. (Photo courtesy of Chantal Bilodeau)

A: (*Distractedly*) OK, I'll catch up.

(*B exits in a buff. A looks at the audience.*)

A: It's weird to be looking at your own past. Then again, I can only imagine what it must be like to stare at your future... And you know, whatever happened, I'm sure it was complicated, these things always are, so I'm gonna go out on a limb here and assume that you tried your best. It was a mess, some of you fucked up, some of you fought hard, and here we are. And isn't it wonderful? You evolved. All of the shit you went through made you evolve into me, a new species, which, granted, is not the greatest thing since sliced bread but it's a step forward. I mean, think about it. Six extinctions! Not one, not two, *six!* Six times the earth was nearly wiped out of all life so the odds that you and I would be standing here today... Anyway, we should cut you some slack is what I'm saying. No species is perfect. For all we know, the dinosaurs were assholes. I mean, it's not like they left stone tablets for us to find out... So, thank you. Yeah... Thank you. Whatever you did wrong, you also did a lot of things right and that's the story I want to remember. That's the story I want to tell. That's the story we need to celebrate—us, here, six extinctions later. I'm proud of being your kin, I really am. And I hope the species that comes after me will be proud of being mine.

(*A exits.*)

A: (*Not listening*) Oh, yeah?

B: On my ass... A bright, colorful 3D tattoo on my ass... Every time I get undressed, it'll look like a frog is leaping out of my underwear.

(*Beat.*)

A: (*Re: Homo sapiens*) I feel sorry for them. Imagine being stuck in this park with the last of your fellow sapiens for your entire your life.

B: (*Sighs loudly*) All right, I'm going. If I don't come back, it's because I kissed a frog, it turned into a Gender Nonconforming Charming, and we eloped.