

The Prodigal Son*

– a social drama

(with puppets, masks and pantomime)

by
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* translated from the Spanish by the playwright from his original script

NOTE: Catholicism is the national religion of Peru.
The play draws on a familiar parable from Christ's Gospels.

THE PRODIGAL SON
- an Andean Circus Drama

PROLOGUE:

[Large backdrop curtain is topped by red lettering, saying:
"The Prodigal Son"]

[Dance MUSIC. Enter the CHORUS (three Andean village women in indigenous costumes wear full-head masks of papier-mâché), dancing comically to upbeat local music. As they dance, they sew or knit. The first woman drags a long banner as she knits, while the other two women sew words on the banner.]

[As the dance concludes, the NARRATOR enters with a portable microphone. He is dressed in a suit jacket and top hat but wears the pants and sandals of a villager. He holds the text of the play in hand, and like a Stage Manager, continually refers to it. A whistle hangs from a cord around his neck.]

[As the NARRATOR welcomes the audience, the CHORUS of three village women retrieve their musical instruments (snare drum, cymbals, bass drum). As he introduces the CHORUS, each woman sounds her instrument and bows in turn. The NARRATOR explains that the CHORUS of three women has a dual function - as musicians and as local village woman commenting on the play.]

[As the NARRATOR histrionically announces that the performance is about to begin, the CHORUS SOUND the bass drum and start a dramatic DRUM ROLL. As the NARRATOR says the title of the play, the cymbals CLASH. He retreats upstage and the CHORUS sit on the ground and resume their sewing.]

SCENE ONE:

[The PRODIGAL SON, a village youth, enters. He wears village clothing and has a large papier-mâché head sporting an enormous *chullo* (Andean stocking hat with ear flaps). He stretches and yawns and curls up on the ground and sleeps.]

**NOTE: THE NARRATOR SPEAKS ALL DIALOGUE.
OTHER CHARACTERS MIME AS HE SPEAKS FOR THEM.**

NARRATOR

The village is asleep. "Look!"

CHORUS

(indicating the youth; miming)

Look!

[Above the backdrop curtain the rim of a painted cardboard sun slowly begins to rise.]

NARRATOR

But now the sun is rising. Dawn has come. Ah-h-h...

[When the sun has risen completely and is totally above the top of the backdrop, the cymbals CLASH. Another sign appears above the curtain, reading: "Ah-h-h..."]

CHORUS

(watching sunrise; miming)

Ah-h-h...

[Sign saying "Ah-h-h..." disappears suddenly as if yanked down.]

NARRATOR

(to PRODIGAL SON)

Wake up, my son.

[The youth stretches his arms and yawns. Slowly he sits up, sighs, and slowly rises.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

First, the Prodigal Son brushes his teeth.

[The PRODIGAL SON mimes brushing his teeth. Another sign appears above the backdrop, reading: "THANK YOU, TEETH." After a beat, it too disappears suddenly.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Next, he washes his toes.

[Hopping from foot to foot, the PRODIGAL SON mimes washing his toes. Another sign appears above the backdrop, reading: "THANK YOU, TOES." After a beat, it disappears suddenly.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Then he drinks tea for breakfast. Mmmm...

CHORUS

(rubbing their bellies; miming)

Mmmm...

[GLORIA, a two-dimensional plywood cow comes out from behind the curtain. She has long eyelashes and a big smile. Around her neck hangs a sign, reading: "GLORIA." A cloth painted in a mottled pattern is draped over her plywood pony of a body. Her pink, cloth udder is filled with cans of evaporated milk.*

* NOTE: Canned evaporated milk with the brand name "Gloria" is the only milk available in Peru's Andean markets.

[The PRODIGAL SON, drinking his tea, pays no attention to GLORIA. She rattles her cans to be milked. He ignores her.]

NARRATOR

The Prodigal Son milks Gloria the cow.

[With a sigh, the PRODIGAL SON rises and approaches GLORIA. He sits on the ground beside her and milks her into a metal pail. As he pulls on her cloth udder, tin cans of milk fall into the metal bucket with a CLANK. A sign rises above the curtain, reading: "Ah-h-h..."]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Gloria the cow is now happy.

CHORUS

(sighing; miming)

Ah-h-h...

[Gloria nods her smiling plywood head. The PRODIGAL SON takes GLORIA and the pail of milk behind the curtain.]

NARRATOR

The Prodigal Son takes the milk inside the house. All morning long he and his mother work in the fields, tending their crops. It is hard work. They are both tired.]

[The CHORUS mimes a sigh.

A sign appears above the curtain, reading: "LUNCH-TME."]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

... But now the mother of the Prodigal Son must prepare lunch for the family.

[The CHORUS sound a DRUM ROLL. Slowly the enormous head of a 15-foot high puppet begins rising above the curtain. The bass drum BOOMS once, and the MOTHER's head is totally revealed. It BOOMS again when we see the shoulders of the MOTHER. As most of the puppet is revealed, the Bass Drum BOOMS a third time, the drum roll PEAKS, and the cymbals CLASH.]

[The enormous puppet wears the clothes of a local village woman. Two actors under her skirt hold her central rod and slowly turn the puppet so she appears to be walking out from behind the curtain. Two actors dressed in white control the movements of each of the enormous paper mache hands. Besides the head and hands, the puppet is all fabric.]

[The PRODIGAL SON enters. He ducks under the ample skirts of his MOTHER, the enormous puppet, and comes back out with his plate of lunch. He sits cross-legged on the ground and eats.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

The Prodigal Son would like some bread with his lunch.

[A sign appears above the curtain, asking "BREAD?" The puppet shakes her enormous head and raises her large hands, palms up, helplessly. The PRODIGAL SON looks up at her and mimes his dialogue.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

"There is no bread," says the Mother. "No bread?" says the Prodigal Son. "No bread, my son," says his Mother.

[The PRODIGAL SON hangs his head. He sets his plate aside. He looks up.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

"There's no work either, Mama," says the Prodigal Son.

(beat)

"There's no money."

[The PRODIGAL SON turns his pockets inside out. A sign appears above the curtain, explaining: "NO MONEY!"]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

"I'm going to the city to find work," says the son.

[The bass drum BOOMS menacingly. MOTHER clasps her large puppet hands together as if in prayer or despair. The CHORUS gather around her in sympathy and support.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

"There's no other solution," says the son. "There's no work here."

[The Chorus clasp their hands together too.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

"I'm going to the city," says the son.

[The PRODIGAL SON turns and walks away. The large hands of the puppet rise to cover her face while the Chorus reach out desperately, as if to stop the PRODIGAL SON.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

"No!" says the Mother.

[The PRODIGAL SON stops and turns.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

"I'm going to the city to study, Mama," says the son. "To study?" asks his Mother. "Yes." "No!" She begs. "Yes, Mama. I must go."

[The two signs above the curtain shake violently, as if "BREAD" and "MONEY" were making demands on the son. The CHORUS plays a DRUM ROLL to add to the tension as the actors make broad pantomime gestures. Finally, the cymbals CLASH and the CHORUS and MOTHER hang their heads in sadness. Brief tableau. The Puppet raises her head.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

"Go with God, my son," says the Mother.

[The PRODIGAL SON walks back to his MOTHER and takes one of her large hands between his. He sighs. He then rests his head on her big hand. Brief tableau. The CHORUS approach one by one and pat the PRODIGAL SON lovingly on his back.]

[The PRODIGAL SON slowly draws back, pulls away, turns, waves, and starts off. GLORIA, the plywood cow sticks her head around the curtain. Her smile has inverted into a sad frown. She shakes her cans of milk. The PRODIGAL SON stops, pats her on the head, and hurries off.]

[The MOTHER raises one large hand as if waving good-bye. A sign rises above the backdrop curtain: "MAY GOD GO WITH YOU." The puppet is escorted off-stage by the CHORUS and GLORIA.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

(approaching audience)

What do you think? Should the son go to the city? Or should he stay with his Mother and help on the farm?

(gesturing; pause)

Hmm? What do you say?

(addressing someone in audience)

Why?... Why should he stay with her? To be together so they can starve together?

(responds to someone else)

That they should separate? And try for a better life?

(shrugs)

Really? Each alone by himself?

[The NARRATOR pauses and paces, watching the audience. The large puppet has now moved behind the curtain. Only her head can be seen. A large, crystal teardrop now hangs from the corner of her eye. She sinks slowly down behind the backdrop. The NARRATOR suddenly stops.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

The Prodigal Son is in the city. Look!

[The cymbals CLASH and the Narrator turns abruptly and retreats into the wings.]

SCENE TWO:

[The PRODIGAL SON crosses the stage to the SOUNDS of the city. The CHORUS HONK horns, RING bells, POUND bass drum. The NARRATOR blows his WHISTLE to add to the frenzy. The sign "MAY GOD GO WITH YOU" begins to tremble. The PRODIGAL SON has replaced his *chullo* and sandals with shoes and sport jacket. He carries a backpack draped over his shoulder. As he crosses the stage and disappears behind the backdrop curtain, the sign sinks below the curtain too.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

And so the Mother's son went off to the city. For one full year, the Prodigal Son remained in the big city. When the year was over, he paid a visit to his village and Mother.

[A sign reading, "HOME, SWEET HOME" rises at a angle above the curtain. CHORUS stops making city SOUNDS. SOUND of birds CHIRPING.]

SCENE THREE:

[The CHORUS of three women sit to sew their banner. After a beat, they take out plates and eat their lunch. The PRODIGAL SON enters. He now wears gaudy clothes and enormous sunglasses made of cardboard. He also wears oversized headphones and carries an enormous i-pod. A huge cardboard cell phone is hooked to his belt.

NARRATOR (cont'd)

The Prodigal Son returns to the village.

[The CHORUS offer a dinner plate and cup to the PRODIGAL SON. He holds up his hand, rudely refusing the plate and invitation to eat. They make room for him to sit on the ground, and he shakes his papier mache head.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

The village neighbors greet the Prodigal Son and invite him to eat with them. "*Chuno?*" he asks, turning up his nose at the local food. "I don't eat *chuno* any more! And I certainly don't eat with my hands any more!

NARRATOR (cont'd)

"What do you do in the big city?" ask his neighbors.

[The PRODIGAL SON puffs up with pride and sticks out his chest. As he paces back and forth in front of the CHORUS, he hooks his thumbs in his suspenders.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

"I study agricultural engineering," boasts the Prodigal Son. "Soon I will work for the Minister of Agriculture and drive my own car. I will have my own private office and personal secretary. I also will have many government seals and rubber stamps with my name on them: Senor Lopez, Ministry of Agriculture..."

[One of the CHORUS women stand up and gesture, asking a question.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

"Lopez?" asks his neighbor. "But your last name is Quispe!"
(whispering for the CHORUS)
"Quispe, Quispe, Quispe..."

[As the Chorus cup their hands over their mouths and whisper his last name, the PRODIGAL SON waves his arm dismissively.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

"Speak Spanish" says the Prodigal Son. "But son," says the village woman, "you always spoke Quechua. You understand Quechua." "Before," says the Prodigal Son. "Not any more. No one speaks Quechua in the city."

[The PRODIGAL SON disappears behind the backdrop curtain. The women of the CHORUS shrug to each other. They sit on the ground and resume eating.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

The Prodigal Son goes home to visit his mother. She is so happy to have her son home again.

[A FRIEND, dressed identically as the PRODIGAL SON, enters. He wears a large head of paper mache with enormous sunglasses. He carries large i-pod, has cell phone on his belt, etc. He glances down at a piece of paper and looks up again, as if looking for an address. He appears to be lost.]

[The CHORUS stop eating to observe him. Through pantomime, the FRIEND asks the CHORUS for directions. They point behind the curtain. He bows his thanks and starts off. One woman of the CHORUS stops him and invites him to eat. He bows again, sits and eats with gusto.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

The Prodigal Son's friend from the city comes to visit the Prodigal Son.

[The head of the big puppet rises above the backdrop curtain as the PRODIGAL SON comes out from behind the curtain. Using one hand as a visor, he stares off-stage as if expecting someone. He turns to look in the other direction.]

[The CHORUS beckon to him. He gives a perfunctory wave, but doesn't look at them. He then does a double-take when, out of the corner of his eye, he sees his FRIEND eating with gusto, laughing and patting the women of the CHORUS on the back.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

The Prodigal Son is embarrassed that his city friend is talking to the women of his village. The Prodigal Son is ashamed of his village.

[The PRODIGAL SON beckons to his FRIEND to come along. The FRIEND is reluctant to leave. He invites the PRODIGAL SON to sit. The CHORUS make room for him on the ground. The FRIEND offers him a potato. The PRODIGAL SON throws the potato to the ground and drags the FRIEND to his feet.]

[As the PRODIGAL SON pulls his FRIEND toward off-stage, the large puppet head of MOTHER watches their movements. The FRIEND sees her, stops and points.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

"Who is that village woman?" asks the Friend.

[The PRODIGAL son makes believe he doesn't see where the FRIEND is pointing and grabs him by the arm to leave. The FRIEND pulls away and points again, as if to say, "No, over there." The CHORUS rises. One woman points at the puppet; one begins a DRUM ROLL; the other picks up her cymbals.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

(as SON looks off-stage left)

"Who?"

(as FRIEND gestures at puppet)

"Her!"

(as SON looks off-stage right)

"Where?"

(turns SON and points him
toward curtain)

"There."

[Silence. Drum ROLL stops. Brief tableau.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

"I don't know her," says the Prodigal Son.

(cymbals CLASH)

"I've never seen her before."

[Bass drum BOOMS and the large puppet head begins to sink like a deflated balloon. As MOTHER disappears behind the backdrop, the CHORUS clasp their breasts in horror. In stylized, synchronized movement they then extend their arms

to the heavens; then clasp their breasts; then raise their arms. Meanwhile GLORIA the cow enters. FRIEND points at her.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

"Is that your cow?" asks the Friend. "What cow?" asks the Prodigal Son.

(as FRIEND points)

"That cow."

(beat)

"That's not a cow," says the Prodigal Son. "That's a milk machine."

[As the PRODIGAL SON pulls his FRIEND off-stage, GLORIA's plywood head drops in dismay. The CHORUS sink to the ground and sit. GLORIA exits.]

SCENE FOUR:

[After a beat, a sign appears above the backdrop curtain, reading: "THE ABANDONED." MOTHER, the large puppet, rises behind the curtain. Now she has crystal teardrops hanging from the corner of both eyes. GLORIA the cow comes out from behind the curtain. Her pink, cloth udder is very swollen.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

All day long, the Prodigal Son's Mother works alone in the fields. There's no one to milk Gloria the cow.

[After the large puppet rises to her complete height, she walks out from behind the curtain and crosses the stage.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

There is much hunger in the village.

(beat)

Soon the hunger grows even worse...

[A sign rises above curtain, saying: "THE HUNGRY."]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Due to lack of help on the farm, the Prodigal Son's Mother can't harvest the potatoes. She loses most of her crop.

[The CHORUS rise to their feet. They beat their breasts and reach in lamentation to the sky - all in stylized, synchronized movements. The large puppet raises her large hands - palms up - in hopeless despair.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Soon there is no food. "What will we do?" ask the mothers.

(pause)

In order to have something to eat, the Prodigal Son's Mother decides she has no choice but to kill Gloria the cow – for meat.]

[The CHORUS POUND the bass drum and CLANG the cymbals. From the shock, Gloria's udder collapses and tin cans of milk CLANK on the floor. Once again the large puppet raises her hands – clasped together – beseeching the heavens. GLORIA comes over and tries to duck under MOTHER'S skirts.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

The Prodigal Son's Mother is very sad. Mother does not wish to kill Gloria. "I'm so sorry, Gloria," says Mother.

(beat)

But Gloria understands. She knows she must sacrifice herself for the good of the family.

[GLORIA nods her head.]

SCENE FIVE:

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Meanwhile, the Prodigal Son is busy in the big city.

Two signs rise above the backdrop curtain. One reads: "THE CITY" and the other "WORLD OF BODIES."]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

The young man suffers there. "Look!"

[The PRODIGAL SON enters looking dirty and disheveled. He no longer wears his enormous sunglasses. He carries a briefcase. He is talking on his enormous cell phone and pacing frantically back and forth. The CHORUS begins a drum roll and pounds the bass drum, creating the chaotic pace of the city. The PRODIGAL SON makes phone call after phone call. He seems to be chasing something he cannot attain.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

The Prodigal Son has finished his studies at university, but he cannot find work.

[A seedy-looking youth in sunglasses enters, furtively glancing over his shoulder. With his back to the audience, he opens his jacket and offers something to the PRODIGAL SON, who eagerly sets down his briefcase to look.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

Many temptations exist in the city.

[Anther seedy-looking youth enters. He sneaks up behind the

Prodigal SON and steals his briefcase. When the surprised Prodigal Son turns to pursue the thief, the first man steals his cell phone. The Prodigal Son runs after the breifcase thief, then just as he is about to exit he stops and reaches for his phone, as if to call for help. His phone is gone. He looks around. Both thieves are gone with all his belongings.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

The Prodigal Son suffers in the city. "Look!"

[The CHORUS continues its DRUM ROLL and POUNDING of the bass drum.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

The Prodigal Son is all alone in the city. And now he does not even have his city things.

[The CHORUS CLANG the cymbals. All action stops. At center-stage the Prodigal Son stands with his head down, his arms hanging limply by his side. He looks dejected and downcast.]
Brief tableau.]

SCENE SIX:

NARRATOR

(approaching audience)

What should the Prodigal Son do?

[The CHORUS split up and approach the audience. They beckon them to speak. They hold a hand up to their ears as if wanting to hear suggestions. They beckon some more.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

(to audience)

Can you help?... What do you think?... What do you suggest?

(pacing)

The Prodigal Son has a college degree. He has a degree in Agricultural Sciences. But he has no job.... What should he do? What do you suggest?

[The Chorus retrieve their instruments and start a drum roll. As the music gets louder, the backdrop begins to tremble. The NARRATOR beckons urgently to the audience to speak. As the DRUM ROLL peaks and the cymbals CLASH, the curtain shifts slightly to one side, revealing the head of the enormous puppet, lying on the ground on a heap of clothing. MOTHER looks dead.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

(asking audience)

What should the Prodigal Son do?

(beat)

There's no work in the city; there's no food in the village.
What can he do?

[Brief tableau. MUSIC peaks and stops abruptly.]

[The PRODIGAL SON lifts his head, moves his arms, and turns. He sees his MOTHER and takes a step in her direction. As soon as he does, her head moves slightly. He stops. He slowly takes another step toward her and the head rises slightly. It's as if life is being breathed into a deflated doll.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)
(as if breathing life)

Ah-h-h...

[The PRODIGAL SON approaches his MOTHER. He removes the crystal teardrops from the corner of her eyes. He kisses her on the cheek. Slowly, the puppet begins to rise. The heap of clothes is now seen to be her dress, which now rises neatly below her as she ascends to her full fifteen feet in height.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)
And so the Prodigal Son returns home to his village.

[Two signs rise above the curtain. One says: "THE COUNTRY" and the other reads: "WORLD OF THE SOUL."]

NARRATOR (cont'd)
The Prodigal Son returns home without a job, but he returns home with knowledge. In college he learned about bread made from *quinua*. Bread made from *quinua* is healthier and more nutritious than other kinds of bread.

[The NARRATOR hands a sign to the PRODIGAL SON who in turn shows the drawing of *quinua* bread to his MOTHER, the puppet. At that moment, GLORIA TWO enters. The cloth covering her plywood is painted in a different mottled pattern than GLORIA's. A sign hangs around the calf's neck, reading: GLORIA TWO. The PRODIGAL SON approaches her and pats her flank.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)
Gloria's calf. Gloria Two.

[The PRODIGAL SON sits on the ground beside GLORIA TWO and begins milking her cloth udder. From the small calf small cans of milk fall, CLANKING into the metal bucket.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)
(together with CHORUS)

Ah-h-h...

(beat)

The Prodigal Son has returned home to the village. But he has returned with knowledge.

He has learned how important it is to raise nutritious crops and to eat nutritious foods. All children should drink milk every day.

[The PRODIGAL SON picks up three of the small cans of milk and gives them to each woman of the CHORUS.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

The Prodigal Son returned home to help his fellow villagers.

[The CHORUS rise and unravel the large banner they have been sewing during the play. As they unravel it, we see it says: "OF ALL THE ARTS AND SCIENCES, SET THE CHILDREN TO STUDYING THOSE WHICH WILL RESULT IN ADVANTAGE TO MAN"]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

(reads banner)

"Of all the arts and sciences, set the children to studying those which will result in advantage to man."

[As the NARRATOR reads the banner, the CHORUS display it to different sections of the audience. The PRODIGAL SON enters and holds the banner with one member of the CHORUS while the other two women retrieve their drums.]

NARRATOR (cont'd)

The people of Peru are awake.

(indicating CHORUS and banner)

Look!

[As a painted cardboard cut-out of the sun rises above the curtain backdrop, the CHORUS gives a DRUM ROLL. When the sun is completely risen, the cymbals CLASH.]

NARRATOR

Ah-h-h... The sun always rises!

[The CHORUS approach the PRODIGAL SON and each shake his hand. The MOTHER raises her large paper mache hands, as if in thanks or benediction.]

NARRATOR

The sun always rises – to those who are awake.

[A sign appears above the backdrop curtain, reading: "THREE CHEERS FOR THE SUN!" The actors APPLAUD the audience.]

THE END