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Dramatic Publishing

WOLF CHILD: THE CORRECTION OF JOESPH



Drama by
EDWARD MAST



WOLF CHILD: THE CORRECTION OF JOSEPH

AATE Distinguished Play Award Winner

Suggested by accounts of the education of feral children, *Wolf Child* tells the fictionalized story of young Joseph, a boy raised by wolves. Commissioned and premiered at the Coterie Theatre of Kansas City, Mo.

Drama. By Edward Mast. *Cast: 3m., 2w., with doubling, or up to 9 (3m., 4w., 2 either gender).* Joseph is captured, held against his will and prevented from seeing what he thought was his family. He is disciplined, corrected and punished until he learns a simple lesson: to walk on two legs instead of four. Joseph learns to walk, talk, behave, even laugh and play like a human being. *Wolf Child* asks what is lost as well as gained in his struggle to enter civilization. *Single set. Costumes of 1810 England. Approximate running time: 80 minutes. Code: WD6.*

(Cover illustration by Russ Wall.)

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Wolf Child: The Correction
of Joseph



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(WOLF CHILD: THE CORRECTION OF JOSEPH)

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WOLF CHILD: THE CORRECTION OF JOSEPH

was commissioned by the Coterie Theater in Kansas City MO. The script was developed in October 1992 in a workshop led by Suzan Zeder at the University of Texas at Austin, and premiered in March 1993 at the Coterie Theater. The production was directed by Jeff Church.

Traveller
Joseph
Minister
Margaret/Wolf Mother
Julia/Wolf Sister

Roger Mangels
Christopher Clarke
Brad Shaw
Lisa Cordes
Marlene Mujica

SETTING

Rural New England, about 1810

Credit: Cover Illustration by Russ Wall

Bio: Russ Wall is an internationally published illustrator who graduated from Arizona State University with a BFA in graphic design. His work has appeared in annual reports, business collateral, and editorial publications such as Arizona Highways and Modern Maturity. He owns and operates with his wife, Ruth, Squeeze Design, a full service graphic design and marketing firm based in Phoenix, Arizona.

WOLF CHILD:

CHARACTERS:
(groupings indicate doubling)

Traveller
2nd Human

Boy (Joseph)

Minister/1st Human

Wife
Wolf mother

Julia
Wolf sister

note: I have not specified that the Traveller needs to be a musician; however, if the actor has musical skills, that character can become a travelling musician, with his instrumental music opening the show and marking transitions between scenes.

Any music made by Traveller should be distinct from the noises that he provides for the various objects throughout the play. These noises should be made without instruments of any kind, and do not need to foreshadow the words that Joseph later invents for those objects.

SETTING

A rural New England town outside of Boston. About 1810.

THE CORRECTION OF JOSEPH

(In the darkness: a wolf howl, long and sad. Silence for a moment: then lights up slowly on a man moving downstage toward us, in silhouette at first. Lights are up by the time he reaches the lip of the stage. Walks with odd, stiff-legged gait. He is the Traveller. Staff, pack, wide-brimmed hat, perhaps a trunk or box. Clothes of an early 19th-century itinerant craftsman. Looks at us. The man speaks to us with halting urgency; the words are understandable but he must struggle to assemble them.)

TRAVELLER: I
am not
like
you.
I speak
but
not like you.
I am
here (*touches chest*)
and here (*rubs head with both hands*)
have
different.
Once I have
I was
not
different.
I had not
speak,
but I had
was
like
like all
around me.
Not here, but
outside, under sky and . . . (*Pauses.*)

My remember
now
has not my remember
then.
My remember then . . .

WOLF CHILD:

TRAVELLER: I don't know if
my remember
then
has true.
Or not.
But my remember then
has . . .
all around me then
has
not words, no words,
but but
mouth
voice
voices.

(We begin to hear noises: not literal sounds of the wild, but voices of the wild, some simple long tones, some staccato or rhythmic. Very quiet at first, building volume, harmonious.)

All around me has
had
voices;
not sound but
sound.
Bird
not only bird
but
but
branch and
root and gr
ground
have
sound.
To me.
My ear and
smell and (*rubs self*)
skin
listen to
ground and
night
and wind

TRAVELLER: and
cold
spoke
spoke
to me.
All around me.
In sleep was
sound and
song.
In all.
Night and
sunup,
all was sound.
I was with
voices.
I was
had
sounds.
Before.
Before . . .

(A howl offstage; Traveller steps back as three others enter: a woman, boy and girl. They are wolves: no masks or animal parts, but dressed neutrally and sparsely, with crouching, agile postures and motions. They are running, fugitive, exhausted. The mother stops them, clutches the terrified children to her. They embrace briefly, catching breath; but then the mother jerks head up at a noise offstage. She makes sharp guttural noises at them as she tries to shove them in one direction, leap off opposite. But the children follow her, clinging to her. She grabs the girl by the back of the neck with her teeth, dragging her to a spot and growling at them to stay; the boy follows. When the mother tries to move away, the children want to go with her, but she desperately growls/shouts at them and they cower in place confused and panicked. She looks off toward the noise; turns, takes a last look at the wolf children; turns to run off opposite.

The Traveller beats a single sharp blow on a drum: the Mother pulls up short, crumples and falls dead.

WOLF CHILD:

The young wolves freeze with horror. They scurry over, nuzzle and rub their faces and necks and noses against the mother's body, whimpering, trying to wake her. Enter 1st Human. 1st Human wears a mask. The Traveller sets down drum, puts on a mask, enters as 2nd Human with rifle. The two young wolves see the humans; they try to run off. The 1st Human barks a grunted order - - no word we can understand - - and 2nd Human blocks the retreat of the children. Another grunted order: 2nd Human lets the girl escape. She runs off. The boy struggles, squirms, bites, growls, but they hold him.

The 1st Human steps toward the restrained boy, looks in his face. The boy stops squirming, stares, terrified. 1st Human takes the boy away from 2nd Human. Speaks in calmer tones.)

1st HUMAN: You're safe now. You're safe now.

(Tries to hug the boy; fails. Lets him go. Boy jumps away toward the mother wolf; 2nd human catches him.)

It's alright. Let him go. He won't run off.

(2nd human lets go. Boy runs to body of mother wolf, crouches there whimpering and nuzzling.)

He thinks that poor creature was his mother.

(Traveller removes mask, steps over near the Boy. Pool of light isolates the two of them as Traveller points down at him.)

TRAVELLER: This one is not wolf.
This one is
was
me.

(Lights change. Mother Wolf rises; all exeunt except for Traveller and the Boy. The Boy continues to cower

THE CORRECTION OF JOSEPH

and whimper, but looks around curiously and fearfully as the world changes around him. Traveller speaks as he brings on several household objects: a chair, a doorway, a window, several bowls, a fork and spoon.)

TRAVELLER: Was new then.
All was world of
this. And this. And this.
Things.
And . . .

(Enter the 1st Human, who has put on a coat and a reversed collar: he is still masked, but we see that he is a minister. The Minister puts a leash on the Boy, speaking to him to calm him.)

MINISTER: Now boy. Easy. There now. Good boy.

(The Boy resists, but the Minister is stronger. When the Boy is leashed, the Traveller sets the doorway upright, and a human woman - the Wife - enters. She is also masked. She carries bowls of food. Boy gapes at them.)

WOMAN: *(somewhat grimly)* This is him then?

MINISTER: Yes. Boy, meet Margaret, my wife.

WIFE: He's filthy.

MINISTER: Yes. He's probably never bathed in his life.

WIFE: Not recently, anyway.

TRAVELLER: *(to us)* Creatures all had
tall.

WIFE: Hello boy. You'll be living with us now. Give your new mother a hug then.

(She extends arms. The boy recoils with a snarl. She pulls back, puzzled and annoyed.)

WOLF CHILD:

MINISTER: My dear, he does not understand yet.

WIFE: Doesn't he? Say you. We've seen plenty of stray boys in this house, and the boys will be stubborn.

MINISTER: Be gentle with him. This boy is unusual.

WIFE: You always say that. We'll just see. Boy, I say hello and welcome.

(She approaches him; he steps back, snaps teeth at her.)

WIFE: Well that's nasty. Perhaps you're not ready to live here yet.

MINISTER: Dear - -

WIFE: Sh! Perhaps I won't give you any of this delicious meal I've prepared. How about that?

(She picks up bowl, holds it over her head as if to keep it away from him. Boy looks at it, doesn't approach it. He stares at her, unmoving.)

WIFE: Did you feed him already?

MINISTER: No.

WIFE: What is the matter with him? Never seen a boy so casual about food.

MINISTER: *(amused)* He may not know it's food, my dear.

WIFE: Doesn't know it's - - oh pff. *(holds bowl down under his nose)* Meat, boy? Eat meat?

(She picks a piece, puts it in her mouth, chews loudly. Picks another piece, holds it over to him. He sniffs it; turns away with a grimace.)

Well you certainly are an ill-mannered little urchin - -

THE CORRECTION OF JOSEPH

MINISTER: *(gently cutting her off)* It is possible he has never eaten cooked food.

(With a snort of irritation, she sets down bowl.)

Do you have anything uncooked?

WIFE: I suppose. Some carrots, or here: some nuts.

(Dubiously, she holds another bowl toward him; sets it down, steps away. Cautiously he approaches bowl. Sniffs. Squats, lifts a hand and knocks over the bowl. Bends down and picks up nuts off the floor with his mouth, devours them, snuffles and slurps the food on the floor.)

Wife watches him, frowning and disturbed. As he eats, she approaches him gently reaches out, touches his scalp. He recoils slightly. She stays still, hand outstretched. Slowly, he begins to eat again. He lets her touch his scalp and skin.)

Is he truly from the forest?

MINISTER: I didn't believe them either, at first. But yes. He seems to be.

(As Minister speaks, enter Julia, a girl wearing a human mask. She sees the boy, grimaces.)

JULIA: Eeuw! Is that him?!?

(The Boy jerks up at her noise, leaps away and across the room toward the door. Minister catches and holds him.)

WIFE: *(snapping)* Quiet Julia!

MINISTER: Julia! Close the door.

(Julia quickly closes the door.)

WOLF CHILD:

MINISTER: *(to Boy, calming him)* It's alright. This is my daughter Julia. Julia. There now. There now.

(Lets him go; boy lopes about uneasily.)

(to Julia) We will need to keep doors closed and locked behind us for some time now.

JULIA: What wrong with him?

WIFE: Hush. There's water on the stove. You get a rag and some hot water, and see that it's hot. Hear me?

JULIA: *(exits sulking)* Yes maam.

MINISTER: Close the door behind you.

(Wife turns back to the Boy. She bends down, not too close, to look in his eyes. He stops, stares back at her. She makes her motions gradual so as not to startle him. She looks at him, overtaken with wonder.)

WIFE: You really are a lost one then? From the forest, not just from the street? *(pause)* Oh poor dear boy.

(He lets her reach over and touch him.)

My poor dear child. It's alright. It will be alright. You're not lost anymore. This is your home now. *(to Minister, though not taking eyes off Boy)* How was he lost?

MINISTER: No one knows.

WIFE: My poor boy.

MINISTER: Yes I know. I know. The poor boy.

(Julia enters with basin and rag.)

The door.

THE CORRECTION OF JOSEPH

(Julia grimaces again as she closes the door behind her. As she hands the basin and rag to Wife, Minister steps over and locks the door. Wife takes the leash off the boy, picks up rag, begins to wash him. At first he recoils, but then he likes the warm touch. Opens mouth wide, grunts and stretches languorously at her touch. The Minister looks on contentedly. Julia stares, frowning and disgusted.)

WIFE: There now. That's nice, is it?

JULIA: Is he gonna **live** here?

MINISTER: For some time, yes.

JULIA: Do we **have** to?

MINISTER: No. We could send him to an institution in Boston where he would live in a large dirty barn with other people who can't speak or walk or hear or think or clean themselves. They would strap him down to a bed at night, and bind him to a chair to feed him. Would **you** like to be treated that way?

JULIA: Well what are **we** gonna do with him?

MINISTER: We may have to bind him sometimes. It will be a burden, I know. For your mother most of all perhaps. But I think . . .

JULIA: What?

MINISTER: It think it may also be a privilege.

(He kneels before the boy, gently touches his head and looks in his face. The boy stops languishing under the wife's hands for a moment, looks back at the Minister.)

MINISTER: I think perhaps we have been chosen.

WIFE: Chosen, are we?

WOLF CHILD:

MINISTER: Yes. For a special task. A very special task.

(The Boy suddenly, innocently, flings his head back and forth, shaking off water like a shaggy dog. Minister Wife, and Julia are soaked.)

Lights change: Traveller picks up chair, upends it to form a lectern. Wife and Julia leave. The Minister turns to the lectern, begins to address us formally as the Traveller pulls the Boy away. As the Minister speaks to us, the Traveller puts a shirt and trousers on the Boy.)

Good afternoon gentlemen. I very much appreciate the opportunity to address your learned society. I know your time is valuable, and as a minister, I realize I have no credentials in the sciences; but I sincerely believe you will come to understand the significance of what I have found. The boy you will see before you now - -

(The Minister takes the Boy's leash from the Traveller, pulls the struggling, newly-clothed boy forward. In his new shirt and trousers, the Boy is squirming and writhing as if hog-tied or straightjacketed. He also sees us and is afraid.)

- - was apparently lost as a small child. The circumstances of his recovery, as you have already heard, seem to indicate that he was raised in the wild by wolves. We have no way of knowing what his exact age is, nor at what age he was lost to civilization. Nor do we know how or why he was lost. I have made some preliminary observations. He has certainly lived in the open wild and seems immune to common illnesses. You will note he walks on all fours.

(He gently prods the boy to walk.)

As you see, he can squat on haunches; but even when his hands are aided, he is incapable of erect carriage.