



PRODIGAL SON

BY
JOHN PATRICK SHANLEY



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



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PRODIGAL SON was originally produced by the Manhattan Theatre Club (Lynne Meadow, Artistic Director, Barry Grove, Executive Producer) on January 19, 2016. It was directed by John Patrick Shanley, the scenic designer was Santo Loquasto, the costume designer was Jennifer von Mayrhauser, the lighting designer was Natasha Katz, the sound designer was Fitz Patton, the original music was by Paul Simon, and the production stage manager was Kyle Gates. The cast was as follows:

JIM QUINN Timothée Chalamet
CARL SCHMITT Chris McGarry
ALAN HOFFMAN Robert Sean Leonard
AUSTIN David Potters
LOUISE SCHMITT Annika Boras

CHARACTERS

JIM QUINN

CARL SCHMITT

ALAN HOFFMAN

AUSTIN

LOUISE SCHMITT

PRODIGAL SON

Scene 1

Music establishes quiet tension. There's a dark mansion in miniature, upstage. A teenager, Jim Quinn, enters from the surrounding dark, looks at the building. Window by window, it lights up. A book is lying downstage. He picks it up. He's in a white shirt, navy sports jacket, black pants, Oxfords, skinny black tie. He's from the Bronx, and sounds it. He says to the audience:

JIM. I always had a book. I was fifteen. Do you remember fifteen? For me, it was a special, beautiful room in hell. *(More light. Sound of a train.)* I came by train. Mr. Schmitt and I met at a diner in Keene, New Hampshire. 1965. *(Carl Schmitt enters, crew-cut, New England reserve, early 40s, also in a jacket and tie. He and Jim sit in a diner booth. Carl looks at Jim's transcript and figures out his credits on a napkin. They have a pot of tea. Jim forgets the audience.)*

MR. SCHMITT. Jim.

JIM. Mr. Schmitt.

MR. SCHMITT. I read your transcript, Jim. You've had a pretty bumpy two years.

JIM. Yes, I guess I have.

MR. SCHMITT. Can I ask you something?

JIM. Sure.

MR. SCHMITT. It says here you were suspended for saying you didn't believe in God. Is that true?

JIM. It's true that I said it, but I didn't mean it.

MR. SCHMITT. Then why did you say it?

JIM. I just was trying to wake the teacher up. Brother Henry. He taught Religion, but the way he taught it, he just read from the

book. He didn't like questions. So I raised my hand and said I didn't believe in God to see what he'd do.

MR. SCHMITT. And what did he do?

JIM. Well, it definitely woke him up, but he wasn't happy. He sent me to the principal.

MR. SCHMITT. It's a serious thing to say you don't believe in God, Jim.

JIM. That's what the principal said. He suspended me.

MR. SCHMITT. What got into you?

JIM. Just crazy stuff.

MR. SCHMITT. What?

JIM. Well, the thought came into my head to say I didn't believe in God, and I thought, "Who put that thought there?" And I thought it was probably God, you know?

MR. SCHMITT. What if it was the Other Guy?

JIM. I don't think so. I feel like the devil would want me to be lazy, and God would want me to speak.

MR. SCHMITT. You're fifteen?

JIM. Yeah. Yes. I'll be sixteen in October.

MR. SCHMITT. I teach Religion. Comparative Religion. But unlike your friend Brother Henry, I don't read to the class from a book. I understand you attended a retreat this summer at my school, sponsored by Opus Dei.

JIM. Yes.

MR. SCHMITT. To see if you wanted to be a priest.

JIM. I didn't. I don't.

MR. SCHMITT. How'd you get involved with Opus Dei?

JIM. Mr. Benishek, my Political Science teacher, brought me to their house. They kind of adopted me.

MR. SCHMITT. Lot of smart people at Opus Dei.

JIM. And the John Birch Society.

MR. SCHMITT. What's that?

JIM. Mr. Benishek. He took me to hear the John Birch Society, too. You know, a speaker.

MR. SCHMITT. What did you think? (*Jim laughs.*)

JIM. Oh, he messed up.

MR. SCHMITT. In what way?

JIM. He said bad stuff about President Kennedy to a bunch of Irish Catholics in the Bronx. They almost lynched him.

MR. SCHMITT. But what did you think of the speaker?

JIM. I thought he was crazy. But I liked hearing what he said because I'd just never heard anybody talk like that. I like things I haven't thought of.

MR. SCHMITT. Is that why you went on the retreat?

JIM. Pretty much. I never really thought I'd be a priest. My mother'd like it.

MR. SCHMITT. You met a member of our faculty at the retreat. Alan Hoffman.

JIM. He told you about that?

MR. SCHMITT. He said you were very good at charades.

JIM. He did?

MR. SCHMITT. He was amazed. Apparently you guessed *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* after one clue.

JIM. I really like that poem.

MR. SCHMITT. Why?

JIM. I don't know. I'd like to live like that guy.

MR. SCHMITT. You mean, drink a lot of wine? (*Jim laughs.*)

JIM. No. He's just not... There's no misery, you know? You know that poem?

MR. SCHMITT. Sure.

JIM. He saw day and night like a chess board, and God was a big finger writing in the sky. He just seemed to see things so... He saw the size of things. And he was free. Happy. He saw Time goes really fast. I think that, too. Life is so short.

MR. SCHMITT. If you only live in the physical, it is short, but some people think beyond their own lives. "The future's more beautiful than now."

JIM. It is?

MR. SCHMITT. A French theologian named Teilhard de Chardin said that. He believes that we're headed somewhere as a race, to a moment of epiphany. He calls it the Omega Point.

JIM. The Omega Point. Sounds like a science fiction movie.

MR. SCHMITT. Yes. So why do you think you did so badly in your last school?

JIM. I don't know. I felt like I was trying but I just couldn't do it. The building was ugly. All the classrooms, everything looked like a kitchen. It made me feel bleak.

MR. SCHMITT. Lot of students?

JIM. Yes.

MR. SCHMITT. Thomas More is different than that. The main

building's an old mansion, and the student body is very small. Do you know who Thomas More was?

JIM. He was a martyr. He wouldn't lie about what he believed. So the king had him killed.

MR. SCHMITT. I'm surprised you didn't do better on the IQ test.

JIM. I used to do good on them.

MR. SCHMITT. Well.

JIM. Excuse me?

MR. SCHMITT. You used to do well on them.

JIM. Right. I used to do well on IQ tests. I think IQ tests make me nervous now.

MR. SCHMITT. Why?

JIM. I see how the questions could have a lot of different answers, and the answer choices never seem to include something I can completely agree with so it makes me feel like something is wrong. My brother Tom loved taking IQ tests. He's older than me.

MR. SCHMITT. What's he doing now?

JIM. Vietnam.

MR. SCHMITT. You proud of him?

JIM. Sure.

MR. SCHMITT. Well, the way I figure your credits, you can go into junior year.

JIM. I can?

MR. SCHMITT. Barely but yes. I'll give you a scholarship for the tuition, but your parents will have to pay for your room and board.

JIM. Is that a lot of money?

MR. SCHMITT. It's not too bad, no.

JIM. How much?

MR. SCHMITT. Nine hundred dollars.

JIM. Sounds like a lot.

MR. SCHMITT. Your mother said it was alright.

JIM. Well, she's the bookkeeper. Why would you give me a scholarship? I flunked everything.

MR. SCHMITT. I think you can do the work. And your mother cried on the phone.

JIM. She did?

MR. SCHMITT. A little.

JIM. She called from work, you know, 'cause it's free. She's a telephone operator.

MR. SCHMITT. Yes, I could hear the other operators in the background.

JIM. She'll be happy I have somewhere to go. She was pretty worried.

MR. SCHMITT. What about you?

JIM. I was pretty worried, too. Like I said. I had nowhere to go.

MR. SCHMITT. Well, make use of the opportunity. Alright. I've got to get back. When does the train come?

JIM. In about two hours.

MR. SCHMITT. Not too bad. You'll be alright? (*Jim holds up a thick paperback.*)

JIM. Sure. I have a book.

MR. SCHMITT. What is it?

JIM. *Interpretation of Dreams*. I got it across the street.

MR. SCHMITT. Sigmund Freud.

JIM. I started it. I like reading the dreams, not what they mean.

MR. SCHMITT. Why's that?

JIM. I think the dreams are really interesting, but when he says what they mean... I don't know. It doesn't ring a bell. (*Mr. Schmitt gets up and offers his hand.*)

MR. SCHMITT. Well. See you soon.

JIM. Thank you, sir.

MR. SCHMITT. Very good. I'll call your mother. (*Mr. Schmitt goes. Jim stands, calls after him.*)

JIM. Thank you. (*Jim comments to the audience.*) And I thought, Wow. I'm saved. (*He starts away, has an afterthought.*) I stole this book. (*We hear ticking. The main building reappears.*) That's the main building at Thomas More School. Harrisville, New Hampshire. Fall semester. (*Jim starts away, exits.*)

PRODIGAL SON

by John Patrick Shanley

4M, 1W

A 17-year-old boy from the Bronx suddenly finds himself in a private school in New Hampshire. He's violent, gifted, alienated, and on fire with a ferocious loneliness. Two faculty members wrestle with the dilemma: Is the kid a star or a disaster? A passionate, explosive portrait of a young man on the verge of salvation or destruction.

"... savvy and often moving... a return to form for John Patrick Shanley... In monologue and dialogue, Shanley communicates Jim's vast confidence and vaster insecurity, the workings of his creative mind and the fumbblings of his wounded heart."

—**The Guardian (US)**

"... a keen, passionate portrait of the author as a poetry-spouting romantic punk torn between literary dreams and his roots in the Bronx. ... PRODIGAL SON is pure, splendid Shanley: shaggily idealistic and always scratching a philosophical itch underneath jokes and banter."

—**Time Out (New York)**

"PRODIGAL SON is a heart-sore portrait of adolescent turmoil that bears the stamp of hard-earned truth on every scene. ... [it's] the best thing that Mr. Shanley has given us since Doubt. You can't get much better than that."

—**The Wall Street Journal**

Also by John Patrick Shanley

THE BIG FUNK
DOUBT, A PARABLE
OUTSIDE MULLINGAR
and others

DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.

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