

'The Playwright Speaks' note is posted at the end of the play.

I WAS WRONG

by jerome de la lande

ONE

*Tall and Cat and Rain and Bear
are walking around briskly
without any purpose
shrouded in the claws of their passion
and offended obfuscation.*

*Only Child is sitting still
crosslegged on a small mound
playing with a doll
fully absorbed
and never looking up.*

TALL
It's not good enough, it's not good.

CAT
They deserve worse, it must be worse.

TALL
They need to feel it, all the way to their bones.

RAIN
Down their soul.

TALL
It's not enough.

CAT
Nothing will ever be enough.

TALL
They must be made to repent.

RAIN
They must.

CAT

They must be made to understand the futility of their attempt.

TALL

So futile.

CAT

Pushing those empty arguments. What were they trying to prove?

RAIN

Yet it was not in jest.

TALL

They knew quite well what they were doing, there was no mistake.

CAT

Those words were intended for our very ears.

RAIN

It was folly.

BEAR

Provocation!

TALL

A desire to hurt and offend.

CAT

A plot to delegitimize us, our work, our achievements.

BEAR

Subversion!

CAT

They need to pay for it in front of us all.

TALL

Everyone should stand and watch it be done.

CAT

Everyone should learn.

RAIN

It cannot be unheard.

BEAR

Submission!

CHILD

It's not good enough, it's not good!

*As Child is shaking and scolding the doll
the others stop in their tracks
staring in silence
at the little one
who has the power
always
to make them pause if only for an instant.*

TALL

They must recognize their errors.

CAT

Beg forgiveness on their knees.

TALL

Confess their crimes and their intentions.

RAIN

Provide all words with definitions.

BEAR

No absolution!

CAT

A weapon cannot be turned into a shield.

RAIN

No words will ever come to their rescue.

BEAR

Never!

TALL

No one will hear, but everyone will know.

CHILD

It's not good enough, it's not good!

*And again and always
they stop and stare
if only for an instant.*

TALL

They should be made to suffer.

CAT

They should be drowned in the filthiest of water.

RAIN

In the venom of their tears.

CAT

Watch all their sins go down the drain.

RAIN

Washing the stains from their confession.

CHILD

It's not good enough, It's not good!

And again...

TALL

They should be made to rot in a cell.

CAT

Tied to their cot and driven insane.

TALL

Chemically mutilated to oblivion.

BEAR

Castration!

RAIN

Tongues of vipers are too prolific.

CAT

They should be whipped, they should be stoned.

TALL

Forced into slavery and sold.

CAT

After their lips would first have been sown.

BEAR
Needlepoint!

RAIN
May the will of their masters be cherished as gold.

CHILD
It's not good enough, it's not good!

And again...

CAT
They should be burned alive at the stakes.

RAIN
Pulled into the smoldering ashes of late.

CAT
They should be slowly asphyxiated.

TALL
Squeezed of the remnants of any burgeoning opinion.

BEAR
Herbicide!

CHILD
It's not good enough, it's not good!

And again...

RAIN
No air, no fire, no water will inflict on them enough shame.

TALL
They should be tortured at the hands of our prophets.

CAT
Remove the skin of their fingers and toes.

TALL
Hang them upside down and crown them with thorns.

RAIN
Use them as target practice for our woes.

BEAR
Crucified!

CHILD
It's not good enough, it's not good! it's not good!

*And again
for a little more than an instant
remaining still...*

TALL
Have we been mistaken?

CAT
Are we hallucinating?

RAIN
Have we forgotten the lessons of our daughters?

*...before resuming their walk
brisker still.*

RAIN
No killing no torture no prison, not in the name of our civilization.

TALL
Nothing unsavory will ever endanger our integrity.

CAT
Let them dispose as they please of their people's liberty.

TALL
They are the ones who will murder in the name of conformity.

BEAR
Gulag!

CAT
They are the tyrants, they are the fools.

TALL
They are in violation of all our rules.

RAIN
We are better than that, walking on higher ground.

TALL

We are sure to prevail, our mission is sound.

CAT

Our heart is beating for the truth of our vision.

BEAR

Exploration!

TALL

Nothing can stop us as we are but a beacon.

RAIN

Deep through the darkness we shine in unison.

TALL

Only us can, reach them out and conquer.

CAT

Those minds of steel that rejected our offer.

BEAR

Expansion!

RAIN

Let those barbarians practice their medicine.

CAT

Let them continue on their path to obstruction.

TALL

Only us know, what rules to break or keep.

CAT

Humanity is null without an intervention.

BEAR

Jurisdiction!

RAIN

No-one but us can point in God's direction.

TALL

No-one but us can make such an assertion.

CHILD

It's not good enough, it's not good! It's not good!

*Again they cannot help but stop
and stare
pensive and silent
if only for a moment.*

RAIN

No killing no torture no prison, yet we must show our shared revulsion.

CAT

We must make an example.

TALL

More than an example.

CAT

Or they will never learn.

TALL

It will happen again.

CAT

We must be firm and stick to our guns.

BEAR

Prohibition!

RAIN

We must insist on complete reformation.

CAT

We must submit a deadline for submission.

TALL

We must protest on the porch of their mansions.

CAT

At night, with a bullhorn and percussions.

BEAR

Flashmob!

CHILD

It's not good enough...

...

TALL

They should be banned.

CAT

They should be shunned.

TALL

They should be pushed outside of our circle.

RAIN

Caught in a web of masterful assumptions.

BEAR

Ostracized!

CHILD

It's not good enough...

...

TALL

They should lose all their means of survival.

CAT

Cut off their passports and their bank accounts.

RAIN

Empty their home and remove any hope.

CAT

Erase any memory of their summer vacation.

BEAR

Deleted!

CHILD

It's not good enough...

...

TALL

They should be alone abandoned by all.

CAT

Marked by the plague of total exclusion.

RAIN

Pushed to the edge of annihilation.

TALL

Till they beg us in awe to ease their suffering.

BEAR

Euthanasia!

CHILD

It's not good enough!

*Barely they stop
for the briefest of moment.*

TALL

They should be ignored?

CAT

They should be avoided?

RAIN

They should be covered in feathers and tar?

CHILD

It's not good enough, it's not good! It's not good! It's not good!

*What is an exasperated child to do
other than pull off the head
of its abused doll
and throw it afar?*

*Such unexpected and violent action
will often be followed
by the quiet interruption
of all movements and steps
from a subdued crowd.*

TWO

*Voices emerging from darkness
emotionless and mechanical*

*pronouncing words
without meaning.*

CAT
I was wrong.

TALL
I was wrong.

BEAR
No, I was wrong.

RAIN
Forgive me, as I was wrong.

TALL
I was not thinking, I was wrong.

CAT
I was so wrong, so wrong...

RAIN
I apologize, for I was wrong.

BEAR
Yes, I was wrong.

*A ray of light is shining from above
onto an empty mound
gradually intensifying
revealing five shadows
standing cross-like
arms outstretched
in an attempt at contrition.*

*Words are regaining their meaning
a natural and hurried flow
insecure and demeaning.*

*Only Rain remains at peace
speaking with the assurance
of one who has been amiss.*

TALL
It should have been clear to me...

CAT

I should have seen it earlier.

TALL

There were signs, all those signs...

BEAR

I was blind.

TALL

I wasn't listening, I refused to listen.

CAT

I could have heard, I could have tried.

BEAR

I was deaf. I was dumb.

CAT

I should have heard, but I chose not to.

RAIN

I apologize, for I was selfish.

TALL

I was wrong.

CAT

I was wrong.

CHILD

Me too, I was wrong too.

TALL

Nothing can change what has been done, it is too late, it has been done.

BEAR

Nothing can help, it cannot be fixed, it cannot be undone.

CAT

What has been done will remain, what has been said will still resonate, will still hurt.

BEAR

What else did I say that should not have been said? Everything I said.

RAIN

I apologize, for I was always speaking in haste.

BEAR

I should have been thinking, before I chose to express the emptiness of my thoughts.

TALL

Never again will I pretend to know.

CAT

Never again will I pretend to understand.

BEAR

Who am I to believe I can understand?

CAT

I was wrong.

BEAR

I was wrong.

CHILD

Me too, I was wrong too.

RAIN

I apologize, for I lost my way and my integrity.

TALL

I am not worthy of the attention I received, I am not qualified. I am a fraud and an usurper.

CAT

Too often I have failed to refrain myself from speaking out openly. I am weak. And hollow.

BEAR

It is too easy to claim any moral justification, I was never the one to follow.

CAT

Do not be confused, I am guilty of all my sins. I was wrong.

RAIN

Hear me apologize, for I am unfit to speak and express an opinion.

CHILD

My opinion was wrong too!

TALL

I will not hide from you behind a meaningless defense, there is no possible alternative to your accusations.

CAT

There are no excuses, everything I said, I said. Yet I never took responsibility, I never admitted my errors...

TALL

Words were spoken, pages were written. I was heard. I was wrong.

BEAR

Words were spread in organized confusion, under my lighthearted supervision...

CAT

I do now. I admit my errors. Please believe me, as I was wrong.

BEAR

...causing despair among those unwittingly listening. I was wrong.

RAIN

Hear me apologize, for I doubted what I should have revered. The sacred words are not to be played with.

TALL

I was wrong.

CAT

I was wrong.

BEAR

Never again will I have a chance to address the emptiness of what my words have too often expressed.

CAT

Never again will I come before you and revel in the length of my shortcomings. This is my chance.

TALL

Only now was I given the opportunity to convince you of my deep and heartfelt abnegation.

RAIN

Forgive me as I have been careless in my devotion and faithless in my promises. I lost my direction and forgot the meaning of my attachment to the sole acceptable lexicon of our union. I did not perform as you were in the right to expect. I was only indulgent when

I should have been ruthless. I could not prevent the flood of unsolicited opinions. I have failed when I should have risen. Pity me, as I am but human.

*Kneeling
arms joined forward as in a prayer
Rain is the one taking the lead
followed one at a time
by each and everyone
as in a gospel sermon
or a pagan ceremony.*

BEAR

Pity me and forgive me for constantly breaking the rules that I obstinately failed to understand.

CAT

Forgive me for ignoring the true voices that I am to forever listen and follow.

TALL

And forgive me, for inciting others to search for their own answers instead of accepting the truth of your compromised conclusions.

CHILD

And me too, forgive me too.

RAIN

Forgive me, as I am but human. Miserably defective and weak. A sad specimen of an unruly specie. A single worm on a dry path, waiting to be stepped on and crushed, as inevitably as the sun follows the storm. Only human.

*Kneeling and advancing
pleading and reneging
toward whatever may become
a source of absolution.*

CAT

Forgive me, as I forgot the true reasons behind unchallengeable conventions.

TALL

Forgive me, as I turned away from the only appropriate rules of communication.

BEAR

Forgive me.

CHILD

Forgive me, forgive me!

RAIN

Forgive my humanity and my imperfections. Forgive my name and my instinctive resorting to visual simplifications.

*Standing up and turning
toward a little mound
open and inviting.*

BEAR

Forgive me.

CAT

Forgive me, I was wrong.

TALL

I was wrong.

CHILD

I was wrong.

RAIN

My birth is my cross, I carry the weight of my predecessors and I denounce their lives and errors.

*As Rain steps on the mound
turning to the heavens
each in turn in a circle
kneels below
in rabid worship.*

TALL

They were wrong, forgive me.

CHILD

Forgive me.

CAT

I was wrong.

BEAR

Forgive me, as I was wrong.

RAIN

Allow me to reform under the ever-attentive ear of your benevolent repression. Forgive me and help me be Other.

CAT
Help me. Forgive me.

TALL
Forgive me and help me, as I was wrong.

CHILD
I was wrong.

RAIN
Teach me to grow and abandon my hard-set cultural misapprehensions.

TALL
Teach me.

CAT
I was wrong.

BEAR
I was wrong.

RAIN
Show me the right way of using the proper allocution.

BEAR
I was wrong. Show me the way.

CAT
Show me the way.

CHILD
Show me.

RAIN
Let me benefit from your knowledge and your wisdom.

CAT
Let me.

BEAR
Show me the way.

TALL

I was wrong.

RAIN

I am but a student in constant need of indoctrination. Educate me.

TALL

Educate me.

CAT

Please lecture me.

BEAR

Lecture me, as I was wrong.

RAIN

Scold me when I do not yield to the voices of your reason. Who am I to challenge the authority of your vision?

BEAR

Scold me.

TALL

Lecture me. Help me.

CHILD

I was wrong.

RAIN

Punish me until I refrain from any further oral expression.

CHILD

Punish me, me!

TALL

I was wrong.

CAT

Punish me, lecture me.

RAIN

I do not deserve to even think about the proper punctuation.

BEAR

I was wrong.

CAT

Lecture me again.

TALL

Teach me what to think.

RAIN

Words should be permitted only to those with high distinctions, or at least the right connections.

TALL

Punish me, lecture me.

BEAR

Enlighten me.

CAT

Educate me.

RAIN

I was wrong. And it will now be my mission to forever promote your definitions without allowing any discussion.

TOGETHER

I was wrong.

RAIN

I was wrong.

TOGETHER

I was wrong.

RAIN

I was wrong.

TOGETHER

I was wrong.

CHILD

Hallelujah!

*Blessed be those
who find in their heart
the talent and the strength
to forget their past...*

THREE

*Voices in the dark
in a deep whisper
rushing and chanting
empty phrases
with an addictive
melody.*

RAIN
Don't say that.

CAT
Don't say that, don't say that.

BEAR
Be careful.

TALL
Be careful, don't say that.

CAT
Be careful.

BEAR
Don't say that.

CAT
Don't say that, be careful.

TALL
Don't say that.

*A light from above
descending and expanding
revealing a child
sitting cross-legged
on top of a mound
while others are circling
hunching down in fear
furtively glancing
at the light above.*

RAIN

Be careful, be careful.

TALL

Don't say that.

CAT

Don't say that, be careful.

*One takes a step
out of the circle
hesitant and humble
yet duly interrupted
by the fearful chanting.*

BEAR

I am not the most compassionate person, but when I see someone on the ground, sleeping on the ground, I mean, well...

CAT

Be careful.

TALL

Don't say that, be careful.

...

BEAR

Of course you never know the reasons, there must be reasons, things don't just happen, it's not random, must be something they did, something really...

RAIN

Don't say that.

CAT

Be careful, be careful.

...

BEAR

I mean, no-one I know has ever ended like... I'm sure a lot of very good people... Once I saw... She didn't look like she would be...

TALL

Be careful, don't say that.

RAIN

Don't say that.

*Defeated and flustered
Bear rejoins the ranks
of the silent marchers
before another one
steps out
and gives it a try.*

CAT

There is something to say about those automated checkout machines at the store, and not having to deal with the same overworked, underpaid, and not always very...

TALL

Don't say that.

RAIN

Be careful, be careful.

...

CAT

Of course everyone has to eat, I would not want to take that away from anyone, but I mean, there is also something to say about not wanting to have to confront on a daily basis this kind of...

BEAR

Don't say that.

TALL

Be careful, don't say that.

...

CAT

Isn't that the same thing as having to watch death in the face? Why would I want to do that? I don't need to be constantly reminded of what some...

RAIN

Be careful.

BEAR

Don't say that.

CHILD

Please...

*For a brief moment they stop
startled by the interjection
of an indifferent child.*

*As they resume their march
painstakingly
in the opposite direction
another one steps out.*

TALL

I heard it is a wonderful place to visit at this time of year, and it's not too crowded with tourists, so at least you can enjoy watching the locals when they...

BEAR

Be careful, don't say that.

CAT

Don't say that.

...

TALL

They are building a brand new airport and a highway, so it will become easier to get there... The fishing villages had to go, of course, but it was only shacks and...

CAT

Be careful.

RAIN

Don't say that.

...

TALL

Anyway, some people will always complain, am sure they got their money worth, manna from heaven really, I mean, what could those old dilapidated...

RAIN

Be careful, be careful.

CAT

Don't say that.

CHILD

Please...

*Again they stop
Tall rejoins the circle
and they resume their silent march
in the opposite direction.*

*As Rain steps out
struggling to speak
the others become
anxious and agitated
covering their ears
and accelerating.*

RAIN

I would not say it was a mistake, after all one is entitled to one's opinions, but in the context of the conversation, and at that particular location, in the middle of dinner, and in front of the whole staff — Be careful, don't say that. Don't say that. Be careful —

...

I mean it's one thing to talk about the weather, but those details about who buys what, did we really need to hear about the eating habits of — Be careful, be careful. Don't say that. Be careful —

...

But we had a wonderful time. The food was interesting. It was the first time I ever tried something cooked in such a way. One of the guests even asked for the recipe, we all laughed. I am not sure it was — Don't say that, be careful. Be careful, don't say that —

...

I mean I understand not everyone appreciates humor, but really, when it is done in good fun with no intention to offend anyone, then why would they get so — Be careful. Don't say that. Don't...

CHILD

Please...

*Again they stop
for a longer time
staring above the mound
in expectation.*

*Then slowly they resume their march
still covering their ears
grabbing and silencing
anyone
who would attempt to speak.*

CAT

Despite anything you might say, it is my strong opinion that...

BEAR
Don't say that.

RAIN
Be careful.

...

BEAR
You may think differently, but I honestly believe that...

RAIN
Be careful.

CAT
Don't say that.

...

TALL
I am absolutely convinced that...

BEAR
Don't say that.

CAT
There is no doubt in my mind that...

TALL
Be careful.

RAIN
The one thing I know to be true is...

CAT
Don't say that.

CHILD
Please!

*They stop and stare
above the mound
before resuming
in the opposite direction
frenetically*

*walking and chanting
even faster still.*

BEAR
Last night I had the strangest dream.

CAT
Don't say that.

RAIN
Be careful.

TALL
Was the little fox eating a rose?

BEAR
Be careful.

RAIN
Don't say that.

CAT
Why is my toaster burning all my hopes?

RAIN
Don't say that.

TALL
Is today even a day?

RAIN
Be careful.

BEAR
There is still some sadness on the wall.

TALL
Be careful.

CAT
Fork in the left eye, please.

RAIN
Don't say that.

TALL

Sometimes I feel so happy.

CAT
Be careful.

CHILD
Please. Please!

*As Child stands up
to confront them
the others try to catch her
and pull him down.*

RAIN
Don't say that.

TALL
Be careful.

CHILD
Please. Let me say it. Let me say it.

RAIN
Be careful, Child.

BEAR
Don't say that, Child.

CHILD
Let me say it. I want to say it.

RAIN
Be careful, Child, be careful.

CAT
Don't say that, Child.

CHILD
I want to say it. Let me say it.

RAIN
Don't say it, Child.

TALL
Be careful, Child.

*Triumphant Child
manages to get away
and climb back on the mound
sending the others
scrambling away
in sheer panic.*

CHILD

I am going to say it, I am. I must say it now.

RAIN

Please, Child, please.

BEAR

Don't say it, Child.

CAT

Be careful, Child.

CHILD

Look at me, look at me saying it.

*Defiant and yet glancing above
Child is dancing
and chanting
like nursery rhymes
as the others are crouching down
trying to hide.*

CHILD

Our Only Freedom Is Words!
Our Only Weapon Is Words!
Our Only Possession Is Words!
Our Only Freedom Is Words!
Our Only Weapon Is...

*A white ray of light
falls on the mound
enshrouding and interrupting
the little child
who remains transfixed
immediately kneeling
arms joined forward
as in a prayer.*

CHILD

I was wrong. I was wrong. Please forgive me, as I was wrong...

*The white light turns brighter
and brighter still
drowning Child
till it suddenly disappears
leaving the mound
empty and dark.*

The end.

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *The idea for this short play came to me a year ago as I was struggling to finish a full-length satirical play — Keeping Up With Amerika — and questioning the timing of writing a satire that I knew would never pass the Woke Test. Developing and writing I Was Wrong is what allowed me to vent and keep going.*

The form of the work is directly related to my frustration as a failed musician, one who can neither read music, play of any instrument or sing on key. I conceived of each character as having a different vocal type (BEAR as a bass, TALL a tenor, CAT a soprano, RAIN a mezzo and CHILD a counter tenor or a coloratura soprano) and I attempted to compose a one act opera.

Without any music...

I Was Wrong has yet to be performed anywhere.

AUTHOR'S BIO: *Born and raised in Paris, France. Lived in Sao Paulo, Montreal and London before to resettle in New York City, where he lives alone with his dog, teaching and writing, in both English and French.*