

The Good Audition Guides

**CONTEMPORARY
DUOLOGUES:
ONE MAN &
ONE WOMAN**

edited and introduced by

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Introduction

WHY DUOLOGUES?

Whether you are doing theatre studies at school, taking part in a youth theatre, at drama school (perhaps in your final year and looking for showcase material), or attending a professional acting workshop, the duologue will arguably provide the most intense form of character exploration and analysis. It will draw on all the essential skills of the actor – namely playing an objective, identifying obstacles, incorporating backstory, staying in the moment and listening. It is what any Stanislavsky-based acting technique is all about, and a well-crafted duologue will allow you to put all these elements into practice.*

The twenty-five duologues in this volume are from plays that have largely been written post-2000. With the odd exception the characters range in age from fourteen to forty. There is a wide variety of character types and styles of writing from which to choose. They are all drawn from the extensive list of new plays published by Nick Hern Books.

CHOOSING YOUR DUOLOGUE

Not surprisingly, the majority of these duologues for men and women are of a romantic or sexual nature. Many are about relationships that are new and flirtatious, while at the other end of the spectrum there are some that explore the moments just before the break-up of a marriage or partnership. Several of the duologues are ethnically or geographically specific, but the majority can be played in any accent and by any ethnicity. Similarly, out of context, some of the duologues can be played either younger or older than specified. Use your judgement and change place names or other references to suit your own purposes.

* Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863–1938) was a Russian theatre practitioner who developed a series of techniques in order to help the actor towards a more realistic portrayal of his character.

You will also find a good mix between the dramatic and the comic, the overtly political and the more playful. Some contain strong language and deal with adult themes. All provide a particular challenge and represent the pressing interests of some of our leading playwrights.

PREPARING YOUR DUOLOGUE

To understand the characters and their context in any one piece, you will need to read the whole play and to undertake all necessary research. Work with your scene partner to create detailed character histories and a backstory. Work out what it is that you want in the scene, where your characters are in agreement and where they are in conflict. Is there a power struggle? Ask yourselves what the scene is about (see below) and think about the story you wish to tell and why. The duologues in this volume concern themselves with the human condition. They explore our deepest longings, fears and needs. They pose complex questions about how we relate to each other and to the world around us. By engaging in the characters' psychology you will be able to reveal what lies at the heart of a scene.

PERFORMING OR PRESENTING YOUR DUOLOGUE

As obvious as it may sound, remember that the playwright has written a *conversation*, so you will need to listen and to reply accordingly without preempting any outcome.

Allow yourself to be affected by what is said to you as you respond, and think about the effect you want to have on your partner. Stay in the moment and remain flexible and open to any impulses you or your partner might experience. The best kind of duologue is like an exciting tennis rally in which the audience are gripped, not knowing which way it will go. Several of the duologues in this volume are highly physical. Perhaps you will be working with a director who will have their own ideas about how to stage the scene. If you are working just the pair of you, think about how and where you will move in the space and what sort of physical dynamic there is between the characters.

In some cases the writer has given a detailed description of what happens physically. Follow their stage directions and think of it as ‘choreography’ as you would a dance. Some of the writers use forward slashes (/) to indicate when the other character interrupts with their next speech.

THE USE OF PROPS

Several of these duologues require the use of props. As far as you are able you will want to seek out items that are as close to the specified article/s as possible. Most actors enjoy working with props. The challenge of how to handle them during a scene, and the comic and dramatic possibilities they offer are all very much part of the actor’s craft. Be sensitive to anything that you handle on stage. Is it an item of rare or precious value? Is it something that disgusts you? Is it something that is dangerous and might frighten you? If you cannot get the ‘real’ thing, use your imagination to endow the object with all the qualities of the original.

TIMING/EDITING

For the most part, the duologues are the same length as they appear in the original play script. Unless you are looking for showcase material, where you will be obliged to edit a scene to the standard one to three minutes, you will find it more useful to have the complete scene as it is written. Occasionally I have modified a duologue to make it flow more easily, and where a duologue is exceptionally long I have shortened it. In these cases, I have inserted this symbol [...] to show where a cut has been made.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

For each duologue I have provided a list of the following:

 WHO The characters’ names, their ages, and where they come from. In many cases, the characters can be played either

younger or older than in their original context. If a character's accent is not native to you, you may like to try playing it in your own accent. However, watch out for duologues that have been written with a strong dialect or idiom and where the essential rhythm of the piece needs to be maintained.

 **WHERE** For the most part, this is specified in the text. However, you may prefer to change place names if you wish to transpose the scene to suit your own accent.

 **WHEN** Most of the duologues in this volume are set in the present day. Some are historical. Read the whole play to make further decisions about the time of year it is, day of the week and the time of day.

 **WHAT TO CONSIDER** This will include the style of the play, its themes and use of language, the characters' backstories and some indication about what happens next.

 **WHAT THE CHARACTERS WANT** Objectives to play. Once you have learned your scene and have done all the necessary research and preparation, the only thing you should be actively playing is the 'What do I want?' or the 'What do I have to have?'

 **WHAT THE SCENE IS ABOUT** It is important to think beyond what your character says and does to the wider implications of a scene. This will enable you to play the scene with intelligence, sensitivity and a greater understanding and awareness of what the play is trying to say.

*

These lists are suggestions only. When you become increasingly familiar with your duologue you will find you have opinions of your own; you may even find yourself in disagreement with my notes. Use this book as a springboard from which you will form your own opinions and ideas. My notes are by no means a substitute for reading the play or for thinking for yourself about the characters and their situations; they are rather a tool intended to help, to provoke and hopefully to inspire.

2nd May 1997

Jack Thorne

☞ WHO Sarah, twenty-eight, and Ian, twenty-nine. Out of context both characters could be played either younger or older.

☞ WHERE Ian's tiny bedsit.

☞ WHEN 2.41 a.m. on 2nd May 1997.

☞ WHAT HAS JUST HAPPENED Sarah has met Ian at an election-night party hosted by the Liberal Democrats. Their dialogue comes in the middle of a full-length play that sees two other couples, the first set earlier that night and the third set the following morning.

☞ WHAT TO CONSIDER

- It is election night, 1997. The year that Blair came to power and led a landslide victory for the Labour Party.
- It was hot in London that night and there was an atmosphere of shock and excitement as many high-profile Conservative politicians, including Michael Portillo, lost their seats. In his case to a completely unknown candidate at the time, Stephen Twigg.
- The stage direction reads: 'SARAH [is] drunk, but not so you'd notice immediately', but be careful not to overplay Sarah's drunkenness. Drunk people tend to make a special effort to appear sober.
- As we discover in the scene, Sarah has mistaken Ian for a man called James whom she fancies.
- Sarah is very much of the *Bridget Jones* and the *Sex and the City* generation of women. These books were first published in 1996 and 1997 respectively.
- The following excerpt comes at the beginning of a much longer scene between the two of them. Later on in the dialogue we discover that, a year ago to the day, Sarah's mother was brutally murdered. Ian's mother has cancer and both characters are having to confront mortality.

- Although the scene starts comedically, and seems to be as much about sex as anything else, it is important to carry a sense of the characters' pain from the outset.
- The singer Cilla Black presented the hugely popular television series *Blind Date*. She had a Liverpudlian accent and her question to the contestants – 'What's your name and where do you come from?' – became a kind of catchphrase.
- The 'Millennium Bug' was the fear that in the year 2000 all computer data would be lost.
- Read the play to see what happens at the end and to make a decision about whether you think these two could end up together.
- Words in [square brackets] are there to indicate intention, and not to be spoken.

 **WHAT SARAH WANTS**

- Attention. (Think about how she loves to shock.)
- To be heard.
- To find comfort.
- Relief from her loneliness.
- To be held, both emotionally and physically.

 **WHAT IAN WANTS**

- Company. (In order not to have to think about the fact that his mother is dying.)

 **WHAT THE SCENE IS ABOUT** The fear of insignificance, loneliness, abandonment, mortality.

 **NB** This play offers a number of other duologues from which to choose.

A tidy bedsit. SARAH enters first, she's drunk, but not especially so you'd notice immediately. IAN isn't drunk.

SARAH. Oh, it's not that messy...

IAN. It's not tidy.

SARAH. With the bed to the side...

IAN. And the sofa... there... you want to sit down?

SARAH. I want to look around.

IAN. Looking for what?

SARAH. I just want to poke...

I like people poking about my house.

I like people being intrigued.

IAN *smiles*.

IAN. Then we should have gone to yours... I could have been intrigued at [yours] –

SARAH. No, I followed you... If you had followed me we could have gone back to mine.

But I made the move, so I won a trip to your house.

She starts to poke about. IAN looks at his hands.

My mum used to love poking about my room – poke – poke – one time she found an old toothbrush she insisted I was using as a dildo. I was fifteen years old – she said, ‘Lots of girls have very healthy sexual appetites at your age, I know I did, but it’s a very confusing as well as perfectly natural time.’

IAN laughs. SARAH looks at him.

IAN. My dad just gave me a book. *Your Body and You*.

SARAH. ‘It’s perfectly natural, do you want to talk about it?’

The dildo?’ No, she called it something else. She called it something – I can’t remember – I think she may have called it a ‘sexual device’. Truth was, she’d heard about it on Radio 4 – *Woman’s Hour* did dildos. Sexual devices.

But the truth also was that I had a new pair of Doc Martens and I was proud of them and mud and shit kept