



THE LANGUAGE ARCHIVE

BY JULIA CHO



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Commissioned and Originally Produced by Roundabout Theatre Company,
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produced by special arrangement with Roundabout Theatre Company.

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SPECIAL NOTE ON EPIGRAPH

Reprinted from *6,000 Years of Bread* by special arrangement with Skyhorse Publishing, Inc.

THE LANGUAGE ARCHIVE was produced at the Roundabout Theatre's Harold and Miriam Steinberg Center for Theatre in New York City, opening on October 17, 2010. It was directed by Mark Brokaw; the set design was by Neil Patel; the costume design was by Michael Krass; the lighting design was by Marc McCullogh; the original music and sound design were by David Van Tieghem; the dialect coach was Ben Furey; and the stage manager was William H. Lang. The cast was as follows:

GEORGE Matt Letscher
MARY Heidi Schreck
EMMA Betty Gilpin
ALTA Jayne Houdyshell
RESTEN John Horton

THE LANGUAGE ARCHIVE received its world premiere at South Coast Repertory, produced by special arrangement with Roundabout Theatre Company. It was directed by Mark Brokaw; the set design was by Neil Patel; the costume design was by Rachel Myers; the lighting design was by Marc McCullogh; the original music and sound design were by Steven Cahill; the dialect coach was Phillip D. Thompson; and the stage manager was Chrissy Church. The cast was as follows:

GEORGE Leo Marks
MARY Betsy Brandt
EMMA Laura Heisler
ALTA Linda Gehringer
RESTEN Tony Amendola

CHARACTERS

GEORGE: A linguist. A man in his 30s or 40s.

MARY: George's wife. A woman in her 30s or 40s.

EMMA: A lab assistant. A woman in her 20s or 30s.

ALTA: An old woman.

RESTEN: An old man.

(The actors playing Alta and Resten could also play the following:)

THE DRIVER: A man of any age.

OLD MAN/BAKER: An old man.

LANGUAGE INSTRUCTOR: A woman of any age.

A PASSERBY: A man or a woman of any age.

A PASSERBY: A man or a woman of any age (different from the previous).

CONDUCTOR: A man or a woman of any age.

OLD MAN/ZAMENHOF: An old man.

“Why should I take up such a burden?” I thought to myself. “Who would ever finish gathering so much material?” But then I did take up the burden. And I gathered — without finishing.

And now, in the midst of the gathering, I begin the tale.

—H.E. Jacob
Six Thousand Years of Bread

THE LANGUAGE ARCHIVE

ACT ONE

Scene 1

George and Mary.

GEORGE. Lately, I've become worried about my wife. She used to be an upbeat person. But recently, she's become very sad. She cries at everything — long-distance phone commercials, nature specials when animals of prey get killed, sometimes over nothing at all —

MARY. Um ... George?

GEORGE. — She'll just be washing the dishes and then suddenly slump over.

MARY. George, I can hear you. I'm right here.

GEORGE. I'm just trying to explain how you've been lately.

MARY. How *I've* been?

GEORGE. Yes. The ... your tendency lately to be kind of ... sad.

MARY. Well, that's very funny. Kind of hilarious, actually, because from my viewpoint, you're the one who's sad.

GEORGE. Me?

MARY. You.

GEORGE. That's ridiculous — why should I be — why should you think I'm sad? I don't cry, I don't carry on —

MARY. Exactly, that's th —

GEORGE. You're the one who can't stop crying. (*To us.*) She cries when she makes salad, she cries when she swiffs the floor, she cries

when she pays the bills and then she uses her *tears* to seal the envelopes —

MARY. But I —

GEORGE. She even cries — she even cries when she's asleep. She wakes up in the morning and there are little pools of tears in her ears, she stands up and they trickle down her neck and become little pools in her collarbones and where are you going? (*Mary has left. To us.*) And then she goes. She never wants to talk about it. No matter. It's not like I don't have other things to attend to. There are many developments in my field that I must constantly keep abreast of. Too many, in fact. The task: it's quite Sisyphean. (*There is an armchair and beside it, a towering pile of books. George sits and opens a book. He flips a page. He finds a small piece of paper tucked into the book. He takes it out. He reads it. He is perplexed.*) Mary? (*Mary enters. She has the aspect of having been interrupted right in the middle of something — some piece of housework.*)

MARY. Yes?

GEORGE. Mary, do you know what this is?

MARY. What is what?

GEORGE. (*Reading.*) "Husband or throw pillow? Wife or hot water bottle? Marriage or an old cardigan? Love or explaining how to use the remote control?"

MARY. What is that?

GEORGE. I'm asking you. It was in my book.

MARY. That's odd.

GEORGE. Right here, in my book. It's a new book.

MARY. Is it a bookmark?

GEORGE. It's written on a scrap of paper.

MARY. Maybe some bookstore worker put it there.

GEORGE. It's in your handwriting, Mary.

MARY. I don't know what you mean. (*She leaves. George goes back to reading. He takes a sip from a mug of tea by his elbow. He drains it, then does a slight double take. He lifts out his tea bag. He sees at the bottom of the mug.*)

GEORGE. "In a moment of sadness, sitting on the last, lowest note, she knew they both saw the fragility of their marriage when he said: 'Maybe we should try ballroom dancing.'" (*Calling.*) Mary. (*Mary enters. George pulls out the wet piece of paper from the bottom of the mug.*) What does this mean? (*Mary goes over, takes the wet piece of paper and reads it.*)

MARY. I have no idea.

GEORGE. I know you put this here.

MARY. This couldn't possibly be me. You've never suggested ball-room dancing.

GEORGE. So someone else has crept into our house —

MARY. There are people, you know, / who go into houses and take ladies' underwear, so —

GEORGE. — and put a note into my book, my tea? (*Registering what she's said.*) Yes, "take" operative word. Not leave behind — (*He reads.*) "The fragility of their marriage." What is that? What does that mean?

MARY. These notes aren't from me, how many times do I have to say it?

GEORGE. Just admit it, admit you're going around leaving bad poetry lying around the house —

MARY. IT ISN'T ME. (*She leaves.*)

GEORGE. Now. My wife is not one to lie. Neither is she one to write poetry. If that's even what these notes are. It seems quite impossible that she is the one leaving these for me to find. And yet. She is the only other person in this house besides me. And so: I thought: maybe: I can catch her in the act. (*George spies on Mary. Mary is in the kitchen, washing dishes. She wears bright yellow rubber gloves. She begins to cry. It starts off with a tear trickling down her face. Then a few more. A few sniffles. She slumps over. It's not a big crying jag. But there is no doubt that she is crying. Weeping. She tries to wipe her tears on the bit of sleeve not covered by the rubber glove. She sighs. She collects herself. And then she resumes washing dishes as if nothing has happened. George is unsure whether to stay or go.*) ... Mary ... ?

MARY. Have you figured it out?

GEORGE. No. But I wanted to, that is, perhaps we could discuss ...

MARY. Discuss...?

GEORGE. This habit of yours, this phase ... perhaps you could use ... help.

MARY. Well, now that you mention it, it would be nice if you could vacuum the stairs —

GEORGE. I meant help with other issues.

MARY. What issues?

GEORGE. Well, the ... crying, among other things; I don't think — I could be wrong, but I highly doubt it — that it's normal to be this way —

THE LANGUAGE ARCHIVE

by Julia Cho

2M, 3W

George is a man consumed with preserving and documenting the dying languages of far-flung cultures. Closer to home, though, language is failing him. He doesn't know what to say to his wife, Mary, to keep her from leaving him, and he doesn't recognize the deep feelings that his lab assistant, Emma, has for him.

"However whimsical — even fantastic — it becomes, it affirms life no matter how melancholy."
—**Bloomberg News**

"[THE LANGUAGE ARCHIVE's] dialogue is a tour de force ... the gulf between what's said and what isn't is rarely described and traversed with as much power as it is here. What makes this achievement more significant still is that the play itself is in no way ordinary ... passionate ... wise and wonderful."

—**Talkin' Broadway**

"Uniquely blends absurdist farce with sentimental comedy."

—**The Los Angeles Times**

"Quirky, but ravishingly well-written piece that is smart, funny, deep and tender."
—**OC Weekly**

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