



**DOV AND ALI**  
BY **ANNA ZIEGLER**



DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.

DOV AND ALI  
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The world premiere of DOV AND ALI was produced at Theatre 503, London, England, on June 10, 2008. It was directed by Alex Sims, the designer was Morgan Large, the lighting designer was David Holmes, the sound designer was Tom Hackley, and the stage manager was Suzie Jenkins. The cast was as follows:

ALI ..... James Floyd  
DOV ..... Ben Turner  
SAMEH ..... Kiran Landa  
SONYA ..... Orla Fitzgerald

DOV AND ALI was originally produced in the United States by The Playwrights Realm (John Dias and Katherine Kovner, Co-Artistic Directors) on June 5, 2009. It was directed by Katherine Kovner, the scenic designer was Steven Kemp, the costume designer was Oana Botez-Ban, the lighting designer was Traci Klainer, the sound designer was Daniel Kluger, and the stage manager was Joanne E. McInney. The cast was as follows:

ALI ..... Utkarash Ambudkar  
DOV ..... Adam Green  
SAMEH ..... Anitha Gandhi  
SONYA ..... Heidi Armbruster

## CHARACTERS

DOV — Jewish, early 30s, male.

SAMEH — Muslim, 16, female.

ALI — Muslim, 17, male, Sameh's brother.

SONYA — Christian, early 30s, female, blonde.

## SETTING

Detroit. The present day.

## NOTES

The simpler the set, the more fluidly the action can move forward. If possible, Dov and Ali should always be onstage, so that one scene can move seamlessly into another.

Dov should be played with confidence, and as a good teacher. Ali is extremely confident, but speaks without malice. Dov and Ali are intellectual equals who at times even enjoy sparring with each other. Sameh speaks with a wisdom beyond her years when narrating (though not without a sense of humor and an adolescent disdain for her brother), and the innocence of a teenager in the flashback scenes. Sonya is breezy without being naïve, tolerant of Dov but aware of the situation in which she finds herself. She and Dov are truly in love, and the more playful their first scene together, the more it demonstrates their chemistry, the better.

*But to the unbelievers a voice will cry: "God's abhorrence of you is greater than your hatred of yourselves."*

—The Qur'an

*When [the Prophet Muhammad] was asked to define religion, he reportedly replied that religion is the way we conduct ourselves towards others.*

—Irshad Manji

*This Book is not to be doubted.*

—First line of the Qur'an

# DOV AND ALI

*A spotlight rises on Sameh, wearing a hijab.*

SAMEH. Here are the opening lines of a new story that's also thousands of years old: Once upon a time, in the middle of a school in the middle of Detroit in the middle of the United States of America, there was a confused teacher and there was a precocious student. One had the short, cropped hair of a soldier and one had hair in constant need of a trim. One happens to be my idiot brother. Both had fathers whose love was opaque, hard to measure and make out. Both had names and families and objects they treasured, favorite foods and preferred seasons, a time of day that made him happiest. In short, they were human beings. *(Lights shift to Dov's classroom. He is on the phone.)*

DOV. But you're not old enough to retire ... Well, how long have you been thinking about this? ... Of course I care, I've just been so ... I know, I'm sorry, Aba. Well, why don't I come *this* Friday ... Yeah, I'll have to drive in the dark a bit — I can't leave work early, but I'd prefer to see you than adhere to every ... But *I* don't mind driving on Shabbat; I mean, I want to talk to you about — now? Okay. *(Beat. His father has hung up.)* Bye. *(He hangs up. He doesn't move.)*

SAMEH. And once upon a time, they were friends. Sort of. *(Ali has entered the room but Dov doesn't see him. Ali's a very neat boy, tucked in in all the right places.)*

ALI. Mr. Gold?

DOV. Ali. *(Beat.)* Can I help you?

ALI. I came about the book.

DOV. *(No one ever comes to discuss the books with him.)* You want to talk about the book?

ALI. I'm wondering about the character of Jack.

DOV. Yes, Jack.

ALI. I was struck by the strength of the class's response to him since I found his actions entirely natural.

DOV. Which actions are you referring to?

ALI. Killing the pig, and then killing the boy.

DOV. (*Taken aback.*) Okay.

ALI. I didn't understand Carolyn's comment, one with which you evidently agreed, that this reflects some innate savagery in us all. That Jack is the metaphor for that savagery. Is it savage to want to survive?

DOV. Did they need to kill Simon to survive?

ALI. Yes. He was bringing the group down.

DOV. Was he?

SAMEH. Was he?

ALI. Yes — he was keeping it from being united.

DOV. Is it always good for everyone to be united? I mean, if everyone was of the same mind, in this instance, more boys would have died. It was the dissenters who kept things from going completely haywire.

ALI. I disagree.

DOV. It was the fact that there were two groups — Ralph, Piggy, and Simon and Jack's gang — that created a kind of protection. Jack could focus on the other group instead of wreaking havoc on his own.

ALI. And that's a good thing?

DOV. Yes — but I mean, that's not really the question. The question is did they need to kill Simon —

ALI. No, I think this is the question. You're saying it's better for there to be two sides because if there were only one it would destroy its own people?

DOV. That's democracy.

ALI. I don't think so. (*Beat.*)

DOV. Let me ask you something.

ALI. Fine.

DOV. It's just ... If you already have answers you find sufficient, then why ...

ALI. Why did I come today?

DOV. Right.

ALI. Well, I wanted to see you because ...

DOV. Yes?

ALI. I think because I don't want to believe, as my father would have me believe, that my teacher is an imbecile.

DOV. Yes?

SAMEH. Is that why, Ali? Really? You know, I don't have anyone to talk to anymore either. I cannot speak unless I am spoken to. Just so you know, Ali.

DOV. And in order not to be deemed an imbecile, I'd have to agree with you that *Lord of the Flies* is in fact a call to do away with certain elements of our society that interfere with some kind of purity of spirit.

ALI. Entirely.

DOV. The book has never been taken that way. Golding himself never said such a thing and he was interviewed extensively.

ALI. A book's author doesn't always know what he intends, or what he's written.

DOV. There I agree with you.

ALI. How old are you, Mr. Gold?

DOV. Older than you.

ALI. That's a kind of puerile response, isn't it?

DOV. I meant that what's important is that I'm an adult, and you're a —

ALI. What do you mean by "being an adult"?

DOV. I mean that ... being an adult is about the accumulation of various kinds of wisdom. I've been around the block and back. You know the saying.

ALI. You think you're wise? (*A breath.*)

DOV. I'm happy for you to interpret the book however you want. You know that I'm thrilled that you're interpreting it at all. (*Beat.*) Okay?

ALI. Is it true that you didn't finish your PhD? That you started one and you didn't —

DOV. Haven't yet —

ALI. Finished it?

DOV. How do you know that?

ALI. What's the topic of your dissertation?

DOV. Utopian societies in literature.

ALI. And why can't you finish it?

DOV. I'm a little busy these days —

ALI. I think it's laziness. Or fear.

DOV. (*Unaffected by him.*) Oh yeah? Fear of what?

ALI. That you're not good enough. I mean, that you're not a good enough person.

DOV. Why would I think that?

ALI. Don't all Jews ask those sorts of questions — "Who am I?" "Why am I here?" "What am I meant to do?"

DOV. Doesn't everyone?

ALI. No. (*Beat.*) Anyway, aren't all high school teachers afraid of



doing something else? That's what my father says. (*Beat.*) Hey, what does your father do?

DOV. He's a rabbi. (*Beat.*) What does your father do?

ALI. That's personal. (*A breath. Sameh steps out to address the audience.*)

SAMEH. You'd think, given the circumstances, that this is where the story begins. It's not. In fact, most stories have been going on forever, and this one is no different. And so we enter it in the middle. We enter it when my idiot brother starts to go see his teacher every day outside of class because he is tormented by events he can't speak of and doesn't understand. (*The lights shift back to the classroom — a few days later.*)

ALI. It's just that, it seems that you're justifying all sorts of behavior with this idea of humanness. This notion that human beings are allowed to err because they are human. It's circular and means nothing.

DOV. It doesn't mean anything to you to be human?

ALI. It means simply that I was born and I will die. That I need food to sustain myself. That, to be good, I must pray for my salvation. That to be saved, I must praise Allah as much as humanly possible.

DOV. So you said it yourself — humanly possible. Suggesting there are certain limits to what humans can do.

ALI. I will never fly with my own wings. I cannot continue to breathe if I don't drink water.

DOV. Ali ... You're seventeen, right?

ALI. Age is a state of mind, Mr. Gold.

DOV. How did you get to be so ...

ALI. What?

DOV. Sure.

ALI. I don't understand how anyone could live his life any other way ... I mean, there has to be a compass ... there *has* to be a rule-book, otherwise ...

SAMEH. Oh yes, otherwise what, Ali? Otherwise, what??

DOV. You don't think there's value in being open-minded?

ALI. I think you're talking about being uncertain, about walking around not knowing who you are, and that's different than being open-minded. (*Beat.*) With all due respect, Mr. Gold. (*Beat.*)

DOV. Let's look at this section. Page 78.

ALI. Now you're going to hide behind the book?

DOV. You shouldn't speak to me that way, you know.

ALI. I know. (*Beat.*) I apologize.

DOV. Okay. (*Beat.*) Fine. (*He reads aloud.*) *Again he fell into that strange*

*mood of speculation that was so foreign to him. If faces were different when lit from above, or below — what was a face? What was anything?*

ALI. What are you suggesting by choosing that passage — that there's no permanent self?

DOV. Of course there's no permanent self.

ALI. I disagree.

DOV. What's your context?

ALI. Let's say this. I'm in this office with you right now. Later, at home, I'll be with my parents and ... *(Beat.)*

DOV. Is everything okay?

ALI. Of course.

SAMEH. He was going to say "with his parents and his sister."

ALI. I'll conduct the same conversation with them. I'll stand by the same points of view.

DOV. You'll talk about *Lord of the Flies*?

ALI. Of course. We always discuss my English books.

DOV. That's great.

ALI. It's neither good nor bad. It's the way my family does things ... They want to make sure I'm taking the right lessons from things.

DOV. It seems to me that you'll take whatever lesson you want from something. You're not exactly malleable.

ALI. I tend to agree with my father on most subjects.

DOV. What about your mother?

ALI. She agrees with my father too.

DOV. Always?

ALI. Of course always.

DOV. Is that a good thing?

ALI. *(Obviously defensive.)* Mr. Gold, I trust and revere my father. Don't you revere yours? *(A breath.)*

DOV. I respect him, sure, but do I always agree with him? No. Nor would it be healthy if I did.

ALI. Then you don't respect him.

DOV. You're being very limited in your definition of respect.

ALI. I believe, for instance, that Israel shouldn't exist. I believe it because my father believes it and his reasons are sound. He is a very reasonable man.

DOV. Uh-huh.

ALI. The Jews stole it.

DOV. Are you baiting me?

ALI. Do you feel baited?

# DOV AND ALI

by Anna Ziegler

2M, 2W

Once upon a time, in the middle of a school, in the middle of Detroit, in the middle of the United States of America, there was a confused teacher and a precocious student. When Dov, an orthodox Jew, and Ali, a strict Muslim, get caught in a cultural crossfire, both are confronted with the same choice: Will they stand by their beliefs or face the devastating consequences?

*“... a flawless play ... In a time of ceaseless snark and cynicism, its earnestness in asking bigger questions can be downright refreshing.”*  
—The New York Times

*“In an American tradition of plays such as Oleanna ... Anna Ziegler’s four-hander is an intense, intelligent and hugely promising play that plays out clashes of belief systems in the classroom.”*  
—The Guardian (UK)

*“DOV AND ALI is a powerhouse play that drives its way through an hour and a half of twists and turns about race, individuality, human relations and role models ... There is a resounding truth that pours out of it in all directions ... and yet [it] doesn’t preach. There are no answers offered, there are no morals proffered, but when theatre is this good, it reminds you how essential it is.”*  
—WhatsOnStage.com

*“DOV AND ALI is an acutely observed exploration of the hypocrisies that ... engulf us today ... Ziegler’s script packs a powerful punch ... An incredibly moving play that challenges notions of freedom, expectations and ultimately forgiveness.”*  
—The British Theatre Guide

*“[A] gripping new play about a placatory Jewish teacher and a viciously intense Muslim pupil in a Detroit school, both of whom have similarly divided cultural loyalties. It’s beautifully wrought.”*  
—The Telegraph (UK)

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