



The Book of 500 Monologues: Volume I: Greek to Spanish 16th & 17th Century (Volume 1)

Leon Katz

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The Book of Monologues includes five hundred selections in chronological sequence from the Greeks to the Twentieth Century. A considerable miscellany of passages from Western drama's repertory – some widely known, some almost unknown - embrace monologues of extraordinary emotional depth: Io in Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound, the Hamlet-Gertrude Closet Scene, Racine's Phaedra, Hecuba in Euripides' The Trojan Women; passages exploring complex, scrupulously-studied characters: Euripides' Medea, Musset's Lorenzaccio, Buchner's Dan-ton's Death, Atreus in Seneca's Thyestes; passages of passionate intellectual rumination, Corneille's Emperor Augustus in Cinna, Calderon's Segismund in Life Is a Dream, Don Juan in Shaw's Man and Superman. There are also many selections on holiday from tragedy and the portentous. Some outstanding ones: the brilliantly witty Oscar Wilde's comic strategem which he puts into the mouth of a Duchess of Berwick in Lady Windermere's Fan, or the supremely civilized characters Millamant and Mirabel in Congreve's The Way of the World negotiating their civilized marriage contract, or the Second Century BC bourgeoisie sophisticate Metro in Alexandria, Egypt, negotiating for a new dildo, or on a lower rung, the Frenchified Lord Foppington in Vanbrugh's The Relapse enumerating the joys of his empty days, or the commedia dell'arte zanni Arlecchino remembering his Trip to the Moon, and his attempt at suicide by tickling himself to death, or the civic-minded Aristophanes, whose Trigaesus, in Peace, begs his mounted beetle on their trip to Heaven not to shit on the Athenian world below. The Headnotes preceding each monologue, in addition to clarifying, when necessary, its internal logic or its place in its play's plot, also take into account shifting beliefs in the psychology or religion or philosophy that change the meaning of human motives and human acts from period to period. Since plays are in perpetual conversation with their own time's dogmas and structures of belief, they can't help but become lynx-eyed observers and critics of their moment. And so, to follow the full intent of dramatic texts, it's worth noting that in their perpetual annotations of the dogmas and the counter-dogmas of their moment, over and above their particular "story-points" and their own thematic wisdom, they harbor an additional intention - of either corroborating contentedly, or snickering behind-handedly, or desecrating murderously those very dogmas or counter-dogmas with which they live. To ferret out those postures is to grasp a play's or a passage's overriding reason for being written at all. Comprehending them is to comprehend - over and above their stipulated "meanings" - both the ethic and the animus of its author. They're the dormant sources of a play's or a passage's essential power.

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