

赵氏孤儿

The Orphan of Zhao

By James Fenton

2026 Lent Term Week 7

10th March to 14th March

ADC Main Show

Producer Application Pack

The Orphan of Zhao is about cruelty, sacrifice, and revenge, as well as the price to be paid along the way.

History and art are allegorical; allegories are often seen as too artistic but not historic enough, nor political enough.

A story from more than 2000 years ago in ancient China.

It remains relevant and painful.

CW (highlight to see):

Synopsis

In ancient China, a political feud between a loyal, upright courtier, Zhao Dun and a power-greedy, cruel courtier Tu'an Gu, led to the massacre of the entire clan of the former. A kind and brave doctor Cheng Ying saved the only child of the clan, sacrificed his own son to protect the last heir of the Zhao, Cheng Bo. Through incidents involving people giving up their lives to save this Orphan, his true identity was concealed, became Tu'an Gu's adopted child, and was revealed about his true origin and family years later. Killing the man who was the leader of the state and the father figure who raised him up now became the only choice to make. In the end Cheng Ying faced the spirit of his long passed son.

[\(full script\)](#)

Quick Q&A

1. Do I have to be of **Chinese/East Asian** heritages to get involved?
 - Not at all! While Chinese/East Asian backgrounds are **strongly encouraged**, it is not a requirement. It is crucially important that the team, from cast to production, is diverse and inclusive in the most beneficial way possible.
2. Is there a Chinese **language** requirement?
 - No. We are using James Fenton's version of the story, which he translated and adapted for Royal Shakespeare Company in 2012 for an English-speaking audience. Hence including the songs the full script is in modern English.
3. Is there any **accessibility** support if I need it?
 - Yes! Please reach out to theorphanofzhao@outlook.com if you have any specific requirements. The team is dedicated to making the process as accessible as possible.

About

History and art are allegorical; allegories are often seen as too artistic but not historic enough. *The Orphan of Zhao* is one such story. Originating from a series of true historical events before 4th century BC amid a period of political and military conflicts in Chinese history, it had been retold and restaged repeatedly in various art forms, among which is the zaju (a form of Chinese opera combining drama songs poetry and comedy) version written by **Ji Junxiang** in the 13th century. As one of the 4 greatest tragedies of Chinese opera, Ji Junxiang's version investigated the themes of greed, revenge, and nobility. **James Fenton's** translation and adaptation in 2012 for Royal Shakespeare Company (which this production is using) was based on Ji Junxiang's version, shifting the focus towards the ethics of such revenge, further questioning the price and the morality of sacrifice.

There are many themes potentially traceable in this piece of history, this allegory, this story. What I see particularly emphasised in Fenton's adaptation and also strikingly relevant to today's theatre is the naked confrontation to cruelty. Cruelty and power, especially political power, are often seen more separated than they may actually be. Cruelty may seem to be the means for the politician (Tu'an Gu) to reach his end, that is the political power, but how is greater power continuously enabling and expanding his cruelty is often less investigated. *The Orphan of Zhao* remains a powerful allegory on how power hungry individuals' cruelty will always find a way to seep into a flawed system, and painfully reveals the toll the system and the people will take because of this.

The reason I choose James Fenton's adaptation instead of a translation of the play itself is to probe deeper into the transferability, contestability, and even volatility of morality, in this case particularly the morality of sacrifice and revenge. One key editing done by Fenton happens at the end of the show, where 20 years after Cheng Ying kills his own child to save the Orphan and after the antagonist Tu'an Gu is finally defeated, Cheng Ying has an unrealistic conversation to the spirit of his long dead biological son, presented as the 20 year-old he could have been. This materialises the cost of sacrifice borne by Cheng Ying, in choosing loyalty and 'morality' over his family, emotions, and too, 'morality'. Interestingly, in 2021 a Chinese musical was put on tour nationally in China, which was largely based on Fenton's plot writing, instead of Ji Junxiang's ancient script. Such a dialogic fusion of cultures and perspectives is what I believe will benefit Cambridge theatre the most.

Hence thematically, or message-wise, I am excited to present the dual ideas: to examine the effect of cruelty on especially a political system, and to present to the audience the struggle of a moral conundrum with its following consequences.

Director's Note

Hi I am Chester, a 2nd-year Education student at Homerton. I am beyond excited to bring *The Orphan of Zhao* to the ADC stage!

This story has been with me since my childhood, and I studied this particular text by James Fenton for my Theatre Studies and Drama A Level. In the last decade, two Chinese stories (that I know of) have been put on as ADC main shows, *Teahouse* (2016) and *Thunderstorm* (2024), both of which are contemporary Chinese dramas. Hence this time I am thrilled to bring on something older, but in a modernised way.

The production process will be loads of fun. It is my ambition to cultivate a creative space where cultural dialogues can happen freely, with the traditional Chinese values and aesthetics interacting with all other cultural and historical backgrounds. It will be my biggest mistake if I were to exclude anyone from any heritages and cultures, so please don't let this specific setting set you back from applying!

Some of the exciting elements of the show and productions include:

- monologues directly to the audience
- not entirely realistic approach to dialogues
- unnaturalistic and lyrical language
- songs and dances
- traditional Chinese instruments on stage
- action/fight moments possibly choreographed as dances
- use of fabrics for set and costumes
- combination of modern theatre and traditional Chinese elements in set and prop design
- A GIANT WEARABLE PUPPET

Also I am like so super duper nice so like pls pls just email me or message me on Facebook (Chester Chen) if you have any questions!

Application Process

For each role, please read through the role description and email your answers to the application questions to theorphanofzhao@outlook.com.

The deadlines for different roles are different. If you need any extension at all, please email to the same address, or drop me a message on Facebook (Chester Chen). The same goes for any questions you may have!

Roles Available

- Producer (deadline: 5th Dec)

Producer

TOOZ is looking for a producer who is enthusiastic about bringing an epic show to stage! You will work very closely with me and the rest of the prod and tech teams.

Some of the key responsibilities include:

- ADC production procedures and admin forms
- Budget managing
- Publicity planning and overseeing
- Recruitment (cast prod and tech)
- Rehearsal schedule and room booking
- Overall management of the team members

Particularly for TOOZ, the Producer should be confident to oversee team members from different backgrounds, consistently communicative and organised, and passionate about creative problem solving.

To apply for Producer, please email your answers to the following questions by 5th Dec to theorphanofzhao@outlook.com. If you need any clarification or an extension, please let me know.

1. Why do you want to produce an ADC main show? Why do you want to produce *The Orphan of Zhao* specifically?
2. What past relevant and/or transferable experience and skills do you have?
3. What do you plan to do for outreach and publicity? You may consider both for team recruitment (cast tech prod) and for publicity targeting at potential audiences.
4. Favourite film/book/album?

Please note that for Producer, I may schedule **a quick casual interview** with you after I receive your application. More info will be provided.