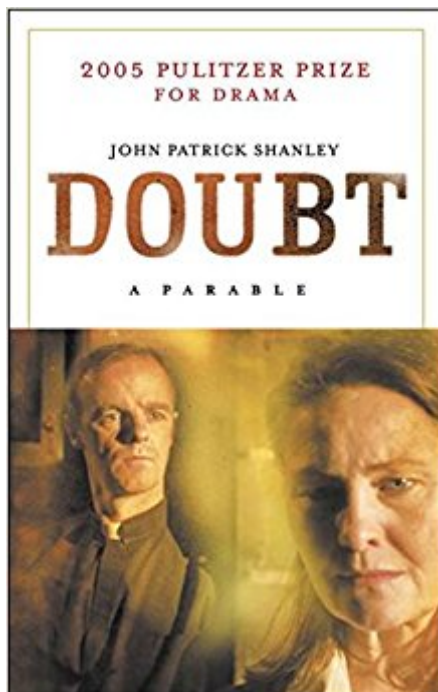


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Doubt: A Parable



Synopsis

“A superb new drama written by John Patrick Shanley. It is an inspired study in moral uncertainty with the compellingly certain structure of an old-fashioned detective drama. Even as *Doubt* holds your conscious attention as an intelligently measured debate play, it sends off stealth charges that go deeper emotionally. One of the year’s ten best.” —Ben Brantley, *The New York Times* “[The] #1 show of the year. How splendid it feels to be trusted with such passionate, exquisite ambiguity unlike anything we have seen from this prolific playwright so far. Blunt yet subtle, manipulative but full of empathy for all sides, the play is set in 1964 but could not be more timely. *Doubt* is a lean, potent drama . . . passionate, exquisite, important, and engrossing.” —Linda Winer, *Newsday* Chosen as the best play of the year by over 10 newspapers and magazines, *Doubt* is set in a Bronx Catholic school in 1964, where a strong-minded woman wrestles with conscience and uncertainty as she is faced with concerns about one of her male colleagues. This new play by John Patrick Shanley—the Bronx-born-and-bred playwright and Academy Award-winning author of *Moonstruck*—dramatizes issues straight from today’s headlines within a world re-created with knowing detail and a judicious eye. After a stunning, sold-out production at Manhattan Theatre Club, the play has transferred to Broadway. John Patrick Shanley is the author of numerous plays, including *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea*, *Dirty Story*, *Four Dogs and a Bone*, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, *Sailor’s Song*, *Savage in Limbo*, and *Where’s My Money?*. He has written extensively for TV and film, and his credits include the teleplay for *Live from Baghdad* and screenplays for *Congo*, *Alive*, *Five Corners*, *Joe Versus the Volcano* (which he also directed), and *Moonstruck*, for which he won an Academy Award for original screenplay.

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Customer Reviews

John Patrick Shanley is from the Bronx. He was thrown out of St. Helene's kindergarten, banned from St. Anthony's hot lunch program and expelled from Cardinal Spellman High School. When asked why he had been treated in this way, he burst into tears and said he had no idea. Then he went into the Marine Corps. He did fine. He is still doing ok.

Sister Aloysius thinks Father Flynn is abusing a student at the parochial school. Father Flynn thinks Sister Aloysius impedes the redeeming work of the church. Both of them try to recruit a young Sister James, manipulating her innocence to their own ends. When the fallout begins, no one knows who to believe; even the priest and the sisters lose sight of the truth. Shanley's most famous play is stunning in its evasiveness. Any attempt to nail it down to a single meaning is destined to fail because the characters and their conflict are too slippery to admit of simple definitions. This beautiful ambiguity could have burned audiences, but Shanley handles it with such aplomb that the tension between possibilities makes the play sing with life. Only a few years old, this brief, quick, powerful play is already recognized as a contemporary classic. And no wonder, since its characters say the words many of us wish we could speak. They voice our doubts, ask our questions, tremble with our fears. Not just for theatre fans, Shanley's "Doubt" is a play that audiences and readers treasure and consume time and again.

It feels very real, almost compelling. It was my first read of Shane's plays. It led me to what I consider to be a masterpiece; *Outside Mullingar*

For centuries people have doubted religion and its workers, with good reason, as this play demonstrates. Shanley uses the powerful tool of insinuation to bring about the feeling that could cripple entire kingdoms: doubt. This play doesn't question the relevance or wisdom of religion. Rather, it tells a story that makes you question the motives and ethics of the people you at meant to trust the most.

I saw "Doubt" this weekend down in the Twin Cities. While you are more likely to see a national

touring company of a Tony Award winning musical, such as "The Light in the Piazza" (which we will see in a couple of weeks), Tony Award winning dramas do make it out to the hinterlands from time to time. What was rare was that the cast was headed by Cherry Jones, who won her second Tony Award for originating the role of Sister Aloysius on Broadway. Usually you have to go to New York City to see the stars in the show (or maybe Los Angeles, which is where I saw Michael Crawford do "Phantom"), so this was a real treat. The draw might have been an award-winning actress, but by the end of the performance the star is John Patrick Shanley's Pulitzer Prize winning play. "Doubt: A Parable" is set in a parochial school in the Bronx in the Autumn of 1964 and begins with a homily by Father Flynn that questions the role of doubt in the modern world and sets the stage for the drama. The priest asks the audience, "What do you do when you're not sure?" Then Sister Aloysius, the principal of the school, has a meeting in her office with young Sister James, who is warned about being too passionate about teaching history to her students in general and in particular not to turn FDR into a secular saint. Sister Aloysius is not a sympathetic figure, especially given that our introduction to the nun is to watch her crush the joy of teaching out of a young teacher. However, then she makes Sister James aware that she has concerns for a new student, Donald Mueller, the school's first black child. Her concern is not because of the boy's race, but because she suspects Flynn has been "interfering" with the boy. Distance makes it difficult to remember the times, but an undercurrent of the play is how Sister Aloysius is strictly old school while Father Flynn has embraced the directives of the Second Vatican Council to make the clergy more accessible to their parish and become like "members of their family." Shanley does not get into deep theological issues but finds a telling point of contention in Sister Aloysius' dismissal of the song "Frosty the Snowman" as an example of paganism. Yet despite our lack of agreement with her strict conservatism, it is impossible not to be concerned about Sister Aloysius' suspicions regarding the charismatic young priest who likes his fingernails to be slightly long. I have a background in competitive debate so one of the things I appreciated in Shanley's drama is how he balances the two sides to create the requisite titular state. When I was dissecting the play with my wife on the way home from the theater I discovered that while I (male Italian raised Lutheran) was looking at the play from the assumption of the priest's innocence, she (female Irish raised Catholic) was assuming he was guilty. Of course the play works both ways, but certainly there have been more than enough headlines about stories of abuse in the Catholic Church in the past decade to make it easier for the play's audience to jump to the same conclusion as Sister Aloysius. Coming to a decision as to the "truth" of what happened between Father Flynn and the young boy is a question of when you decide to place your bet on who to believe. Sister Aloysius begins the play with her suspicions and moves towards certainty on her

own timetable. Sister James serves as a warning not to decide too early, but Shanley clearly wants us to come to our own decisions before the drama's "resolution." Waiting until you are sure is to repeat Hamlet's tragic error, which is not to say that Sister Aloysius is the Dane's opposite because she is not guilty of the proverbial rush to judgment. The term "reasonable doubt" is never used in the play, but it certainly comes into play as the nun commits to certainty in advance of having absolute proof, mainly because being denied such proof cannot, in her mind at least, preclude action. Sister Aloysius wants to know what really happened between Father Flynn and Donald, even if the boy's mother is willing to turn a blind eye. For me the point at which Sister Aloysius becomes heroic is when Father Flynn threatens her for her refusal to follow Church protocols. He seeks to convince her that she has no choice, because failure to obey would basically send her to Hell for disobedience. But she sees herself in the same danger if she fails to do what she can to save one of her children, and in her decision to damn herself for the right reason and his decision to coerce rather than persuade is where my doubts were erased. For me the most delicious irony is the way Sister Aloysius' crucial phone call mirrors Father Flynn's point earlier in the play about the value of true stories. The final line of the play is also dripping with irony in a very conscious effort by Shanley to leave his audience exactly as he wants them to be.

Are there times in the course of human endeavors where the end justifies the means? Are there times when mere suspicion is sufficient to take up arms against a potential threat? Suppose the potential victim is a child and the suspected predator is a person of power. Suppose the suspect is your superior? Suppose you are a nun and he is a priest. Do you act to stop him without proof? How much proof of harm, potential harm, do you need? Does the way the priest looks at the boy provide sufficient reason for a nun to interfere? Suppose the evidence of that "look" came to the nun second hand. Then what? What should the nun do? The nun is Sister Aloysius, a worldly older nun. A disciplinarian. A traditionalist. She's wary of the young parish priest, Father Flynn, who makes up interesting parables that teach and inspire. Sister Aloysius is also uncomfortable with the fact that Father Flynn seems to enjoy playing basketball with the boys just a little too much. She's uncomfortable with the fact that the boys like rather than fear Father Flynn. In short, Sister Aloysius has doubts. She has doubts, serious doubts about Father Flynn. She decides.....No, she is compelled, compelled by doubt, serious doubt...compelled to act. Damn the facts! Damn the consequences! In the pursuit of wrongdoing, a nun has to do what a nun has to do. If the destruction of a man's reputation is the price to assure the safety of a child, then no doubt that's the way it has to be...Right?

I was required to read this play for a college class, and I have to say I was pleasantly surprised by it! The play is short, about 60 pages, but it is very thought provoking. The characters are well developed, and the plot has you jumping back and forth between sides as you second-guess who is innocent and who is guilty. In the end, the only thing that is certain is your doubt. I hope to someday see it in the theater!

This play is great because it talks about many issues, otherwise considered a taboo. Also the ending is usually the case, with this type of situation. Read to find out!

Amazing play! I meant to order the kindle but the book is fine. Small light and clean. I believe everyone should read it.

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