Doubt Study Guide

Doubt by John Patrick Shanley

BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

John Patrick Shanley's drama *Doubt* premiered at the Manhattan Theatre Club on November 23, 2004, before moving to Broadway, at the Walter Kerr Theatre, in March of the following year. It instantly became the most celebrated play of the season, taking the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Drama; best new play awards from the New York Drama Critics' Circle, the Lucille Lortel Foundation, the Drama League, the Outer Critics Circle, and the Drama Desk; the Obie; and four Tony Awards (best play, best actress in a play, best featured actress in a play, and best director). The play was published by Theatre Communications Group in 2005.

Set at a Catholic school in the Bronx in 1964, *Doubt* concerns an older nun, Sister Aloysius, who does not approve of teachers' offering friendship and compassion over the discipline she feels students need in order to face the harsh world. When she suspects a new priest of sexually abusing a student, she is faced with the prospect of charging him with unproven allegations and possibly destroying his career as well as her own. To help build her case, she asks for help from an idealistic young nun, who finds her faith in compassion challenged, and the mother of the accused boy, who is protective of her son, the first black student ever admitted to St. Nicholas.

Beginning in early 2002, the Catholic Church in the United States was embroiled in a high-profile scandal about priests who had had sexual relations with young students and parishioners, some incidents dating as far back as the time in which Shanley's play is set. Hundreds of victims came forward, and the Church, as of 2005, was facing lawsuits and undergoing reorganization, but the shock of the abuse of trust and the Catholic Church's attempts to cover up these crimes have left a scar on the public conscience. *Doubt* faces the unthinkable aspects of this situation with knowledge and restraint.

Author Biography

Nationality 1: American

Birthdate: 1950

John Patrick Shanley was born in New York City in 1950. His father, who grew up on a farm in Ireland, was a meatpacker and his mother a telephone operator. He attended Catholic schools, but with a very unstable record: he was thrown out of kindergarten at St. Helena's, and he was banned for life from the hot-lunch program at St. Anthony's. After he was expelled from Cardinal Spellman High School, a priest who knew him and believed in his intellectual ability arranged for Shanley to attend Thomas More Prep School, a private school in Harrisville, New Hampshire. It was there that he started thinking seriously of a career as a writer. After graduating, he attended New York University, left for a stint in the U.S. Marine Corps, and returned to continue his studies under the GI Bill, graduating in 1977 as valedictorian.

Since then, Shanley has had a prolific career writing for the stage and screen. By 2005, he had written twenty-three plays. In 1987, he became internationally famous for his acclaimed script for the movie *Moonstruck*, for which he won an Academy Award and the Writer's Guild Award and was nominated for a Golden Globe. On that basis, Stephen Spielberg offered Shanley the opportunity to direct a movie from his own original script for *Joe versus the Volcano*, which came out in 1990. The film met with mixed reviews, and Shanley, as of 2005, had yet to direct another movie. He has adapted novels to screenplays, and several of his plays have been adapted for the movies, but his primary focus has always been theater. Despite his decades as a successful playwright and his immediate success in writing for the screen (*Moonstruck* was his very first screenplay), Shanley never won any major theatrical awards for his works before *Doubt*.

Plot Summary

Act 1

The first act of *Doubt* consists of a sermon by Father Flynn. His theme is uncertainty, which he relates to the disorientation felt by most of the country the year before, when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. He points out how people came together spiritually and concludes that despair does not have to be an experience that isolates people, if they have faith. To make his point, Father Flynn tells a story about a sailor, lost at sea, who uses his memory of the stars to guide his navigation, even when the stars are covered by clouds for more than twenty nights. The sailor's faith in the truth he once knew is likened to the despairing person's faith in God.

Act 2

Sister Aloysius, the principal of St. Nicholas School, meets in her office with Sister James, who teaches eighth grade. She asks about a boy who has been sent home with a bleeding nose and warns that children sometimes inflict their own injuries as a way to leave school. During the conversation, Sister Aloysius reveals her dislike of teachers who act kind in order to hide their own weakness or laziness.

The talk turns to whether Sister James stays in the room when the □specialty□ instructors□those in charge of teaching art, music, physical education, and similar subjects□come in. In particular, Sister Aloysius is interested in whether Sister James leaves the boys alone when Father Flynn teaches religion and physical education. She asks Sister James to be alert, but she cannot find it in herself to be more specific about what she suspects.

Act 3

Act 3 comprises another monologue by Father Flynn, addressing the boys during basketball. He tells them that they will be able to shoot better if they relax and quit thinking about how they might look. On the subject of personal hygiene, he tells an apocryphal story about a boy with whom he grew up, named Timmy Mathisson, who had dirty fingernails that he put in his nose and in his mouth, which resulted in his death from spinal meningitis.

Act 4

Sister Aloysius and Sister James meet in the garden. Sister James explains that the boys in her class are at a lecture, given by Father Flynn, on the subject of being a man. Sister James explains that the new African American boy in her class, Donald Muller, does not have to worry much about bullying from the other students, because Father

Flynn has taken on a role as his special protector. Immediately, Sister Aloysius says that she thinks Father Flynn is planning inappropriate behavior with the vulnerable boy. Sister James recalls that Father Flynn took Donald for a private talk to the rectory and that, when he came back, Donald had alcohol on his breath.

Sister Aloysius explains that it would be difficult to have a priest removed, even if there was evidence that he had had sex with a student. Father Flynn would certainly deny any such allegation, and Monsignor Benedict would believe whatever Father Flynn said. The rules of the Church prohibit a nun from taking suspicions to any higher authority. The boy would not talk, intimidated by shame. Sister Aloysius tells Sister James that she is going to confront Father Flynn and will need Sister James there as a witness.

Act 5

Father Flynn arrives at the door of Sister Aloysius's office, but the rules forbid a priest and a nun to be in a room alone. When Sister James arrives, Sister Aloysius serves tea. Father Flynn thinks that the meeting is about the Christmas pageant. Sister Aloysius mentions Donald Muller, saying that she knows that he has given the boy □special attention□ and that Donald behaved strangely when he returned to class. Father Flynn, feeling accused, starts to walk out when Sister Aloysius mentions the smell of alcohol on the boy's breath. He explains that Donald had been caught by the caretaker drinking altar wine and that he was trying to spare the boy exposure.

After Father Flynn leaves, Sister Aloysius explains to Sister James that she thinks he was lying. Sister James vigorously defends him, accusing Sister Aloysius of simply disliking him, but Sister Aloysius dismisses her defense as being grounded in youthful naïveté. Sister Aloysius phones the boy's parents and asks them to come to the school for a meeting.

Act 6

Father Flynn gives a sermon about intolerance. He tells the story of a woman who, while gossiping with a friend, sees a hand over her head. She goes to her priest, and he tells her that it is a sign of God's displeasure. He instructs her to go home, take a pillow onto the roof, slash it with a knife, and empty it out. When she returns, the priest tells her to go and gather up all of the feathers that came from the pillow. She explains that she cannot, that they scattered to the winds. The priest in Father Flynn's story explains that gossip, once it is out, cannot be recalled either.

Act 7

Father Flynn meets Sister James while she is praying in the same garden that was the setting of act 4. She has had trouble sleeping, feeling guilty about being a gossip, like the woman in Father Flynn's sermon. Father Flynn speaks comfortingly, telling her that she is free to make up her own mind about him and is not obliged to follow whatever

Sister Aloysius thinks. When she asks, he tells her directly that Sister Aloysius's allegations are not true. Father Flynn contrasts his own philosophy, which emphasizes love and concern, with Sister Aloysius's philosophy of strictness and discipline. Before she leaves, Sister James tells him that she does not believe that he is guilty.

Act 8

Sister Aloysius has a conference with Donald's mother. Mrs. Muller explains that she and her husband expected Donald to have trouble at St. Nicholas, being the first black student there, and they were glad that Father Flynn was looking out for him. Mrs. Muller is focused on Donald's staying through the end of the school year, which will give him a chance at being accepted into a good high school. When Sister Aloysius expresses concern about Father Flynn, Mrs. Muller takes a defensive posture: she knows that, in the event of a public inquiry, Donald, not the priest, would be blamed. She decides that it would be better for the boy, even if Father Flynn is using him sexually, to stay at St. Nicholas until graduation.

When she leaves, Father Flynn comes in, furious. He ignores the rule that states that a priest and nun cannot be alone in a room and slams the door behind him, demanding to know why Donald Muller's mother was there. He goes through the evidence of his misbehavior and discredits each charge, until Sister Aloysius says that she has talked to a nun at his last parish. Father Flynn raises objections□that she should have gone through the parish pastor, that there is no evidence in his official record of inappropriate behavior, and so forth□but Sister Aloysius insists that she knows he has taken advantage of boys. When she starts to leave to report him to higher authorities, he stops her and listens to her demands to leave St. Nicholas. When she does leave, he phones the bishop to ask to be reassigned.

Act 9

Sister Aloysius and Sister James meet and talk in the garden. Father Flynn has been moved to another parish, but with a promotion to pastor. Sister Aloysius was unable to convince Monsignor Benedict of Father Flynn's inappropriate behavior, but she is sure of his guilt. She feels guilty herself, because, to get him to leave, she lied about having contacted someone at his previous parish, a bluff that evidently frightened him away.

Scene 1

Scene 1 Summary

This multi-award winning play dramatizes the conflict between a well-intentioned, progressive priest and an equally well-intentioned but conservative nun over the priest's relationship with a young black boy. Themes relating to the nature of doubt, the desire for justice, and the right of individuals to live with integrity, freedom and safety are explored in a series of evocatively terse scenes, leading to an explosive climactic confrontation between self-righteousness and compassion.

Father Flynn preaches a sermon on the theme of doubt, suggesting that it can be one of the most unifying, powerful and sustaining of all human experiences. He illustrates his point in two ways. First, he refers to the sense of almost universal paralysis and uncertainty in America in the days, weeks and months after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy (see "Quotes", p. 5). He contrasts the sense of communal loss and confusion that arose in the wake of this event with a parable of a lost sailor doubting the one moment of clarity by which he was able to set his course. Father Flynn compares the unifying force of communal doubt (such as that experienced in the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination) with the loneliness and terror of individual doubt such as that of the sailor (see "Quotes", p. 6). He concludes by saying that even if someone feels individual doubt and uncertainty, that person is nevertheless part of a universal experience, one shared at one point or another by all humanity. "When you are lost," he says, "you are not alone." He concludes with a brief prayer and leaves.

Scene 1 Analysis

There are several important elements in this speech, the first of which is the way it clearly sets the action in a particular time and place: America following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. At the time of his death, Kennedy was in many ways an model for much of the country - young, ambitious, attractive, well bred, wealthy, a man of intellect and spirit and courage. His death was, as Father Flynn suggests, a profound shock to the country, to its beliefs about itself and its future. The reference functions on two key levels. As Father Flynn himself suggests, in its examination of communal doubt it provides a powerful contrast to the parable about individual doubt (the story of the lost sailor) that follows it, and also serves to effectively illustrate his point of doubt being a universal human experience, providing an effective link between each individual no matter what their individual experience. Everyone, Father Flynn is saying, experiences doubt, and there can be comfort and community in that. On another level, however, the reference also foreshadows the spiritual and professional "assassination" of Father Flynn by Sister Aloysius that fuels the dramatic conflict in the rest of the play, and the resultant experiences of doubt, undergone by all the characters, that result from her actions.

The second important element of the speech is its religious context. On one level, Father Flynn is delivering a sermon, which in church tradition is often experienced on both sides as a passing on of wisdom from one who has, at least to some degree, been enlightened to those who haven't. There is a significant irony in this - Father Flynn presents himself in this context as having a deeper, broader understanding of doubt, but, as the action of the play narrates, discovers that his understanding isn't nearly as deep as he thought. In this irony there is perhaps a commentary on the church in general - that its teachings and attitudes are not, in fact, as elevated as the institution and its leaders would have those attending services believe. On another contextual level, the sermon introduces and develops the concept of the parable, a literary term describing a story told to illustrate a moral, spiritual or religious message (for additional information on parables see "Objects/Places - Parables"). It's important to note that the play is in fact subtitled "A Parable," a designation suggesting that the play is telling its story in order to illuminate a universal human experience—that of doubt.

The relatively overt introduction of the theme of doubt is the third, and perhaps most important, element of the speech. The key point to note here is that while Father Flynn makes the point that doubt is a unifying, universal experience (and therefore should be regarded as a positive), the play's point is the opposite - that doubt is ultimately destructive and divisive. While most of the characters, in one way or another, confront doubt about or in others and therefore act in destructive ways, they also confront doubt about or in themselves and are themselves destroyed. This latter process, also experienced by most of the characters in the play, is symbolized in Father Flynn's story of the Lost Sailor - in effect, a parable within the parable of the play. Yes, he uses it in an attempt to teach his listeners about the transcendent unifying qualities of hope, but at the same time it foreshadows the journeys of self-doubt and self-destruction each of the characters is about to undergo. There is, however, a third level of significance to this parable, deepening the play's thematic meaning.

In recounting the parable of the Lost Sailor, and indeed throughout this entire sermon, Father Flynn makes no reference to doubt being a means towards increasing faith in God or religion. Yes, there is the implication that the sailor must have faith, but the word is not specifically referred to. Nor is God, except in the prayer at the end, which is a formalized and ritualistic ending to sermons in general, as opposed to a specific prayer related to this specific subject. Father Flynn does say that doubters are not alone, but the context of the speech indicates that he is referring to the fact that all humanity doubts, not that God provides comfort or security. This lack of reference to God is, in turn, a key aspect of the play's central theme, its exploration of doubt.

Even though the play's examination of doubt takes place within the social-religious setting of the church as an institution—and the Roman Catholic Church in particular—there are few overt references to God or religion. The implication of this is that doubt is a personal, human experience that must be encountered, challenged and survived without God's help. There is in this idea a possible echo of the final moments of Christ on the cross. As his death neared, while he was experiencing doubt and spiritual pain of the sort experienced by several of the characters in this play, he cried out to God, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" In other words, he is facing doubt and pain alone as a human

being. On top of the lack of references to God in this play, there is also this same sense of loneliness that in humanity's doubt about itself and its place, humanity (as individuals and as a community) feels very alone. This sense of aloneness pervades and underscores the experiences of doubt in all the characters and can, in turn, be seen as the universal moral/spiritual truth at the core of doubt, both the experience and the play.

Scene 2

Scene 2 Summary

This scene takes place in the office of Sister Aloysius, who is described as being a member of the "Sisters of Charity." She is at work on a ledger as Sister James arrives. Sister James asks if Sister Aloysius has a moment and wants to know if Sister Aloysius has heard whether William Jordan, who left school with a bleeding nose, is alright. Sister Aloysius tells Sister James that her concern is misplaced - she (Sister Aloysius) is unshakably convinced that William deliberately hurt himself to get out of school and that he's a troublemaker (see "Quotes", p. 8). They discuss other children including Donald Muller who Sister Aloysius seems to think is likely to be bullied. During their conversation, Sister Aloysius tells Sister James in no uncertain terms that she needs to be aware of teaching too many new ideas and of showing too much enthusiasm. Sister James indicates that she gets great joy out of teaching, but Sister Aloysius admonishes her that the children she teaches should be afraid of her and that she should be "a fierce moral guardian."

As conversation about various teachers and classes continues, Sister Aloysius leads the conversation to Father Flynn. The conversation reveals that he teaches gym class to the boys, that Sister James enjoyed his sermon about doubt, and that Sister Aloysius is curious about whether he's in doubt himself, or whether he believes someone else is. When Sister James tells her that she should ask him, Sister Aloysius indicates that it would be inappropriate for her to speak in such a way to a man who is her superior. As Sister James prepares to leave, Sister Aloysius tells her that she needs to be alert to anything unusual in her class, being careful to not say anything specific or accusatory (see "Quotes", p. 15). Finally, she tells Sister James to help Sister Veronica, another nun teaching in the school, whenever possible - Sister Veronica, it seems, is going blind. With that, she dismisses Sister James and goes back to work.

Scene 2 Analysis

The first key element of this scene is the introduction and portrayal of Sister Aloysius, the character who simultaneously plays the protagonist and the antagonist in the story. She is the protagonist partly because she is the principal motivator of the action (initiating and defining what goes on and why), and partly because she undergoes the most significant journey of transformation (moving from a place of absolute certainty, as portrayed in this scene, to a place of doubt, as portrayed in the final moments of the play). On the other hand, she is also antagonist in that she is the principal force of opposition to what seem to be the positive attitudes of the other characters: the joy of Sister James, the compassion and forward thinking of Father Flynn, and the practical wisdom of Mrs. Muller. All that said, key aspects to her character are vividly revealed in this, her first appearance in the play. Her narrow mindedness, her judgmental nature, her self-satisfaction, her reveling in her own authority—these are all characteristics that

play key roles in those simultaneous definitions of her character and in the action to come. There is a profound irony in Sister Aloysius being, as described in stage directions, a member of the Sisters of Charity; there is, as the action of the play reveals, little or no charity evident in her attitudes or actions.

The second key element of this scene is the way in which it dramatizes the play's thematic exploration of doubt; specifically, by the way Sister Aloysius plants doubts in the mind of Sister James. First, she causes Sister James to begin to doubt herself, her teaching abilities and her perceptions and her feelings of compassion. This action, in turn, functions on two levels. It foreshadows Sister Aloysius' actions both later in the scene when she creates doubts in Sister James' mind about the apparently peaceful surface of the school's activity, and later in the play when she creates doubts about Father Flynn. On the second level of function, the beginning of Sister James' doubt is the first stage of a sub-plot, or secondary line of action, that illuminates and/or mirrors the action in the main plot. In the same way as Sister James begins to experience doubt here, both Sister Aloysius and Father Flynn come to experience doubt later in the play. In other words, Sister James' reaction to Sister Aloysius foreshadows Father Flynn's eventual reaction to her, and Sister Aloysius' eventual reaction to herself. As the result of Sister Aloysius' actions, both question themselves in the same way as Sister James begins to here.

A third element of this scene is the careful reference to church hierarchy. A nun, even an older and more experienced nun like Sister Aloysius, is always subservient to the priest. There is a whiff of sexism in this relationship, of women being subservient to men, but the more important aspect of this relationship is that Sister Aloysius is essentially powerless. As she herself says later in the play, any suggestion or accusation she makes will, because she is who she is and functions in the way she does, almost automatically be disregarded. This status, or lack thereof, is a key factor in defining or motivating her to act in the way she does later in the play. She has, in effect, no other way to get her concerns acted upon other than to do it herself, and by means or subterfuge. At least this is how she justifies what she does to herself.

A fourth important element of this scene is the reference to Sister Veronica. This character is never seen, but is nonetheless symbolically important. In Biblical tradition, Saint Veronica was a woman in the crowd watching Christ pass as he carried his cross to his crucifixion who wiped the sweat, blood and tears from his face. She is often held up as an embodiment of mercy and compassion. The irony here is that Sister Veronica, named for this saint, is going blind - meaning that in metaphoric terms, mercy is blind. In other words, there is an inability to see with the eyes of mercy. This can be seen as a reference to Sister Aloysius' merciless persecution of Father Flynn.

Finally, there is a key element of foreshadowing in this scene—the reference to Donald Muller. Like Sister Veronica, he is never actually seen, but nevertheless plays a key, focusing role in the action of the play to follow.

Scene 3

Scene 3 Summary

Father Flynn addresses the (invisible) boys he's coaching on the basketball team. He explains to them the difference between playing as a team and playing as an individual (see "Quotes", p. 16), and tells them how to overcome their nervousness by creating something else to focus on: a routine of behavior in getting ready to take their shot, so they can focus on that rather than on their nervousness. He changes the subject, telling them they need to take better care of themselves; in particular, that they need to clean under their fingernails. He refers to his own nails, admitting they're a little long, and says he likes them that way. He implies not only that dirty nails can lead to disease but that they can also keep boys from attracting girls. He reacts to the boys' laughter, calls an end to practice, and invites the boys back to the rectory for punch, cookies and "a bull session."

Scene 3 Analysis

The action of this scene contains several important elements. First, it shows Father Flynn having an open, comfortable yet firm relationship with the boys he coaches. The nature and motivation and source of this relationship is later called into question by the accusations leveled at him by Sister Aloysius - is he good to them because he's grooming them to be his sexual victims? There is, on the other hand, the possibility that there is nothing negative going on at all; Father Flynn could simply be good with kids, and with boys in particular. It may be important to note, at this point, that at no place in the play does Father Flynn confess to doing anything improper. Later, in the latter part of Scene Six, he makes a statement that implies there are circumstances that might be perceived as improper, but nowhere does he say he's done anything wrong. Taken in the context of this ambiguity, this scene can be taken as either an ominous foreshadowing or simply an expression of misinterpreted, valuable human connection.

The second important element here is Father Flynn's reference to basketball. The first part of this reference, to acting alone as opposed to part of a team, can be seen as a reference to Sister Aloysius' determination to, and previously discussed need for, acting alone in terms of bringing her beliefs about Father Flynn to light. The second part of the reference, to creating a routine, can be seen as metaphorically illuminating Sister Aloysius' actions in the previous scene and in the following section - her routine of working with her ledger (Scene 2) or working in the garden (Scene 4) as she's getting ready to "take her shot" at Father Flynn.

The third element here is the reference to Father Flynn's fingernails, significant for a few reasons. First, the reference foreshadows Sister Aloysius' reference to his nails at the end of Scene 8 Part 2, at which point it's clear that for her, his nails are an embodiment and/or symbol of everything she thinks is wrong about him. The point must be made

that it's never actually explained why Father Flynn keeps his nails long. Perhaps, as he says in this scene, he just likes them that way. The main reason the reference is important, however, may not be in the fact that his nails are long but that, as he says, he keeps them clean. The reference may offer a key insight into his character and, in turn, into his relationship with the boys. Put bluntly, in the same way that his nails are not the normal length, he may not have normal feelings about the boys in his charge. His preference of keeping his not-normal nails clean may be a reference to him in effect keeping those not-normal feelings clean. In other words, he doesn't act on them. There may also be, in this, an explanation of those previously discussed "circumstances" (Scene 8) - again, he may have sexual feelings for the boys—the "circumstances" in question—but does not act on them. All that said, the reference to "circumstances" definitely indicates there is something going on in him, something that he doesn't want people to know about and something that he seems to know could be destructive if it were known. What those "circumstances" are, however, remains ultimately a mystery.

Scene 4

Scene 4 Summary

This scene is set in a small garden. Sister Aloysius tends to a rosebush, "protecting it from frost" as Sister James appears. Sister Aloysius asks where the boys are, and Sister James tells her they're in the rectory, listening to Father Flynn give a talk on "how to be a man" (see "Quotes", p. 18). This leads to a conversation about how each woman experiences being a woman and the revelation that before she became a nun Sister Aloysius was married to a man who died in World War II. This in turn leads to a reference to how the priests and nuns in the convent/school/church complex are kept as far apart as possible as much as possible. Sister Aloysius turns the conversation to Sister James' class, asking specifically about Donald Muller and whether anyone has hit him yet. Sister James tells her it's unlikely, since he's got a protector in Father Flynn, adding that his interest has grown since Donald became an altar boy. At that point Sister Aloysius stops tending the garden and "becomes rigid," leading Sister James to understand that the relationship between Father Flynn and Donald Muller was what she was asked to watch for earlier (Scene 2).

As Sister Aloysius comments, almost to herself, on how she's been expecting something like this, Sister James expresses her concern about having lost her peace of mind about her teaching. Sister Aloysius tells her she has no right to peace of mind - she must be constantly vigilant. Sister James says she feels she's become less close to God, but Sister Aloysius tells her firmly that closeness to God manifests in other, more important ways (see "Quotes", p.20). She then grills Sister James about what exactly she saw take place between Donald and Father Flynn, and Sister James tells her she saw Father Flynn take Donald to the rectory alone, came back to class upset, and smelled of alcohol.

Sister Aloysius comments that she ran into a similar situation at another convent and that in that instance she had an ally in one of the senior priests. Here, she says, she doesn't, adding that she has no man here to turn to and "men run everything." She decides to confront Father Flynn herself in an effort to get him to confess the truth, and insists that Sister James be there as a witness, since a nun can't be alone with a priest. Sister James is horrified by the idea, but Sister Aloysius manipulates her into agreeing with the plan. They then see the boys coming out of the rectory with Sister James saying they look happy and Sister Aloysius thinking they look "smug." As Father Flynn appears, Sister Aloysius comments on how she feels called to do the kind of thing she's asking Sister James to join her in doing (see "Quotes", p. 24). Sister James leaves to take the boys to class. Sister Aloysius says she'll be in touch later.

Scene 4 Analysis

Sister Aloysius' actions in tending the rosebush can be interpreted as a representation of her actions in attacking Father Flynn. In the same way she protects the delicate rosebush from the physically destructive frost, she acts out of a desire to protect Donald Muller, whom she has already indicated is "delicate," from what she believes is the physically, spiritually and destructive attack of Father Flynn. Meanwhile, the spiritual context of her desire is defined in this scene (see "Quotes", p. 20) as it becomes clear that Sister Aloysius sees herself as a crusader and has always done so, as indicated by the reference to the other church. It's interesting to note that there's no reference to whether this other priest was guilty - she only says he "had to be stopped." The question here is whether Sister Aloysius, then as now, acted upon suspicion only, or whether she had actual evidence - a question that, in turn, gives rise to another: What is the pattern of behavior here - of crusading justice, or of judgmental revenge on the men who, Sister Aloysius clearly feels, repress her? Indeed, her negative attitude towards the entire male gender can perhaps be seen not only in her references to the priests and the church hierarchy, but also in her descriptions of boys throughout the play - William Jordan is seen as a manipulator, the boys coming out of the rectory are seen as smug. Is there perhaps a significant irony in the fact that both Sister Aloysius and Sister James bear the names of male saints? Are they women living according to the dictates of men, as opposed to Sister Veronica, who is given the name of a female saint who acted from the dictates of a broader perspective and a loving soul?

At this point, some analysis of the character of Donald Muller might be appropriate. He is, as previously discussed, never seen, but a portrait of the kind of boy he is emerges. This occurs partly through references by Sister Aloysius here and in Scene 2, in which he is, at least in her mind, the sort of boy who would be an easy target for bullying, and partly through Sister Aloysius' encounter in Scene 8 Part 1 with Donald's mother. The impression given in that section is that he is perhaps effeminate, certainly sensitive, definitely artistic - all indications, albeit stereotypical ones, that he's homosexual. Combine this with the fact that he's black and attends an all-white boys' school in the early 1960s, a time when racial segregation and discrimination was both rampant and lawful in many states, and there is the sense that he is a victim twice over.

Sister Aloysius' reaction here, and her subsequent actions later in the play, would appear to indicate that for her, his apparent homosexuality was by far the greater concern. This is not so much because of the potential for bullying by other boys but because of the potential for exploitation from Father Flynn, whom she clearly believes to be a homosexual or a pedophile (conditions which, it must be remembered, were practically synonymous in the time in which the play is set). This question of Donald's character must be taken into account when considering both the nature of Father Flynn's so-called "crime" and the "characteristics" he speaks about. Is it possible that Father Flynn is homosexual himself, is aware that Donald faces persecution (having perhaps faced such persecution himself), and takes an interest in order to help him take the kind of place in the world he (Father Flynn) so fervently believes is possible? Or is Father Flynn simply telling the complete and utter truth about the incident with the

communion wine? The play offers no clear answers, and that perhaps is one of its key thematic points. Given that it portrays three of its four characters (Aloysius, James, Flynn) as suffering when they live and act according to what they believe *are* clear answers, it seems to be suggesting that living with an honest belief in and respect for un-clear answers, in the way Mrs. Muller does, is a healthier, more spiritually true, and more life-affirming path.

Scene 5

Scene 5 Summary

Sister Aloysius takes a phone call from the school groundskeeper, Mr. McGinn, and asks him to remove a tree branch, blown down by the wind, over which Sister Veronica fell earlier. As she hangs up Father Flynn arrives, carefully staying outside the door as they make small talk about the wind and about Sister Veronica. Father Flynn says he heard she tripped over a tree branch and asks whether her sight is all right. Sister Aloysius tells him Sister Veronica's sight is fine (which is a lie, given that she told Sister James in Scene 2 that it wasn't), and then makes a joke about how nuns often trip over their habits (see "Quotes", p. 26).

Sister James arrives, breathless and anxious to not be late. Sister Aloysius invites both her and Father Flynn in. Father Flynn sits behind Sister Aloysius' desk, an action she notices but tries to ignore. She also tries to ignore the length of his fingernails, which she notices for the first time as she pours him tea, and also tries to ignore the fact that he likes three lumps of sugar - but with a look intimidates Sister James into refusing to take any. She (Sister Aloysius) also refuses to have any tea at all, saying she's already had her cup. Conversation reveals that Father Flynn believes he's there to discuss the Christmas pageant, that Father Flynn thinks it might be a good idea to incorporate a non-religious song like "Frosty the Snowman" in the next pageant. Sister James agrees, but Sister Aloysius is appalled by the idea (see "Quotes", p. 29). Her reaction leads Father Flynn to make a note about a possible future sermon on intolerance, which in turn leads Sister James to try to change the subject by offering more tea. Sister Aloysius and Father Flynn continue to argue, however, while Father Flynn suggests that there be more integration between the church and the community and Sister Aloysius arguing that distance must be maintained. As Father Flynn asks Sister James for more tea, Sister Aloysius suggests that they must be careful to neither hide nor over-emphasize the presence of Donald Muller, referring to how Father Flynn has already singled him out for special treatment.

As Sister Aloysius and Sister James detail what they saw as the circumstances of that treatment (the visit to the rectory), Father Flynn realizes that he's not there to talk about the pageant at all. He essentially tells Sister Aloysius that what passed between them is none of her business. She insists upon being told what happened; he tells her to talk to his (male) supervisor and prepares to leave; and she stops him by referring to the alcohol on Donald's breath. Father Flynn tells her that Donald was caught drinking the communion wine, that he took Donald into the rectory to talk about it, and that Donald pleaded to not be removed from the group of altar boys. He adds that now that Sister Aloysius knows, that's going to have to happen, adding that he was trying to avoid that scenario because Donald is the only black student in the school, and his absence would be commented upon. He then goes out to write his sermon on intolerance, telling Sister Aloysius that he's not pleased by how she handled this situation.

After Father Flynn is gone, Sister James, with relief, indicates that she believes him. Sister Aloysius, however, indicates that she doesn't and vows to "bring him down." Sister James accuses her of simply not liking him because he's different and tells Sister Aloysius that the students are all terrified of her. Sister Aloysius tells her that's how it should be, and then places a call to Donald Muller's mother, requesting that they meet.

Scene 5 Analysis

This scene is the climax of the play to this point, with many of its previously discussed narrative threads playing out in a confrontation notable for its economy of writing, its emotional intensity, and its metaphorical resonance. Sister Aloysius' narrow mindedness, her determination, her suspicions, her attitudes towards men, and her genuine fear for the well being of Donald Muller all play key roles in defining her attacks on Father Flynn. It's important to note that there is also an indication here of her capacity for falsehood. In her obvious lie about Sister Veronica's sight, there's clear foreshadowing of her lie about the phone call she made to Father Flynn's previous parish later in the play.

Meanwhile, it's interesting to note how in this scene Father Flynn indicates he and Sister Aloysius share similar perspectives on a number of topics and two in particular: he too is concerned about Donald Muller, and he too is very aware of the male/female dynamic in their church-based and individual relationships. The latter is particularly significant, in that he clearly attempts to pull male rank on her as he leaves. A question raised by this is whether Sister Aloysius becomes more determined to, as she says, "bring him down" because of his attitude or because of what she believes him to have done to Donald Muller.

The tension between the two of them is dramatized in a number of ways throughout the scene: through their differing attitudes towards the Christmas pageant, towards the relationship between church and laity, and perhaps most interestingly in their differing attitudes toward the tea. First, there's Father Flynn's fondness for sugar which Sister Aloysius would undoubtedly see as an indulgence, and the fact that he asks for a second cup - significant in that when she's offered tea by Sister James she refuses, saying she's already had her one cup for the day. In short, their differing attitudes over the tea are a microcosm of their differing attitudes toward, well, almost everything. Caught in the middle of this is Sister James, struggling to hold on to a certain degree of joy and personal integrity in the midst of what is becoming a very personal confrontation. She is in the process of her own journey of transformation, no longer as fully humanist and warm and open as she used to be, well on her way to falling under the narrow-minded spell of Sister Aloysius.

Father Flynn's story of what happened between him and Donald Muller is a key focus of narrative and dramatic confrontation from this point in the play onwards. Meanwhile, Sister Aloysius' telephone conversation with Mrs. Muller foreshadows Mrs. Muller's appearance in Scene 8, Part 1.

Scene 6

Scene 6 Summary

Father Flynn preaches another sermon, this one on the evils of gossip. He recounts a parable about a woman who had bad dreams about being judged by God for being a gossip, and who was told by her priest to stand on the roof of her house, rip open a feather pillow, scatter the feathers to the wind, and then go about picking them all up. "That," says the priest, "is gossip."

Scene 6 Analysis

The primary function of this brief scene is to both indicate and illuminate Father Flynn's reaction to Sister Aloysius' accusations. There are two things to note here, first that the story of the gossipy woman is, like the story of the lost sailor in Flynn's first sermon (Scene 1), essentially a parable. The repetition of this narrative technique reinforces the idea that the play as a whole is also intended to be seen as a parable. The second noteworthy element in this scene is that for all his suppressed but evident anger, Father Flynn seems to not be taking Sister Aloysius completely seriously. He figures she's merely gossiping, not acting maliciously. Yes, there are dangers in gossip, as dramatized in the parable, but there is also a sense from the tone of the speech that Father Flynn believes he's nipped Sister Aloysius in the bud, and that he's got little more to fear. On a technical level, this attitude increases the level of suspense in the audience and reader, who already knows how determined Sister Aloysius is to see him destroyed. On the level of male/female relationships throughout the play, Father Flynn's attitude can be seen as the patronizing, dismissive attitude of a man who believes he has the upper hand.

Scene 7

Scene 7 Summary

This scene is set in the garden. Sister James sits meditatively as Father Flynn approaches, reacting negatively to the noisy cawing of a crow and apologizes for disturbing her. Sister James says she's upset because her brother is ill but she can't go to him because of her commitment to her class. She adds that she's also troubled by a dream in which she looks in a mirror and is unable to see her face, and by thoughts about Father Flynn planted in her mind by Sister Aloysius. After both she and Father Flynn admit to avoiding Donald Muller out of fear their actions might be misinterpreted, Sister James asks Father Flynn several questions. She wonders whether his sermon was actually about anyone, whether parables like the ones he uses are actually better for conveying meaning than using explicit examples from life, and whether he's guilty of what Sister Aloysius accuses him. For his part, Father Flynn lets her draw her own conclusions about who the sermon was about, and explains that parables are much better at conveying understanding than real life (see "Quotes", p. 39). He also tells Sister James that he's innocent of everything Sister Aloysius is suggesting, telling her that he doesn't want to fight Sister Aloysius and to do so would completely upset the workings of the school and he doesn't want Sister Aloysius to be fired. He also appears to understand her dream, realizing that Sister James loves teaching and telling her that such love is exactly what should be at the heart of her teaching and of her life (see "Quotes", p. 41). Sister James tells him she believes in him and goes out. Father Flynn shouts at the still-cawing crow to be quiet.

Scene 7 Analysis

This scene is notable first for its symbolic content. The crow heard as the scene begins and ends can be seen as representing Sister Aloysius: the crow is physically black, as is Sister Aloysius in her habit, while its noisy aggressive cawing can be seen as representing Sister Aloysius' noisy, aggressive "cawing" about Father Flynn. Meanwhile, Sister James' dream of seeing herself without a face is a fairly explicit metaphor for her loss of identity - as she herself indicates, she defines herself by her love of teaching, and to have that taken from her by Sister Aloysius empties her of her self-image. Father Flynn makes a clear and compassionate effort to restore Sister James' faith in herself, but by the end of the play it seems as though that effort was in vain - Sister James has, it eventually appears, begun to take on the harsher, blacker, more judgmental mantle of Sister Aloysius.

The second reason this scene is notable is for Father Flynn's explanation of why parables work better to illuminate real life than life itself actually does. His words can also be interpreted as a comment on storytelling in general, and on how it can be seen as giving meaning, shape, and definition to life.

The third notable point in this scene is in its revelation of Father Flynn's character. His compassion for Sister James' position, and in particular his passion in conveying it, can be seen as a manifestation of his own sense of compassion. This aspect of his character is revealed further in his awareness of what would happen to Sister Aloysius if he complained to their mutual superior, and also of what's happening to Donald Muller. In short, it seems from their conversation that Father Flynn and Sister James are essentially kindred spirits—not just in the sense that they are both being persecuted, albeit in different ways—by Sister Aloysius, but that they are being persecuted for the same reasons. That said, the question must be asked whether Father Flynn in this scene is attempting to manipulate Sister James onto his side, or whether he genuinely believes what he is saying. The answer to this question hinges on what one believes to be the truth about what happened between Father Flynn and Donald Muller. If Sister Aloysius is correct in her suspicions, then it's more likely that Father Flynn is rationalizing here, justifying his behavior to himself and manipulating Sister James into believing and supporting him. If Sister Aloysius is not correct and she is persecuting Father Flynn for no reason, then Father Flynn's comments here are more likely to be a genuine, honest confession of his feelings, his faith, and his philosophy. The play is carefully ambiguous on this subject; as previously discussed, it offers no clear answers, but serves its purpose by simply raising the questions.

The fourth notable point here is developed in subtext—that is, it is not actually included in dialogue. This is the play's secondary thematic concern with the nature of the church's teachings, as defined on one side by the rigidity and rules of Sister Aloysius and on the other by the compassion of Sister James and Father Flynn.

Scene 8, Part 1

Scene 8, Part 1 Summary

When Mrs. Muller arrives, Sister Aloysius is listening to the news through an earphone plugged into a transistor radio which, she tells Mrs. Muller, she confiscated from a student who was listening to it in class. She explains to Mrs. Muller that she got into the habit of listening to the radio during the war when she would listen for word of how the fighting was going and particularly for news from where her husband was stationed. Mrs. Muller reacts with relatively little surprise to news that Sister Aloysius was married, being more interested in what's going on with Donald. Conversation reveals that Donald's father beat him after being dismissed as an altar boy, that Donald has a history of being picked on, that Mrs. Muller is grateful for the protection and support offered to Donald by Father Flynn.

When Sister Aloysius suggests that there's something improper in the relationship between Flynn and Donald, Mrs. Muller forces her to admit that she's got no actual evidence, implying that they're in similar situations. Neither of them has any power to act because control in their respective situations is held by the men. She also accuses Sister Aloysius of having something against Father Flynn, a charge to which Sister Aloysius doesn't respond. Mrs. Muller hints that she knows her son is homosexual, and is the reason why his father beats him. She indicates that if Father Flynn is taking advantage of that it doesn't matter; the more important thing is that someone—some man—is showing her son care and consideration. Sister Aloysius suggests that Mrs. Muller doesn't know what she's talking about. Mrs. Muller suggests that it is Sister Aloysius who doesn't know - she may know rules, but she doesn't know life. Sister Aloysius says she's still determined to stop Father Flynn, indicating that she's prepared to expel Donald to do it. Mrs. Muller pleads with her not to, saying Donald needs to stay in school only until June (after which he'll go into high school), adding that Donald's father would kill him if he was expelled and asking what Sister Aloysius wants from her. Sister Aloysius says she was hoping Mrs. Muller might have some information that might help her cause, but sees that she doesn't. Mrs. Muller says goodbye (see "Quotes", p. 50) and leaves.

Scene 8, Part 1 Analysis

As she did at the beginnings of Scenes 2 and 4, Sister Aloysius begins this scene in the middle of a so-called "routine" activity - in this case, she's listening to the radio. It's interesting here to note the stage directions - she is described as "looking out a window, very still," which seems to give the audience the impression that she is praying or in deep thought. The reason for this intention isn't made explicitly clear, but one explanation might be to create the sense that she's considering, or re-considering, her persecution of Father Flynn. The arrival of Mrs. Muller, and the revelation that Sister Aloysius is listening to a radio, immediately dispels this impression, a circumstance that,

in relation to the idea that she's reconsidering, gives the clear idea that she's not. In other words, the audience is led to believe one thing, but soon discovers that the opposite is true - that when it comes to Sister Aloysius, even the impression that she's reconsidering, doubtful or compassionate is false. That said, it's interesting to consider other aspects to this moment. Among these is the fact that Sister Aloysius listens to the news, which indicates that in spite of her spiritually, morally and physically cloistered existence she still has some awareness of the outside world. Whether she has a relationship with the world, whether she's affected by it and its changes, is another question. Further to this point, it must be remembered that the play is set following the Kennedy assassination (see Scene 1 Analysis for an explanation of the thematic relevance of this setting), a period when the news would probably have been full of commentary and analysis about the lost state of the country. In short, Sister Aloysius is probably listening to stories of doubt. Finally, the fact that she took the radio from a student and is using it herself must be considered. Is she a hypocrite for doing something for which she condemned another?

The most important element of this scene is the appearance of Mrs. Muller, who is significant for two main reasons—who she is and the way in which she challenges Sister Aloysius (the latter, of course, being a function of the former). The first thing to note here is that the writing portraying Mrs. Muller is among the most effective in the play. Who she is emerges with great power and clarity, a feat all the more remarkable because she only appears in this one scene and is spoken of nowhere else (having characters refer to other characters, and therefore define them, in other scenes is an often used narrative technique not employed in this play). The second thing to note about Mrs. Muller is that she is a contrast in almost every conceivable way to Sister Aloysius: compassionate, wise, loving, and endowed with a broad, realistic perspective. There are two things they have in common. The first, as Mrs. Muller points out, is that they're both helpless before the power of the men in their lives; Mrs. Muller (and Donald) are helpless before the violence of Mr. Muller, while Sister Aloysius is helpless before the church-sanctioned misogyny of the nun / priest relationship. Their second common characteristic is willpower. Both Sister Aloysius and Mrs. Muller are determined to get what they want. It's interesting to note, however, that while they both have relationships (of a sort) with Donald, and while they both claim to be acting in his best interest, Sister Aloysius is clearly prepared to sacrifice that interest in order to achieve what she believes to be in her best interest and that of the school. Mrs. Muller, on the other hand, acts out of pure love and compassion for him - a desire to bring him into a full, open, safe life, a desire Sister Aloysius only gives lip service to. In short, there is the strong impression here that while Sister Aloysius is aware of the outside world (as indicated by her listening to the radio) Mrs. Muller has a real understanding or awareness of the way that world works—and she's there to do her best to make sure her son is not destroyed. Sister Aloysius, meanwhile, remains self-righteously impervious to everything Mrs. Muller says and does. Once again she is portrayed as having no mercy, no room in her heart, experience and beliefs for anything other than what she believes or wants to believe. Mrs. Muller challenges those beliefs both directly, by demanding that Sister Aloysius change her tactics, and indirectly, by simply being the loving, wise woman she is.

Scene 8, Part 2

Scene 8, Part 2 Summary

Shortly after Mrs. Muller leaves, Father Flynn rushes in and confronts Sister Aloysius. Ignoring her insistence that there needs to be a third person present to witness their conversation, he closes the door and tells her that she must stop what she's doing. She responds that it will only stop when he confesses and resigns. He says he has nothing to confess, arguing that she's persecuting him because he has forward thinking ideas that don't mesh with hers. She accuses him of giving Donald wine to drink and sexually seducing him. He denies the accusation, accusing her in turn of wanting to find something to use against him and asking Sister James to watch for such an incident. She says that she is convinced, offering the evidence that she saw him touch one of the student's wrists and that the student pulled away.

Flynn makes a note of what she's saying, telling her he gets flustered in confrontations and can't always remember what was said. As he writes, he tells Sister Aloysius that he intends to have her transferred out of the school. She, in turn, tells him that before she spoke with Mrs. Muller, she called the school where he taught previously and spoke with a nun who confirmed her suspicions. Flynn is initially angry with Sister Aloysius for having broken the usual channels for making complaints such as hers - she should, he said, have spoken to the priest. Sister Aloysius suggests that they have an understanding, adding that this is his third parish in five years and that he must be stopped. He demands that she abide by the rules of the church and obey him, but she says she will step outside the rules of the church if she has to (see "Quotes", p. 54). Father Flynn asks whether she's ever done anything wrong; she says she has and confessed it, asking repeatedly whether he gave Donald Muller wine. He denies it. She tells him he's lying and prepares to leave, saying that once she goes she will not stop - the implication is she will go straight to their superior and tell him what she believes.

Father Flynn calls for Sister Aloysius to stop. She comes back, pleading for compassion (see "Quotes", p. 55), but she remains adamant that he must resign, accusing him again of taking advantage of Donald Muller and mistaking what she implies to be sexual desire for compassion. He says he'll fight her; she tells him he'll lose. He asks where her compassion is, and she tells him, "Nowhere you can get at it." She tells him she's going out, that he can use her phone, that she has no sympathy for him - and that he should cut his nails. After she goes, Father Flynn calls to make an appointment to see the Bishop.

Scene 8, Part 2 Analysis

This scene contains the climax of the play, the confrontation between Sister Aloysius and Father Flynn. There are several noteworthy elements here; the first is the way that, for the most part, both this scene and the play are ambiguous about whether Father

Flynn is actually guilty. It could be easily, and validly, argued that in his plea for compassion and subsequent choice to resign Father Flynn is doing what Sister Aloysius accuses him of in Scene 9: tacitly admitting his guilt by doing what he asks her to. The question must be asked, however, whether it's possible that he's not—would it not, in fact—make the play's secondary theme relating to the dangers of narrow thinking and judgmental-ness stronger if he was innocent?

There are other ambiguities about this scene, all carefully foreshadowed in what has gone before. Father Flynn is certainly right when he accuses Sister Aloysius of opposing forward thinking - there have been several evident examples of this throughout the play (and yet she used the transistor radio, one of the most technologically forward advances of the time; again the question must be asked, Is she a hypocrite?). Is this the reason for her accusation? From what has been seen of her so far it might possibly be; but if Father Flynn is guilty, he's making the point as a distraction. Father Flynn is also right about her having broken procedural rules, but the question here is why does he make this argument at this particular moment? If she's right and he is sexually abusing Donald, it's possible here as well that he's scrambling for a distraction—something, anything, that will both deflect her attack and prevent it from damaging his career. Yes, this argument is something of a technicality, but in courts of law criminals evade guilty verdicts on technicalities all the time. On the other hand, if she's wrong and he's innocent of her accusations, Father Flynn is simply acting out of an admittedly misogynistic but nevertheless strict set of rules that are, to a church loving man as he evidently is, are as much of a sin as the lie she tells (revealed to be a lie in the following scene). These rules, in turn, can also be seen as a reason Sister Aloysius is so determined - for once in her life, no matter what, she is going to win over the men.

The entire question of Father Flynn's guilt or lack thereof hinges on the interpretation of the word "circumstances" (see "Quotes", p. 55). What circumstances could Father Flynn mean? Is he a celibate homosexual, with a genuine compassionate love for Donald Muller? Is he a pedophile, a victim of a "circumstantial" sexual attraction beyond his control? Did the lonely, needy, Donald make sexual advances on *him*? The narrative isn't explicit about what those circumstances might be, but whatever they are it's clear that Father Flynn is making a plea for compassion and understanding from Sister Aloysius, neither of which she (for any or all of the reasons defined above) is not prepared to offer.

Sister Aloysius' final word on the subject is her reference to Father Flynn's fingernails that, as has been discussed, represent to her (and for the play) all that is different about him that she detests. By telling him to cut his nails she is, in essence, telling him to cut himself off from himself. In the same way as she told Sister James that she must abandon both her joy in teaching and her love for the children in her care, she's telling Father Flynn that he must abandon a part of himself that he values (for whatever reason). Here again there is an indication that Father Flynn is innocent - Sister Aloysius has a pattern of behavior, in that she repeatedly tells other characters that they cannot or should not rejoice, or be different, or embrace their difference, or celebrate it. It might not be going too far to suggest that this pattern carries into her determination to get rid of Father Flynn. In other words, because of Sister Aloysius' pattern of behavior, there is

every possibility that like Sister James, Father Flynn gets joy, satisfaction and fulfillment out of offering Christ-like succor to the disadvantaged (i.e. Donald Muller). For Sister Aloysius, there can be no joy, and any evidence of it is to be condemned, whether she's aware that that's what she's seeing or not - that is, if what she sees between Father Flynn and Donald Muller is in fact a source of joy for both of them, something that Mrs. Muller suggests that Donald experiences.

Scene 9

Scene 9 Summary

Sister Aloysius talks with Sister James, their conversation revealing that Sister James has been away visiting her brother and was upset to discover Father Flynn is gone. She comments that Donald Muller is "heartbroken" that he's gone, but Sister Aloysius, in what seems to be a deliberate echo of Mrs. Muller, says "it's only until June." Further conversation reveals that Father Flynn has been posted to another parish, that Sister Aloysius told their (male) superior her suspicions and that he didn't believe her, and that she lied when she told Father Flynn about calling his previous parish. She justifies her actions by saying "...if he had no such history, the lie wouldn't have worked. His resignation was his confession. He was what I thought he was. And he's gone."

She goes on to say that "in the pursuit of wrongdoing, one steps away from God. Of course there's a price." Suddenly she bursts out with a deeply emotional confession: "Oh, Sister James!" she cries. "I have doubts! I have such doubts!" Stage directions describe her as being "bent" with emotion, and also describe Sister James as comforting her.

Scene 9 Analysis

This scene is particularly effective because of the two surprises it contains - the revelation that Sister Aloysius lied, and the outburst of emotion when she reveals her doubts about what she did. In the same way as the play never answers the question of Father Flynn's guilt, neither does it resolve whether Sister Aloysius was justified in her actions.

That being said, the question of Flynn's guilt is ultimately irrelevant - whether he sexually assaulted Donald Muller or he didn't, the larger moral concern of the play is clearly whether Sister Aloysius is justified in doing what she does. Is she self-righteous, or simply right?

Her comment about there being a "price" for "stepping away from God" is a fulfillment of what she says earlier (see "Quotes", p. 54) about being prepared to do whatever it takes to see what she believes to be justice served. She seems to see herself as being condemned for being a sinner, even though she sinned in what she believed to be a cause of righteousness. This is, perhaps, the source of her cry of anguish at the end of the play; in other words, is being condemned to hell for being a sinner the cause of her doubts?

The final stage direction, describing Sister James as confronting Sister Aloysius, is a masterpiece of understatement and ambiguity. It would be an interesting challenge for a director and the actor playing Sister James to consider the way in which comfort is offered. Does Sister James feel genuine compassion for Sister Aloysius, or has Sister

Aloysius (ironically enough) bullied all the compassion out of her? Or is there a sense of self-righteousness now about Sister James? Is the thought running through her mind that Sister Aloysius brought her pain upon herself, and is only experiencing what she deserves? The irony here, of course, is that if she does have this perspective (and it's perfectly possible), then she's become just as judgmental as Sister Aloysius—and, not to put too fine a point on it, just as dangerous.

Characters

Sister Aloysius Beauvier

Sister Aloysius is the principal of the St. Nicholas school. She is stern, suspicious, and cynical, making a point of showing the students no weakness and discouraging signs of weakness in the nuns under her. When she is first introduced, her suspicious nature seems excessive: she suspects a boy who went home with a nosebleed of having intentionally inflicted it himself, and she feels that ballpoint pens, as opposed to fountain pens, offer students the easy way out. Her dour attitude makes her unsympathetic, and audiences are left to wonder whether, as Father Flynn and Sister James speculate at different times, she is suspicious of Father Flynn only because she personally dislikes his compassionate demeanor.

Sister Aloysius was not always a nun: she was once married, but her husband died in World War II, nearly twenty years before this play takes place. At a previous assignment, at St. Boniface, she was involved in having a pedophile priest □stopped,□ but currently, at St. Nicholas, she feels frustrated, certain that the Church hierarchy will not stand behind her should her suspicions about Father Flynn prove to be true.

Throughout the play, Sister Aloysius does not waver in her certainty that Father Flynn has had improper relations with boys. In the last act, however, after the priest's resignation confirms her suspicions, she tells Sister James that she had to lie in order to trap him, referring to lying as a step away from God and the price that one must pay in pursuing wrongdoing. The last line of the play has Sister Aloysius telling Sister James, □I have doubts! I have such doubts!□ Her doubts reflect her awareness that persecuting Father Flynn has had bad as well as good effects.

Father Brendan Flynn

Up until the end, *Doubt* does not make clear whether Father Flynn is a just a concerned man or an actual child molester. Throughout the play, he makes a convincing case that he is being persecuted by Sister Aloysius because she disagrees with his progressive ideas. In their final confrontation, though, when he is faced with the nun's claim that she broke the prescribed order and has spoken to a nun from Father Flynn's previous parish, he gives in and leaves St. Nicholas before she can expose him.

Father Flynn comes from a working-class background, and he is comfortable with the boys of his parish. He teaches religion and physical education. His manner with the boys, shown in act 3, is tough yet caring: he offers advice; criticizes; pokes fun; and, in the end, invites them back to the rectory with him for Kool-Aid and cookies. When he is accused of giving Donald Muller wine as a way to approach him for sexual favors, he explains that he was really protecting Donald from being thrown out of school after he

found out the boy had drunk some of the altar wine. Father Flynn tells Sister James that he believes in being open and caring, that he follows the Bible's teachings of love.

In act 1, Father Flynn gives a sermon that includes a story about a man in a boat, lost at sea and with no stars to guide him; Sister Aloysius later implies that this is a sign that he himself has some secret that would prompt a feeling of despair. When he is addressing his basketball class, he tells them a story about a boy with whom he went to school, a boy who did not wash his hands properly and caught spinal meningitis and died. Later, after being confronted by Sister Aloysius and Sister James, he gives a sermon about a woman who learns that gossiping can have uncontrollable and ruinous results. Father Flynn's style is to turn events and situations from his own life, and from the world around him, into parables.

One particularly telling moment comes when, called to a meeting in Sister Aloysius's office, he walks over and sits behind her desk: rather than seeing the kindly priest fighting against a rigid and humorless traditionalist, audiences see him being cocky, proud, and a bit arrogant. He still seems defensive later in the play, when he tells Sister Aloysius that she will not be able to prosecute him, until his fear that she might actually have heard the truth about his history□he has been at three parishes in five years□forces him to ask for reassignment, indicating his guilt.

Sister James

Sister James is an earnest young nun in her twenties, who starts out eager to teach her students and pique their interest in history. She believes the best of her students and approaches their problems with compassion and sympathy. These are qualities that Sister Aloysius warns her against. For instance, Sister Aloysius explains that teachers who try to make their subjects interesting to students are really just performing and being clever. She tells Sister James that students who have to go home with physical problems might have inflicted the problems on themselves, precisely to get out of school. She makes Sister James doubt her basic assumptions about her role as a nun: as Sister James explains to Father Flynn when they are confiding in each other about Sister Aloysius, □She's taken away my joy of teaching. And I loved teaching more than anything.□ At the end of the play, when it is revealed that Father Flynn has been reassigned, Sister James returns after a visit to her brother, who had previously been identified as being ill.

Donald Muller

Donald Muller, the boy who is presumed to be the victim of sexual abuse, does not appear onstage, but his role is important. He is the first black student at St. Nicholas, putting him immediately in a dangerous position: the nuns accept it as a matter of course that he will be in fights with the other boys. Sister Aloysius views his difficult situation as making him an ideal candidate for the tactics of a sexual predator. This suspicion grows when Sister James tells her that Donald was taken to the rectory by

Father Flynn and that he returned behaving strangely and smelling of liquor. Father Flynn explains that he was trying to protect Donald from punishment after the boy stole some of the altar wine and drank it. After the priest says this publicly, Donald is punished by being dismissed as one of the altar boys.

Donald's mother later reveals to Sister Aloysius that Donald was in fights at his previous school and that his father abuses him at home. When told that Donald might be a victim of a sexual predator, she says that she believes that he may have encouraged the relationship and that she and his father think the problems at the old school were a result of his homosexual tendencies.

Mrs. Muller

Mrs. Muller is the mother of Donald Muller, the first black child to attend St. Nicholas. She has been afraid that he would meet with hostility in the predominantly Irish and Italian neighborhood and was comforted to know that Father Flynn formed a close bond with the boy. When she is called down to talk to the principal of the school, Mrs. Muller fears that her son's school career might be in trouble: she has been counting on his being a St. Nicholas graduate in order to assure his placement in a good high school. She is aware that he has been expelled from the altar boys for drinking wine, but she thinks of that as a minor infraction that is behind them. She reveals that Donald's father beat him when he found out about the altar wine.

When she finds out that her son may be the victim of a sexual predator, Mrs. Muller does not react with outrage. She is afraid that her boy will be blamed for the crime by a community that is already inclined to be hostile to blacks. When Sister Aloysius tells her that she thinks Father Flynn has given Donald wine as a way to have sex with him, Mrs. Muller points out how, in that episode, it was her son, and not the priest, who was punished. She reveals that her son may already be a homosexual, which would make him a willing participant in Father Flynn's abuse. Overall, she is willing to accept a relationship between the boy and the priest for a few months until Donald graduates, preferring to concentrate on the good influence that Father Flynn offers to a boy who is trying to fit in to a hostile environment and to escape an abusive father.

Objects/Places

Parables

As discussed in the Analysis of Scene 1, parables are a form of storytelling designed to shed light on a point about human morality, spirituality or behavior. Parables are notably employed in the Bible and particularly the New Testament in the teachings of Christ. He used the technique on several occasions and in various ways to illustrate the central point of all his teachings - that the spirit of God is not only in heaven, but manifests in human beings on earth, particularly in their relationships with each other (such as in the parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son). *Doubt* is subtitled "a parable," suggesting that the play is itself designed to illuminate an aspect of universal human experience, not just tell a story about a particular set of characters.

St. Nicholas Church / Convent / School

This is the institution where the play is set. St. Nicholas was, among other things, the patron saint of children, a fact that makes the naming of the school in this play (where the welfare of one particular child is the catalyst for the drama) both appropriate and ironic.

Sister Aloysius' Office

The play's key confrontations, between Sister Aloysius and Father Flynn as well as between Sister Aloysius and Mrs. Muller, take place here. This is the one place, other than in a classroom, where Sister Aloysius feels she has the most power.

The Courtyard

This small garden is the setting for most of the play's scenes relating to the characters' experiences of doubt. Sister James' doubts about herself and about Father Flynn, as well as Sister Aloysius' doubts at the end of the play all come to light here, in a space open to the sky in the way the characters' become, when here, open to themselves.

The Rectory

No action in the play is actually set here, but encounters that affect the play's drama do take place here: the place where Father Flynn makes his home, and where he has his private encounters with Donald Muller and the other boys in his care.

Father Flynn's Fingernails

As discussed in relation to the analyses of Scene 3 and Scene 8, Father Flynn's unusually long fingernails are a symbol of his different, somewhat more advanced perspectives. The fact that Sister Aloysius is uncomfortable about their length, therefore, is a metaphor for her discomfort with his overall progressiveness.

Tea and Sugar

During the confrontation in Sister Aloysius' office in Scene 5, tension between Father Flynn and Sister Aloysius over Father Flynn's fondness for, and requests for more, tea and sugar can be seen as a manifestation of their tension over the larger issues between them: Father Flynn's progressive attitudes and his allegedly inappropriate behavior with Donald Muller.

The Rosebush

As discussed in the Analysis for Scene 4, the rosebush is a symbol of all the children for whom Sister Aloysius feels she has responsibility, and of Donald Muller in particular.

The Church

The church as an institution is, in this play, an oppressive force for discipline and control. There is also the sense that both Sister Aloysius and Father Flynn see the church as willfully blind (Sister Aloysius because she sees the church as being unwilling or unable to believe and support her and Father Flynn because he sees the church as unwilling or unable to see Sister Aloysius' vendetta for what it is). There is also the sense that the audience would see the church in that way rather than doing what seems to be necessary in order to get to the truth, the higher ups act to keep the peace and simply make the problem go away.

The World

The world, society at large, and human nature—all are seen in different ways by different characters. Sister Aloysius sees everything outside the walls of the convent, the walls of her Roman Catholic-defined perspectives, as dangerous and as something to be conquered and dominated. Sister James sees it all as something to be explored, experienced fully, and enjoyed wherever possible. Father Flynn sees the differences and challenges of the outside word as something to be embraced, incorporated into the faith and teachings of the church. Mrs. Muller sees the world as both a source of trouble (i.e. her husband) and as the only source of reality. She seems to have no room for faith or for anything spiritual. For her, anything other than the realities of day-to-day life and

the struggle to make the best of it is false—false hope, false belief, false perspective, false action. For her only the world is true; she is, in effect, the only realist in the play.

Themes

Certainty

One of the key elements of *Doubt* is the issue of certainty and how difficult it is to be certain, even in an environment of faith. The two main characters, Sister Aloysius and Father Flynn, each hold staunchly to their views of the world and are unwilling to see things as others do: this unwillingness to yield is both a strength and a weakness and leads to the final tragic conclusion. The other two onstage characters, Sister James and Mrs. Muller, are racked with doubt, able to see both sides of their dilemma.

Sister Aloysius is certain that there is sexual abuse going on at St. Nicholas, even before she has any substantial proof of it. She says late in the play that her certainty grew from one small gesture: the way in which one of the students recoiled from Father Flynn's touch. The evidence that she compiles as a result is flimsy and easily explained away. She takes such minor issues as the length of Father Flynn's fingernails and the fact that he lectures the boys on being men to be support of her suspicion. When Father Flynn offers reasonable explanations for his behavior, she persists. He believes that her personal dislike for his teaching style may be strengthening her sense of certainty. She is even willing to threaten trouble for the boy, who presumably is the victim in this case. She shows no sense of uncertainty until the play's last line, when she admits to having doubts.

Father Flynn is just as certain that he himself is a force for good and that, with his emphasis on love and compassion, he is better for the boys than Sister Aloysius is. In the end, his retreat from St. Nicholas seems to be an admission of guilt, but he never verbally acknowledges having done wrong.

Mrs. Muller, on the other hand, is pragmatic enough to admit that allowing a bad relationship may lead to a greater good. She suspects that her son and Father Flynn might be involved in a relationship, but she also knows that exposing their relationship would do much more damage to her son's future prospects than anything the priest could do. She weighs up the factors□the months until graduation, her husband's rage, the benefit of graduating from a good school□and decides that there are no easy answers about right or wrong.

The weight of the question of certainty makes Sister James a very important figure in this play. She starts out feeling that the best way to teach is with compassion, but Sister Aloysius convinces her that strict discipline is more important than compassion. When he needs her support, though, Father Flynn talks with her about how Sister Aloysius's stern, disciplinary approach is a violation of the Bible's focus on love. Sister James is divided between logic and emotion, reason and compassion: her certainty shaken, she is troubled, which is the effect that *Doubt* strives to evoke in its audience.

Gender Roles in the Church and the World

In general, Sister Aloysius feels frustrated in her attempts to remove Father Flynn because of the Church hierarchy. At one point, though, she recognizes that the structure of the Church is arranged to keep men in power, so that, even as the school's principal, she will be incapable of taking the actions she feels she needs to take to protect her students. In act 4, she recalls to Sister James a time at a previous parish when a sexually predatory priest had to be removed from contact with children. □But I had Monsignor Scully then . . . who I could rely on. Here, there's no man I can go to, and men run everything.□

Outside the Church, society at large experiences a similar division of male and female roles. Mrs. Muller comes to meet with the principal alone because her husband has to work, enforcing the traditions of men being breadwinners and women being focused on child rearing. When their boy, Donald, is in trouble at school, however, his father becomes involved in his life by taking on the role of disciplinarian, which he approaches with a violence that is so extreme that his wife thinks it is a threat to the boy's life.

Vulnerability

There are two characters in *Doubt* who are used to represent vulnerability. The first and most obvious is Donald Muller, the student who is suspected of having been sexually abused. Donald has recently transferred from another school and is the first black student to attend St. Nicholas. When she hears that Father Flynn has established himself as a □protector□ to Donald, Sister Aloysius immediately assumes that his motive is to take advantage of him. □He's isolated,□ she explains to Sister James. □The little sheep lagging behind is the one the wolf goes for.□ While the teachers who advocate compassion□Sister James and Father Flynn□see Donald's vulnerability as a responsibility, Sister Aloysius has no doubt that an unscrupulous predator will take advantage of any weakness.

At the same time, Sister Aloysius is concerned with keeping Sister Veronica's weakness hidden from the Church hierarchy. Sister Veronica's eyesight is failing with age, and Sister Aloysius fears that, if her condition were commonly known, the Church would move her out of the parish. To some extent, her concern for Sister Veronica is protective, putting Sister Aloysius in the strange position of having to shield a weakened nun from the Church that she serves. But while she is telling Sister James to watch over Sister Veronica, she says, □I cannot afford to lose her.□ Her concern about Sister Veronica's vulnerability is based, at least in part, on her own consolidation of power. To some extent, Sister Aloysius is taking advantage of Sister Veronica's vulnerability in the same way that she assumes Father Flynn is taking advantage of Donald's.

Sexual Abuse

Any sexual relationship between an adult and a minor is technically considered sexual abuse, because the minor is presumed to lack the worldliness and experience to knowingly consent to a relationship. It is particularly immoral for someone in a position of authority, such as a teacher or work superior, to enter into such a relationship with someone who might feel intimidated by their power.

As with most moral issues, however, *Doubt* blurs the distinctions that might otherwise seem clear-cut. For one thing, it presents the relationship between Father Flynn and Donald Muller as one of emotional depth, whether it has a physical element or not. Father Flynn believes that he is a good man, that it is he, not Sister Aloysius, who is concerned with the boy's welfare. Donald's mother also seems to believe this to be true: she sees the dangers that threaten her son, both in the hostile school environment and from his abusive father at home, and she is thankful that he has a protector. She is willing to accept the idea that a sexual relationship might exist between the boy and the priest, because she fears that the threat of their having no relationship at all would be worse. □My son needs some man to care about him and see him through to where he wants to go,□ she explains. □And thank God, this educated man with some kindness in him wants to do just that.□

Mrs. Muller also raises the prospect that Donald may have encouraged such a relationship because he is, as she puts it, □that way.□ While this might remove some of the stigma of it being a homosexual relationship, it does not make it any less abusive. Even if the boy is a willing participant, not forced into having sex, the adult is still guilty of abuse of power.

Doubt

The play explores issues of doubt from several perspectives: as a unifier of humanity (Father Flynn, Scene 1), as a destroyer of joy (Sister James throughout the play), as a destroyer of self-righteousness (Sister Aloysius and Father Flynn), and for the audience, as a necessary source for questioning that which seems certain. This last is perhaps most important - the reason for the parable, as the play is subtitled, being told in the first place.

The play's two main characters, Sister Aloysius and Father Flynn, are certain of themselves, but as the certainty of each is challenged by the other in a deeply self-righteous way, doubt enters their minds and perspectives. As a result, their experience of themselves and of humanity is broadened and deepened; they suffer, but they become wiser. This is perhaps the play's ultimate thematic point, the message of the parable that the audience is meant to take with them - that in the end, doubt is a good thing, that anything that shakes anyone out of narrow thinking and judgmental-ness broadens humanity's perspective on itself and opens individual members of the human race to deeper understanding.

This is the point made by Mrs. Muller in her scene with Sister Aloysius - it is here that Mrs. Muller is unsure of everything, that she doubts certainty of any sort. As she says herself, there is no "black and white," no certainty, that each moment, each individual, each situation must be questioned and explored and accepted for its own truth and not judged for what an individual believes it to be. This idea is supported by the fact that Mrs. Muller is clearly the most loving, the most openhearted, and the wisest character in the play. Yes, she suffers, but she understands, embodying the play's ultimate thematic perspective that everything must be doubted, but healthily and openly - not fearfully, not angrily, certainly with respect, and ultimately with compassion.

Justice and Compassion

In his final cry for compassion from Sister Aloysius, Father Flynn gives voice to an issue that has, for most of the play, been mostly sub-textual (in other words, has been a motivator of action without actually being spoken about). Every character in this play struggles with issues of justice and compassion - is it compassionate that William London is judged the way he is by Sister Aloysius, or is she justly seeing him as he truly is? Do Father Flynn and Sister Aloysius see each other justly for who they are, or are they truly doing what they do out of compassion (misguided or not) for Donald Muller? Is it just that Sister James struggles with acting as her instinctively compassionate nature suggests, caring for her students instead of dominating them, visiting her ill brother, supporting Father Flynn? Is it truly compassionate for Mrs. Muller to acquiesce to whatever is going on between Donald and Father Flynn in the name of what she believes to be emotional nourishment for her son, or is she being unjust in exposing him to a relationship that might be psychologically damaging? The play's point in raising these questions is this: as Mrs. Muller says, there is no black and white, that true justice is empty if it's not tempered with compassion and that compassion untempered with justice is indulgent and dangerous. Ultimately, there is the suggestion in the play's exploration of this thematic point that justice and compassion are, or at least ought to be, two sides of the same coin, that one is nothing without the other.

Personal Identity/Integrity

The issue of integrity, of living freely and truly according to one's nature, is at the core of each main character's experience in the play. Sister Aloysius struggles to live freely and fully as a woman, worthy of and receiving respect. Father Flynn struggles to life freely and fully as an idealistic, open minded and openhearted priest, a compassionate caregiver for troubled young boys (whether this struggle is complicated by feelings of pedophilia and/or homosexuality is open for debate). Sister James struggles to live freely in her joy of teaching and of young people. Mrs. Muller struggles not so much for herself but for her son, fighting for his right to feel and be cared for, nourished, and respected for who and what he is. Even the unseen Sister Veronica, with her increasing blindness, is living this struggle - it seems that she's trying to continue to live her life as she's always lived it, but has the obstacle of increasing darkness in her path.

The interesting thing is that all these characters know who and what they are, but are confronted with the doubts of others that who and what they are is valid or acceptable. As a result, each character loses that sense of identity, and in a sense loses the struggle to maintain it. The play ends before the audience can see the potential benefits of that loss - no one knows whether Sister Aloysius, for example, becomes a more charitable nun, or whether Father Flynn becomes a more charitable man, or Sister James is able to reconcile the demands of her profession with her personal joy, or whether Mrs. Muller's son even grows up. This lack of moving on, however, does not suggest that such moving on is impossible - on the contrary. It is, in fact, perhaps an illustration of the way the themes of doubt and personal integrity blend to suggest that such moving on is not only possible, but necessary.

Style

Priestly Monologues

Acts 1, 3, and 6 of *Doubt* consist of monologues delivered by Father Flynn, who is onstage by himself. These monologues function as speeches in the play. Two of them are meant to represent sermons from the pulpit, addressed to parishioners during a mass, and the other one is given as a lecture to a group of boys playing basketball. In the last one, Father Flynn interacts with particular boys, responding to them as if they were there, though no actors are present.

Dramatists often use monologues to allow a character to express her or his own ideas without other characters who are involved in the story knowing what those ideas are. In such cases, characters might walk away from the action, often toward the audience, and say out loud what is going on in their minds. In this case, though, Father Flynn's words are meant to be heard by an audience. In the cases of the sermons, it would make no sense to provide an audience on the stage, since Father Flynn is just talking, and their reactions are not necessary. It would be quite possible for another playwright to have written in parts for Jimmy, Ralph, Conroy, and the other boys that Father Flynn directly addresses in act 3, but there really is no need for that, since audiences can imagine their actions from what the priest says.

Multiset Stage

Three of the play's nine acts take place in the small garden that separates the convent where the nuns live from the rectory where the priests live, and three acts take place in Sister Aloysius's office. The scenes are so short that changing sets frequently would put a disproportionate drag on the action. To keep the action moving, the script allows the different sets to be on one stage, changing from one to another by having the lights cross-fade□dim on one set as they come up on the other.

The garden is an important location for symbolic reasons. As Sister Aloysius points out, it is a small patch of land, but □we might as well be separated by the Atlantic Ocean.□ Sister Aloysius says that she stopped visiting the garden because Monsignor Benedict used to go there: though they live in proximity, the nuns and priests are not allowed to meet with each other one on one. This rule is presumably in place to keep nuns and priests from developing romantic relationships, though in reality it creates a sense of alienation that prohibits them from addressing problems when they arise. The garden, which could be a peaceful, spiritual setting, becomes, ironically, a place that breeds mystery and suspicion among the people it separates.

It is also important, in establishing the social dynamic of St. Nicholas parish, for the play to be based in Sister Aloysius's office. As the school's mother superior, she has authority over the nuns, and in her office she can rule, rattling off theories of education

and voicing suspicions and innuendoes that she would not be able to discuss out in the open. When Father Flynn comes to a meeting there, he usurps her power by sitting down at her desk, showing that even a low-level priest is more powerful in the Church hierarchy than the highest nun. Later, when he finds out that Sister Aloysius has been talking with Donald Muller's mother, Father Flynn ignores the rule that forbids a nun and a priest to be together without supervision, and he slams the door behind himself at the start of their climactic confrontation in act 8.

Compassion as a Tragic Flaw

Father Flynn is a caring man who tries to break down the social barriers that separate him from the boys in his class. His compassion is conscious, a trait that he actively pursues, believing that it is more important for the boys to feel loved than it is for them to be pressured by rules. In particular, he makes a point of giving extra attention to Donald Muller because he feels that the boy can use a friend, given his circumstances. His extraordinary friendship with the boy is suspicious, if not inappropriate. Even if he is not, as Sister Aloysius assumes, sexually involved with the boy, Father Flynn's desire to ignore common social boundaries puts him in a position that threatens his career. By traditional dramatic standards, his need for acceptance can be seen as a tragic flaw in that it is a character trait that leads to his downfall.

While compassion is not generally viewed as a flaw, Shanley does establish a framework for seeing it as one. In act 2, discussing the teaching style of Sister James, Sister Aloysius characterizes innocence in teachers as self-indulgent and lazy. To her, a teacher who tries to befriend a student is doing so for selfish reasons. As much as Father Flynn is adamant in his insistence that children should be treated with compassion, Sister Aloysius is adamant that such ideas are a sign of impure intentions. Whether or not he is a sexual predator, Father Flynn draws attention to himself with his insistence on behaving as the boys' friend.

Parable

Although Shanley clearly takes as his subject the sexual abuse scandal that has plagued the Catholic Church for years, he has said that he did not set out to write a play about that situation. The true subject of *Doubt* is, as its title indicates, uncertainty. The play's subtitle is □A Parable,□ indicating that it is not meant to be any sort of analysis of the events described in the newspapers. Although the play takes place at a Catholic school, it does not explicitly address intricate matters of Catholicism; instead, it uses its setting to examine a human predicament that can occur in any religion or profession.

Traditionally, a parable is a rhetorical device used to illustrate an abstract concept. In this case, Shanley is interested in exploring the idea of doubt, which, as he illustrates in the play, is much more complex than it seems at first. The main characters behave with certainty, but the structure of the play shows audiences that they experience doubt and also why they do. The use of the word *parable* in describing this play is particularly

significant because of that word's association with Christianity: many of the lessons Christ relates to his followers are told through parables. The parables of the New Testament are generally associated with universal themes that apply to all cultures and times, whereas Shanley applies the word to a story that is unfolding in the headlines of the present day.

Point of View

In the context of play analysis, point of view must be considered in terms of the playwright's apparent intentions in developing character, narrative and theme in the way that (in this case he) has. In terms of the characters, the playwright's point of view seems to be defined by objectivity - none of them is absolutely right, and perhaps most importantly, none of them is absolutely wrong. The most compelling example of this aspect of the play is Sister Aloysius - audience members are as likely to be attracted to her passionate defense of the vulnerable Donald Muller as they are to be repelled by her close-minded and judgmental attitudes towards Father Flynn and Sister James. By the same token, audiences are just as likely to be turned off by Father Flynn's evident misogyny, not to mention the possibility that he's a pedophile, as they are to be empathetic with his suffering at hands of the viciously devious Sister Aloysius.

In short, the play's point of view is that these characters, and perhaps by extension all humanity, are complicated and multi-faceted, a point of view that can also be inferred from the way both the narrative and the theme are treated. In terms of narrative, the playwright chooses to never make it absolutely clear what happened between Father Flynn and Donald Muller. In terms of theme, the playwright never comes down firmly on the side of one perspective or the other being good or bad. Everything about this play - character, narrative, theme - is drawn in shades of gray, with the point of view that nothing about life is as simple as those living it (or those in the audience viewing this particular parable about life) perceive it, or would like it, to be.

Setting

As previously discussed throughout this analysis, *Doubt*'s setting plays a key role in defining its ultimate thematic meaning. This setting has two components: time and place. In terms of time, Father Flynn sets it clearly in his opening speech - 1964, the year after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy which was, in many ways, a metaphorical assassination of America's belief in itself and its promise. In other words, it was a time of great cultural doubt and uncertainty, doubt that certainly manifested in the lives of individual Americans in similar ways to the way doubt manifests in the lives of the characters in the play - specifically in terms of identity, responsibility, and integrity.

The second key component of the play's setting is place - specifically, the convent/church/rectory/school of St. Nicholas. The important thing to note here is the sense of isolation inherent in this setting - convents are by nature set apart from the world, physically as well as spiritually. This sense of isolation has echoes in the similar sense

of isolation that exists in the rectory, where the priests live, and in the church itself (which, in its ethical certainty and dictatorial-ness, is morally isolated to the point of the self-righteousness evident in Sister Aloysius). Sister Aloysius attempts to instill a sense of isolation in the school, a sense that students and teachers alike are, or at least should be, immune to outside influences. It is here that isolation fails - students bring in things like transistor radios and non-fountain pens, symbols of the way the influence of the outside world is inevitable (witness the way that even Sister Aloysius gives in to its appeal when she listens to the radio). The point here is that the physical isolation of the setting reinforces and/or illuminates the spiritual and moral isolation of the more self-righteous characters—in particular, Sister Aloysius and Father Flynn.

Language and Meaning

Because this particular piece of work is a play, examination of its use of language is limited to the way it's used in dialogue. From that perspective, there is the general sense that language is used to differentiate the characters. There is a sense of freedom in the way Father Flynn speaks that's clearly at odds with the repression inherent in the words used by Sister Aloysius, whose words are in turn vividly contrasted with the wary, respectful compassionate language used by Mrs. Muller.

A key point to note about the use of language is the conspicuous absence of references to God, Jesus Christ, and faith. The reader would be forgiven for making the assumption that because this play is set within the context of Roman Catholicism and has a priest and two nuns as central characters, there would in fact be extensive religious references. The lack of such references is something of a surprise, and leads to the previously referenced possibility that part of the play's thematic point is that experiences of doubt are human experiences, universal to every individual regardless of whether they're religious. Yes, the Roman Catholic context is visually inescapable - nuns wear habits, priests wear collars and robes, there are likely to be crucifixes all over the set. In terms of the words spoken by the characters, however, they are, in essence, words of man, not words of God. The one exception is in Father Flynn's passionate plea to Sister James in Scene 7, in which he refers to the teachings of Christ (not referring to him as Christ but as "our lord" and "our savior"). In this exception, in the fact that Flynn is pleading with Sister James to live from a place of love, there is perhaps the suggestion that faith in Christ and his teachings has less to do with the church than with a personally experienced connection with what Christ meant and lived, as opposed to what the Church says he said.

Structure

The play's structure is fairly straightforward, moving in linear fashion from moment "a" to moment "b" in a steady progression towards its climax. There is a clearly defined sense of cause and effect, with action leading to reaction leading to action and so forth. There are occasions when the action of a particular scene is less relevant to the overall action of the play - when the dramatic or narrative content of a scene has more to do with

necessary revelation of character than with moving the story forward. Examples are the detailed exploration of Sister James' teaching methods in Scene 2, Father Flynn's coaching of the boys in Scene 3, the argument about Frosty the Snowman in Scene 5, and Flynn's sermon about gossip in Scene 6. Such moments, however, are still essential and do still further the play's purpose - deeper into the realm of theme and character, as opposed to ahead into the realm of story.

Ultimately, both manifestations of movement convey and develop a sense of inevitability to the action - that there is no way the central characters, Father Flynn and Sister Aloysius, can avoid their ultimate confrontation, and that none of the characters can avoid the personal and spiritual damage that that inevitability brings about.

Historical Context

Catholic Church Scandal

The history of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church is, by its very nature, shadowed, concealed over the course of decades by threats and bribes that number into the millions of dollars. The wave of public disclosures dates back to 1984, when rumors of sexual impropriety led to the guilty plea of the Reverend Gilbert Gauthe of the diocese of Lafayette, Louisiana, in molesting eleven boys. The ensuing investigation implicated nineteen other priests, and the diocese negotiated out-of-court settlements with the victims for undisclosed financial amounts. Over the next eight years, several other scandals made headlines, including at least one case involving a Chicago cardinal in which the accuser later testified that his original claim was a lie. By 1992, protestors picketing outside the conference of U.S. bishops in Washington, D.C., infuriated by the Church's position of trying to hide abuse cases at all costs, influenced the bishops to issue the first set of written principles regarding how to handle allegations. Still, accusations continued to pop up, with notable cases in Dallas, Honolulu, and New York City.

The scandal hit with full force in Boston in 2002. In January of that year, the defrocked priest John Geoghan was accused of having abused more than 130 children while serving as a priest in the Boston archdiocese over a period dating back to the 1970s. The subsequent investigation revealed that his superior, Bernard Cardinal Law, frequently hid Geoghan's crimes by reassigning him and authorizing payoff money to his accusers. Among the revelations that came out in the press was that Law had known about Geoghan's behavior since 1984; that Geoghan's victims, all boys, included one who was just four years old; and that the Catholic Church had already paid out about forty million dollars to Geoghan's victims. The shock of the Boston case spread: by the end of 2002, twelve hundred priests had been accused of sexual abuse nationwide, and five U.S. prelates (bishops or archbishops) had been forced to resign. By 2005, similar cases had sprung up in a number of other countries.

A study conducted by the John Jay College has determined that between 1950 and 2002 an estimated 4 percent of Catholic priests engaged in sexual relations with a minor, almost exclusively boys. Sex-abuse-related costs totaled $573 million, with $219 million covered by insurance companies; these numbers are lower than actual amounts paid, because some dioceses, most notably Boston, did not participate in the survey and because payments made after 2002 were not included. Most of the incidents of abuse, a full 75 percent, were found to have taken place between 1960 and 1984, but researchers are not certain of what this statistic might mean. Although the hope is that sexual abuse by priests has tapered off as time has progressed, the figure might indicate that people who are abused as children are hesitant to report it until they have grown up and that another wave of allegations will come up in the future. In all, the John Jay study found that sexual abuse had occurred in 95 percent of the dioceses in the

United States. Since 2004, another seven hundred priests have been removed from their positions in connection with this scandal.

School Integration

For a hundred years after the end of the Civil War, states were allowed to legally force black students and white students to attend different schools. The legal principle, upheld in the Supreme Court's ruling in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case of 1896, was that different races would be provided accommodations that were □separate but equal.□ In practice, however, the facilities provided for white students were almost always superior. This led to the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, during which segregation, or separation, of the races was challenged throughout the country. *Plessy* was overturned in 1954, in the case of *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, which ruled it illegal to refuse students admission to schools on the basis of race.

Although the law was clear, traditionalists who had grown up in a world where races did not interact with each other fought change. One of the most famous cases occurred in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957: black students were stopped from entering Central High School by a crowd of violent whites led by the state's own governor, Orval Faubus, and President Eisenhower had to order federal troops to the site to protect the students. Similar tensions occurred in 1963, when a black student, James Meredith, enrolled at the University of Mississippi, considered a bastion of southern segregationist tradition: riots and threats of lynching forced Meredith to live under the protection of National Guard troops for several months.

Segregation problems were most frequently associated with the South, but the struggle to integrate northern schools was just as difficult, and problems sometimes lingered longer. The schools of Washington, D.C., for instance, had been segregated for decades, with white families moving to the affluent suburbs, leaving schools in the city where blacks lived in overcrowded conditions and infrastructure was poorly maintained. After the *Brown* ruling, when the courts ordered that students from each area be transported by bus to the other areas in order to achieve more racial balance, violence became an almost daily occurrence, culminating in 1964 in a particularly bloody struggle between a predominantly white parochial school, St. John's, and the predominantly black school, Eastern.

The most notable holdout to integration in the North, however, was in Boston, where, as in Washington, whites and blacks lived in separate districts. Attempts to integrate Boston schools relied on complex busing systems, moving students of both races, often against their wills, for hours each morning to take them to learn in hostile environments. Although there were unfair aspects to busing, the alternative, which proved to be districts that were consciously arranged by the Boston School Board to keep races separate, were deemed by the courts to be even worse. The Boston plan, begun in 1974, led to years of violence and racial tension. While not always as legally complex or emotionally inflamed, similar integration struggles took place in cities throughout the North in the 1960s and 1970s.

Critical Overview

There is no question that *Doubt* was a breakthrough critical and popular success for Shanley. Although Shanley had seen his plays produced in New York City for more than twenty years, this was the first work to make the general public aware of him as a playwright. Previously, his claim to fame had been an Oscar for his first movie script, *Moonstruck* (1987), and as writer and director of the cult favorite *Joe versus the Volcano* (1990). Within months of its Broadway debut, the play had already taken the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, the Obie for its previous off-Broadway run, and several Tony Awards.

What captured the attention of the critics, garnering *Doubt* more serious consideration than other plays about serious, topical issues, is Shanley's finely tuned balance of the moral complexity of the issues he raises. As Charles Isherwood puts it in the *New York Times*, the play □is no hand-wringing tract about the abuse of power and religious hypocrisy.□ He goes on to see its larger implications: □The play is a quiet indictment of the reverence for righteousness that has become a hallmark of American culture in recent years.□ Robert Brustein, writing in the *New Republic*, dubs it □the strongest play about the Catholic clergy since Christopher Durang's *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All to You*, which also featured a splendid characterization . . . of a less-than-charitable nun.□ Brustein mentions in passing that the play might be a little too direct and unambiguous, but he generally finds it a □significant advance□ for Shanley. As Richard Zoglin puts it in a *Time* magazine article about must-see shows on Broadway, □Shanley's work packs more complexity, humanity□doubt□than plays twice its length.□

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1

Critical Essay #1

Kelly is an instructor of creative writing and literature. In this essay, he examines the relationships that the characters in this play have with the world outside the Church.

Shanley's drama *Doubt* centers on a nun in a Catholic parish in the Bronx in 1964. She starts the play with suspicions that a priest in the affiliated church is a sexual predator, and she makes it her mission to have him removed, regardless of the cost to herself, his presumed victim, or anyone else. The play is carefully crafted to raise important issues□from faith to cynicism, compassion to discipline, and righteousness to obedience□but it recognizes the complexity of all these ideas and avoids taking sides. For all the attention *Doubt* has gained in the media because of its timely subject matter, Shanley's real interest is in the interplay between certainty and uncertainty and how too much of either can be destructive. As such, the play's main character is neither the accuser, Sister Aloysius, nor the accused, Father Flynn; it is rather the young nun, Sister James, who can see the merits of being both steadfast and tolerant. Sister James could be considered a surrogate for the audience: a reasonable, neutral party who is willing to listen to what each side has to say. It is strange, then, that Shanley has her disappear from the play at the climactic moment. It is strange, but it works, because the absence of reason is the whole point.

Shanley uses the word □doubt□ in two specific, deliberate places, defining the extremism of the two main characters. Early on, before audiences have even been made aware of Sister Aloysius's suspicions of Father Flynn, the subject of his possibly having a shameful secret is raised when Sister Aloysius and Sister James are discussing his latest sermon, on the topic of Doubt. (Shanley uses the capital □D□ in the published script, even though theater audiences would not be aware of it.) Sister Aloysius wonders in a provocative way, □Is Father Flynn in Doubt, is he concerned that someone else is in Doubt?□ Much later, when her allegations of sexual abuse become apparent, this question makes sense; outside the context of his crime, however, it seems that Sister Aloysius, who is stringent in her ways, looks down on the priest only because he lacks absolute certainty. At the end of the play, though, having won a battle of wills over Father Flynn, Sister Aloysius suffers from her own uncertainty. □I have doubts!□ she exclaims to Sister James. □I have such doubts!□ If certainty is what allows Father Flynn to continue as a child molester without crumbling under a guilty conscience and what allows Sister Aloysius to doggedly pursue a possibly innocent man, then uncertainty in the play is not presented as being any more attractive.

This is not a play about the relative merits of child molesting or kindness but about that terrible feeling that one does not know the right course. The two main characters are each insulated, wrapped so deeply in their own self-assurance that they cannot relate to the world outside of themselves. They each feed off the self-righteousness of the other to nourish the righteousness of their own causes, unable, owing largely to surrounding circumstances, to see things in a larger context. Shanley uses the self-contained world of the parish to parallel the self-assured worlds of his characters' minds.

This is why Sister James is such a potentially important figure. Sister James agrees with many of the views of Father Flynn in regard to education and Christian behavior, approaching her job as a teaching nun with the attitude that love, not discipline, is the most important thing to offer her students. She is also in agreement with Sister Aloysius, however, that child molestation is an unthinkable crime that cannot be left unpunished. She is anguished, she wants her peace of mind, and she is as disgusted by Sister Aloysius's cold heart as she is by Father Flynn's alleged behavior. Her allegiances shift, depending on who is talking to her; in short, she is just as uncertain about how to morally judge these two people as most of the open-minded audience members are inclined to be. It would be nice if she could be a voice of moderation, to make the two sides recognize each other, but, given the political structure of the Church, that clearly is not possible. Neither her mother superior nor a priest has any inclination□or need□to listen to her.

It is therefore fitting that, when the final confrontation between Father Flynn and Sister Aloysius comes in act 8, Sister James is nowhere to be found. Later, when the excitement is all over, it is explained that she was out of town visiting her sick brother, whose illness has been mentioned earlier. (Showing concern for this brother is just one part of Father Flynn's charm offensive, to win Sister James to his side.) This absence in which she attends to other things changes the significance of Sister James in the story. Sister James avoids ending up being a junior version of either side or a combination of traits learned from Sister Aloysius and Father James, because she has a life outside the walls of St. Nicholas school and parish house. The play gives special significance to events that happen outside the insular church environment, showing separation from outer life as a direct cause of doubt and the inability to deal with it.

Each scene takes place on Church property, and the play only hints at what life is like beyond the Church's protection. Outside is a frightening world of violence and disease. One of the four onstage characters, Mrs. Muller, the mother of the boy whom Father Flynn is suspected of victimizing, lives in the secular world. She brings with her a sense of defeat that casts a cloud over the idealism of both Sister Aloysius's need for control and Father Flynn's need to love. Her son, Donald, has been beaten up, both by students at the public school he attended and by his own father, because of suspicions of homosexuality. Mrs. Muller understands that Father Flynn might be using her son sexually, but she accepts such abuse as being better than the violence of the world outside. The parish is a sanctuary for her, albeit a flawed one.

Sister Aloysius is the one member of the Church who has had significant experience with the outside world, having lived a secular life and having even been married before taking her vows. All she says about that time is that her husband fought and was killed in Italy during World War II. Her entry to the Church marked an escape from that violent world and, in itself, might be enough to explain her jaded view, her sense that such common pieces of life as ballpoint pens and sugar are luxuries that weaken the spirit. Shanley also provides a little background of her life within the Church, when, eight years earlier, at another parish, she played a part in the downfall of another sexually predatory priest. As much as life at St. Nicholas seems to be harmonious, a life like Sister Aloysius's will not let her leave appearances to speak for themselves.

Leading the life that Father Flynn has led, on the other hand, offers every encouragement to try to maintain the status quo. The priest has limited experiences to draw on: Sister James even comments on his frequent use of made-up stories for his sermons, which indicates talent and imagination but does not suggest any sort of personal history that he would care to recall. His history is with the Church, and, so far at least, it has been a successful one. If Sister Aloysius is right (and her successful bluff at the end indicates that she probably is), Father Flynn has behaved criminally before and beaten the rap, and so there is no reason to expect that he will not do so again. Perhaps he really does believe that his sexual relations with children are based in love, but, at some level at least, he knows that there is nowhere but the Church where such behavior would be protected. His past is within the Church, his future is within the Church, and in neither past nor future does his behavior earn him the sort of punishment that it would in the real world.

Having one of the key players, Sister James, go outside the Church while the other players battle each other within it is thus symbolically significant. Audiences can assume that Sister James will bring an outsider's view to the situation when she returns to it. For Sister Aloysius and Father James, though, there is nothing but symbolism to connect them to the outside world.

Sister Aloysius indulges in just one personal interest in this play: she listens to a transistor radio in act 8. Her listening is not for pleasure. She does not listen to music, she listens for news, which she relates to the time in her past when her husband was at war and she followed the news reports carefully. This curiosity about the outside world, her constant bracing for the tragedy that eventually did come in her husband's case, shows a lot about her imagination. Sister Aloysius spends her life preparing for the worst, and when she actually does find the worst in Father Flynn's actions, it seems almost a coincidence.

For Father Flynn, the outside world shows up in the form of a crow. Act 7, in which he makes the calmest and most convincing case for his innocence, is bracketed by the appearance of a crow overhead. His explanation to Sister James in that scene is entirely reasonable: he tells her how much he values the Christian principle of love and how much Sister Aloysius opposes such compassion, making it clear why she would try to distort his actions into looking like perversity. Because he apparently believes himself to be innocent, Father Flynn sounds innocent□that is, until the end of the scene, when Sister James leaves and he is left by himself. A crow, which he had accused of □complaining□ at the scene's start, caws again, and Father Flynn yells at it. For a man who has just explained his innocence, he betrays himself to be conscience-stricken.

Doubt conveys how the Church creates an environment that encourages security, an environment wherein the uncertainty that rules the outside world is minimized, if not overcome. Because she can see both Father Flynn's and Sister Aloysius's points of view, Sister James is in danger, throughout the play, of becoming an adherent of one or the other extreme; instead, she escapes the trap of narrow-mindedness by renewing her connection to the world. For those who do not leave the Church grounds, there are

only abstract images, such as voices on the radio or squawking birds, to remind them of the world they have shut out.

Source: David Kelly, Critical Essay on *Doubt*, in *Drama for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2006.

Quotes

"It was a public experience, shared by everyone in our society. It was awful, but we were in it together!" Father Flynn, p. 5

"For those so afflicted, only God knows their pain. Their secret. The secret of their alienating sorrow." Father Flynn, p.6.

"We simply have to get [William] through, out the door, and then he's somebody else's project." Sister Aloysius, p. 8.

"I'm sorry I'm not more forthright, but I must be careful not to create something by saying it. I can only say I am concerned, perhaps needlessly, about matters in St. Nicholas School." Sister Aloysius, p. 15.

"The rest of the game you're cooperating with your teammates, you're competing against the other team. But at the foul line, it's you against yourself." Father Flynn, p. 17.

"Well, if Sisters were permitted in the rectory, I would be interested to hear that talk. I don't know how to be a man. I would like to know what's involved." Sister Aloysius, p. 18.

"When you take a step to address wrongdoing, you are taking a step away from God but in His service. Dealing with such matters is hard and thankless work." Sister Aloysius, p. 20.

"If I could, Sister James, I would certainly choose to live in innocence. But innocence can only be wisdom in a world without evil. Situations arise and we are confronted with wrongdoing and the need to act." Sister Aloysius, p. 24.

"What with our being in black and white, and so prone to falling, we're more like dominos than anything else." Sister Aloysius, p. 26.

"'Frosty the Snowman' espouses a pagan belief in magic. The snowman comes to life when an enchanted hat is put on his head. If the music were more somber, people would realize the images are disturbing and the song heretical." Sister Aloysius, p.27.

"What actually happens in life is beyond interpretation. The truth makes for a bad sermon. It tends to be confusing and have no clear conclusion." Father Flynn, p. 39.

"...that was the message of the Savior to us all. Love. Not suspicion, disapproval and judgment. Love of people." Father Flynn, p. 41.

"You accept what you gotta accept and you work with it. That's the truth I know." Mrs. Muller, p. 48.

"You may think you're doing good [Sister], but the world's a hard place. I don't know that you and me are on the same side. I'll be standing with my son and those who are good with my son. It'd be nice to see you there." Mrs. Muller, p. 50.

"I will step outside the Church if that's what needs to be done, though the door should shut behind me! I will do what needs to be done, Father, if it means I'm damned to Hell! You should understand that, or you will mistake me." Sister Aloysius, p. 54.

"Are we people? Am I a person flesh and blood like you? Or are we just ideas and convictions. I can't say everything. Do you understand? There are things I can't say. Even if you can't imagine the explanation, Sister, remember that there are circumstances beyond your knowledge. Even if you feel certainty, it is an emotion and not a fact. In the spirit of charity, I appeal to you. On behalf of my life's work. You have to behave responsibly." Father Flynn, p. 55.

Topics for Further Study

In the twenty-first century, the number of nuns continues to diminish, and the average age of active nuns is getting older. Interview a nun (either in person or via the Internet) and find out what factors induced her to take her vows. Have another person read the interviewee's part as you present your conversation to your class.

Critics have tried to compare Sister Aloysius's willingness to take action, even without much evidence, to America's preemptive strike against Iraq in 2003. Research the arguments and lead a class discussion on the similarities and the differences between the two positions.

Sister Aloysius says that she entered the convent after her husband died during World War II. Research the ways in which important social upheavals, such as wars, famines, and the overthrow of governments, affect the enrollment numbers for religious orders and create a chart that shows the correlations.

In what ways do you think this story would have been different if St. Nicholas had been a racially integrated school? Find footage of news reports about school integration and put together a video montage of people talking about what it was like. Present it to the class, along with your views on the ways in which racial integration might have changed the story.

What Do I Read Next?

Shanley's best-known work is his screenplay for the movie *Moonstruck*. His 1994 two-person play *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea* (2000) has a similar romantic appeal. It is available in *Thirteen by Shanley*.

At the same time that *Doubt* was being performed on Broadway, Martin McDonagh's play *The Pillowman* (2004) was also running. The play is a hypnotic, Kafkaesque story of a writer who is interrogated by authorities in a fictitious authoritarian state for the similarities between incidents in his stories and a recent spree of child murders.

Cheryl L. Reed's 2004 study *Unveiled: The Hidden Lives of Nuns* is not, as its title might suggest, an exposé about the women who serve the Church but is instead the honest account of a wide variety of nuns from a selection of different orders throughout North America.

Christopher Durang's 1981 play *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You* is a comedy lampooning the stereotypical nuns that people remember from their childhood and, as such, can be seen as the temperamental opposite of *Doubt*. It is available in *Christopher Durang Explains It All for You: Six Plays*.

For a better sense of what life was like in the neighborhood of the play's St. Nicholas, read the wonderful history *The Bronx: It Was Only Yesterday, 1935-1965* (1992). The authors Lloyd Ultan and Gary Hermalyn provide background for a wealth of photos showing a life gone by.

Further Study

Berry, Jason, *Lead Us Not into Temptation: Catholic Priests and the Sexual Abuse of Children*, University of Illinois Press, 2000.

This book, originally published when the abuse story was first surfacing in 1992, is considered a classic in the study of what went wrong with the priesthood in the last half of the twentieth century.

Calhoun, Ada, "Bryony Lavery and John Patrick Shanley Dish about Religion," in *New York Magazine*, September 13, 2004, p. 61.

In a joint interview, Shanley and the playwright Bryony Lavery (*Last Easter*) consider the place that religion has in their works.

Foster, David Ruel, ed., *The Two Wings of Catholic Thought: Essays on Fides et Ratio,* Catholic University of America Press, 2003.

In 1998, Pope John Paul II issued an encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, proclaiming that reason and faith do not have to be considered separately but can be found together in Catholicism. The essays in this book examine the implications of that doctrine, which appears as one of the central conundrums of *Doubt*.

Wilson, Anna Victoria, and William E. Segall, *Oh, Do I Remember!: Experiences of Teachers during the Desegregation of Austin's Schools, 1964-1971*, State University of New York Press, 2001.

The authors repeat testimony of teachers and students who suffered through the awkward phases of including people of color into traditionally white school systems, giving a sense of the division that race can create in an academic setting.

Witchel, Alex, "The Confessions of John Patrick Shanley," in the *New York Times Magazine*, November 7, 2004, pp. 31-35.

This article was written at a time when three of Shanley's plays, including *Doubt*, were about to open in New York City.

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Brustein, Robert, □Prosecution Plays,□ in the *New Republic*, May 23, 2005, p. 27.

Isherwood, Charles, □Stories That Tell vs. Storytelling,□ in the *New York Times*, May 6, 2005, Section E, p. 1.

Zoglin, Richard, □4 Must-See Shows On (and Off) Broadway,□ in *Time*, April 25, 2005, p. 56.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's"For Students" Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently

studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals— helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man–the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. • Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an “at-a-glance” comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author’s time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes “The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,” a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children’s Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

"Night." Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234–35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the "Criticism" subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on "Winesburg, Ohio." Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335–39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. "Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition," Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9–16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133–36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. "Richard Wright: "Wearing the Mask," in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59–61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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