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“ONE STEPS AWAY FROM GOD”: AN ANALYSIS OF JOHN PATRICK SHANLEY’S
DOUBT, A PARABLE THROUGH A HERMENEUTICS OF THE IMAGINARY

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**“One Steps Away From God”: An Analysis of John Patrick Shanley’s
Doubt, a Parable through a Hermeneutics of the Imaginary**



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1. John Patrick Shanley 2. *Doubt, a Parable* 3. Teatro Norte-Americano Contemporâneo 4. Estudos do Imaginário

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RESUMO

A peça *Doubt, a Parable* (2004) de John Patrick Shanley revisita o mundo que ele conheceu quando criança – o bairro do Bronx dos anos 1960. A história se desenrola em uma comunidade escolar católica ítalo-irlandesa e o enredo diz respeito a uma dúvida – que se transforma em crença – por parte de uma das personagens, Irmã Aloysius, a diretora da escola. Ela acredita que o Padre Flynn esteja molestando sexualmente o único aluno negro da escola. A peça é uma construção em aberto, que permite a cada leitor/espectador construir sua própria interpretação dos fatos. Além de ser o autor da peça, Shanley também transformou seu texto teatral em roteiro para o cinema, e atuou como produtor da peça e roteirista e diretor do filme *Dúvida*, de 2008. Nesta dissertação examino as estratégias utilizadas por Shanley para manter a possibilidade de interpretação aberta quando ele traduz sua obra para mídias diferentes – na página, no palco, no cinema. Ao empreender tal análise, considero pertinente explorar padrões contemporâneos sobre questões como verdade, dúvida e certeza, porque as mesmas encontram-se imbricadas com o construto artístico examinado, favorecendo assim um olhar atento sobre o papel do autor e do leitor nesse processo. Para investigar as construções ideológicas que definem os elementos de dúvida e certeza, utilizo o conceito de Paradoxo do Imaginário, como proposto por Castor Bartolomé Ruiz (2003), dando especial atenção às questões relacionadas com o simbolismo da dúvida, tal como pode ser percebido na obra de Shanley.

Palavras Chave: John Patrick Shanley – *Doubt, a Parable* – Teatro Norte-Americano Contemporâneo – Estudos do Imaginário

ABSTRACT

John Patrick Shanley's play *Doubt - a Parable* (2004) revisits the world he knew as a child, which is the Bronx of the 1960's. The story centers upon a Catholic Irish-Italian school community, and the plot relates to a doubt - that grows into belief, and ends up as certainty - on the part of Sister Aloysius, the principal of the school, who is persuaded that Father Flynn, the vicar, has been harassing the only Black student in the school. The play is an open-ended construct, allowing each reader/spectator to build their own interpretation of the facts implied. Shanley is more than the author of the play. He has also worked as the producer of the play on the stage and he turned the story into a movie screenplay, *Doubt*, and has worked as a director to the movie. In this thesis I examine the strategies used by Shanley to keep the possibility of interpretation open as he translates his own work into different media, on the page, on the stage and on the screen. As I do that, I also consider the contemporary standards regarding issues as truth, doubt, certainty, especially as they constitute themselves aesthetically in the fictional world, thus reexamining the role of the author and the role of the reader in the process. So as to investigate the ideological constructions that define the elements of doubt and certainty I refer to the concept of "paradoxes of the imaginary" as proposed by Castor Bartolomé Ruiz (2003), with special attention to questions concerning the symbolism of doubt as perceived in Shanley.

Key words: John Patrick Shanley – *Doubt, a Parable* – Contemporary American Drama – Studies of the Imaginary

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INTRODUCTION

“The truth is never pure and rarely simple”

Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Ernest*

When I was an altar boy at the age of ten I would always get to the church in our parish early in the morning, so I could join the others in the raffle of which one of the altar boys would ring the bells during the celebration of the mass. I used to love ringing the bells, although I cannot explain why. The sounds evolved through me in a sense that I would feel like I belonged to all that magical ritual performed by the priest. I used to serve all the three masses on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. I also studied in the parish’s school – an institution run by the Congregation of the Sisters of the Divine Providence. My childhood was full of the Catholic imagery and myths that have helped to build up who I am, and have also affected the way I face life. From that time, the images related to the nuns of the school are carved in a strong way in my memory. They were really serious and very demanding in academic issues. I can virtually see the way they would walk through the school’s corridors, dressed in their grey habits looking for unruly students behind their thick glasses.

Hence, I believe that the first impetus of this thesis is to sneak around and snoop behind the curtains to get to know more about these women who devote their lives to their God in their mysterious responsibilities. Secondly, this is a work about doubt. And it is also about a play and a playwright that seem both immersed in doubts. This author, John Patrick Shanley, has written more than twenty plays and he has won many important literary prizes, the Pulitzer among them. In this sense, after doing some research at the CAPES Database, I take pride in being the first person to write a thesis about Shanley in Brazil.

The play *Doubt – a Parable* (2004) is a work about doubts. We can see in this aesthetic construct a combination of images that relate to questions that have been haunting

contemporary ethics and philosophy. The two millennia of Christianity that have forged our history are now being deconstructed and analyzed by contemporary thinkers. As the good comes along with the bad, there is a good side and a bad side to this process. On the one hand, the realization that there is no immanent truth, but rather a number of different approaches to the same phenomena, is redeeming and allows people to move in a freer and more independent way. On the other hand, the price paid for that has impaired any possibility of mythical thought in the present day when people seem to have more difficulty in finding a balance between reality and imagination¹, reason and symbolic thought, technology and humanization. We have come close to an aporia where all our doubts seem to be meaningless.

Shanley's play invites us to an investigation of this present tension, by approaching the issue of doubt. The receptors (readers and spectators) are provoked into considering the different sides to the notion of Truth, which foments our uncertainties about what is real in a world that sometimes seems unreal. According to Shanley,

It is a doubt (so often experienced initially as weakness) that changes things. When a man feels unsteady, when he falters, when hard-won knowledge evaporates before his eyes, he's on the verge of growth. The subtle or violent reconciliation of the outer person and the inner core often seems at first like a mistake, like you've gone the wrong way and you're lost. But this is just emotion longing for the familiar. Life happens when the tectonic power of speechless soul breaks through the dead habits of the mind. Doubt is nothing less than an opportunity to reenter the Present. (Shanley, 2009, p.8)

Here I pose the questions related to this research: How are our deepest doubts shaped? What layers underline our contemporary culture of uncertainties? What sustains the Western perception of the world? What questions should we ask in this fragmented society, whose aesthetical notions have been changing constantly throughout constant breakings and rearrangements? How are such issues approached in the fields of Literature and Art? How to investigate what is unsaid? What are our current beliefs? Do we have any? Is it possible to represent our deepest concerns through Literature? What conceptions underlie a contemporary play? What values motivate its characters and the way they perceive the world? We have

¹ To the aims of this work reality and imagination are treated as dichotomies that are understood through different philosophical postures, bound to Hermeneutics of the Imaginary, such as Gaston Bachelard's and Castor Bartolomé Ruiz's, and to Comparative Mythology Studies as Mircea Eliade's and Joseph Campbell's. Here, Reality represents materiality, or those aspects that can be grasped through reason, while Imagination is bound to the branch of images conceived by human mind that do not have the aspect of materiality.

reached an anguished aporia, an ending path, where a tired humanity stands divided between dichotomies such as action and thought, symbolic and material, production of technological innovation and production of consciousness and sensibility, myth and reason. We have been living in a culture of doubts.

As this is a wide-spreading discussion, ranging through the territories of Philosophy, Ethics, Morality, History, Religion, and Anthropology, my efforts will be constrained, as much as possible, to the limits of the fictional context of *Doubt - a Parable*, lest I lose control of the discussion. The point to stress here is that we are not always aware about the extent of our own doubts, or even about what doubts really are. According to Louis Althusser (1967) (ALTHUSSER: 2005, p. 1298), if we trust we subscribe to a certain ideology, and suddenly find ourselves acting against the things we believe, that is a symptom that we are exposed to more ideologies than the one we accept as true. And being exposed to a plethora of information is the trademark of our present time. As a consequence, uncertainty has played a main role in our perception of the world; this is the archetype to our days. And what is the role of individuality in this massively globalized society? What is true and what is not? What is doubt? John Patrick Shanley's work poses these questions. In Shanley's words,

What is a doubt? Each of us is like a planet. There's the crust, which seems eternal. We are confident about who we are. If you ask, we can readily describe our current state. I know my answers to so many questions, as you do. What was your father like? Do you believe in God? Who's your best friend? What do you want? Your answers are your current topography, seemingly permanent, but deceptively so. Because under that face of easy response, there is another You. And this wordless Being moves just as the instant moves; it presses upward without explanation, fluid and wordless, until the resisting consciousness has no choice but to give way. (Shanley, 2009, p.8)

This thesis addresses such questions so as to put forward an argumentative balance among the paradoxes of the imaginary² as perceived in John Patrick Shanley's play *Doubt - a*

² The line of Studies of the Imaginary investigates images that reverberate in all ages and that are bound to the theory of symbols and archetypes by Carl Gustav Jung. These studies have risen especially in France, and are carried out in philosophy by Gaston Bachelard's *Hermeneutics of the Imaginary*, in anthropology by Gilbert Durand, and in Comparative Mythology by Mircea Eliade and by the American scholar Joseph Campbell. It is also important to highlight the importance of the studies developed by Northrop Frye, who has approximated these questions Literature. In Brazil, we have three representative names of the field in Ana Maria Lisboa de

Parable (2004), through a reading engaged with a Hermeneutics of the Imaginary. This is not a work meant to answer questions, but to provoke them. As Beatriz Sarlo³ suggests, questions are not always to be answered,

Precisamente, los problemas que enfrentamos no tienen, como nunca tuvieron los problemas sociales, una solución inscripta en su enunciado. Se trata más bien de preguntar para hacer ver y no preguntar para encontrar, de inmediato, un guía para la acción. No son preguntas de qué hacer sino del cómo armar una perspectiva para ver. Hoy, si algo puede definir a la actividad intelectual, sería precisamente la interrogación de aquello que parece inscripto en la naturaleza de las cosas, para mostrar que las cosas no son inevitables.⁴ (Sarlo, p.15)

When John Patrick Shanley devised *Doubt – a Parable*, he got engaged in writing a play about the world he knew in the 1964 Bronx – his own neighborhood. At that time, he was a boy from an Irish family inserted in a Catholic community that had its parish divided between Irish and Italian families. This scenery has played a very important role in his plays. As one can notice, the Bronx is very recurrent in Shanley’s works, such as in *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea*, *Welcome to the Moon* and *Italian American Reconciliation*. In these plays, we find reflexes of Shanley’s childhood’s neighborhood, through characters that represent the kind of people the author used to observe when he lived there.

Doubt – a parable is not different from the other plays in this respect. The story is set in a Bronx Catholic community with its center at St Nicholas church and school - formed basically by Irish and Italian students. The principal of the school, Sister Aloysius, is both a nun and the head of the school. The other characters are Sister James, a nun and a teacher of St Nicholas school, Father Flynn, the priest responsible by St Nicholas parish, and Mrs. Muller, the mother of the only African – American student in the place – Donald Miller. In

Mello, Castor Bartolomé Ruiz and Maria Zaira Turchi. More than a review of this studies, however, the present thesis aims to use them so as to analyse the tension between the symbolic and the rational aspects of the work.

³ Beatriz Sarlo is an Argentine literary and cultural critic. She is also founding editor of the cultural journal *Punto de Vista*. Sarlo has also taught at several US universities, held the Simón Bolívar chair at the University of Cambridge, and has been a visiting fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. She also writes regularly for Argentine newspapers such as *La Nación* and *Clarín*.

⁴ My translation: “Indeed, the problems we face do not have, as the social problems have never had, a solution in the registered enunciation. It is rather a matter of asking to understand, and to devise a line of action, rather than asking to find the answer. They are not questions about what to do, but about how to find a way to perceive. If there is something to define intellectual activity, that would be precisely the question of what seems enrolled in the nature of things to show that things are not inevitable.”

this setting a number of dramatic tensions are articulated, that involve as varied thematic lines as relations of power, sexuality, gender, color, morality and ethics. Despite the setting, however, Shanley says (SHANLEY, 2005, p.8) that it is not a play about Catholicism, Sisters of Charity⁵ or a discussion on religious beliefs or racial segregation. The author sees this work as a play about doubt.

The plot develops around Sister Aloysius's suspicion, which grows into persuasion and certainty, that Father Flynn is molesting Donald Miller, the Black Student. She is struck by that notion after Sister James – Donald's teacher – comments that Donald came to the class from the church seeming frightened and with alcohol smell in his breath. Donald does that after a private meeting he had with Father Flynn. This is the central conflict in the play, and can be interpreted by the reader or spectator in different ways, depending on the point of view he sides with. To Sister Aloysius, this is a case of pedophilia; Father Flynn denied the accusation and states his point; Sister James is pressed between two strong persuasive argumentations. The play unfolds as a series of dialogues, punctuated by three monologues – being two of them sermons delivered by Father Flynn to his congregation on the subjects of doubt and gossip. These sermons are self-revealing and can be even taken as self-incriminating. If we consider the play as drama, as a text to be experienced from the page, there are two referents that immediately come to the mind of an English speaking proficient reader. The first are the sermons by Rev. Dimmesdale, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* (HAWTHORNE, 1988), which can be either taken as admission of blame or represent a saintly plea so that God have mercy on human weakness. The second literary echo found in this play retraces James Joyce's short story "The Sisters", and shall be further discussed farther along in the thesis.

Whenever the play is put on stage, the subtlety involving the innuendoes of what might or might not have happened in the church depend on the lines of action taken by the director and on the interpretation of the actors. In each new production these ingredients will integrate in a different way. This is why I will not plunge deeply into the possibilities of the play on the stage in this thesis. I will rather concentrate the comparative comments on the relations involving the text of the play and the screenplay written by Shanley to the movie

⁵ This is a congregation of religious women in the Catholic Church whose primary missions are education and nursing and who are dedicated in particular to the service of the poor. They have a very important role in Shanley's play *Doubt – a Parable*. He dedicates his play to the many orders of Catholic nuns who have devoted their lives to serving others in hospitals, schools and retirement homes.

Doubt (2008). Something will be said, also, about the choices that show in the interpretations provided by Meryl Streep and Philip Seymour Hoffman to sustain this tension.

The reasons why I chose *Doubt - a parable* as the corpus for my thesis are at the same time emotional and rational. Emotional because, as stated in the opening paragraph of this work, Shanley's plunge into the settings of his childhood invoked similar memories in my own life. Rational because writing one's thesis forces one to stand tall and to state one's ideas about a number of things. My choice was for *Doubt, a Parable*, for three reasons: first, I would work with theories on the Imaginary, the critical approach upon which I have been building my life as a researcher for at least the last six years; second, this allows me to approximate the fields of Literature, Criticism and Performance, which represent the three subjects that please me most; and lastly, the thematic core of this play - the issues of Doubt and Certainty - represent the state of art of current intellectual investigation, and I would like to say something on that respect as well.

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first brings the contextualized information I consider relevant for the development of the discussion to be held in the work, centering on things, places and kinds of experience that were part of the life of the person John Patrick Shanley; that have played their part in the shaping of the author John Patrick Shanley; and that have been used in due time as materials appropriated and worked by the author so as to constitute the reality inherent to his fictional world. This section also discusses the reception of *Doubt, a Parable*. The second chapter, entitled *Shaping Imaginary*, addresses the theories of imaginary in the aspects they can prove useful in the analysis of the play. In the third chapter, *Unveiling the Symbolic*, I present my reading of the play - one among the many possibilities of interpretation. The basis for my reading comes from the analysis of a set of images, symbols and archetypes according to the precepts from the theoretical line selected, namely the school of the Imaginary. This is also a chapter to present my view on Shanley's movie adaptation of his play *Doubt, a Parable*.

Bachelard's Phenomenology of the Imaginary stresses the importance of imagination as occupying a central position in human knowledge. It understands images as innately impressed in the human mind, emerging into consciousness and creativity. Human beings are creative by nature, we do not explain the world only in a rational way, but act creatively upon it. This is reflected in the way we give sense to things, and in the way we insert ourselves in

the world. The imaginary and the symbolic are part of our insertion in this world. They are determinant of our understanding of the chaos of life and they organize our representations of the world. In Philip Malrieu's words, imagination is action,

Entre a função de abertura ao conhecimento desempenhada pela imaginação e sua função existencial existem laços profundos. Ela engloba, com efeito, um movimento duplo. A imaginação permite que o sujeito exista, que se comporte em relação às coisas e aos outros não já em função das suas necessidades mas em função de um modelo, que não é um modelo propriamente acabado mas que é elaborado pelo próprio ato de imaginar. O imaginário é a retoma, a situação das imagens espontâneas num quadro que lhe confere uma significação. Essa retoma é um ato de unificação do eu, de relação de condutas primitivamente separadas e pode ser efetuado em vários níveis.⁶ (Malrieu, 2002 p. 237)

The importance of imagination and the use that artists make of it to translate human values is one of the main interests of the Phenomenology of the Imaginary. They are strongly connected with the theory of symbols and archetypes by Carl Gustav Jung, nowadays a widespread theory on the unconscious. This ramification of philosophy, psychoanalysis and ontology was adopted by many scholars, such as Mircea Eliade, Joseph Campbell, David Leeming and Northrop Frye (among others) in an attempt to grasp specific social occurrences like art, religion and mythology. These studies have been called Studies of the Imaginary, because they contemplate different areas of knowledge, all put together in the search of an understanding of what human imagination really is and what its function in society is.

Analyzing a literary work through such theories proves to be a useful way to perceive the object as a product conceived by the tension between imagination and reason. This tension is what we conventionally call the paradoxes of imagination, in the jargon. The paradox lies exactly in the tension provoked by materiality and symbols as they are presented in our society. Imagination and reason are inseparable; one cannot exist without the other. The studies of the imaginary place imagination in a central position, as a way to understand human production of knowledge. Castor Bartolomé Ruiz makes a defense of such studies saying that,

⁶ My translation: There are deep connections between the function of opening to knowledge performed by imagination and its existential function. This comprises, in effect, a double movement. Imagination allows the subject to exist, to behave in relation to things and the others, no longer depending on their needs but in terms of a model, a model that is not exactly over, but which is prepared by the very act of imagining. The imaginary is the recovery, the situation of spontaneous imagery in a context which gives it a meaning. This recovery is an act of unification of the self, in relation to behavior originally separate and that can be made at various levels.

(...) estamos resgatando dos porões da exclusão aquela que foi habitualmente considerada a “louca da casa”: a imaginação. Pobre louca, tão vilipendiada durante séculos de filosofia ocidental. Ela é a dimensão humana que nunca se conseguiu controlar. Por esse motivo, foram estabelecidas as mais variadas formas de domesticação sobre ela. Em último extremo, quando se chegou a convicção de que era inútil o esforço para sufocá-la, foi enclausurada no mundo da falácia, pendurando sobre ela o epíteto de perigo; a imaginação é uma alucinação. Mas ela ressurgue outra vez desde todas as perspectivas possíveis na mente do cientista e da mão dos poetas, na reflexão do filósofo e na experiência dos místicos, na criação do artista e na práxis do revolucionário, no planejamento da gestão e na esperança da utopia.⁷ (Ruiz, 2003 p.52)

Doubt - a Parable has an astonishing ending, driving the reader/audience to an open-ended closing. The fact that there is no conclusive evidence about Father Flynn’s guilt or innocence respecting the accusation cast upon him is disquieting in many ways. In case he is guilty, the fact that he is not punished is outrageous. On the other hand, in case he is not, the uncertainty provoked by the scandal will follow him for life, which is cruelly unfair. But perhaps the more interesting trait about this play is the way it changes not only from reader to reader, but also from reading to reading. Each time we read the play, or see the play, or watch the movie, new hints and new motives and symbols can be perceived, and that can change our perception of things. I have accessed these texts, *Doubt - a Parable* (on the page and on the stage), and *Doubt* (the movie), several times, and was shocked about the changes that took place in my perception of the facts involved, along this process. This reminds me of the text “Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics”, by Stanley Fish (FISH, 1986), where he says that there is only one first reading to a text; there is only one second reading to a text; and so forth.

It all depends on the response of the reader/spectator - because fortunately we are dealing with the fictional world. In case we were in the actual world I could be writing “It all depends on the response of the jury”. In either case, Shanley’s work addresses the contemporary issues of lack of certainties about practically everything: “What do you do

⁷ My translation: We are rescuing Imagination from the attics of exclusion, she who has been usually taken as considered the "mad woman of the house": imagination. Poor little thing, so despised for centuries of Western philosophy. It is the human dimension that was never managed to be controlled. For this reason, we established the most varied shapes of domestication on it. As a last resort, when it reached the conviction that it was futile effort to suppress that, it was cloistered in the world of fallacy, hanging on it the epithet of danger, the imagination is a hallucination. But it rises again from every possible perspective on the scientist's mind and the hand of the poet, on the philosopher's reflection and on the experience of mystics, in the creation of the artist and the revolutionary practice, planning and management in hopes of utopia.

when you are not sure?” (Doubt, a Parable, 2005, p. 5). In other words, the textual fabric of the play develops on the matter of doubts and how they can be “a bond as powerful as certainty” (Idem, p. 6). In the preface to *Doubt – a Parable* Shanley declares that contemporary life has led him to a bitter necessity to question old values, and that that has taken him into a branch of doubts,

There is an uneasy time when belief has begun to slip, but hypocrisy has yet to take hold, when consciousness is disturbed but not yet altered. It is the most dangerous, important, and ongoing experience of life. The beginning of change is the moment of Doubt. It is that crucial moment when I renew my humanity or become a lie. (Shanley, 2005, p. 9)

Roland Barthes, in *Poétique du Recit*, reminds us that the person is one thing, and the author is another thing; and so are the narrator and the characters in the text. There are bonds and connections linking them, but there are differences as well. Who is Shanley when he writes a preface to his own play? Still the author, a critic, just another reader? Shanley intrudes upon his own play in more ways than one. When he puts the play on the stage and does the casting, when he writes the screenplay and changes and adapts this and that, when he translates his own work into other languages, then he is shaking my old safe structural notions about the roles to be played by the author, by the reader, by the critic and the translator. I think this is a contemporary discussion that deserves to be approached, even if tentatively, with a comment here and there, which I intend to do as we move through this thesis.

As Shanley allows himself to say more about his play, and puts himself in the interesting role of translator, he approaches his original work *Doubt – a Parable* through four different directions: he is first the playwright conceiving a textual fabric destined to be performed on the stage, secondly producer providing and feeding the first performance of *Doubt* on the stage, then as the screenwriter responsible for the adaptation of the play to the filmic language, and finally he is the director of *Doubt* on the screen. Shanley is not the only artist to do so, in fact there is a whole wave of artists who are able to who prefer to lead the media development of their works on their own.

Drama has always been a complex kind of text because it contains many particularities inside a structure that may apparently seem simple. First, it is complicated to say to what extent drama belongs in Literature. Not only because of its structure, but also because of the

elements that compose a play and that depend on a different kind of materiality than that allowed by the written text. These elements are vital parts of a play and they cannot be ignored by anyone who wants to make a serious analysis of that play. The effect that a play causes is different from the effect of a novel, or a poem, because it does not depend only on the text written on the page. As film theorist Dr Gerald Mast reminds us,

One can easily define what a novel concretely, physically is: it is that piece of matter one holds in one's hands, its letters printed on paper and bounded by the covers in which those pieces of paper have been gathered. But a play has no similar concrete, physical existence. The object that one can hold in one's hand is not a play but the script of a play. Nor is a performance of that text the play but a performance or production of the play. A play, then, is not a physical thing at all but an imaginary ideal: either the imaginary combination of all possible performances and productions of that script or the idealized "best" performance that can be imagined (by whom? at what time?) from that script. As teachers of literature we frequently pretend that the text of the play is the play, as if it were a novel written in speeches. (Mast, 1982, p. 287)

The fact is that a play can be faced as a conglomerate of languages put together to be heard and to be watched by someone. It depends on as many elements as the text, the actors, the director, the producer, the technicians, light, scenery, music, costumes, make-up, and space. Actually from these aspects I take three as the most relevant: the text, the actor and the audience – leave out one of these three elements and we won't have a play.

Although I am simplifying the question by referring to general knowledge of what a play is, I think it is important to reinforce some aspects that will be important to this thesis. When we analyse a play we must consider that it is both a piece of literature, and also a space for performance that cannot be repeated twice in the same way. In a sense, the interaction between the actors and the audience makes them the owners of the play, because they are responsible for creating a believable fictional life. They cannot crystallise their art, though, because it lasts one single moment. Although actors can make use of many techniques, nonetheless they cannot repeat the same text in the same way twice, because the actor is not the same. He is a human being who is, as Stanislavski⁸ says, invested of a second nature,

⁸ Konstantin Sergeyevich Stanislavski was a Russian actor and theatre director. His innovative contribution to the acting art is based on a method of physical actions that are related to an emotional memory. So, the actor explores his own emotional memories to bring out concrete actions that will feed life to a fictional character.

lending his body to the text, using his body in a completely different way from what non-actors would use. Still, they are as vulnerable to the same daily changes as we are. So, the greatest challenge of the actor is to make this daily quest for the truth of his character believable.

Then we have the director, a central figure in contemporary theatre art. Directors are also the owners and the intellectuals responsible for giving a play its form, and also for proposing a new and fresh interpretation to it. If we have as many Hamlets as we have different actors role playing Hamlet, so we will have as many different interpretations to the same text as we have different directors. In this sense, drama, literature and cinema are very close to one another. Mast reminds us of these similarities talking about the role of interpretation in cinema and literature. According to him,

(...) more to the point for literary scholars, does one condemn Shakespeare or Chaucer for their alterations of their source materials, for their hammering the original Boccaccio story or Holinshed chronicle into the form they needed for their own particular concerns in that particular narrative? Although the filming of a literary work has been called “adaptation” by some and “translation” by others, both terms imply (indeed demand) a respect for the original text as the fixed foot of a compass around which the film version must resolve. If one terms the film work an “interpretation” of the original text (as Verdi’s *Otello* is an operatic interpretation of Shakespeare’s play or as Shakespeare’s *Henry V* is a dramatic interpretation of Holinshed’s history), the burden for artists becomes wholeness and integrity of their artistic interpretations, not their loyalty to the original. Further, critics who claim that a film violates the integrity of the original material can only mean that the film violates either their own interpretations of the original or the general consensus regarding the interpretation of the original work. Seen in this manner, the critical problem is not of two competing works of art (film versus literary text) but of two competing interpretations (the critic’s and the filmmaker’s) of the same work of art. While the critical interpretation owes its loyalty to the original work, the artistic interpretation becomes an original work in its own right. (Mast, 1982, p.281)

And we still have the presence of the writer, dead or alive, who is the main owner of the play, whose words are repeated through the years in multiple performances. However, we have been witnesses to a new phenomenon in contemporary drama art – the multiple artist, who performs several functions at the same time. Of course this is not something new – Shakespeare was responsible for writing, directing and role playing in his group. Nevertheless, nowadays these characteristics come to scene again, and we have the presence

of artists who are also responsible for the translation of their works into different languages - as cinema, for instance.

This kind of artist was foreseen by Antonin Artaud, who in his book *The Theatre and its Double*, professed that postmodern world would give birth to a new kind of artist, cruel and capable of translating himself in different the artistic languages with the same proficiency (ARTAUD, 1998, p.156). Artaud looked forward to this theatre of cruelty that would able to provoke the nausea of being alive in modern times. This feeling of void and this lack of guidance felt by Artaud are the main aspects of contemporary drama and contemporary theatre performances.

In this scenario, it is impossible to have closed boundaries delimiting what a play is - written, performed or even adapted to the cinema. All these boundaries have been suffering constant breakings and rearrangements and are very supple in the present days. Nonetheless we have to say that there still is a difference when we talk about a play on the page, on the stage and on the screen – the eye that looks at it. While reading a play the reader is responsible for imagining the scenes and characters without any exterior help. The play performed on the stage imposes all these elements on the watcher, but without giving a direction to the watcher's eye. When someone watches a play it is possible to listen to the text and see the sequence of images at the same time, but it is the watcher who decides what he/she wants to observe. In this case, the watcher is the responsible of what he will see. There is a third possibility that is a play adapted into a movie. In this case we have the eye of the director who conducts the camera lens as he understands the play he has read. In the cinema we do not have the possibility of looking to what we want as in the performance on the stage, because the filmmaker will guide our eyes during the telling of the story. In this sense, watching a film is like reading a piece of criticism. In both cases we read on the second degree, we read *apud*. We read someone else's reading of the original text. And when the text is as subtle and delicate as the one we have in *Doubt - a Parable*, any little detail may make a difference in the conclusion we get. In this sense, I can say that the investigation this thesis is committed with is “my reading of *Doubt, a Parable* and Shanley's reading of Shanley's play” as he translates himself from the page into the screen. I will skip the translation into the stage, because that enterprise would be unfeasible in the limited time span of a master's research.

Furthermore, there are many possibilities of reading and approach involving the reader of drama, the audience in the theatre and the watcher in a movie. There are many different kinds of language involved. We can see a play as a holistic construct that takes place in a tension produced by the clash between materiality and imagination.

Since there are so many sides to the many-folded circumstances involving the creation, the development and the plot of *Doubt - a Parable* and its multiple translations, the focus of this dissertation must be very clearly presented. As a consequence to that, many things I would like to do, and many courses I would like to pursue, will have to be relinquished lest I get lost in the forest and fail to reach my aim. Therefore, here is the pledge to be fulfilled in the work: chapters one and two offer the keys to chapter three. And chapter three comes divided into two sections. One of them presents my reading of the play *Doubt - a Parable* using as tool the instrument the means afforded by the Studies on the Imaginary. The other presents my reading of Shanley's reading of his own play.



1 A Play Carved on Doubts

What are authors made of? What are plays made of? Many thesis and books could be written on those subjects. For the sake of this chapter, however, we will simply consider some facts and elements that belong in the life of the person John Patrick Shanley, which contributed to make of him the man he is, to define his approach to things, to the world and to art, perhaps even to waken in him the drive to write which ended up creating the author who wrote the play that is the focus of this work. The facts connected to the person inevitably influence the author, and determine the laws of the fictional world he creates. We should not make the mistake of believing, however, that the keys to the issues of the fictional world can be extracted from the life of the author, because the world of life and the fictional world belong in different spheres, they have different kinds of reality and they work differently. In Shanley's case, some of the ingredients that form the person and that have a reflex in the fiction created by the author are Shanley's American-Irish ancestry, his being brought in a Catholic neighborhood, the Bronx, New York, the time-span, the closeness to Broadway, Off-Broadway, Off-Off Broadway, and other interesting details that we unveil now.

1.1 John Patrick Shanley in the Present American Scene

“Writing is acting is directing is living your life. I see no difference between writing a play and living my life. The same things that make a moment in my life succeed, combust, move, these same things make a moment in my playwriting have life. And when I move in my writing, I have moved in my life. There is no illusion. It is all the same thing.”

John Patrick Shanley, *13 by Shanley*

Contemporary American drama offers a rich panorama of present-day life in the United States, inviting the reader/audience into considering and discussing present-day themes as racism, AIDS, economic crises, and the process of adaptation involved in the mixing of foreign cultures in the American melting-pot. Current playwrights, like John Guare, Tony Kushner, Emily Mann - or John Patrick Shanley, the object of this thesis - have stretched the limits of authorship. Not only do they write their plays, but also put them on stage as directors and/or producers when the plays are put on stage. If the work is translated into the movie media, the authors often write the screenplay, direct the movies, answer for the production, for the casting, sometimes even work as actors as well. In 1967, Alan S. Downer, Chairman of the Department of English at Princeton University, stated that theater would survive and prosper in the future, however he could not envision in what precise way. He trusted that American drama would always remain “a popular art, reflecting the nation and its experience” (DOWNER, 1967, p. 213). He also stated that any kind of speculation in the future of American drama would be innocuous; it would all depend on the movements of American culture and history. Downer also refers to the difference between the two aspects of a play, on the page, and on the stage, and the different elements that affect the reader and the audience,

But the literature of the theater, the permanent shelf of dramatic classics, has always been much smaller than the repertory of the theater, the plays which draw and hold audiences night after night. It is not just in America that audiences are drawn more to performances than to play texts; it is the player who attracts our first allegiance. And it is certainly true that in recent decades those American players who have been most attractive – the most enfolding personalities, the most skilled craftsmen – have found their vehicles in the musical play and comedies of sex and domesticity. (Downer, 1967, p.220)

Downer is right when he considers the different elements that may account for the success or popularity in drama, musicals and comedies, especially if we consider the peculiarities of the American taste. Because of the American tradition of movie-making, also, the importance of the role of the actor also acquired a totally new dimension. In this sense, Downer is also right when, speaking from the 1960's, he acknowledges he cannot foresee to what extent the art of playwriting would develop in the next decades. One of the features that acquired new dimensions relates to the role of the actor as an integrative part of the creative process. With the strong movement of the researches of different acting techniques – that can be traced back to the famous method of Constantin Stanislavski, passing through the theories

of Meyerhold⁹, Michael Chekhov and Jerzi Grotowski¹⁰, until reaching the adopted methods of Eugenio Barba¹¹, and Peter Brook¹², the artist related to theater has a huge branch of aesthetical options when he lends his talent and his body to enhance the discussion of the social issues present in the culture reflected in the play he embodies.

The method of Stanislavski was disclosed in the United States through the hands of one of his brightest pupils – Michael Chekhov, who was the responsible for the wide spreading of the naturalistic method, and explored the question of how to access the unconscious creative self through indirect non-analytical means. This method changed the notion of what good acting was, in the fifties, and never ceased to influence the further developments in acting techniques from them on. It was a great success at that time and he planted the seeds to the reformulation of the American scene through the teaching of his method, and also because such method fomented the opening of one of the most prestigious acting schools of the United States – the Actor’s Studio.

The Actor’s Studio opened in 1947 in New York City as a membership organization for professionals bound to the theatrical doings. It was also developed as a school for actors, in which the students are exposed mainly to the theories of Stanislavski, as a way to approach a role in a play or in a movie. They have also refined Stanislavski’s and Chekhov’s methods of dramatic training. It was thought as a place where the artists would have enough space to develop their acting skills and to approach their roles without the pressures of commercial productions. Marlon Brando, Marilyn Monroe, Robert de Niro, Paul Newman, Sally Field, Shelley Winters, and Alec Baldwin are just some of the alumni from Actor’s Studio. It is important to highlight the creation of such place, because it encompasses the new path the

⁹ Meyerhold brought the experimentalism of the symbolism to the theatre through his Biomechanics techniques, which aimed at improving actors and dancers body performance.

¹⁰ He was a Polish director who creates the concept of the “Poor Theatre”, in which all the production elements are used only as a support for the performer. The main aspect of the Poor Theatre is the acting itself. Grotowski also developed the concept of an Acting Laboratory, in which the actor observes real living situations in order to improve his/her performance.

¹¹ Barba is an Italian director who created the concept of Theatre Anthropology, a very intricate method to develop dancers and actors skills. He was the one responsible for bringing the knowledge of Ancient Oriental Theatre – as Kabuki for instance – into the Occidental theatrical scene. In 1979 Eugenio Barba founded the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA).

¹² Brook is the English director responsible for the founding of the International Centre for Theatre Research, a multinational company of actors, dancers, musicians and others which travelled widely in the Middle East and Africa in the early 1970s. He is very influenced by the work of Grotowski, creating the concept of Void Space, in which the performer is highlighted by the absence of elements in the scene.

actor will tread from that moment on. The importance of the developing of skilled dramatic abilities becomes in the present scene as important as the craft of a script or a play.

The fifties were also eyewitness of the growth of one of the most influential American groups of theatrical research – The Living Theatre. The group was created as a counter-culture counterpart to Broadway shows feeding its aesthetical ideas from the theories of the French playwright and theoretician Antonin Artaud. Artaud was responsible for the elaboration of a new concept of performance that broke the invisible walls that used to separate actors from audience, in a new kind of performance named Theater of Cruelty. The use of such theories, allied to a very powerful profusion of colors, nudity, light, moving scenarios and political ideologies established a pattern to be followed by groups all over the world. It highly influenced groups in France, Germany, and England. Even in Brazil, when we consider the roots of groups such as *Teatro Oficina* from *Rio de Janeiro* and *Tribo de Atuadores Ói Nós Aqui Traveiz*, from *Porto Alegre*, we can find the influence of the aesthetical proposal of the Living Theatre.

Taking all these facts in consideration, we can state that the contemporary American Theater is the result of a mix of different postures and ideologies. On the one hand we have the beauty and lushness of Broadway productions. On the other hand, we have the experimental, more intellectualized productions of Off-Broadway and Off-off Broadway that have revealed important names in contemporary American dramaturgy, such as John Guare and John Patrick Shanley, engaged in academic research work aiming at devising new possibilities of American stage performance. The profusion of new ideas coming from playwrights, actors, directors and producers, makes the American stage remains one of the richest in the world, because of this self-reflexive characteristics that keeps it always re-inventing itself. Richard Gilman is aware of such richness of American drama, but is also aware of the dangers of consumerism and proposes an awareness of the modifying power of theatrical art. According to him,

What we have to catch up with, we who are concerned with the theater and particularly with the theater in the United States where it has perennially suffered from the conviction that beauty originates in the pocketbook of the beholder and is a matter of seduction, is, at the very least, a consciousness of what has been happening to the bases of drama. We need an articulated consciousness, one that spreads among the practitioners and invades the theaters or, at any rate, one that cannot help being heard no matter what its efficacy will be allowed to be. (Gilman, 1967, p. 156)

This is the context in which is the playwright who stands at the center of this thesis, John Patrick Shanley, who has written more than 20 plays¹³ among which we find the 2004 work *Doubt, a Parable*. In his plays, Shanley approaches Gilman's concerns about what is to be said when on the stage. Not only Shanley, but many of his contemporary colleagues, are concerned with bringing social issues to the stage, and create works that provoke polemical debates and trigger philosophical questions. Shanley's texts bring into discussion issues such as racial segregation, loneliness in the big metropolis, and difficult personal relations. Above all, he talks about life in the Bronx – the neighborhood where he was born and grew up.

I will now refer to some elements in the life of John Patrick Shanley, because they are relevant for us to figure out in what ways the Bronx of his childhood is translated into the Bronx of his fictional universe, and contributed to make of him the author he is now. Shanley was born in 1950, the youngest of five siblings in a Catholic Irish-American family. His father was an Irish immigrant and his mother the daughter of Irish immigrants. They lived in the Bronx, a neighborhood mostly formed by Irish, Italian and Jewish immigrants. Shanley says his childhood was not an easy one, living in a violent place, whose inhabitants seemed to be very distant from the world he figured out for himself, making of him an outsider.

It was extremely anti-intellectual and extremely racist and none of this fits me. I was in constant fistfights from the time I was 6. I did not particularly want to be. People would look at me and become enraged at the sight of me. I believe that the reason was they could see that I saw them. And they didn't like that. (Shanley, 2011, p.2)

Shanley spent his first 8 school years in a Catholic school which was run by the Congregation of The Sisters of Charity. That was St. Anthony's Grammar School, which he attended in the Bronx and which provides the inspiration for the school we have in *Doubt, a Parable*. After that, Shanley went to Cardinal Spellman High School, where the discipline was very severe. According to Shanley, "They beat children with their fists. I saw a 220-pound priest put a boy, a little gangly boy, against the wall and hit him in the stomach as hard as he could." (SHANLEY, 2011, p.3)

¹³ See the annex on the page 120.

In an environment that proved itself as violent as the streets he used to walk, Shanley responded by becoming a professional problem child. More than once he was punished for saying he did not believe in God during Religion classes. Most of the time he spent in school he was either in the detention room or reading science fiction books in the class room, until he was finally expelled by the brothers of the congregation. Instead of trying another Bronx public high school, he decided to attend a private school in New Hampshire, which was affiliated to the Catholic Church. That was the Thomas More Preparatory School. Away from the Bronx, Shanley began to bloom. He was encouraged by his teachers to develop his thriving writing skills, starting by writing poems.

It was during his years at the Thomas More Preparatory School that Shanley developed his passion for drama; there he watched his first play – *Cyrano de Bergerac*. At home, nobody seemed to notice how much John had been touched by that experience. He was an artist in an environment that was not propitious for that. When he graduated, he went on to New York University, but after a semester of pitiable grades Shanley enlisted in the Marine Corps which, somewhat awkwardly, he liked for it resembled his Catholic-school style of discipline. After his Vietnam War service ended, Shanley returned to New York University. In 1977, the year he turned 27, he graduated as the valedictorian of his class.

By that time Shanley had already written some plays, but it was only in 1982 that he got on the stage with the performance of *Welcome to the Moon*, a play with collective themes centered on love and the absence of it, filled with rather fantastic characters, such as a mermaid and a magical coat. The specialized critic was less than kind with Shanley's debut. According to Alex Witchel from *The New York Times*,

Frank Rich, later the *New York Times* op-ed columnist, was once the paper's theater critic, and reviewed *Welcome to the Moon* that year. Rich opened his critique with a line of dialogue, "It's a relief to say things, even if they are sophomoric," Rich quoted one of the characters as saying. "No doubt that's true for the person who's doing the talking," the critic quipped, "but what about those who have to listen?" (Witchel, 2011, p.5)

Shanley did not give up, and in 1983 he wrote one of his masterpieces – *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea*, that was first put on stage in Waterford, Connecticut, in 1983. The play went to New York and to London stages that year, winning the prize of best new American Plays granted by Kentucky press. After that, Shanley became a rising star, and that favored

him the access to a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)¹⁴ funding. Such financial prize unchained John from the most different jobs he had to perform for his subsistence – he has worked as an elevator operator, apartment painter, and bartender. Although Shanley’s plays were doing well, as soon as the NEA funds began to run low, he had the idea of writing screenplays, aiming to make more money to give him the necessary time to dedicate to his true passion – the theater.

In his first movie *First Corners* (1987), although the story was shot, starred by Jodie Foster and Tim Robbins, he was not successful. In his second try, he explored deeply into the Italian-American families’ scenario, which he knew from his youth, writing a script originally named *The Bride and the Beast*. When Norman Jewison decided to film the story, he (Jewison) suggested the change of the title to *Moonstruck* (1987). The movie featured Cher as an Italian-American woman, widowed young, who is engaged to be married again. While her fiancé visits Italy, she attempts to make peace with his brother (Nicolas Cage), a baker with one wooden hand, and ends up falling in love with him instead. A strong supporting cast and interesting subplots centering on love and infidelity rounded out the work, which gave Shanley the 1987 Academy Award for best screenplay.

Although Shanley reached some success in Hollywood after his Oscar winning, most of his following movies were not so well seen by the critics – among them we have *Joe versus the Volcano* (1990), *Alive* (1993) and *Congo* (1995). It was only in 2008, when he adapted his own play *Doubt, a Parable* (2004) for the screen, that he got another Academy Award nomination. *Doubt, a Parable* brought prestige back to Shanley’s life. The play had its premiere at the Manhattan Theater Club on November 23, 2004 in the off-Broadway circuit. In the following year it moved to Broadway, at the Walter Kerr Theatre. I believe not even Shanley could foresee the success his play would be. *Doubt, a Parable* instantly became the most celebrated play of the season, winning the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Drama; the Best New Play Awards from the New York Drama Critics’ Circle, The Lucille Lortel Foundation, The Drama League, The Outer Critics Circle, The Obie, The Drama Desk and four Tony Awards for best play, best actress in a play, best featured actress in a play, and best director.¹⁵

¹⁴ The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) is an independent agency of the United States Federal Government that offers support and funding for projects exhibiting artistic excellence. It was created by an act of the Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government.

¹⁵ According to the New York Times Theatre Reviewer, consulted in November 5, 2011.

In 2008, Shanley himself wrote the screenplay adapting *Doubt, a Parable* into a movie format. The movie was titled *Doubt*. This process of adaptation into a different media proved successful, and the movie was as acclaimed as the play had been. Shanley's movie was casted with Meryl Streep playing the role of Sister Aloysius and Philip Seymour Hoffman as Father Brendan Flynn. The cast also includes Amy Adams in the role of Sister James and Viola Davis as Mrs. Miller. Oprah Winfrey asked for a reading for the role of Mrs. Miller, but Shanley did not accept the offer. The movie repeated the award success winning prizes as the Critic's Choice Awards, the Phoenix Film Critics Society Awards, the Screen Actors Guild Awards, the Washington D.C. Area Film Critics Association Awards, and the Houston Film Critics Society Awards, besides several nominations for the Golden Globe Awards, the Chicago Film Critics Association Awards, the BAFTA Awards and the Academy Awards.

Shanley has often been asked to what extent he wrote *Doubt* to discuss the pedophilia scandals of the Catholic Church or to talk about the world he knew in the old Bronx neighborhood, Shanley says that it is more than that:

And still another reason I wrote this play is that I'm very aware that debate has become the form of communication, like on "Crossfire". There is no room or valued placed on doubt, which is one of the hallmarks of the wise man. It's getting harder and harder in this society to find a place for spacious, true intellectual exchange. It's all becoming about who won the argument, which is just moronic. (Shanley, 2011, p.3)

The structure of the movie, as well as that of the play, is both dependent on the interpretation of the audience/reader. The audience is summoned into producing their interpretation, into filling the blanks as to the pertinence or not of Sister Aloysius doubts/certainties. Shanley has been often asked about the "true version" of what happened, or did not happen, between Father Flynn and the 12 year-old black student Donald Miller. Shanley, with his very economical way, few characters, almost no change of scenarios, brings to discussion one of the main issues of contemporary times – the uncertainty of knowledge and how we behave in a situation when we have to be sure of something. The premise of the play seems to be the impossibility of being sure about anything, in a world built out of a variety of different perspectives and different perceptions about things. In the following section, the focus of our attention will move from the creator, the author, into the creature, the play. I will then explore some aspects of the play. After that, in the third chapter, I will offer

my interpretation; even if aware that it is one among the countless possible approaches to this complex work.

The contemporary American theatrical scene owes a lot to John Patrick Shanley and his effusively philosophical plays. The way he takes his playwriting is so serious that he gets very disappointed when the craft of a play is not taken as seriously as he judges it should be. Shanley believes there are so many things to be said, and he says publicly that he is not satisfied with productions that still insist in betting on easy profits. Shanley declares,

Playwriting is the last great bastion of the individual writer. It's exciting precisely because it's where the money isn't. Money goes to safety, to consensus. It's not individualism. That's why sometimes I get very frustrated watching plays. I'm like: Man, you have the shot here to say anything and this is what you are saying? This boring retreated play I've seen 500 times, this denatured Arthur Miller? I mean you could do or say anything that's within the bounds of the law if you don't harm anybody physically, and this is what you're doing? Theater is just too exciting a prospect to be left to dullards. (Shanley, 2011, p.7).

John Patrick Shanley has written some other plays after *Doubt, a Parable*. He is sixty-one years old now, and has been diagnosed with a strong glaucoma. As people grow older, and meet with a number of limitations, they have to decide about the line of action where they will concentrate their efforts. Shanley decided to abandon his Hollywood career and to dedicate his time exclusively to write his plays. He jokes with his present condition, saying “you know, in Ireland, kings were kings until they had a physical imperfection and then they were put to death” (SHANLEY, 2011, p.7).

1.2 Doubt on the Page

“Conviction is a resting place and doubt is infinite”

John Patrick Shanley – *13 by Shanley*

We have already considered the different ways of interaction with the work of art involving reader and text, audience and play, and audience and movie. Different readers/watchers build different worlds of perception which vary according to their reality and

resources, and to the points in which they focus their attention. The more open and subtle the text is, the greater the variations in reception will be. In this section I concentrate exclusively on the relation involving the reader and the paraphraseable content of the play *Doubt, a Parable*, moving through the plot so as to pinpoint some critical moments in which most likely different readers may react in different ways. If we are dealing with the relation between the reader and the text, we must first clearly define what reader and what text. As to the latter, we are dealing with the play; not with the screenplay, not with the movie, not with any production of the play. So far so easy. The difficult thing is to specify who the reader is. According to Stanley Fish (FISH, 1986), so that the act of reading comes into existence, we need a reader. The text is an event, and the reader is the one who imposes a certain meaning upon it. I wish I could say that the reader here in this section is Fish's ideal reader, or well-informed reader, but I do not believe such wonderful creature exists. I can only offer my own trip into the plot, which is of course partial and limited to my own experience of the world. Let us do it, anyway, moving through the plotline, meeting the main characters, and addressing the theme of Doubt as well as possible.

The play is structured in nine scenes. Three of them are monologues, two consisting of sermons preached by Father Flynn during the mass service, and one of a speech delivered to his students in the school's gym. The story opens in the church during a Sunday mass, in which father Flynn is giving his speech on Doubt, which is described by him as "a bound as powerful and sustaining as certainty" (DP¹⁶, p.6). Doubt is the central theme in the play, it works as the fabric that permeates all the actions and thoughts of the four characters mainly involved with the happenings in the play: Sister Aloysius Beauvier, Father Brendan Flynn, Sister James and Mrs. Miller. I do not include here the name of the Black student, Donald Miller, because (differently from the movie) he does not have a physical existence in the play, he is only mentioned in the speeches of other characters. In a first reading of the play what we have is a consistent and rich sermon about the theme doubt. Of course, if one re-reads this sermon after having the whole knowledge of the plot, the second reading of this scene gets a number of further dimensions, and can help different readers to corroborate their different interpretations to the facts that may have happened, or not, in the silences the story contains.

After listening to the opening speech on Doubt, we are next taken to the office of Sister Aloysius, the Principal of St. Nicholas School. She is talking to Sister James, a young

¹⁶ Henceforth, the abbreviation DP, in the references, refers to the written text of the play *Doubt, a Parable*.

member of the Congregation who is the teacher to the eighth grade. Sister James shows her concern about a student – William London – who had a nose bleed during her class. Sister Aloysius asks if the nose bleed was spontaneous, adding that she is afraid Sister James is a bit too naïve. Sister Aloysius asks if it has occurred to Sister James the possibility that the boy could have provoked this bleeding to get rid of the class. When she says, “you are a very innocent person Sister James” (DP p.8) Sister Aloysius shows her strict view of the world. She reinforces her argumentation by saying things as, “There is a chain of discipline. Make use of it.” (DP, p.8), and “Every easy choice today will have its consequence tomorrow.” (DP p.9), and also “The best teachers do not perform, they cause the students to perform,” (DP p.11). Such sentences suffice to show the kind of person Sister Aloysius is. Out of the several possible reasons why the nose of the boy might be bleeding, she selected one, and directed her speech on that direction, finding there a good opportunity to suggest to the younger nun that the best attitude a teacher might hold was an attitude of constant surveillance, so as to prevent any possible evil before it came into existence.

However, Sister Aloysius ends this same scene showing another aspect of her personality. She tells Sister James that Sister Veronica, an old nun, is going blind, and asks, “If you see her making her way down those stone chairs...for the love of Heaven, lightly take her hand as if in fellowship and see that she doesn’t destroy herself” (DP p.15). This sentence reveals that she can also be tactful, and how attentive she is as a leading person in that community. Instead of emphasizing the compassionate or altruistic aspect of the remark, however, she says she needs Sister Veronica to remain on the staff because they “cannot afford to lose her” (DP p.15). This scene introduces the character of Sister Aloysius as someone severe and on the guard, but also capable of being kind and good-hearted, according to circumstances. And also that the principal of this school pays dedicated attention to the smallest details of school life.

Scene Three takes us back to Father Flynn, but he is not at the church anymore. We find him at the school’s gym, where he is coaching the boys and instructing them on how to be relaxed when shooting fouls, to forget about themselves and to concentrate on their goal. After that, he addresses some matters of hygiene, emphasizing the importance of the boys’ having clean nails. He shows them his own nails saying, “Look at my nails. They’re long; I like them a little long, but look at how clean they are. That makes it okay.” (DP, p.16). We can notice that the scene which introduces Sister Aloysius is more revealing of her personality

than the ones that relate to Father Flynn. The sermon scene seems to ask for a second reading, which can only be meaningful to those who have already read the whole play. As to this scene involving the emphasis on clean nails, literary critic Martin Andrucki, instructs us that technically this kind of scene is called, in theatre jargon, a “plant”. He says,

When a playwright takes the trouble to insert a piece of information like this, we can be sure it is neither arbitrary or insignificant. Those fingernails are a detail called a “plant”, an element in the exposition whose importance will emerge later in the action. (Andrucki, 2008, p.4)

Therefore, it is as if we, the readers, must wait a bit longer so that we can form our opinion about Father Flynn. So far, all we get is that students seem very interested in his ideas and in his coaching methods. He is both a good teacher, popular and well-liked by the boys.

Scene Four is set at the garden of the school, where Sister Aloysius and Sister James are talking. Sister James tells Sister Aloysius that the girls are in their music class and the boys are at the rectory with Father Flynn, who is lecturing them on ‘how to be a man’. The following conversation follows,

Sister Aloysius: 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. Have you ever given the girls a talk on how to be a woman?

Sister James: No. I wouldn’t be competent.

Sister Aloysius: Why not?

Sister James: I just don’t think I would. I took my vows at the beginning...Before...At the beginning.

Sister Aloysius: The founder of our order, The Blesses Mother Seton, was married and had five children before embarking her vows.

Sister James: I’ve often wondered how she managed so much in one life.

Sister Aloysius: Life perhaps is longer than you think and the dictates of the soul more numerous. I was married.

Sister James: You were!

Sister Aloysius: (Smiling for the first time) You could at least hide your astonishment.

Sister James: I... didn’t know.

Sister Aloysius: When one takes on the habit, one must close the door on the secular things. My husband died in the war against Adolph Hitler. (DP, p.18)

There are several interesting discussions that might be triggered, on the mind of the reader, from the exchanges above. On the one hand, it is impossible to teach life experience on theoretical terms; on the other hand, this is precisely what schools are expected to do. How can one have authority to teach something, if one does not have the experience of the thing being taught? When Sister Aloysius says “if sisters were permitted in the rectory” she unfolds a strict structure which distributes power according to gender, among other things. Sister James thinks of sexual experience as connected to “being a man” or “being a woman.” Sister Aloysius seems to take pride in the fact that she - like the founder of their congregation - has been a wife before becoming a nun. The allusion to Hitler evokes the notion of a dangerous world “outside” that cannot reach Sister Aloysius in her new present life. Maybe this is the reason why she chooses her religious name, after St. Aloysius Gonzaga, the rich noble man from the 16th century who leaves everything behind to become a Jesuit after serving at war and witnessing the horror that can be perpetrated there. The fact that Sister Aloysius has a lay past, has led a married life, has had a husband who is now dead, has had her life changed because of the war adds further complications to character, because we do not know to what extent such kind of experience contributed to make her so suspicious and defensive as she is now. The conversation then turns to the pastor of the parish – Monsignor Benedict. Sister Aloysius describes him as absent-minded, “I don’t believe he knows who’s the President of the United States. I mean him no disrespect of course. It’s just that he’s otherworldly in the extreme.” (DP p.19) This description of Monsignor Benedict seems to hint at another plant as well, like Father Flynn’s fingernails.

The next topic of their conversation triggers the conflict of the play – they talk about Donald Miller, the Black student. Sister Aloysius is worried about the way the community might treat him, and Sister James inadvertently increases the problem when she tells Sister Aloysius that Donald Miller has a protector in Father Flynn. Sister Aloysius eagerly presses Sister James for further information, and we learn that Father Flynn has paid special attention to Donald since the boy joined the altar boys. We also learn that the boy was summoned in the rectory and that he returned to class in a sad mood, and with alcohol on his breath. After learning about these facts, Sister Aloysius is suspicious of Father Flynn’s intentions about the boy, and believes that there may be a sexual basis for his interest in the boy, or that perhaps he has already violated the child.

At this stage we already have a number of elements related to the theme of doubt. We can question the reasons behind Father Flynn's protection, and we can also question the predisposition Sister Aloysius shows to distrust people in general, and males specifically.

The character of Donald Muller, the Black boy, is not given a voice in the written text of the play, or material existence, through the performance of an actor, on the stage. He reaches the reader indirectly, through the speech of four other characters, Sister James, Sister Aloysius, Father Flynn and his own mother. Thematically, Donald Muller is the repository of a number of ethical, moral, legal and political subjects, involving corruption in the Church, ethnical intolerance in the U.S., racism, sexual abuse, harassment of several sorts. But the reader is never directly affected by this character. Donald can only be assessed through the way he is perceived by each of the other characters. The result of this movement is that the reader is prevented from the possibility of coming to their own perception of the facts. He can only take Donald as an idea, as the personification of the weak side in the social clash of power, as the embodiment of the notion of the victim. He is an outsider, he is in danger in that community, and he is a fragile piece in an intricate puzzle. Donald is vulnerable and in a position where he can be let alone, verbally abused and even physically attacked.

In Scene Five Sister Aloysius invites Father Flynn to her office for a conversation. She is worried because of Donald Miller's vulnerability. When she is told that Father Flynn is interested in the boy, she believes that it is exactly the boy's vulnerability that attracts the man: "The little sheep lagging behind is the one the wolf goes for." (DP, p. 21) So, Sister Aloysius is persuaded that Father Flynn is molesting Donald Miller. Firstly, she considers going to the Monsignor, but she gives up the idea, even though the ethics of Church hierarchy would require her to do so. Even though she has described the Monsignor as being "too otherworldly" (DP p.19), she seems to believe that men will cover up for men, or even, that the Institution will cover up the scandal. She says "He would believe whatever Father Flynn told him" (DP, p. 22).

In their meeting, while they discuss the preparation of the Christmas Pageant, Sister Aloysius offers Father Flynn some tea. As he accepts, he asks for some sugar. Sister Aloysius takes that as a sign of danger, as another symptom of his lascivious nature. She also notices his fingernails. This takes us back to Martin Andrucki's observations,

Now we understand why his fingernails were mentioned earlier in the action. Clearly Sister Aloysius sees in them a sign of unseemly vanity, the kind of epicene affectation one might expect in a sexual pervert. The next moment further confirms her view of the priest. When Sister Aloysius offers him sugar, he requests not a modest single lump, but a voluptuous three – clearly the mark of a sensualist. In Sister Aloysius’s eyes, the symptoms of Father Flynn’s depravity continue to accumulate. (Andrucki, 2008, p.6)

As to the Christmas Pageant, Father Flynn suggests a secular song to the event, to which Sister James enthusiastically agrees, proposing *Frosty, the snowman*. Father Flynn agrees, and suggests that “one of the boys dress as a snowman and dance around.” (DP, p.29). Sister Aloysius takes this suggestion as a clue to get into the subject she really wants to talk about. She asks Father Flynn which boy he has the intention of using for the role, which he answers saying that they can organize tryouts for the role. Eventually, she gets to the subject of Donald Miller’s participation in the pageant, and Father Flynn declares that he sees no point in treating Donald differently from the others. This is the moment Sister Aloysius was waiting to remind the priest, in a dark tone, that he has himself been providing the boy with special attention. This is the assertion that changes the scene completely; from now on the tone gets darker and darker. Sister Aloysius hits clearly at her point and lets the priest know that she suspects him of sexual impropriety with the boy.

Father Flynn seems offended, and reminds her that he is not answerable to her. However, the nun is decided and plays her most powerful card – the smell of alcohol noticed by Sister James when the boy came back from the rectory. Father Flynn says that the boy was caught by the school custodian drinking altar wine, and that he had called Donald to talk about that so as to avoid the necessity of expelling Donald from the altar boys. Sister Aloysius is not convinced. When Father Flynn leaves her room, she promises Sister James that she will bring him down. The scene ends with Sister Aloysius making a phone call to Donald’s parents.

Scene Six takes us back to the Church, where we find Father Flynn in his blue and white vestments at the pulpit, during the Mass service, delivering a sermon on gossip. From this scene onwards we will follow the defense of Father Flynn and the presentation of his arguments. In Scene Seven there is a conversation between Sister James - who is feeling very badly about that entire situation - and Father Flynn. The scene seems to mirror the meeting between Sister James and Sister Aloysius in the second scene, but it works in the reverse way.

In Scene Two Sister Aloysius asks Sister James to control her sentiments, her instincts, and her passionate way to value the things of the heart more than her logical thinking. Now Father Flynn asks Sister James to do the opposite. He says,

There are people who go after your humanity, Sister James, who tell you the light in your heart is a weakness. It's an old tactic of cruel people to kill kindness in the name of virtue. Don't believe it. There's nothing wrong with love. (Shanley, 2005, p.41)

Father Flynn points to Sister James that – as servants of God – they must be helpful towards the ones who need them the most. Sister James stands at the middle point between the positions of Father Flynn and Sister Aloysius. In Scene Two, when she cries because her attention is being called on some points that she must improve, Sister Aloysius tells her “No tears” (DP, p. 12). Now in Scene Seven, when she cries again, Father Flynn “pats her uneasily, looking around” (DP, p.42).

Regardless of what might or not be happening between Father Flynn and Donald, the clash between the vicar and Sister Aloysius is revealing of a number of issues which are highly relevant to the intellectual and ethical discussion of our present time. It is very difficult to determine where the limits are between the individual and the public, the ideals to be cherished and the institutions that hold them, the person and the cause. The fictional time of the play is set in 1964, when the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was in progress (HERBERMANN, 2009, p.458). Deep changes were being considered in the Roman Catholic Church, as a strategy to make it more fit to accept and embrace the circumstances of modern life. The Council was presided by the popes John XXIII and Paul IV. The masses would not be in Latin anymore, priests and nuns would no longer have to wear habits, and were advised to get to know their communities better, to get closer to them, in order to turn the Church into a more welcoming place. So, *Doubt, a Parable* is placed in the middle of two Church eras, and has in Sister Aloysius and in Father Flynn two good representatives of the conservative and the progressive lines. Father Flynn's plea for Christian brotherly love can either stand for the real spirit of religiosity or for a convenient cover for a sexual pervert. Conversely, Sister Aloysius' plea for surveillance can either stand for attention and care for the protection of her community, or the profiting from an institutional space for her to make use of her bitterness and mistrust in people.

Scene Eight presents the conversation between Sister Aloysius and Mrs. Muller, Donald's mother. Sister Aloysius is sure of getting Mrs. Muller's support to her plea, as she tells the mother that Father Flynn is paying dubious attention to her son. Sister Aloysius presents her arguments strongly, so as to highlight the possibility of Father Flynn's being a pedophile, and to make her hypothesis believable in Mrs. Muller's eyes. There is an unexpected twist in the plot, however, when Sister Aloysius realizes that Mrs. Miller sees the thing through a different perspective. It is not that Mrs. Muller does not believe in Sister Aloysius's notion, but she is not interested whether or not there is ground for the nun's suspicion. Mrs. Muller tells Sister Aloysius that Donald is currently spanked by his father. The main reason for that lies in the boy's delicate ways. According to her,

My boy came to this school 'cause they were gonna kill him at the public school. So we were lucky enough to get him in here for his last year. Good. His father don't like him. He comes here, the kids don't like him. One man is good to him. This priest. Puts out a hand to the boy. Does he have his reasons? Yes. Everybody has their reasons. But I ask the man why he's good to my son? No. I don't care why. My son needs some man to care about him and see him through to where he needs to go. And thank God, this educated man with some kindness in him wants to do just that. (Shanley, 2005, p.49)

Sister Aloysius is both outraged and astonished at the moral relativism of Mrs. Muller, who would rather have her son protected by an influential adult male - regardless of his motivations - than beaten and killed on the streets of a dangerous neighborhood. Sister Aloysius is kept aback as Mrs. Muller reminds her that, "Sometimes things aren't black and white." (DP, p.49).

The more the story develops, the more discredited Sister Aloysius is to the eyes of the reader, precisely because she is so radical in her attitudes. It is at this point, however, that other circumstances start to unfold. As soon as Mrs. Miller leaves Sister Aloysius's office, Father Flynn enters and an argument follows, where he demands that she stops her campaign against him. Sister Aloysius answers she will not, and she refers to a scene that took place some time before, when she saw Father Flynn touching the wrist of a student, named William London, and the boy pulled his hand away, as if repulsed. We readers realize then that it was this little detail that sprouts the seeds of doubt in Sister Aloysius's mind. The priest makes his final efforts to convince her that he is not guilty of the crime she is accusing him of. Sister Aloysius leaves the office, as if there is nothing else to be said between them. The scene ends with Father Flynn making a phone call to the bishop and asking for an appointment.

The final scene takes place some time afterwards. We learn that Father Flynn is not at St. Nicholas Parish anymore. He has been transferred to St. Jerome's where he gets a promotion to the function of Pastor. As Sister Aloysius and Sister James talk, in the garden of the school, the latter acknowledges that she did not believe Father Flynn was guilty of the crime of pedophilia. Sister Aloysius still clings to her hypothesis, and she confesses she lied about a supposed phone call she had made to Father Flynn's last parish. She thinks that maybe this lie might have caused him to ask to be transferred to another parish. The play ends with Sister Aloysius bursting into tears, and telling Sister James, "Oh, Sister James! I have doubts! I have such doubts!" (DP, p. 58). This is the last line of the play.

1.3 Doubt on the Screen

"The sea in the theatre is a blue cloth; the sea in movies is the sea. The underlying drama in theatre is the struggle of ideas; in movies, it is the struggle of human beings. For that reason movie drama is transmitted as violence: it is translated as violence."

José Luiz Alonso de Santos, *The Dramatic Writing*

The decision to adapt the play *Doubt, a Parable* (2004) into the script of the movie *Doubt* (2008) came from John Patrick Shanley. The Miramax movie started being shot in 2007, having its opening season in 2008. The movie was nominated for 5 Oscars, plus other 38 award nominations, plus 16 wins. Philip Seymour Hoffman was casted for the role of Father Flynn, Meryl Streep was Sister Aloysius, Amy Adams played Sister James and Viola Davis was Mrs. Miller. All four were nominated for several awards. Shanley was also nominated for best adapted screenplay.

The challenge that inspired Shanley to adapt his own play involved the craftsmanship of changing the theatrical note that permeates the play into film language. In his own words to *New York Times* he said, “I was frightened to do *Doubt* as a film. It’s a very serious story, and these people do nothing but talk. There are only four people in the play, and how am I going to do this in a truly cinematic fashion.” (SHANLEY, 2008, p.5). So, he decided to start anew, based on his memory of his earlier years in the Bronx. The aged buildings, the Catholic parish and school, the people walking up and down the old streets were some of the things he tried to capture in his memory to write down on the screenplay. He says¹⁷ it was delightful to grasp all his old reminiscences in order to fulfill the spaces that a transposition of a play to the filmic media demands.

The adaptation of plays into movies is a celebrated tradition in American culture. We can think of many examples of modern and contemporary dramaturgy adapted into the big screen. Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, Peter Shaffer’s *Equus*, Tony Kushner’s *Angels in Americ* are just some among the profusion of cinematic adaptations embraced by American producers. Adaptation is a process that has been studied by many scholars – such as Linda Hutcheon, Susan Sontag and Phyllis Zatlin. Hutcheon says that it is not the idea of fidelity that we have to concentrate on when we are in contact with an adaptation. We should rather be concerned with the ways, the processes to adjust one language into the other (HUTCHEON, 2006, p.7). The phenomenon of adaptation has been widespread in America since the times of silent movies, when even Shakespearean plays were adapted.

Nonetheless, in contemporary America we have witnessed a different kind of movement of adaptation, of translation into different medias. I refer to the case of artists translating their own work into different languages. It has become common for an author to write a novel, or a play, or even a graphic novel and then get involved in the adaptation of the same work into another media, such as the cinema. The opposite way is also true. The Cohen Brothers have first made the movie *Burn after Reading*, and then written the novel, from the screenplay. Movies are also adapted into TV series and novels, as in the case of Nia Vardalos, who wrote the monologue *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* to a small off-off Broadway theater.

¹⁷ All the information that is related in this section about Shanley’s views and opinions on the adaptation of his play were collect from the Miramax DVD *Doubt*. It is inserted in the bonus track where we can find Shanley’s testimonies and the casting testimonies as well.

Vardalos, as actress and playwright, exposes the comic conflicts of a young woman, from a traditional Greek-American family, who falls in love with a man who is not Greek. After that, Vardalos wrote the screenplay, adapting her play to the filmic version which she starred as protagonist. In 2002, *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* was the most successful independent movie in all movie history¹⁸. In 2003, Vardalos adapted her work again, this time into a TV series. These instances illustrate a tendency in contemporary art – the possibility for the artists convey and control their works in as many medias as they wish. The concept of inter-semiotic translation, the conversion of verbal signs into nonverbal sign systems, is one of the ways we have to approach the adaptation of a play from the page or stage to the screen. Phillis Zatlin says,

I propose a theory of film adaptation based on a polysystemic approach to translation. Translation of verbal texts is regarded as interlinguistic, intersemiotic transposition. Film adaptation may or may not involve interlinguistic translation, but it should always be judged in terms of intersemiotic transposition. Translation should replace fidelity as the trope for addressing film adaptation: The trope of adaptation as translation suggests a principled effort of semiotic transposition, with the inevitable losses and gains typical of any translation. (Zatlin, 2005, p.154)

What probably provoked Shanley into changing his play into a screenplay, and into directing the movie, was the range of options available for him to reshape his work. Gerald Mast refers to three basic challenges in filming a play: the verbal text must be converted into sights and sounds, the theatrical decor must be changed into a cinematic decor, and the dramatic work must be converted into a narrated work (MAST, 1982, p. 290). To change the theatrical scenes into narrated scenes, Shanley makes use of many additional scenes and characters that modify the scenario of *Doubt*, and sense comes from a different direction if compared to its version on the stage. *Doubt, a Parable* was a very economical play to the standards of the Broadway stage – simple scenarios, costumes and the light sufficed to provide the audience with the necessary means to follow the plot. In the filmic version, Shanley has to show all the things that before were only imagined. Donald Miller, who does not appear in the play, is given a body and a part in his movie presence. The entire school and church environment had to be reproduced and peopled. Zatlin also comments on this,

From a structural point of view, turning dramatic action into narrative requires substantial changes that complicate the adaptor's work. A good adaptation does not consist of mechanical reproduction of the play in

¹⁸ According to IMDB data.

question. On the contrary, one should take maximum advantage of the wealth of possibilities of the cinematographic medium. (Zatlin, 2005, p. 164)

That is what Shanley does, he takes advantage of the numerous possibilities that the filmic language grants to him. In addition to all that, Shanley performs one more task in this intricate web – the role of reader of himself. Shanley is now a person, a playwright, a movie director (who has previously been a theater director), directing the screenplay that he wrote, that is also based on his theatrical play. There are many levels of presence in these transpositions. John Patrick Shanley, as many of his contemporary colleagues, has to read and interpret himself, in order to translate his work into different languages. His greatest challenge, in a work such as *Doubt*, is to keep the ambiguities that may allow for the different (often opposite) interpretations about Father Flynn. The choice of competent experienced actors makes a difference under such circumstances.

Here we reach the significance of the actors in this process, they who lend their bodies and their talent to help the project come forth. When we read the play we form our opinion about the facts it contains. When we see the play, we decide on which object on the stage we will concentrate our attention. When we watch the movie, however, we focus on the point the camera selected, we listen to the tone conveyed by the soundtrack and we see the facial expression presented by the actor. As a consequence, we cannot say we see the play, what we see is the result of that production's reading of the play.

Each actor performs choices of interpretation in order to change a piece of paper filled with dialogues into a reading possibility of that construct, as translated by the embodiment of performance into a human being. Such choices include gestures, postures, the way of walking, talking, the costumes, facial expressions, the way the voice is modulated so as to provoke a certain effect and to compose a character. The American school has a strong bent towards the naturalistic performance – as a consequence of the influence of the methods by Stanislavski and Chekhov, as already previously discussed. The actors chosen to the leading roles of *Doubt* performed their choices, which have inevitably modified some of the perspectives from a portion of the readers of the play. About the character of Sister Aloysius, as performed by Meryl Streep, Shanley the director talks about her contribution to the shaping of the movie character,

[Meryl] is tremendously intelligent, and we rehearsed for three weeks, and she made some new choices during the rehearsal. She did the big one where Father Flynn asked her if she ever committed a mortal sin, and she suddenly is stricken and basically confessed. And I said: That works. I never thought of that. (Shanley, 2008, p.4)

As Shanley avows, the choices of the actors may change the choices of the playwright or the choices of the director. Cherry Jones, who performed Sister Aloysius on Broadway, has certainly made different choices if in contrast with Meryl Streep's choices for the same character. The intensity or toughness of the voice, the intonation of a line delivered to the audience, those things can change the course of meaning completely. We will have as many Sister Aloysiuses as actresses role-playing the character. The same happens of course with the other parts in the play. Viola Davis says that she focused her attention on the character of Mrs. Muller as if the story was exclusively about her. In Davis's words "it was a story about Mrs. Muller, Right? And then you discover who the character is, and then that's the moment where it's up to you to have courage to trust that you will tell the truth about who the character is. I wanted she (Mrs. Muller) to be different."(DAVIS, 2009)¹⁹.

All these layers of artistic views and differences of interpretation of the same text enhance the complexity of Shanley's question – "What do you do when you are not sure?" (DP, p.5). We have a play and a movie carved on doubts. The uncertainties permeate the play, the writing of it, the performance on the stage, and then, finally, the adaptation to the screen. Shanley attests: "I'd like to attack the notion that movies are about certainty, about affirming a political profile and validating what people already believe." (SHANLEY, 2008, p.5). Anyway, Shanley the translator declares to be satisfied with the results he got – he has written a play and directed a movie where the role of the audience is bigger than in an ordinary play or an ordinary movie. The audience is summoned to think about the issues the works bring up. The subtle symbols and images conveyed in the play and in the movie are important tools to disclose some meanings – although the key to doubt may be not solved, as it is the pillar that sustains this entire fictional universe. In the next chapter, we will discuss some aspects of the

¹⁹ All the information that is related in this section about Viola Davis's views and opinions were collect from the Miramax DVD *Doubt*. It is inserted in the bonus track where we can find her testimonies and the casting testimonies as well.

theories of the Imaginary, in order to provide some instruments that make the analysis of both the play and the movie more substantiated.



2. Shaping Imaginary

“The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword, are portions of eternity too great for the eye of man”

William Blake – *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

William Blake, in the verses above, raises one question related to my argument – the importance of symbolical thought, or the imaginary contents produced by man, even when this man belongs to a fictional world. This thesis investigates John Patrick Shanley’s work through the lens of the Studies of the Imaginary, so as to reveal some symbolical images and archetypical patterns, to form one reading of this play. This chapter first defines the terms that characterize such studies, and then presents the ways to approach *Doubt, a Parable*. William Blake’s verses in the epigraph above also reveal that symbolical thought has been seen for some centuries as minor, when compared to rational thought, and this provokes a lack of balance among the aspects that integrate the totality of human condition. Characters in this play seem trapped in this lack of balance. There is a kind of sickness involving sexuality impregnating the atmosphere. It can be represented either in Father Flynn’s interest in the boys - in case he is a factual or potential pedophile - or (if he is not) in the malicious interpretation of his attention to the boy in the distorted prejudiced perception of Sister Aloysius. There is also a lack of balance involving the core of Christianity and religiosity, because what should stand for love and caring ends up representing a set of institutionalized policies. All these things can be attributed to the destabilization between the symbolical and the rational aspects of civilized life.

In this reading the problems involving the relations between Father Flynn and Sister Aloysius are attributed to dysfunctions in the interaction involving the rational, mythical and symbolical aspects of their interaction. The neoclassical philosophical postures have defined reality predominantly through rationality. Becoming more rational was interpreted as the way to reach Truth with the capital letter. Other aspects of the human psyche, as imagination, dreams, and myths, were not as valued as conscious intellectual rationality. In a Marxist line, Foucault interprets this development as a strategy of power: “These systems rationalize intensively to dominate with more efficiency” (FOUCAULT, 1996, p.8) Dominating a model of thinking society and its ways only focused on a concept of reality bond to materiality is at least naive. It is not possible to think about the totality of man ignoring the oniric, the symbolic, the mythological and the imaginative sides of this same man. Reason and Imagination are two very important parts of the way we understand the whole world around us.

So, I choose the Theories of the Imaginary, as proposed in the French line, as a way of addressing Literature as a bridge connecting Imagination and Reality, Materiality and the Symbolic. The French line developed here derives from the studies of Gaston Bachelard and Gilbert Durand, and meets the theories on symbol, archetypes and collective unconscious as presented by Carl Gustav Jung. According to this line, Imagination precedes logical thinking and conscious rationality. Imagination is a fabric tessellated by the little pieces of images produced by all human beings. It is through the significance attributed to these images that we sew our own identities. In a creative way man finds forms of exteriorizing his subjectivity and projecting his interiority. In this sense, the things that are imagined must be described through their effects, because they cannot be explained by conclusive definitions. This is what happens in *Doubt, a Parable*. We can only discuss the characters’ doubts and certainties by analysing their actions and the effects of their actions. Castor Bartolomé Ruiz (2003) metaphorically defines the concept of imaginary as a creative river whose waters fill the world, the humanized world, assuming the role of a creative creator. According to him,

Temos de mergulhar no sem-fundo humano para nos auto-compreender. Somos cientes de que toda auto compreensão é parcial, e qualquer definição é aberta, isto é, relativa. Por isso não pretendemos explicar-nos racionalmente, mas implicar-nos vitalmente, simbolicamente naquilo que somos. Ao levantar o véu da divindade humana, o que encontramos? Surpresa, nosso próprio rosto! Mas não é só o rosto da finitude conhecida, do humano determinado

ou do logos explicado que vemos. É também um rosto inescrutável, um rosto que não pode ser exaurido por nenhum tipo de determinação ou explicação; ele nos lança para um horizonte de infinito e nos submerge no abismo do sem-fundo humano. A esse sem-fundo humano, tragicamente humano, denominamos de imaginário.²⁰ (Ruiz, 2003, p.23)

So, what is the Imaginary? This is a complex question, difficult to answer, and which probably nobody answers accurately. *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* defines the Imaginary in the following terms,

Imaginary. 1. Adj. pertaining to the imagination; fictitious. 2. N. As a noun, the word is a recent import from the French and bears the traces of a long history of theorization about the imaginary within French philosophy, aesthetics, literary theory, cultural anthropology and psychoanalysis. The term has been in common use at least since the Surrealists, with reference to all kinds of imagined or invented meanings. It is a key concept in work as diverse as that of the anthropologist Gilbert Durand and that of the philosopher Michèle Le Doeuff. Its recent history also owes much of the work of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and critics such as Luce Irigaray and Cornelius Castoriadis. (Mautner, 2005, p. 302)

This definition traces the history of the school, and ranks some theoreticians who have developed the concepts, but it does not explore the concepts. All we know is that before any kind of rationalization on any matter, we first imagine on that. So, it is possible to say that imagination is the first seed of our comprehension of the world around us. We do not think rationally when we are babies, but we imagine things and we try to decode the world through all our senses. Even when adults, imagination still performs a very important role in the way we interact with the world. In this sense, we can say that rationality does not constitute the predominant trait in human identity. Our identity is a combination of what we think rationally and what we apprehend from the images of the world through a kind of symbolical thought.

²⁰ We have to dive into the abysmal human background to reach self-understanding. We are aware that every sort of self-understanding is partial, that any definition is open, relative. So, we do not intend to explain things rationally, but to imply ourselves vitally in what we are symbolically. When we lift the veil of human divinity, what do we find? Surprise: our own face! But it is not only the face of known finitude, the determined human or the explained logos that we find. There is also an inscrutable face, a face that cannot be exhausted by any kind of determination or explanation; that throws us towards an infinite horizon and sinks into a never-ending abyss of humankind. To this never-ending abyss of humankind, tragically human, we call imaginary. (Translation mine)

2.1 The Paradoxes of the Imaginary

“For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good”.

Saint Paul – *Romans VII*

In the words of Saint Paul we can find the seeds of the tension that can be called the paradoxes of the imaginary. Such expression is coined by Professor Castor Bartolomé Ruiz, and relates to the movement provoked by the tension between Reason and Imagination. Ruiz understands our contemporary society as a product of this tension,

Embora o imaginário seja a potencialidade criadora do humano e não possa ser delimitado por qualquer tipo de determinação lógica, ele não pode existir senão imbricado na racionalidade. Não é possível pensar o imaginário sem a racionalidade. Só nas patologias se manifesta uma sensibilidade totalmente fora da razão. Também não é possível pensar uma razão que consegue sufocar o imaginário ou esgotar suas possibilidades criadoras. Ambas as dimensões, razão e imaginação, estão indissociavelmente implicadas. Uma não pode existir sem a outra. Ambas existem co-referidas, porém de uma forma tensa e conflitante. A tensão própria do imaginário e da racionalidade leva, muitas vezes, a pretender explicar um anulando o outro ou a pretender a dissolução de um no outro.²¹ (Ruiz, 2003, p.50)

According to the ideas of Ruiz the imaginary cannot be enclosed by rationality, because rationality does not suffice to reduce the capacity of creation to logical categories or structures of thought. Imagination and rationality depend on each other. The first offers the creative force, and the latter shapes it into material existence. Rationality reproduces and combines things that pre-exist; imagination provides the access to the region of endless

²¹ Although imagination carries the creative potential of the human and cannot be delimited by any kind of logical determination, it can only exist imbricated in rationality. We cannot think the image without rationality. Only pathological conditions manifest a sensibility totally separate from reason. Neither can you think of a kind of reason that can asphyxiate imagination or exhaust its creative potentiality. Both dimensions, reason and imagination, are inextricably involved. One cannot exist without the other. Both co-exist, but in a tense and conflicting way. The tension bound to imagination and rationality often leads to canceling a claim to explain the other or to the wish of dissolving one into the other.

creation. So, in the historical moments in which one of these instances predominated over the other we have met with confusion and conflict. Confusion and conflict happen to be the materials out of which all great literary works find a way to come forth. To Ruiz,

O imaginário é pura potencialidade de renovar o sentido já existente. Porém essa criação de sentido só pode se expressar por meio do logos. Só a lógica permite especificar as potencialidades criadoras do imaginário. Assim, a razão não pode existir sem a fecundação do imaginário, este não pode concretizar-se se não por meio das determinações lógicas que a racionalidade impõe. A força criadora do imaginário só pode existir sob a forma de determinações concretas.²² (Idem, p.51)

Ruiz has an expression to refer to this lack of equilibrium between imagination and rationality: he refers to that as the “human fracture”. Here the words of Saint Paul apply, as each search for definition is in a way prison of meaning. This kind of discourse, that moves freely in the fields of imagination – such as myths and religion – becomes a hydra, a monster with multiple heads, when we bring such questions to the fields of reason. This seems to indicate that there are levels of experience that can only be grasped beyond the range of reason.

We inhabit a world full of images, colors, forms and words, and we interpret and reinterpret such things every single day. From our birth we are cast in a wood of symbols, and we have to decode them in order to keep going. We are not merely rational animals, we are mainly hermeneutic creatures, who give meaning to everything around us. Not only do we adapt to the existent reality, we also modify it through our actions that are motivated by the impulses of imagination. According to Gilbert Durand, “the world is never presented, but it is always represented” (DURAND, 1999, p. 29). A new meaning always substitutes for a presentation. We do not have access to natural reality. Any kind of knowledge implies a building of meaning. Our world is always a sense of a world, because our way to interact with it is hermeneutical.

²² The imaginary represents the potentiality to renew the existing order. But this creation of meaning can only be expressed through logos. Only logical thought allows one to specify the potential of the creative imagination. So reason cannot exist without the triggering of imagination, which cannot be done without the logical determinations that rationality imposes. The creative power of imagination can only exist in the form of precise determination.

Here lies the human fracture, this eternal search for meaning. This fracture can only be fixed by the production of meaning. Every construction of meaning is a symbolical bond to a hermeneutic behavior by man upon the world. In *Doubt, a Parable*, the fracture shows in the variety of possibilities of interpretation offered to the reader, respecting the issues of certainty and doubt. The character of Sister Aloysius illustrates the predicament of this condition of fracture, in her difficulty to articulate the spheres of the real and the imaginary. She addresses the material world through her imaginary constructs. She joins the church after undergoing some traumatic episodes in the world outside. To her imaginary constructions, life within the walls of her congregation probably represents a haven of peace and protection from danger and pain. She is willing to defend that territory at any cost. We do not know much about her former experience as a wife, but the bitterness she shows about men is revealing. When Sister James has a problem, she immediately reports the problem to her superior, Sister Aloysius. But when Sister Aloysius has a problem she decides to solve it herself, instead of reporting the facts to her superior, Monsignor Benedict. She sees the Monsignor as too absent-minded and otherworldly. More than that, she probably suspects he might cover up for Father Flynn's infringements if he knew about them. In this sense, Sister Aloysius extends her distrust to the whole institution. I use this character to illustrate, in three steps, the fallacy of fracture, or how the wheel always comes full circle. First Step: Sister Aloysius's previous difficulties turn her into a bitter and mistrusting woman. Second Step: because she distrusts people, she is always ready to see evil everywhere. As a consequence, she develops a keen eye for possible danger. She knows that her superior, Monsignor Benedict, has his limitations. She knows that the Holy Catholic Church is - ultimately - a corporative institution as any other. She knows that the sexual restrictions imposed on religious men and women may provoke distorted behavior, and that pedophilia is one of the roads involved. She knows about gender and power relations, and that the word of a nun is not as significant as the word of a priest. Based on all that, and also on the pride she has about being an "experienced person", because she has led a lay life of practice before she joined the theoretical ground of religious life, she decides to do justice with her own hands. The fallacy shows, however, in the Third Step: just because the Catholic Church is corrupt, just because pedophilia has a high incidence in the Catholic Church, just because men are socially better treated than women, this does not signify that this specific priest, Father Flynn, is harassing this specific social victim, poor, Black, bullied, Donald Muller. Generalizations and reductions lead into misunderstanding and, more often than not, into injustice. Defending causes and fighting for social equality is important and necessary, but respecting people is even more important and necessary than that. Sister Aloysius's

imagination is biased, sexist, and doubting - regardless of her being right or wrong in the issue involving Father Flynn. Her distorted imagination affects her concept of reality, and determines the course of action she is to follow. And so happens with all other human beings inhabiting the real and the fictional worlds.

Doubt and certainty are two sides of the same coin, and a hermeneutic behavior is an essential condition in the reading of the world/a text. Ruiz says that,

O sentido é sempre uma forma de significar o mundo, um modo de simbolizar a realidade. Ele é criado sempre a partir do desejo. Os sentidos simbólicos que a pessoa cria para as coisas, para as experiências de vida, assim como para o mundo em geral, entrelaçam-se formando redes de significados. Essas teias significativas constituem visões de mundo ou cosmovisões. Todos nós, seres humanos, formamos nossa subjetividade na medida em que nos inserimos na trama de uma determinada cosmovisão. Ao sermos tramados por uma rede simbólica específica, passamos a ser sujeitos socializados.²³ (Ibidem, 2003, p.60)

We may refer to the myth of Sisyphus to illustrate this point. In *The World Mythology in Colours*, Veronica Ions tells us his story in the following words,

Sinner condemned in Tartarus to an eternity of rolling a boulder uphill then watching it roll back down again. Sisyphus was founder and king of Corinth, or Ephyra as it was called in those days. He was notorious as the most cunning knave on earth. His greatest triumph came at the end of his life, when the god Hades came to claim him personally for the kingdom of the dead. Hades had brought along a pair of handcuffs, a comparative novelty, and Sisyphus expressed such an interest that Hades was persuaded to demonstrate their use - on himself. And so it came about that the high lord of the Underworld was kept locked up in a closet at Sisyphus's house for many a day, a circumstance which put the great chain of being seriously out of whack. Nobody could die. A soldier might be chopped to bits in battle and still show up at camp for dinner. Finally Hades was released and Sisyphus was ordered summarily to report to the Underworld for his eternal assignment. But the wily one had another trick up his sleeve. He simply told his wife not to bury him and then complained to Persephone, Queen of the Dead, that he had not been accorded the proper funeral honors. What's more, as an unburied corpse he had no business on the far side of the river Styx at all - his wife hadn't placed a coin under his tongue to secure passage with Charon the ferryman. Surely her highness could see that Sisyphus must be given leave to journey back topside and put things right. Kindly Persephone assented, and Sisyphus made his way

²³ The attributed meaning is always a way to signify the world, a way to symbolize reality. Meaning is always created from desire. The symbolic meaning that people create for things, and for the experiences of life, as well as the world at large, intertwine to form networks of meanings. These webs become significant worldviews or cosmovisions. All of us, human beings, form our subjectivity to the extent that we are part of the fabric of a particular worldview. By being hatched by a specific symbolic network, we become socialized subjects.

back to the sunshine, where he promptly forgot all about funerals and such drab affairs and lived on in dissipation for another good stretch of time. But even this paramount trickster could only postpone the inevitable. Eventually he was hauled down to Hades, where his indiscretions caught up with him. For a crime against the gods - the specifics of which are variously reported - he was condemned to an eternity at hard labor. And frustrating labor at that. For his assignment was to roll a great boulder to the top of a hill. Only every time Sisyphus, by the greatest of exertion and toil, attained the summit, the darn thing rolled back down again. (Ions, 2005, p.113)

The task of Sisyphus represents the strife of mankind – but that is not our point. We see in Sisyphus a metaphor of this deep fracture that seems unsolvable. The ceaseless search of meaning, rolling one’s stone up the mountain, always trying to put the pieces together and fill in the holes. This metaphor has been explored in modern period by many artists²⁴, who present Sisyphus as a symbol for the feeling of void that permeates modernity. Furthermore, the myth of Sisyphus is also contemporary as a metaphor for a man who struggles to build the bridges that can lead him to the healing of his fracture. We can see such bridges as symbols of the constant creation of meanings. Here, however, Sisyphus must ask for help and in contemporary society he is heard by two gods.

The first is Hermes, the messenger of the Gods, who brings meaning to all things. From a hermeneutical behavior it is possible to get closer to reality through the tools of imagination and symbolical thought. In the medieval, holistic, approach to knowledge, the hermetic view – as it is represented in the work of Hermes Trismegistus - encompasses three levels of what we now call *reality*: the physical, mental and emotional. This ancient concept preaches – as modern Physics does nowadays, – that the micro and the macro are connected and work upon the dictates of the same set of forces. Western Civilization, along the second millennium of the Christian Era, experienced an increasing propensity to approach knowledge through an analytic process, dividing the object to be studied into parts, so that each part could be fully and deeply investigated. Canonic academic knowledge became more and more specific, to the point that the notions of “above” and “below” (as in Hermes Trismegistus) turned into disconnected opposites rather than into the two extremes of the same thing. The physical, mental and emotional aspects of reality also became disconnected from one another. Except in the field of Art, perhaps, that has always found a way to affect human experience by transcending the dimensions of the logical and of the rational.

²⁴ Such as Albert Camus in the book *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

The title to this thesis refers to a *Hermeneutics* or a Hermetic approach to the corpus proposed. Not only because the dichotomies that progressively infested rational knowledge, destroying the link between “above” and “below”, have been disregarded in secret hermetic societies that operated in a parallel course to canonic medieval erudition; but also because “Hermetic”, as in Hermes Trismegistus, is a word akin to the Greek god Hermes, syncretic to Toth in Egypt. Hermes is the god of writing and of magic, master of the magic powers of the word. And he is also the messenger of the gods, the one able to enter all places, to establish links and connections, like a diplomat and a translator. From Hermes comes the word *Hermeneutics*, pertinent to the art of interpreting texts that is what we academic people do when we write our thesis and dissertations. RUIZ (2003) reminds that man, to soothe this feeling of void that keeps him apart from the world, has become a hermeneut of the reality. In this sense, we do not have access to the world but only to a hermeneutic posture that lead us to a constant arrangement and rearrangement of the things around us.

The other god is Dionysus, who brings the party of multiple ideas, in a festive banquet that offers the multiplicity of thoughts conceived by mankind since the word became laical. The god of wine offers to us so many options of thought that it becomes difficult to choose one to help man in his building of meaning. So, not even myth is complete without the contemplation of otherness, an argument also defended by Ruiz,

A potencialidade criadora do imaginário faz com que não habitemos num mundo de objetos naturais, mas vivamos num universo de sentidos culturais. O sentido é sempre social. Ele se organiza em teias e estruturas de significados, a fim de estabelecer suturas simbólicas que dêem coerência à ação humana. Por este motivo, a realidade se manifesta para o ser humano de modo contraditório: como algo sólido e efêmero, paradoxalmente específico e fugaz, tensionalmente presente e futuro. Ele não pode apreender a realidade num só aspecto, sempre deve compreendê-la como abertura a ser construída. Não pode definir analiticamente o real, pois sempre se implica vitalmente no mundo que analisa.²⁵ (Ruiz, 2003, p.67)

We exist as humans in our relation to the other. I am what the other is not. Each subject exists as a subject through the contrast with otherness. We constitute our identity and

²⁵ The potential to creative imagination prevents us from dwelling in a world of natural objects. We live in a world of cultural meaning. Meaning is always social. It gets organized in structures and in webs of significance, so as to establish symbolic stitches that give coherence to human action. For this reason, reality manifest itself to humans in contradictory ways, as something solid and ephemeral, paradoxically specific and fleeting, putting in tension present and future. Meaning cannot grasp reality in one single aspect, it must approach it as an opening to be constructed. Meaning cannot define reality analytically; it is always implied in the world it analyses.

our perception of the world when we perceive that we are not the other (KRISTEVA, 1991, p.170). This is part of my analysis, since I understand *Doubt, a Parable* as a clash between different characters who have to deal with the unsympathetic aspects of the other and with the action that the others can perform. This predicament of being apart and together at the same time is recurrent in myths, even in those that we know too well,

19 And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought [them] unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that [was] the name thereof.

20 And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.

21 And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

22 And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

23 And Adam said, This [is] now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. (1769 Oxford King James Bible Authorized Version, Genesis 2.19-25)

The price Adam pays for the acquisition of this other self is a cleavage in his natural identity. Before Eve, Adam was in charge of naming all things in the world, of investing the world with meaning. He was responsible to give meanings to things. This illustrates our relationship with things that existed before we got in contact with them. They only signify if we meet them. But after Adam is divided in two, he is not the only one to name things anymore. Adam is not entire anymore. Eve is what Adam is not, and Adam is what Eve is not. From this primordial otherness the Biblical myth²⁶ poses a metaphor for the interaction of man with the world and with the other. We are constantly attributing meaning to things, actions and images. And we come to the sense of what we are through the contrast - in the other - with what we are not. The myth of Adam and Eve also stands for the impossibility of man's reaching completeness, and for the role of man as a creative creator in the world he inhabits. Man becomes an agent who is conscious of the presence of the other, and that he is not only a part of the whole thing, he is also different, because he creates and modifies the world through his actions.

²⁶ This thesis does not differentiate between mythology and religion, because their function is the same on the sphere of the imaginary.

The definition of the term “imaginary” relates to the paradoxical behavior of the man who decodes the world through a hermeneutical posture, being embraced by a series of symbols, images, dreams and myths that permeate his own mind. The paradox lies in the tension between what we think we know and in fact is in the world outside – or what we think we are and what we are in the perception of the other(s). In this context it becomes impossible to define what is true, because we are always immersed in many layers of images and their possible interpretations. The play *Doubt, a Parable* joins such discussions as it presents a riddle that is unsolvable. In the play we face the impossibility of reaching an answer that satisfies us as Truth, with the capital letter. The play evokes the concept of Imaginary that we follow in this thesis – Imaginary as a vanishing concept, difficult to define, resembling more a shadow than something concrete. Ruiz says,

O Imaginário é a nossa sombra, companheira fiel dos nossos afazeres. Sombra inseparável do que somos. Está presente e é inatingível. Quando tentamos abraçá-la, ela se transporta para além da nossa própria vontade. Assombra-nos com sua maleabilidade e persistência. Volátil como a dinâmica da luz, é tenaz como a própria existência. De aparência frágil, resiste a todas as vicissitudes. Sempre reaparece como indicador externo de quem somos, como nos movemos e para que existimos. Surge em nossa consciência na intersecção de um corpo opaco e sem a presença do outro desaparece numa aparente inexistência. Constitui o perfil escuro no qual se manifesta o seu imperceptível contorno. Transita na afirmação paradoxal da aparência e da realidade, da ausência e da presença. Afirma a um tempo o sombrio e o assombro da vida²⁷. (Ruiz, 2003, p.81)

When we move those definitions into the field of literary criticism, we may find some difficulty to define which are the best tools to use. Gilbert Durand uses the means of anthropology to analyze the symbols and archetypical contents of a piece of art through refined schemes that structure the possible images conceived by human’s imagination.

²⁷ The Imaginary is our shadow, the faithful companion in our tasks. A shadow inseparable from what we are. It at one time is present and unreachable. Whenever we try to embrace it, it flees beyond our own will. The shadow amazes us with its resilience and persistence. As volatile as the dynamics of light, it represents the very tenacity of existence. Fragile-looking, it resists all vicissitudes. It always re-appears as an external indicator of who we are, of how we move and exist. Imaginary arises from our consciousness as the intersection of an opaque body and, without the presence of the other, it disappears in the apparent absence. It is in its dark profile that we may perceive its imperceptible outline. The shadow moves in the paradoxical affirmation of appearance and reality, absence and presence. It affirms, at one time, the darkness and the wonder of life.

2.2 Dream Language or Imaginary Schemes

*“No estrondo das guerras, que valem meus pulsos?
No mundo em desordem, meu corpo o que adianta?
A quem fazem falta, nos campos convulsos,
meus olhos que pensam, meu lábio que canta?”*

Cecília Meireles, *Partida*

The reading of the world that one performs is a product of his own constructs and concepts. So, it is not difficult to understand that all definitions are likely to fail if they propose to account for a reading of totality. This has already been exemplified in the comment about Sister Aloysius, who is so full of her own certainties. Conversely, there are many ways to approach a literary construct. Symbolical constructs must be observed with refined attention. It is important to pay attention to the image in the context it appears, avoiding the risk of simplifying the analyses by opening dictionaries of symbols that provide possibilities of definitions for the image we investigate. We should rather consider where the image is inserted, feel the literary text that contains it, decide if what we see is a symbolical pattern, or just an ordinary image, and select one possibility of meaning in the context we contemplate.

The studies of the symbolical patterns revealed by images is the main point to be considered. According to Lévi-Strauss, the mythical image has the same origin as the music, both of them are born inside language, (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1997, p. 23) although they refer differently to towards the world – music centering on the dimension of sonority, and myth centering on the dimension of meaning. Lévi-Strauss also reminds us that both sound and meaning find themselves profoundly bond to the structure of language. Akin to the contents of a song, that can be divided into minor parts, as are the musical notes, the mythical narratives can also be divided into segments parts that Lévi-Strauss calls mythemes. The mytheme is the essential part of the myth, the one that is bond to creation through the arrangement with other different mythemes, as we can do when composing different songs with the same notes arranged in a different disposition. Strauss also declares that these mythemes can awaken in man some feelings that are not known by him, as archetypical contents that reveal something

apparently unknown. In the kind of analysis we are performing, it is important to examine which feelings are these, if these mythemes can be considered as sentences, or if it is possible to divide them in minor parts.

Gilbert Durand poses such questions in order to understand the minor parts of the mythemes, or the minor parts of a symbolical or fictitious narrative. His studies rely on signs, symbols, icons, archetypes, figures, images and idols. Durand explores such modalities in the book *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary*, in which he devises some schemes that organize the images generated by man in any the culture of the world. The studies on the symbolical images have improved a lot after Durand. To him, the study of images depends more on the cultural and symbolical patterns of a determinate society than on its language – although he also highlights the importance of Jungian studies about the unconscious, which have helped Durand to devise his structural division of the archetypical images produced by symbolical constructs. He says that,

The study of the meaning of images entails, however, a second consequence. By adopting this approach one inverts the prevailing habits of classical psychology which were either to model the imagination on the descriptive development of thought, or to study the imagination from the perspective of “rectified” logical thought. Now in the case of the imaginary, the rejection of the first Saussurean principle of the arbitrariness of the sign entails the rejection of the second principle which is that of the “linearity of the signifier”. The symbol, not being of a linguistic nature, does not develop unidimensionally. Therefore the motivations which organize do not form long chains of reasons – in fact they do not form any “chain” at all. Linear explanation such as that given by logical deduction or introspective narration is not adequate for the study of symbolic motivations. (Durand, 1999, p. 33)

Gilbert Durand proposes a scheme of division of archetypical images, arranged inside what he calls the “order of the imaginary”. To him, there are images widespread around the globe that provoke similar narratives, or even that are organized inside similar schemes that reveal their archetypical roots. Among those archetypes we have the images of the warrior maiden, of the lovers who are not allowed to be together, or of enemy brothers, for instance. Those images are widespread in the world through the different legends, myths and literatures of different cultures. Such archetypes were previously studied and explored by Carl Gustav Jung, whose theories inspired Durand.

To Jung, the term archetype “applies only indirectly to the collective representations, since it designates only those psychic contents which have not yet been submitted to conscious elaboration and are therefore an immediate datum of psychic experience” (JUNG, 1990, p.5). To Jung, the archetype is more than just an archaic image shared among diverse cultures. It is a bridge that links the two sides of human’s conscience. It is at this point that Durand’s theories meet the Jungian view of images. Both scholars see two aspects in consciousness. The first relates to the direct access we have to the contents of the world, in which we feel as if we understand the processes of the world; it is presented to us as a perception or a feeling. The second instance is the indirect one, in which for some reason the content of the world cannot present itself to our conscious mind, so it is changed into images that are elaborated inside archetypical structures. It is easier to provide an exemplification to this than to explain: if you ask some people to imagine a tree, a dog or a house, taking into account the differences in individual experience, the persons will imagine a tree, a dog or a house (even if different trees, dogs and houses). However, if you ask people to imagine love, or death, the object is absent in the world, so the person has to provide an image through his/her indirect consciousness. Being the object absent it is represented by an image, and this is what Jung and Durand call a symbolical pattern.

So, symbolical imagination belongs in the world of indirect consciousness and is inhabited by archetypical and symbolical patterns. The symbol is, in this sense, a way to represent abstract things or things that are difficult to perceive, as hatred, passion, or the soul. Durand points that the symbol is arbitrary, as it is not directed by the rules of the sign. Although the signifier is always presented in the concrete level, the signified is open to as many interpretations as one is able to provide. The element fire, for example, has a signifier that is easy to apprehend, but it may symbolize several things, in different circumstances.

In order to organize the symbolical patterns provided by legends, myths and literatures, Durand developed a scheme dividing the imaginary into two constellations of images – the Diurnal and the Nocturnal imaginary schemes. The Diurnal aspect of the imaginary is antithetical. It relates to the images that refer to the battle of light versus shadow, and good versus evil. Durand explains, “Semantically speaking, it could be said that there is no light without darkness. The reverse, however, is not true, night having an autonomous symbolic existence” (DURAND, 1999, p 66). The images that belong in the Diurnal aspect of the imaginary are bound to a Manichaeism that coordinates and arranges the archetypical

patterns of narratives such as the journey of the hero, the rescue of the maiden, or even the clash between the powers of light against the powers of the depth of shadows. On the other hand, the Nocturnal aspect of the imaginary is bound to the personification of *Eros*, the coziness of the night, the powers of the triple Goddess and the relevance of the images of the feminine.

In his anthropological studies of the symbolical images, Durand creates a figurative sort of structuralism, whose schemes approach the studies of the narratives through a hermeneutics of the symbol. Such studies are engaged with the exploration of the symbolical fields, contemplating the examination of the images that form the myths, fairy-tales, folkloric narratives and, for the purposes of this thesis, literature as well. The way Durand organizes the archetypal patterns is an attempt to achieve a perfect model, where all the images widespread around the globe would be structured. It is linked to the way all structural theoreticians think and establish their ideas in the climax of the structural fever during the sixties. Ruiz understands such necessity. According to him,

Todo significado se organiza numa rede de sentidos, dentro da qual se exprime de modo mais amplo e complexo. As palavras se organizam em frases, as frases em orações compostas, as orações em parágrafos, os parágrafos em microrrelatos ou narrativas amplas que, por sua vez, constituem universos de sentido. Nessas unidades significativas, os objetos adquirem vida e o mundo se humaniza. Tudo aquilo que o ser humano vivencia, ele o faz inserido numa densa trama simbólica que ele mesmo tece como modo de compreender, penetrar e transformar a realidade. Não podemos pensar nada além do símbolo-logismo ou da mitificação racional²⁸. (Ruiz, 2003, p. 144)

Through his anthropological studies, Gilbert Durand establishes important schemes that work as keys to access the production of symbolically images. In the next section we will talk a bit more about symbolical patterns and their importance in the analysis of the play *Doubt, a Parable*.

²⁸ All meaning is organized within a network of meanings, expressing itself in a more extensive and complicated way. The words are organized in sentences; sentences in paragraphs, paragraphs in micro narratives, and these in broader narratives that, in their turn, form universes of meaning. In these significant units, the objects come to life, and the world is humanized. Everything that is experienced is inserted in a dense symbolic web that is woven as a way to understand, penetrate and transform reality. We cannot think outside the the symbol/logic or mythical reason.

2.3 The Nature of Symbols

“The symbol is the epiphany of a mystery”

Gilbert Durand, *A Imaginação Simbólica*

We come then to the conclusion that a symbol is as an expression of the indirect access of our minds, or at least a product of the unconscious, or an image that bridges a concept that is abstract in the world. We also know that there are definitions that try to account for the full meaning of the word symbol, as it can represent different things in different areas of knowledge. According to the *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*,

In art, a universal aesthetic category manifested through comparison with the related categories of the image and with signs and allegory. In a broad sense, a symbol can be defined as an image, formalized in terms of its signification, or as a sign furnished with the integrity and inexhaustible multiplicity of meanings of an image. Every symbol is an image, and every image is, at least to some degree, a symbol. However, the category of the symbol indicates the image's transcendence of its boundaries and the presence of some meaning indissolubly merged but not identical with the image. The structure of a symbol consists of an objective image and a deep meaning that form two poles inconceivable without each other, because beyond the image, meaning loses its phenomenality, and without meaning, the image dissolves into its components. But image and meaning are also distinct, and the symbol is revealed in the tension between them. In becoming a symbol, an image becomes “transparent”; meaning “shines” through it, presented as semantic depth and perspective. The basic difference between a symbol and an allegory is that the meaning of a symbol cannot be deciphered by a simple effort of reasoning. It is inseparable from the structure of an image and does not exist as a rational formula invested in the image and later extracted from it. The specific characteristics of the symbol, as opposed to the category of the sign, must be sought in this context. In non-artistic (scientific) sign systems, polysemy is a mere impediment that prejudices any rational interpretation; whereas with symbols, the more ambiguous a symbol, the more meaningful it is. The very structure of a symbol is intended to give a holistic image of the world reflected in each particular phenomenon. (Mautner, 2005, p. 554)

Even though the symbol is as old as human perception, in a philosophical and aesthetic sense it is only a relatively recent product of cultural development. It is also interesting to notice that from the start the word symbol is connected to the idea of linking things that have been set apart. The word symbol traces its roots in the Greek word

Symbolom, which in Ancient Greece means to reunite two pieces that were separated. According to Ruiz,

A origem do termo *Symbolon* remete a um sentido sociológico. Os símbolos eram as metades de um objeto, repartidas entre duas partes, dois povos ou duas pessoas e que se certificavam de que existia um pacto entre ambas; o povo, ou a pessoa que mostrava o *symbolom* e encaixava perfeitamente na outra metade era reconhecido como portador dos direitos previamente pactuados. *Symbolon* são as metades de um objeto, que significam a existência prévia de um pacto, contrato, tratado, contra-senha. Eles não têm o sentido em si mesmos, mas remetem a algo previamente acordado. Cada um deles, em separado, não tem valor real; o *symbolon* adquirirá seu sentido pleno quando as partes que estão separadas se juntarem²⁹ (Ruiz, 2003, p. 132)

So, even in its origin the term symbol refers to the task of connecting things. In the field of literary analysis the symbol also links things that are apart from one another. When we analyze a literary work, there is always a profusion of images that are connected to the author's ideas, to the culture of the place where the work has been created, and to the age in which the author is inserted. The images in a literary work may or may not be a symbol, depending on the interpretation one makes of them. There is one important thing to take into account when we investigate symbolical patterns in a poem, a novel or a play – that is the relevance of a determinate image to the comprehension of a passage, or even to the understanding of the construct as a whole. If the nature of the symbol is connecting meanings, the function of the scholar who deals with symbolical patterns is to connect the image highlighted in the literary object with possible meanings. The researcher of symbolical patterns will provide a link that connects the fractured artistic entity with the amount of possible meanings, investigating inside the artistic construct to reunite a possible meaning to a symbolic image. When the researcher attributes a meaning to an image, he performs a kind of symbolical junction. This is what differentiates the uses of the symbol in literary analysis when in contrast with the uses in logics. The symbol must be open to interpretation, because it is connected to the indirect access of our minds – the place where we attribute meanings to things that cannot find their place in the concrete material world. To Jung,

²⁹ The origin of the term *Symbolon* evokes a sociological meaning. Symbols were halves of objects divided in two parts, belonging to two peoples or two persons, whenever there was a pact uniting them. The people, or the person who showed the *symbolom* which fitted perfectly into the other half were/was recognized as the owner of the rights previously agreed. *Symbolon* are the halves of an object that invokes the existence of a prior agreement, contract, treaty, or password. They have no meaning in themselves, but refer to something previously agreed. Each one of them, separately, has no real value; the *symbolon* acquires its meaning when the parts that are separated are again united.

A word or an image is symbolic when it implies something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. It has a wider unconscious aspect that is never precisely defined or fully explained. Nor can one hope to define or explain it. As the mind explores the symbol, it is led to ideas that lie beyond the grasp of reason. The wheel may lead our thoughts toward the concept of a divine sun, but at this point reason must admit its incompetence; man is unable to define a divine being. When, with all our intellectual limitations, we call something divine, we have merely given it a name, which may be based on a creed, but never on factual evidence. Because there are innumerable things beyond the range of human understanding, we constantly use symbolic terms to represent concepts that we cannot define or fully comprehend. (Jung, 1978, p. 4)

In simple words Jung defines the nature of symbols by connecting their nature to all the images that can provide more meanings than their obvious implication. In *Doubt, a Parable* there are many images that are recurrent to Catholic imagery, such as the cross, the circle and the cup. But are they symbols here? They are for sure symbols of something inside the Catholic apparatus, but inside the play, do they operate as symbols too? This is the task of the researcher of symbolical patterns – to find out the significance of an image inside its specific context. The symbolic is a potentiality that belongs to the imaginary. The symbol has the capacity to interweave diverse signs in a common meaning transcending its relation with the signified, which is external to it.

Concerning this connection between the imaginary and the rational processes, Jung concentrates on the physical ways through which we perceive the world, such as vision, smell or sounds. Sometimes, these senses can bring to our conscious memory things that were forgotten, or suggestions of memories that we cannot grasp (JUNG, 1990, p. 57). This happens because our mind holds contents we can access intentionally and contents that do not depend on our control. It is this last part of our mind – the involuntary side – that provides symbolical images. So, part of the unconscious consists of a profusion of thoughts, images and impressions that seem to be hidden, or even lost. However, they continue to influence our conscious minds, our dreams and in the case of artists, their artistic constructs.

John Patrick Shanley writes his plays - as all authors do - accessing his conscious contents, populating his fictional world with information that is familiar to him. So, in his plays we will find bits of his Catholic raising, of his Irish background, of the Bronx through the characters that live in a fictional New York shaped out of Shanley's conscious and unconscious mind, cultural experience and memories. We also have access to symbolical

contents that are partly created in a conscious way, and partly formed by the indirect and unconscious mind of the artist. The convention of the symbolic patterns is varied and always incomplete. It is not possible to know the degree of consciousness the artist has when performing his creation. Actually, that is irrelevant. However, it is possible to explore the potential meanings to such symbolical contents, and in this case, the opinion the author has about his own writing is just one opinion more. He is now just one more reader, and every reader contributes with his own conscious and unconscious degrees of perception to build their reading of the story.

Jung also states (JUNG, 1990, p.26) that our unconscious consists of several archetypal contents that come to the surface, more or less forcefully, depending on the particular circumstances at hand. The archetype and the symbol were defined by Jung as tendencies to form mythological patterns or motifs. These symbolical contents were characterized by archetypal figures, images that resonate in all times and in all cultures - the imaginary that is common to psychic activity in every culture through history. Since such symbolical patterns are common to all humankind and remain in every phase of human culture, they help us understand human personality and its production – arts being one of its possible performances. Nonetheless, we cannot disconnect the cultural experience when we analyze a certain symbol. Even if there is an aspect of universal in the symbolical content, there are also some aspects that belong to the local culture, and they also must be taken into account. Jung reminds us,

The symbol implies something vague, unknown, or hidden from us. Many Cretan monuments, for instance, are marked with the design of the double adze. This is an object that we know, but we do not know its symbolic implications. For another example, take the case of the Indian who, after a visit to England, told his friends at home that the English worship animals, because he has found eagles, lions, and oxen in old churches. He was not aware (nor are many Christians) that these animals are symbols of the Evangelists and are derived from the vision of Ezekiel, and that this in turn has an analogy to the Egyptian sun god Horus and his four sons. There are, moreover, such objects as the wheel and the cross that are known all over the world, yet that have a symbolic significance under certain conditions. Precisely what they symbolize is still matter for controversial speculation. (Idem, 1978, p.3)

Gaston Bachelard, on his turn, forms his Phenomenology of the Imaginary allowing the researcher to overlook the barriers separating authorship and reception, through a poetic reverie. (BACHELARD, 1981, p.69) He performs his symbolical analysis by destroying the

biographical commitment, gathering the symbol in its poetic integrity. Bachelard explores the images of the four natural elements – water, fire, earth and air – and all their poetic derivations in his poetics of the natural elements. Bachelard inserts the studies of symbolism inside the field of the poetic and creative thought – linking perception with sensation more than to Aristotelian reason. The basic precept to Bachelard’s studies on symbols is to perceive the symbolic contents as dynamic creators, amplifying the possibilities of all concrete images when elevating them to the poetic status. In this sense, the symbol engages in a special semantics, in which it owns not only the artificial and concrete meaning, but also a wider possibility of meaning generate by resonances of these same images in different poetic processes.

As an artist, Shanley operates on this different level, which Gaston Bachelard calls poetic imagination (BACHELARD, 2002, p 34). This level of consciousness breaks the rational way of facing the facts, favoring the impulses of imagination that reverberate in the mind underlying the schemes of the unconscious. It is also Bachelard who says that “we have only to speak of an object to think that we are being objective. But, because we chose it in the first place, the object reveals more about us than we about it.” (BACHELARD, 1981, p.2). This seems to be the case of the American playwright and my case as a reader as well.

To the analysis we carry out in the next chapter, I will use these ideas by Jung, Bachelard and Ruiz about symbolic contents, exploring their psychological, philosophical and poetical functions rather than their structural and anthropological sides. In order to do that, I will make use of Durand’s figurative structuralism by using his understanding of the symbolic processes. I will not work with his the archetypal schemes, though. Of course, my choice has a price. Leaving the Diurnal and Nocturnal anthropological aspects of the imaginary out of my thesis, I will not be able to talk about the figurative structuralism provided by Durand, but I must not lose my path, because the scope of a master’s thesis is limited. As all the choices and all the senses are implied in symbolical constructions, I believe this is the right path to follow so as to build my analysis of *Doubt, a Parable*.



3 Unveiling the Symbolic

“Doubt requires more courage than conviction does, and more energy; because conviction is a resting place and doubt is infinite – it is a passionate exercise. You may come out of my play uncertain. You may want to be sure. Look down on that feeling. We’ve got to learn with a full measure of uncertainty. There is no last word. That’s the silence under the chatter of our time.”

John Patrick Shanley, Preface to *Doubt, a Parable*

For John Patrick Shanley, doubt is infinite, a state of mind, or a passionate exercise. He sees doubt as a bond as well, that may unite human beings. *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* defines doubt as a status between belief and disbelief, which involves uncertainty or distrust or lack of assurance about a supposed piece of information. Doubt is connected to a state of mind in which our thoughts are suspended between two contradictory propositions, and then we become incapable of going along with either of them. Kant distinguishes between subjective and objective doubt; the first is "the state of an undecided mind," the final is "the cognition of the sufficiency of the grounds of holding something to be true" (KANT, 1986, p.97).

When Shanley titles his play *Doubt, a Parable* he is sending two messages at least. The first is that in this fictional territory we cannot be sure, or certain, about some things. Naming the play *Doubt*, Shanley excites the curiosity of the reader/spectator, holding them in a state of eagerness to know what is in there. The subtitle, *A Parable*, is also revealing. In the

literary tradition, a parable is a short story, generally fictional, in which the narrator reinforces moral values, or spiritual thoughts, he wants to discuss with his listeners. The plot of a parable is usually subordinated to the analogy it establishes between a particular instance of human behavior. Parables make complex ideas easier to understand and talk about. They characterize religious texts significantly, since parables are ideal for illustrating moral concepts behind religious ideologies. As this literary form is specially connected with Jesus Christ's narratives in the *New Testament*, it particularly suits a play set at the heart of a Catholic community. Only that, this time, instead of illustrating a specific given Truth, the parable comes to disclose the fact that there are many different truths to be considered.

Because Shanley calls his play *Doubt*, he encourages us to view his plot and fictional characters always doubting of their attitudes, filling our mind with intricate questions. In the context of such play, would Father Flynn be an honest man, eager to provoke a reform in the old Catholic traditions, changing the Church into a more welcoming place, or would he be a pervert prepared to make use of a child's social disadvantage to please his sexual aims? What about Sister Aloysius? Would Sister Aloysius represent the cliché of the authoritarian, inflexible, oppressing old nun, or would she be a constrained elder woman who sees the pitfalls of people and is worried about protecting a child from a situation she foresees? As to Sister James, would she be as naïve and candid a person, easy to be trapped by the experienced ways and influence of Sister Aloysius and Father Flynn, or would she be a young idealist striving not to be suffocated by Sister Aloysius excesses or overwhelmed by Father Flynn's allure? And what about Mrs. Muller, is she a loving mother who fighting for the survival and the happiness of her son, even if she is to tolerate a possible dubious relationship between Donald and Father Flynn, or has she given up the fight because she feels incapable of fighting the system? All the questions above have been built with an "or" - an alternative conjunction indicating the alternation between two possibilities. But evidently there are other possibilities as well, such as the characters - or some of them - bearing different degrees of each trend because, as Mrs. Muller says, (I repeat the quote) "Sometimes things aren't black and white." (DP, p.49).

Doubts are widespread through the entire plot, in the actions and the presented thoughts of the characters. The central issue respects Father Flynn. In this chapter, I will not build one reading aiming at reaching one conclusion as to his being or not a pedophile. My intention is not to subvert the purpose of the play, which is set upon the presence of doubt. I

will rather look for structural elements that may corroborate one or other possible conclusion on the part of the reader/spectator. To do so, we will analyze the characters closely, looking at their aptitude to offer evidence for conflicting conclusions. The tool that helps us here is the unveiling of some symbolical patterns contained in the play. Shanley's transposition of the play into the movie also offers us interesting keys to analyze.

When I first read the play and watched the movie my reaction was to see Father Flynn as totally innocent from Sister Aloysius's accusations. Something emotional connected me to the figure of Father Flynn, and I got pity on him for being a good man so cruelly and unfairly accused of horrible things. I believed his innocence, I saw him as a religious man, under attack because of his ideological thoughts and hopes in the possibility of a better world. If we trace back what Stanley Fish says, in "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics" about the changes in reception of a first reading, second reading, third reading (etc.) of a literary work, (FISH, 1986) I believe that Fish's "informed reader" will change his opinion several times along different readings of the same text. This also applies to the watching of the play or the movie. I think that the expected reaction - after the reader finishes his first reading of the play, or as the spectator leaves the theater or the movie having seen the work for the first time - is to take Father Flynn for his word. These were also my first impressions as a reader/ an audience. But now I have read the play more than twenty times, and watched the movie sixteen times. The result is that at this moment I corroborate Stanley Fish's assertion about the different answers to different readings. Now I have such doubts!

When we start the play, it seems Father Flynn is going to be the sole protagonist; he is the first one to be introduced to us, and he has this long monologue in the opening sermon. This is an interesting characteristic that involves the speech of the two protagonists. Father Flynn has the longest monologues when he is in public, in the Mass, in sermons that are philosophical treaties about feelings. But in other circumstances he is surrounded by silence. He talks little, and never about feelings. Sister Aloysius, on the other hand, talks too much. With this she overexposes herself and allows the reader to perceive how emotional her reasoning is beneath the surface of rationality. This in a way discredits her in the eyes of the reader, at least in the first readings of the play.

In his sermon about doubt Father Flynn presents ideas very close to the ideas that John Patrick Shanley presents about the same matter in the preface of the play, alluded to in the

epigraph above. In a sense, both embrace doubt as a philosophical concept. In this first moment, Father Flynn stands as the *raisonneur*³⁰, talking about things that belong to the fields of human behavior, morality and common sense. In his sermon, Father Flynn presents to his community and to the reader/spectator his ideas about doubt being as powerful and sustaining as certainty. He uses the techniques of a parable to illustrate his ideas, putting himself as an ordinary man, making statements that could be directed to the parishioners or to himself: “No one knows I’m sick. No one knows I’ve lost my last real friend. No one knows I’ve done something wrong.” (DP. p.6)

When Shanley presents Father Flynn as an ordinary man, a man who can make mistakes as same as the men from the parish, who sit there listening, Flynn is elevated to the status of a tragic hero. Making Father Flynn one of us, the play follows the Aristotelian theory that the most appealing characteristic of the tragic hero is that he is a person just like us (ARISTOTLE, 1996, p 31). After inviting us to the reflection on themes such as the pain of our puzzled journey through a hostile world, Father Flynn summons our empathy to him and our confidence in his understanding of human sorrows.

It is not difficult to empathize with Father Flynn, especially after the second act, when we are introduced to Sister Aloysius and her complaints about the new world, ball point pens, unruly students and the waste of time the art classes represent. She presents herself as a stereotype of the old hag nuns – always full of complaints and ready to eliminate any kind of pleasure one may feel. In this tradition the old nun is seen as a kind of general or parochial inquisitor, the protector of the dogmas that generally lead students to boredom. So, in this context, when Father Flynn is first accused, we tend not to take the thing seriously because we do not sympathize with the ideas and behavior of Sister Aloysius. She is demanding, authoritarian, she advises Sister James not to perform in her classes, and not to teach History enthusiastically, lest Sister James’s students would prefer History in detriment of other subjects. On the other hand, Father Flynn is a young priest whose ideas of welcoming people to church annoy Sister Aloysius. They belong to different sides of a discussion that appertains the times of the Second Ecumenical Council, or Vatican II. As mentioned before, in the first chapter of this thesis, the Second Ecumenical Council changed drastically what the Catholic Church was. The Catholic environment is very important to the setting of *Doubt, a Parable*.

³⁰ “A character in a play who appears to act as a mouthpiece for the opinions of the play’s author, usually displaying a superior or more detached view of the action than the other characters” (VASCONCELOS, 1987).

Being more specific, the Catholic environment in the 1964 Bronx is important to our understanding of the play. When the playwright establishes the setting at St. Nicholas, a Catholic Church and School in the Bronx, New York, during the year of 1964, he selects a temporal and cultural prospect of information. St. Nicholas is a parochial school, which means it works inside a parish, in a very restricted area, that involves an Irish/Italian Catholic strict circle, and all the play happenings occur in a set of regular spaces that are inside the boundaries of this same parish. Martin Andrucki calls our attention to that,

We get very little the sense of The Bronx and its million-and-a-quarter inhabitants, its rickety elevated subways, its noisy markets and factories. Instead, we feel we are in a kind of cloister – an enclosure containing a tiny group of people playing out a desperate game in seeming isolation. And yet a game whose rules and consequences are profoundly important – especially viewed from the perspective of 2004 in the aftermath of the clerical sex scandals. (Andrucki, 2008, p.9)

So, it is in this reduced space that Shanley's moral parable takes place. This parochial world, comprising a small portion of the Bronx variety, serves as the scenario for a play that resembles an old morality play³¹. *Doubt, a Parable* is similar to those morality plays in its structure. It talks about a very restrict place, but it also talks about moral themes that reach the status of universal. Only that here the same structure is used to reach the opposite effect: in the Middle Ages the morality play served the cause of validating the established order. Now the same context is used to highlight the fact that there is not one unique order to be obeyed, one only intrinsic truth to be unveiled. Different eyes concentrate on different points, different minds consider different aspects of reality, and different readers come to different conclusions. We have people's weaknesses being exposed through the eyes of the stage, and the battle of opposite forces that want to prove to be right, or at least people who judge they are doing the right thing. Furthermore, we have a hierarchical structure in the play that mirrors the Church hierarchy and even aspects of the society of the 1964 Bronx. This gets clear when we consider the power implicit in the role of Father Flynn and Monsignor Benedict, or even in the dialogue between Sister Aloysius and Mrs. Muller. We know that, in the matter of power of speech, in the setting of this play, it makes a difference if you are a woman, a black woman, or a male monsignor.

³¹ In the theatre, one of the three main kinds of vernacular drama of European Middle Ages. A morality play is an allegory in which the characters are abstractions, centered on a hero, whose weakness is assaulted by diabolic forces and protected by angelical beings.

Doubt, a Parable deals on the possibility of a priest abusing of a young Black boy in a parish destined to Italian and Irish immigrants. The importance of the roots of the parishioners is highlighted in the text, when Sister Aloysius reminds Sister James that “there is a statue of St. Patrick on one side of the church and a statue of St. Anthony on the other. This parish serves Irish and Italian families. Someone will hit Donald Muller.” (DP, p. 19). Sister Aloysius is certain of that because she knows the environment of this parish is full of prejudice against colored people. There are many levels here to be explored. First, being the abuses real or not, it would be very difficult to do anything against Father Flynn. Sister Aloysius cannot work against her superior, because she has no power to do anything. She is engaged in a hierarchy that obstructs her from doing what she really wants to do. Who would accept the word of a nun against a priest in that context? Who would accept the word of a Black woman – supposing Mrs. Muller decided to take an attitude in the defense of her son?

The play takes place in the middle of a strong process of change in the Church. The story takes place in 1964, and the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) opens in 1963, under Pope John XXIII and lasts until 1965, under Pope Paul VI. As a matter of fact, since we are dealing with symbols and images in this thesis, I open here a parenthesis to remark that in a way the Church ended up losing a lot after the Vatican II, because much of the mystery and the magic that is necessary to the reaching of myths and archetypes dissolved as the clergy gave up a series of things, such as the ritual of the Mass performed in Latin, with the priest having his back to the parishioners, the loss of the aura that came along with the special vestments and other ceremonials. The price to pay for allowing the community to get closer involved a closer visibility, which proved harmful, because it became clear that the priest was ultimately just another common person/sinner, limited as all others. The space of the rational overlapped into the space of the shadow, and that proved detrimental to the Catholic Church, in the long run, in my opinion. On the other hand, the dessacralization of all institutions proved to be a mark of the second half of the 20th Century, and it is possible that this fact relates to a new stage that is being reached in the development of social life.

Before the Council, with the old theologies still working, the masses prayed in Latin and priests and nuns dressing themselves with sophisticated habits that resembled the Middle Ages, their figures were almost sanctified. Priests were treated with respect and veneration, so they were put in a holy place, as representatives of God, where the fragile hands of a simple nun would never reach. After the Council, everything changed drastically. The language

changed from Latin to the vernacular, and even theology received inserts of a bit of everything, including the theories on the Existentialism. Nuns diminished considerably, and both they and the priests started wearing ordinary clothes – which a great change for people like Sister Aloysius, who were caught in this transition period.

The characters in the play are put in different sides of these two separated worlds. Sister James and Father Flynn represent this post-Council world, with their frankly talking with their students and their joy in teaching. Sister Aloysius belongs to the pre-Council party and she highlights this belief during the play in her lines. In the fourth scene there is a passage that demonstrates their different ideologies on the matter of the behavior of Church representatives. They say,

Flynn: Not yet. I think a message of the Second Ecumenical Council was that the Church needs to take on a more familiar face. Reflect the local community. We should sing a song from the radio now and then. Take the kids out for ice cream.

Sister Aloysius: Ice Cream.

Flynn: Maybe take the boys on a camping trip. We should be friendlier. The children and the parents should see us as members of their family rather than emissaries from Rome. I think the pageant should be charming, like a community theater doing a show.

Sister Aloysius: But we're not members of their family. We're different.

Flynn: Why? Because of our vows?

Sister Aloysius: Precisely.

Flynn: I don't think we're so different. (To Sister James) You know, I would take some more tea, Sister. Thank you.

Sister Aloysius: And they think we're different. The working-class people of this parish trust us to be different. (DP, p.30)

Taking both sides into account, we can find a balance in the arguments of the two characters, to understand the proposal of arguments on both sides when we are thinking about the possibility of the sexual molestation of a child. The time setting is important for the comprehension of the play as a whole. Actually, the two time settings are important, the time when the story takes place (1964) and the time when it is written (2004), because between those two years the issues of sexual assault and pedophilia changed from invisibility into major taboo. And also because of the changes that took place concerning the influence of

religious practices within the community and the internal changes that took place within the Catholic Church as an institution.

The choice of the year 1964 reflects the presence of doubt because that is time of change, in many respects. Priests and nuns are reconsidering the ways in which they should relate to the community around them. If so much that the vicars used to embrace and believe have changed, why would parishioners believe in this new Church? In terms of reception of the play, we still have to consider the time when the play was put on stage, in 2004. According to Martin Andrucki,

We also need to consider the importance of the temporal setting of the play's first production: November, 2004, a time when the sexual scandals in the Church were still fresh in the public mind. Audiences would inevitably view the action of the play, set forty years earlier than the production, through the lens of the present. What would this do to their attitude toward Father Flynn? Would they leap to the conclusion that he must be guilty – thereby embracing the certainty that Shanley had set out to undermine? Or would they find that the play successfully challenges their preconceptions, leaving them doubtful about their easy assumptions regarding Catholic priests and young boys? (Andrucki, 2008, p.11)

The two time referents of 1964 and 2004 therefore challenge us in two complicated areas, sexuality and the relations with the sacred. The sixties is the decade of the sexual revolution. From that point onwards millenary patterns concerning gender roles and relations were broken and changed. It is also in the 1960's that we have another revolution, concerning the Educational System. All that directly affected the functions performed by priests, in the dealing with the sacred rituals of civilized urban communities, and the nuns who served as teachers. The Vatican II represents an attempt to adapt to this new reality. One of the consequences of diminishing the distance between the priests and the parishioners is that the closer we see, the more the defects may show. And so did the aberrations that derive from the repression of sexuality. From the time span of the 1960's to 2004, the sexual scandals involving the church became one of the greatest shames the Catholic institution has to account for. Carl Jung says that there are levels of interpretation, recorded in our unconscious, that are independent on our reason; they are connected to the experiences we live and the information we grasp from the world (JUNG, 1992, p. 36). At a symbolical level, we can face the dispute of Father Flynn and Sister Aloysius through the eyes of the hermeneutics of the imaginary, since both of them represent symbolic roles that stand for the fracture of the hermeneutic experience, as we have discussed in chapter two. Roughly putting it, in the imaginary of the

Sixties, priests were saintly creatures; conversely, in the laicized imaginary of the 2000's, priests are sexual perverts. The experience of man in the world is a fractured one. Man is a hermeneutic creature, eager for investing meaning into the world, always divided by the insertion of otherness. Such phenomenon is configured as the paradoxical relations between pleasure and dissatisfaction, and the presence and absence of things in the world. This paradoxical relation constitutes the way we experience the other. Otherness symbolically manifests the subjective contents that are necessary to constitute man as an integral entity. Castor Bartolomé Ruiz defines these two opposite roles summoning the presence of two mythical images – Narcissus and Utopia.

For Ruiz, the paradoxes of otherness may confound us, because the same object can be the cause of pleasure and dissatisfaction (RUIZ, 2003 p. 105). A fact, a person, a relationship or even a circumstance can provoke the experience of achieving realization or can throw us into frustration. This paradox directs the person to the role of Utopia, or *Utopos*, where the search for pleasure battles against the deception of the world as it presents itself. Father Flynn may perform the role of *Utopos*, independently of the matter of his guilt or innocence in the case of Donald Muller. He tries, through his aptitudes, to change the Church into a friendlier place. Being nice and pleasant with the students and the parishioners, he is acting against the vicissitudes of the world and he is attempting to create a better place for him and the others. He performs the role of *Utopos*, so he is in the search of happiness and pleasure. That may work against him, if we consider that we do not have access to his deep desires or thoughts. In *Doubt, a Parable*, we are not able to define who the characters are, so we have to analyze the actions they perform. This happens because in plays we do not have a narrator. There are only two ways of finding out what is in the mind of dramatic characters: when they reveal themselves in monologues, when they tell themselves/the audience what they think or plan to do; or when they expose their views as they talk to other characters. Father Flynn's monologues are the sermons, so they are not addressed to himself. These sermons have a purpose, and that purpose is not to scrutinize his own feelings. As to the dialogues, it is Sister Aloysius who reveals herself as she talks to others, not Father Flynn. When we see him talk he is performing his roles: we see him talk as a priest to his flock, as an educator to his students, in self defense with Sister Aloysius and discussing ideological and political issues with Sister James.

The incapacity of accepting difference and the otherness may enclosure a person ideologically and symbolically in a narcissistic prison. In such conditions the person does not accept that any good can come from the other, because Narcissus achieves pleasure looking at his own possibilities. For Narcissus the other exists only when performing actions that will satisfy his inner-self. The other is reduced to the boundaries of the necessities of Narcissus. This may apply to the role of Sister Aloysius. It is clear that she accepts, or is forced to accept, the presence of Donald Muller in her school. However, she demonstrates no tolerance with Father Flynn's ideas of changing the parish into a hospitable place, or to the enthusiastic way Sister James teaches History. In the moment of dissatisfaction, Narcissus drives his aggressive instincts against otherness (RUIZ, 2003, p.5). Sister Aloysius does that, with the intention of destroying what makes her unhappy: "I will bring him down. With or without your help." (DP, p. 35) Nonetheless, both Utopos and Narcissus are integrative parts of man, as Ruiz reminds us,

Se Narciso é uma forma patológica de estruturar a subjetividade, seu lugar não pode ser ocupado por *Utopos*. *Utopos* oferece a felicidade plena, dizendo que irá suturar a fratura humana, conseguindo a plenitude tão dramaticamente perseguida. Ele promete o paraíso perdido em uma terra que mana perfeição. As feições do utopismo são reconhecíveis nos mirabolantes projetos sociais ou nas ofertas de felicidade plena que se anunciam como sistemas absolutos ao longo da história. *Utopos* é o irmão gêmeo de Narciso. Cara e cruz de uma mesma moeda. Como ocorria com Narciso, a entrega incondicional nos braços de *Utopos* conduz fatalmente para o desespero ou para o fanatismo. A natureza paradoxal do imaginário se projeta em todas as direções. Narciso e *Utopos* afogam ou dilaceram o sem-fundo humano, porém ambos são necessários e insubstituíveis para que a subjetividade possa realizar-se numa dimensão social e histórica. A auto-estima de Narciso é condição *sine qua non* para que a subjetividade possa auto-afirmar-se como sujeito autônomo e criativo. O horizonte de *Utopos* é imprescindível para dirigir a práxis do sujeito e da sociedade a um horizonte de possibilidades. Esse horizonte, mesmo que possa ser realizado com perfeição, indica a necessidade e a possibilidade permanente de superação e transformação social³². (Ruiz, 2003, p. 106)

³² If Narcissus represents a pathological form of structuring subjectivity, its place cannot be occupied by *Utopos*. *Utopos* promises complete happiness, declaring he will suture the human fracture, restoring the fullness so dramatically chased. He promises the return of the lost paradise in a land flowing with perfection. These features are recognizable in utopian social projects or gaudy political offerings of happiness that advertise themselves as absolute systems through history. *Utopos* is the twin brother of Narcissus. Face and cross of the same coin. As with Narcissus, the unconditional surrender on the arms of *Utopos* inevitably leads to despair or fanaticism. The paradoxical nature of the imaginary is projected in all directions. Narcissus and *Utopos* drown or disrupt the human condition, yet both are necessary and irreplaceable so that subjectivity can take place in a social and historical dimension. The self-esteem of Narcissus is a necessary condition so that subjectivity can assert itself as an autonomous and creative subject. The horizon of *Utopos* is essential to direct the practice of the individual and the social practice to a horizon of possibilities. This horizon, even if it can be achieved, indicates the necessity and possibility of permanent resilience and social transformation.

Man is a hermeneutic creature, bound to the necessity of signifying the world, and of seeing himself in the mirror of otherness. Narcissus and Utopos are the integrative parts of this wholeness. In *Doubt, a Parable* they are represented in the roles of Father Flynn and Sister Aloysius. In a hermeneutic dimension, both characters are representative of the relationship between man and the world. It is not only the love of the Church that guides Sister Aloysius's steps against Father Flynn. It is her certainty against him and her repulse of otherness. In her religious life, Sister Aloysius finds her way to interact with this same Church that encompasses her aptitudes. Religion encompasses a symbolical dimension that can provoke the detachment between the person and the institution through the attribution of new hermeneutic meanings or hermeneutic aptitudes provided by the subject himself (RUIZ, 2003, p 129). In another possible interpretation, Sister Aloysius attributes to herself the role of inquisitor of this institution, because this is her *modus operandi*. In this reading, Father Flynn would be the idealistic priest, who is engaged with his mission of changing the Church into a welcoming place. As he performs the role of *Utopos*, he meets with Narcissus on his path, who brings him down.

If the character of Father Flynn is approached as seen by Sister Aloysius, the emphasis on his innocence is stressed. He is seen as the tragic hero, as he fights the same sorrows we fight in our private journeys. So, where is the doubt? It comes in little things related to his person and to the imagery of priests and nuns in Western tradition. Literary texts inescapably interact with other literary texts. In the essay "Literary Competence", literary critic Jonathan Culler (CULLER, 2005, p. 43) reminds us that nobody approaches a text as *tabula rasa*, readers always make use of their implicit understanding of the norms in literary discourse. They also make use of their literary experience and background. Readers who are acquainted with literary texts written in English are likely to think that some elements in *Doubt, a Parable* evoke the memory of two classics, one by Nathaniel Hawthorne, the other by James Joyce. The reference to Hawthorne beckons to the sermons preached by Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale, in *The Scarlet Letter* (HAWTHORNE, 1988). Rev. Dimmesdale's and Father Flynn's sermons carry different layers of meaning, and innuendoes. They emphasize the unsolvable gap that exists between human weakness and the desire for greatness. The difference between the two characters, however, lies in their perception on the part of the reader. In *The Scarlet Letter* the reader is aware of the fact that each of Rev. Dimmesdale's sermons is an acknowledgment of his guilt, a confession that is at each time interpreted by the

congregation as a saintly act of humility. The knowledge about the facts involving Father Flynn's private life, on the other hand, are outside the concrete reach of the reader, there is no textual/factual information about them.

And then we reach the inter-textual connections between Shanley's *Doubt, a Parable* and James Joyce's "The Sisters", the opening short story in *Dubliners* (JOYCE, 2005). The first hint of a kinship between the two works relates to the characters' names. Both stories spin around the doubt involving the suspicion about pedophilia in the relation between two priests who hold fatherly mentor relations with two boys in their puberty who they teach and protect. Both priests are named Father Flynn. The title of Joyce's story is "The Sisters", and in Shanley's play the moral judgment about Father Flynn's guilt or innocence lies in the hands of "two sisters", Sister James and Sister Aloysius. Each one of these nuns carries in her religious designation part of the name of the author of *Dubliners*, James Aloysius Joyce.

The second layer of reference involves the thematic relevance of Ireland and of the Catholic Church in the two works. Joyce is Irish, and Shanley is Irish-American. When Joyce was a child Ireland almost reached its independence - after eight centuries of subjugation to England - through the political influence of Charles Stuart Parnell. Parnell - a national hero who acquires the status of a myth in Joyce's fiction - was let down by his own fellow citizens in a decisive moment, due to an alliance made by the English government and the Catholic Church in Ireland. This causes Joyce to break with the Church on behalf of Parnell who, defeated, got depressed, sick, and died soon afterwards. Joyce lived to see part of Ireland independent from England, only to reach the sad conclusion that things did not change much after that.

Ireland is one of those nations, such as the Jewish or Italian nations, who arguably have more nationals living outside their territory than inside. The population of Ireland is now of about six million people³³, whereas the population of Irish Americans in the U.S. outreaches thirty-six million citizens³⁴. More than ten percent of the population of the U.S. are of Irish ancestry, coming from the groups who emigrated to America especially to run from the three Irish famines that took place respectively in the mid-18th Century, mid-19th Century and at the end of the 19th Century. The U.S. has the nickname of "The Melting Pot" due to its

³³ According to the Central Statistics Office of Ireland.

³⁴ According to the 2008 American Community Survey, their national census.

characteristics of welcoming immigrants; however, even as a consequence to that, it takes some generations for the newcomers to be really integrated into the system. Meanwhile, they represent, for a period, the poorer spheres of the social pyramid. This is in a sense the reality of the Bronx lower middle-class Catholic Irish and Italian community where Shanley was born and raised, and which he transposes into the fictional universe of his plays. Being an Irish Catholic, in the work of Joyce, represents being poor, decadent and politically revolutionary. Being an Irish Catholic in the work of Shanley means living in a world of change, in the process of being integrated in the country, in a time when the Catholic Church is also changing its route and several of its practices.

Both Father Flynns are implicated in a mysterious episode that took place at the sacristy, involving the holy chalice - a symbol of the faith - , wine, and an altar boy. There is no proof, no evidence, about anything, but there is the doubt. Joyce's Father Flynn dies; Shanley's Father Flynn gets a promotion. Joyce writes in a time when sexual scandals in the Church represented a taboo never to be approached or verbalized. Shanley's play is written in 2004, in a laicized time when several episodes of the kind have been examined, when child molesting is a much more serious problem than the investigation of a religious person. Shanley's play is set in the 1960's, when issues involving sexual problems within the Church were often covered by the Institution and the person involved was likely to be transferred (sometimes even promoted) into another diocese. The fact that this occurred is explored by the author in the play. Nevertheless, saying that things like that frequently occur is one thing; blaming one specific person for that, without evidence, is another.

As previously stated, Donald Muller is only referred to in *Doubt, a Parable*. The readers construct this character through what they hear predominantly from Sister Aloysius, or from Donald's Mother; from the pre-textual ideas and information they have, as persons, about issues as pedophilia and the Catholic Church; and from their competence as experienced readers, taking into account the way the ingredients are mixed in each structural construct. In "The Sisters", on the other hand, there are two boys, the altar boy from Joyce's Father Flynn's past, involved in the episode that triggered his illness and decay, and the twelve year boy who is both the protagonist and the narrator of the story. The element of doubt in Joyce's story derives from the clash between the boy's sensitivity and intelligence and his limitations because he does not master yet the meaning of the allusions and insinuations he meets with on his way. The boy has been friends for some time with this

paralytic old priest who is sent to the home of his sisters to be looked after in his last years. The boy makes company to Father Flynn, and Father Flynn opens the doors of knowledge to him, teaching him Latin, History, Philosophy and Religion. The day the priest dies, the boy realizes the reticence when other people talk about him “I puzzled my head to extract meaning from [their] unfinished sentences.” (JOYCE, 2005, p. 9) During the night he has a dream about Father Flynn, and the impression that the old man wants to confess something to him. The following day the boy has a strange sensation, like double feelings, he is at the same time sad for the loss of his friend, and glad about it, “I felt even annoyed at discovering in myself a sensation of freedom as if I had been freed from something by his death.” (Idem, p. 11) As the boy and his aunt visit the priest’s sisters, at the priest’s wake, he gathers some other bits of loose information, “It was that chalice he broke.... That was the beginning of it. [. . .] They say it was the boy’s fault.” (Ibidem, p. 16) Like Shanley’s, Joyce’s story is open-ended.

This intertextual relation between the two literary texts opens the discussion about the dubious behavior of Father Flynn. There are some aspects, and little details about Father Flynn that can contribute to the building of our own doubts concerning his guilt or innocence. First, we have the plant of the long nails. Why does Father Flynn enjoy having longish nails? And why does he call the attention of the boys for this precise detail, when he is talking to them in the rectory? There are many possible answers. Maybe he played the guitar, and longer nails help produce a better sound. Men wearing longer hair, nails, necklaces, was a fashion from the mid-sixties onwards that reflected an open mind and served to approximate the roles of the two sexes. That would fit the proposal of the Vatican Council of approximating the shepherd from his flock. On the other hand, as Andrucki says, it can be the mark of a sensualist. It is also interesting to notice how Father Flynn highlights the hierarchical chain that puts him above Sister Aloysius. In one of the text lines of the play, as an indication of what the characters are supposed to do, we have: “They come in and sit down. Father Flynn takes Sister Aloysius’s chair. He is sitting at her desk. She reacts, but says nothing.” (DP, p. 27) In another scene, Father Flynn tells Sister Aloysius he is not answerable to her, so he does not have to justify any of his acts to her. In his words, “I’m not pleased with how you handled this Sister. Next time you are troubled by dark ideas, I suggest you speak to the Monsignor.” (DP, p. 35) He knows Sister Aloysius has no power to demand a direct answer.

The dialogue below can be taken in two opposite ways, either as an instance of how generous Father Flynn is in not taking the case into its ultimate consequences by complaining to his superiors about Sister Aloysius's behavior, or as a threat in the form of a polite reminder about whose word is worthier inside this patriarchal millenary institution:

Flynn: I feel as if my reputation has been damaged through no fault of my own. But I'm reluctant to take the steps necessary to repair it for fear of doing further harm. It's frustrating. I can tell you that.

Sister James: Is it true?

Flynn: What?

Sister James: You know what I'm asking.

Flynn: No, it's not true.

Sister James: Oh, I don't know what to believe.

Flynn: How can you take sides against me?

Sister James: It doesn't matter.

Flynn: It does matter! I've done nothing. There's no substance to any of this. The most innocent actions can appear sinister to the poisoned mind. I had to throw that poor boy off the altar. He's devastated. The only reason I haven't gone to the monsignor is I don't want to tear apart the school. Sister Aloysius would most certainly lose her position as principal if I made her accusations known. Since they're baseless. You might lose your place as well.

Sister James: Are you threatening me?

Flynn: What do you take me for? No. (DP. p. 40)

This is also the only moment in the play in which the question "Is it true" is put openly. The direct question gets a direct answer "No, it's not true." Still, the doubt remains. If we believe Father Flynn, the answer is unnecessary. If we do not, we will read it as a lie. Besides, as we have been told by Sister Aloysius, private meetings between priests and nuns infringe the clerical protocol. Therefore, the very situation that Father Flynn and Sister James talk is irregular. Andrucki reminds us that,

We need only remind ourselves that the image of the convent as a hothouse of fornication was a major theme of Protestant polemic during the Reformation. Note, for instance, the scene where Hamlet, maddened by Ophelia's betrayal, cries out, "get thee to a nunnery". This is not a recommendation that she enter a cloister; it is a sneering directive that she become a whore, "nunnery" being a slang term for "brothel" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Does this attitude persist? Is there anyone who has not heard a prurient joke based on it? So, Sister Aloysius's punctiliousness on

this matter is not mere formalism. She understands that the threat of scandals always hangs over the clergy, and she takes firm steps to avoid it. (Andrucki, 2008, p.12)

Father Flynn does not seem to worry about this matter, either because he is an unbiased person, a modern post-Vatican priest, or because he is too confident in his power and position inside the institution. The same consideration applies for the episode in which he tries to hide that Donald Muller has drunk altar wine, notwithstanding the rules he defends are clear about the right posture to take in a case like that. So, we realize that Father Flynn is able to break the rules if it serves his intentions. Second, a threatening tone might be identified in Father Flynn's speech when he says that if he tells what is happening to the monsignor both Sister Aloysius and Sister James will lose their positions in the parish. When Sister James asks him if that is a threat, he promptly says no. However, the words have been said and the idea has been presented. Later in the scene Father Flynn says he knows Sister James's ideology of love – brotherly love – and that he also believes in it. In his words,

Flynn: I care about this congregation!

Sister James: I know you do.

Flynn: Like you care about your class! You love them, don't you?

Sister James: Yes.

Father Flynn: That's natural. How else would you relate to children? I can look at your face and know your philosophy: kindness.

Sister James: I don't know. I mean, of course.
(...)

Flynn: There are people who go after your humanity, Sister James, who tell you the light in your heart is a weakness. That your soft feelings betray you. I don't believe that. It's an old tactic of cruel people to kill kindness in the name of virtue. Don't believe it. There's nothing wrong with love.

Sister James: Of course not, but...

Flynn: Have you forgotten that was the message of the Savior to us all. Love. Not suspicion, disapproval and judgment. Love of people. Have you found Sister Aloysius a positive inspiration? (DP, p. 41)

Although Father Flynn is using these considerations rhetorically on his own behalf, to counterfeit the influence Sister Aloysius exerts on Sister James, his words can also relate to the history of the Catholic Church. The basis to the Christian doctrine is Love. The word “catholic” means universal, all-including. At some point in the development of its history, both concepts ended up meaning the reversal. In the name of love wars were made and an empire was raised. And the concept of disinterested love mingled into the notions of suspicion and danger. Here Father Flynn positions himself as a priest, a representative of the Christian religion, and a defender of the ideology of brotherly love – at least these are some of the Christian values professed by him. In this scene, if he is being honest, he has been a brother to Sister Aloysius by not denouncing her. In this case, he may care for her, in a way she does not care for him. He would play the role of *Utopos*, acting towards a greater good in the intention of not tearing the school apart. On the other hand, if he is not innocent, we can find the hints to a very common discourse in literature – love is a justification for one’s selfish intentions. Andrucki sees in this moment of the play an intertextual relation with Goethe’s *Faust*, because in both plays we have a woman being persuaded by an older man, who uses the discourse of divine love to convince her to do as he wishes.

MARGARET

Desiring no possession
 ’Tis long since thou hast been to mass or to confession.
 Believest thou in God?

FAUST

My darling, who shall dare
 “I believe in God!” to say?
 Ask priest or sage the answer to declare,
 And it will seem a mocking play,
 A sarcasm on the asker.

MARGARET

Then thou believest not!

FAUST

Hear me not falsely, sweetest countenance!
 Who dare express Him?
 And who profess Him,
 Saying: I believe in Him!
 Who, feeling, seeing,
 Deny His being,
 Saying: I believe Him not!
 The All-enfolding,
 The All-upholding,
 Folds and upholds he not
 Thee, me, Himself?
 Arches not there the sky above us?
 Lies not beneath us, firm, the earth?
 And rise not, on us shining,

Friendly, the everlasting stars?
 Look I not, eye to eye, on thee,
 And feel'st not, thronging
 To head and heart, the force,
 Still weaving its eternal secret,
 Invisible, visible, round thy life?
 Vast as it is, fill with that force thy heart,
 And when thou in the feeling wholly blessed art,
 Call it, then, what thou wilt,—
 Call it Bliss! Heart! Love! God!
 I have no name to give it!
 Feeling is all in all:
 The Name is sound and smoke,
 Obscuring Heaven's clear glow. (Goethe, 2005, p. 135)

Faust is desperate to possess Margaret, and has no scruples in using the discourse of God, and divine love, to justify his own actions. He is an elderly man, wiser too, who persuades a young and naïve girl through a discourse full of honorable words. Faust makes use of sophisticated discourse and weaves a semantic web, from which the inexperienced Margaret cannot escape. Andrucki identifies the same strategy in Father Flynn. As Andrucki reminds us, “the blandishments of one of drama’s great seducers have become a cultural commonplace, and Father Flynn instinctively adopts Faust’s pitch: God is love, love is good; trust your feelings.” (ANDRUCKI, 2008, p.14). In this scene, Father Flynn goes through all the steps of seduction – he convinces Sister James through his discourse of divine and brotherly love, then he makes her get emotional and cry, and, at the end, he reaches physical contact, when he “pats her uneasily, looking around” (DP, p. 42).

On the symbolical level, this scene contains another important element – the crow. During the entire scene, a crow observes Sister James and Father Flynn. At the end of the scene, when the crow caws, Father Flynn yells at it, saying “Oh, be quiet.” (DP, p. 42). Why do we have a crow observing the scene? What if it were a dove instead of a crow? Why does the animal annoy Father Flynn so much? A black bird is a strong symbolic image in a theatrical scene. Cirlot defines the image of the crow in the following terms,

Because of its black color, the crow is associated with the idea of beginning (as expressed in such symbols as the maternal night, primigenial darkness, the fertilizing earth). Because it is also associated with the atmosphere, it is a symbol for creative, demiurgic power and for spiritual strength. Because of its flight, it is considered a messenger. And, in sum, the crow has been invested by many primitive peoples with far-reaching cosmic significance. Indeed, for the Red Indians of North America it is the great civilizer and the creator of the visible world. It has a similar meaning for the Celts and the Germanic tribes, as well as in Siberia. In the classical cultures it no longer possesses such wide implications, but it does still retain certain mystic powers and in particular the ability to foresee the future; hence its caw played

a special part in rites of divination. In Christian symbolism it is an allegory of solitude. Amongst the alchemists it recovers some of the original characteristics ascribed to it by the primitives, standing in particular for *nigredo*, or the initial state which is both the inherent characteristic of prime matter and the condition produced by separating out the Elements (*putrefactio*). An interesting development of crow-symbolism is the representation of it with three legs drawn within a solar disk. In this form it is the first of the Chinese imperial emblems, and represents *Yang* or the active life of the Emperor. The three legs correspond to the sun-symbolism of the tripod: first light or rising sun, zenith or midday sun, and sunset or setting sun. In Beaumont's view, the crow in itself signifies the isolation of him who lives on a superior plane, this being the symbolism in general of all solitary birds. (Cirlot, 2011, p. 71)

As the play is set in a Catholic environment, we could take Cirlot's definition when he says that the crow, in Christian tradition, represents loneliness. Father Flynn is lonely in the play, standing in his own defense against a certainty that he cannot dissolve on Sister Aloysius's mind. He is also the only ordered character, in the Catholic religious form, standing in defense of changing the parish environment in a warm and nice place for those who belong in it. The crow could represent Father Flynn, alone and cawing at the air, as if trying to prove his ideals or his own innocence. Even when Father Flynn yells at the crow, this may be interpreted, symbolically, as his attempt to distress his mind of the decisions he has to take alone, just like the crow, which is a lonely bird too. There is also the possibility of interpreting crow's singing as a song of hope – at least it is what it represented to the Ancient Romans (HERDER LEXIKON, 1990, p.67), or to the first Christians. In this context, the singing of the black bird might bring some hope to Father Flynn that in the end everything is going to go well for him. He is not fully happy at the end of the play, but he is not in jail either, and he is even promoted. However, there is another interpretation to the image that presents the crow as a representation of the denatured father, or denatured mother, the one who abandon their own child or provoke injuries to them. (HERDER LEXIKON, 1990, p.67). In this case, we might take Father Flynn as a double of the crow, and head our interpretation towards his guilt. As the only male figure to appear in the play, and the only male who seems to care about Donald Muller, he could be stand for a father figure – after all, “father” is the expression we use to address a priest.

As a messenger of the Gods, the crow may also symbolize the divine conscience that is telling Father Flynn that his propensities towards Donald Muller should be restrained and he should stop, which justifies his annoyance as he yells at the animal. As one can see, there are many levels and several interpretations for this single image in this passage of the play.

This is the true nature of the symbol, it is always open to interpretation, so we can find in it possible hints to suggest Father Flynn's innocence or guilt.

In Scene Five Father Flynn is summoned to Sister Aloysius's office. In this case, again, the symbol is not provided by the dialogue, but by the directions left by the author: "She hangs up the phone. Father Flynn is standing there in this black cassock. He doesn't come in." (DP, p. 25) Such description brings to our minds the mythical figure of the vampire, not only because of his black cassock, but because of the rituals associated with the archetype of the vampire. According to Claudio Zanini, "one of the peculiarities about the vampire is that it does not enter a place without being taken or/and invited" (ZANINI, 2007, p. 105). There is also the pertinence of the figure of the Devil, who shares this same kind of behavior. In his book *O Diabo no Imaginário Cristão*, Carlos Roberto Nogueira refers that there is a tradition of the Devil's waiting to be invited, especially in sacred places (NOGUEIRA, 2002, p.96). Sister Aloysius's office stands for this sacred place, inside a Catholic parish where she is a representative of the Christians in there. So, at a symbolical level, he would be a representation of evil, waiting to persuade those who fall prey to his seductive appeals. If we move, anthropologically, beyond the range of Christianity, into more primitive and more remote forms of religiosity, we can retrace the primeval times of a feminine power, usually referred to as the image of The Great Mother, which subsists in Christianity through the image of the Holy Virgin. This age old image is so powerful that, even as a representative of more recent patriarchal authority, Father Flynn stays outside, as if waiting for permission to get into a holy place.

We could also say that the reason he does not join the room is his decorum, as this is a formal situation and we know that priests and nuns are not supposed to get alone together. However, this did not seem to matter when Father Flynn was talking to Sister James. But Sister Aloysius is not Sister James. She is aware of the possibility that she is being terribly unfair, but the other alternative, in case her suspicion is correct, is that Donald Muller cannot count on anyone else in the world, except herself, to defend him. She is a very attentive experienced woman, who always pays attention to every small detail. Father Flynn, on the other hand, needs a notebook to write down his ideas so as he won't forget them.

Sister Aloysius's attention for details is shown in this passage from Scene Eight,

Flynn: I've not touched a child.

Sister Aloysius: You have.

Flynn: You have not the slightest proof of anything.

Sister Aloysius: But I have my certainty, and armed with that, I will go to your last parish, and the other one before that if necessary. I will find a parent, Father Flynn! Trust me I will. A parent who probably doesn't know that you are still working with children. And once I do that, you will be exposed. You may even be attacked, metaphorically or otherwise.

Flynn: You have no right to act on your own! You are a member of a religious order. You have taken your vows, obedience being one! You answer to us! You have no right to step outside the Church!

Sister Aloysius: 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. Now, did you give Donald Muller wine to drink?

Flynn: Have you never done anything wrong?

Sister Aloysius: I have.

Flynn: Mortal sin?

Sister Aloysius: Yes.

Flynn: And?

Sister Aloysius: I confessed it! Did you give Donald Muller wine to drink?

Flynn: Whatever I have done, I have left in the healing hands of my confessor. As have you! We are the same!

Sister Aloysius: We are not the same! A dog that bites is a dog that bites! I do not justify what I do wrong and go on. I admit it, desist, and take my medicine. Did you give Donald Muller wine to drink?

Flynn: No.

Sister Aloysius: Mental reservation?

Flynn: No.

Sister Aloysius: You lie. Very well then. If you won't leave my office, I will. And once I go, I will not stop. (DP, p. 54)

There are many interesting points in this dialogue. One of them is the separation verbally created by Father Flynn between "us" and "you." "Us", meaning inclusion and belonging, refers to him and either the Church or the (male) priests. "You", singular or plural, can refer to Sister Aloysius as an individual breaking her vow of obedience, or to nuns in general as behaving as if they were as important as priests. Thus confronted, Sister Aloysius

declares that nothing will stop her, even as she has to step outside the Church, or away from God, if that be necessary. At this moment she grows before the eyes of the reader/spectator. She will do what she believes is the right thing to do, no matter what. And the right thing for her, as a feminine force, is to follow her drive to protect Donald Muller from danger. Andrucki sees here a turning point,

She passes from being the scourge of lipstick and ball-point pens to being the enemy of real evil, and her character is elevated accordingly. What gives dramatic characters stature is their embrace of morally sympathetic principles or convictions. When characters take risks and suffer losses in pursuit of those convictions, their stature increases, and they invite our admiration and approval. As we have seen, Sister Aloysius is threatened by Father Flynn with professional sanctions a number of times in the play. But each time, she refuses to back down or mitigate her zeal. (Andrucki, 2008, p.17)

The symbol of the crow and the symbolical inaptitude of Father Flynn to enter the office place Sister Aloysius as a champion of justice against evil. According to her, “in the pursuit of wrongdoing, one steps away from God.” (DP, p. 58). Sister Aloysius is an intelligent woman and she is aware of the fact that, as he is stronger, she must be more cunning. So, she devises some skilled strategies to trap Father Flynn.

In Scene Four Sister Aloysius is talking to Sister James, and the subject of the frost comes up as a topic. Sister James asks if they had had a frost, and Sister Aloysius answers, “When it comes, it’s too late” (DP, p.17). In his book *Campos do Imaginário*, Gilbert Durand talks about the psychoanalysis of the frost. He says that, in literature, when the snow comes it drives all the scenario in white, covering everything else and highlighting only what is relevant to highlight. (DURAND, 1996, p.13). Sister Aloysius comment that “When it comes, it’s too late” uncovers her intention to move preventively, so that when the snow comes there is nothing to be revealed, because she will take all the necessary precautions so that nothing happens. Secondly, there are mentions of wind, and windstorms in the text, all of them in scenes that include Sister Aloysius. The air is, predominantly, a symbol connected to the intellectual mind and to wisdom. It can be described as it follows,

Of the Four Elements, air and fire are regarded as active and male; water and earth as passive and female. In some elemental cosmogonies, fire is given pride of place and considered the origin of all things, but the more general belief is that air is the primary element. Compression or concentration of air creates heat or fire, from which all forms of life are then derived. Air is essentially related to three sets of ideas: the creative breath of life, and,

hence, speech; the stormy wind, connected in many mythologies with the idea of creation; and, finally, space as a medium for movement and for the emergence of life-processes. Light, flight, lightness, as well as scent and smell, are all related to the general symbolism of air. Gaston Bachelard says that for one of its eminent worshippers, Nietzsche, air was a kind of higher, subtler matter, the very stuff of human freedom. And he adds that the distinguishing characteristic of aerial nature is that it is based on the dynamics of dematerialization. Thoughts, feelings and memories concerning heat and cold, dryness and humidity and, in general, all aspects of climate and atmosphere, are also closely related to the concept of air. According to Nietzsche, air should be cold and aggressive like the air of mountain tops. Bachelard relates scent to memory, and by way of example points to Shelley's characteristic lingering over reminiscences of smell. (Cirlot, 2011, p. 6)

Cold and aggressive, two of the masculine characteristics applied by Nietzsche to the air could also apply to the description of Sister Aloysius. In the play, the wind works as a symbol for change, as the wind starts to blow the movements of the play also get faster. The wind brings the change and also reveals what is hidden. It is after the wind that Sister Aloysius reveals her real thoughts about Father Flynn to him in her office. Guilty or not, there is a change in the behavior of Father Flynn, as the "Aloysius wind" starts to blow. These strategies are also symbolically highlighted in the movie adaptation.

Another important point in Scene Eight is the moment when Sister Aloysius asks Father Flynn if he is taking Mental Reservations. For those not acquainted with the Catholic canon, Mental Reservations means the possibility of lying in the favor of a greater moral good. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* defines mental reservation as a "tradition of moral reasoning which justifies apparent untruths in the name of higher moral purpose" (HERBERMANN, 2002, p. 84). A good example to mental reservation would be a situation of a man hidden in a house, because he is being chased by some bandits. Once the bandits come to the house and ask the lady, who is in charge of the garden, if the man is inside the house, she can answer no, and still, she is not lying. Because she is using mental reservation, she chooses to understand the question in other way, such as "Is this man inside the house for us to rob him"? In order to protect the man, she uses her mental reservation. Sister Aloysius, who is well acquainted with the dogmas of her Church, demonstrates that when she asks Father Flynn if he is using a mental reservation. She also knows that when Father Flynn denies having given altar wine to Donald, he could be taking mental reservations for the concept of "to give". Had he left the wine unattended, intending the boy to drink from it, he still did not "give" him the wine. Sister Aloysius summons to her the task of bringing evil

down, because she is certain she is doing the right thing. Andrucki calls our attention to the symbolic importance of her name:

The name she has chosen for herself as a nun is revealing. St Aloysius Gonzaga was a brilliant, aristocratic young Jesuit of the late 16th century who died in his early twenties while ministering to the sick. Aloysius itself is a variant of the name Louis or Ludwig, which originally meant “mighty warrior”. So Sister Aloysius has chosen a name that combines two contrasting qualities: the self-sacrifice of Gonzaga, and the warlike ferocity of Ludwig. As the play progresses, we see both these elements emerge in her actions. (Andrucki, 2008, p. 17)

However, nothing concrete justifies Sister Aloysius’s certainty. She is determined to act according to her convictions, but her convictions may be mistaken. She knows about that, but still she clings to her convictions, because it is only from them that she can extract her strength. This is ultimately the great human flaw, we can only reach that which we call Truth by creating metaphors through which we access the world. Different people create different metaphors to interpret the same symbols. The more abstract the word - such as Love, Right, or Good - and the greater the number of people interpreting them, the greater the mess. Causes, wars, religions, revolutions, have their basis on such metaphors. Through them people are raised or destroyed eventually. The same certainty that can elevate Sister Aloysius to the condition of a saintly woman fighting evil out of her community can also be the certainty of a crazy woman whose frenzy can destroy the career of a righteous man, and even her own. Her meeting with Mrs. Muller also lays emphasis that, in her attempt to help, she may end up destroying the boy.

Mrs. Muller works as a foil³⁵ to Sister Aloysius. Mrs. Muller creates the necessary contrast to show Sister Aloysius and the reader/spectator that life is not as simple as Sister Aloysius’s equations make it seem, that things “are not just black and white”. Differently from Sister Aloysius, Mrs. Muller has no room in her life for moral closed issues and absolutes. She leads a difficult life, she lives with an aggressive husband, in an environment that sees them as inferior because of their color. And her son represents the other even within her own reduced circle. She shocks Sister Aloysius when she, pragmatically, states that she is not interested in the nature of Father Flynn’s interest in her son, as long as he keeps protecting him and guiding his steps towards a better life. If the presence of this priest can help her son

³⁵ A character who contrasts and parallels the main character in a play or story. Laertes, in *Hamlet*, is a foil for the main character; in *Othello*, Emilia and Bianca are foils for Desdemona.

to conclude his studies, she will be satisfied. Mrs. Muller's position is also different from that of Sister James. Sister James is concerned about Father Flynn's motivations, whereas Donald's mother is not. Mrs. Muller points to Sister Aloysius that her rules are not universal, they do not account for all situations.

At the end of the play, Sister Aloysius is successful in her goal of getting Father Flynn away from St. Nicholas parish and school. In the cold garden, during a conversation with Sister James, she cries as she acknowledges that she has such doubts. Maybe this happens because now that the danger has been removed, she can afford being fair again. Now she can afford considering the damage her actions may have provoked, or the circumstances appertaining to the other party. Only now, at the end, she can allow herself to have her own doubts. However, we do not know the extent of her doubts. What are her doubts about? Does she doubt the guilt of Father Flynn, or her failure to prove he was a pedophile? After all, she has solved the problem and cast the wolf away from her children, although he has been transferred to another parish, and he is even promoted. He is promoted to be the pastor of St. Jerome Church and school, so we know that he is still working with children. She may be disturbed by both possibilities. This is one among the many doubts we will not solve. The play finishes where it starts. Sister Aloysius is in doubt, as Father Flynn was, in his sermon. The play starts and finishes with characters talking about doubt. As for us, we move now into the next section, to examine the translation of *Doubt, a Parable* into the cinematic media, highlighting further important symbolical patterns that can enrich our discussion.

3.1 Shanley Translates Himself

"Doubt can only be removed by action."

Goethe, *Faust*

The process of adapting art from one language into another one involves making choices. As I write this thesis from the point of view of a Letters Course, I call the choices made by the intersemiotic translator "a reading." Therefore, I concentrate my attention on the choices made by the translator, which reveal much about his perception of the play as a

reader. So, the focus here is the analysis of Shanley's (the translator) reading of Shanley's (the playwright) play. Such choices can be revealed in two forms, in the screenplay to the movie, and the movie itself, if we consider the influence of the director over the casting process, the performance of the actors, the use of camera, sound, color, and the rest. As a screen player and director Shanley reads Shanley, and needs to reconsider the effects to be achieved, what changes and what remains. The expression "intersemiotic translation" is used by several theorists on adaptation, such as Phyllis Zatlin, in *Theatrical Translation and Film Adaptation* (2005).

The entire project depends on the new reading the artist provides from the original construct that is being adapted. In my opinion, the choice for the open-ending, and to open possibility for either of the two solutions, remains. But new elements are added, that twist the flow of interpretation here and there. The strategies to get the same result by using different means are also worth commenting.

In his path adapting *Doubt, a Parable* to the big screen Shanley has to make different choices. As a playwright, John Patrick Shanley uses words and counts on the black fonts written on white paper and on the imagination of his reader to build a world out of that. The possibilities of construction are as many and numberless as the readers that read the pages. In the movie we can also count on the imagination of the reader, but instead of being led by words, they are led by images, sounds, and by the focus of the camera. The room for the imagination of the audience to roam is smaller. When reading from the page, the reader has to submit to the word choice selected by the author. When watching the movie, the audience submits to several other previous readings, from the screenplay writer, the director, the actor who says the line, etc.

Concerning the thematic line about doubt, although the effect may be similar, there is a different balance of choices in the movie. In my particular view, I left the movie more inclined to accept Father Flynn's guilt than when I read the play. But then this might have happened because watching the film was not my first "reading" of the play. In a movie so much dependent on subtlety as *Doubt*, the casting makes all the difference. The choice of Meryl Streep and Philip Seymour Hoffman is seminal. Both are referred to as "an actor's actor", an expression meaning that they are so good that other actors research on samples of their performances when they are studying to play a part. Another relevant peculiarity of these

two actors is that each of them has interpreted intermittently the roles of hero/heroine and villain in many movies, so that this will not interfere in the reception of the audience, who would otherwise pre-define who is to be right and who is to be wrong.

It is not any director who can count on Meryl Streep and Philip Seymour Hoffman to star their movie. This deed was achieved because of Shanley's reputation not only as a prized playwright, but also as a screenplay-writer, director and producer. The success of *Doubt, a Parable* on Broadway and on the Off-Broadway may have influenced the actors to accept, too, and the quality of the roles. We can even consider that immensely famous actors tend to alternate very popular roles with more intellectualized and sophisticated parts, so as to avoid being too closely associated to a certain role. Meryl Streep accepted the role of Sister Aloysius when the movie *Mamma Mia!* was being released. The drastic difference between characters in the two productions is something very stirring in the career of a great actress. Also, when the actors are very competent and experienced, they usually exchange opinions with the director, to the effect of changing the scenes that were previously conceived.

Although in the play we have only four characters, and three settings, the movie adaptation introduces several additional scenes, and characters, which somewhat alter our perception of things. The more our attention is involved with the new added material, the less we concentrate on the four original characters. Each thing added or removed makes us think of the decisions made by the director, so that we consider Shanley as reader of himself. In my reading of Shanley's reading of the play, I suggest that Shanley stresses a bit further the elements that stress the possibility of guilt on the part of Father Flynn. My basis for this statement lies again in some symbolical patterns. I choose ten scenes to illustrate my argument. The first one takes place in one of the first parts of the movie and involves camera movements,

HIGH ANGLE MASTER SHOT OF CONGREGATION FROM BACK OF CHURCH

FLYNN: How much worse is it then for the lone man, the lone woman, stricken by a private calamity?

LOW DUTCH ANGLE: A single of a PALE WOMAN.

FLYNN: 'No one knows I'm sick.'

LOW DUTCH ANGLE: A single of a STOUT OLDER MAN.

FLYNN: ‘No one knows I’ve lost my last real friend.’

BACK TO FLYNN

FLYNN: “No one knows I’ve done something wrong.” (DOUBT, p.7)³⁶

As said above, when someone is reading the sermon, we create the images. When we are watching the play, it is possible to direct our eyes in the direction we choose and select what we will focus on. However, in the cinematic language, the camera makes this choice for us. The pace, the expression on the faces of the pale woman and the stout older man, will add to the significance of the sermon, in my opinion to the effect of suggesting that Father Flynn has done something wrong. When the camera moves to a pale woman as he says “No one knows I’m sick”, we suppose she is sick, because the look and the acting of the actress stresses the statement. The same happens when the camera focuses on the stout older man, as Father Flynn says “No one know I’ve lost my last real friend”, and the man reacts as if he has lost his last real friend. But the camera closes on Father Flynn when the priest says, or in this context confesses, “No one knows I’ve done something wrong”. The choices for the focus of the camera can be considered a reading, and this reading is not made arbitrarily. This is a choice of the screen player and the director, who in this case are both the same person, Shanley, who opens the movie inviting the audience to suspect that priest.

The second selected scene starts with Sister Aloysius talking to the nuns during lunch and asking them to be attentive about some issues at St. Nicholas Church and School. This is the same talk she has with Sister James in the play. Here the scene gains more characters, and a different setting. The screenplay goes: “Father Flynn walks in. He looks up at the stained glass eye³⁷.” (DOUBT, p. 18). A glass eye, surrounded by solar light, as showed in the movie, certainly is not there without rhyme or reason. On a symbolical level, the image of the eye is strongly connected to the symbolism of Light and the Sun. It may represent the spiritual vision, and is also a mirror of the soul. When an eye is surrounded by sunlight it represents God himself, signifying omniscience (HERDER LEXIKON, 1990, p.148). So, the audience may be invited to interpret that Father Flynn is being watched by superior metaphysical powers, or at least he may think he is. He looks at this solar eye, or is being looked by it,

³⁶ When referring to the movie, I will quote from the screenplay, and I will write the title DOUBT, followed by the page where the referred extract can be found.

³⁷ See the annex on page 125 for an example of this image.

through the banister sticks, to the effect that it seems he is looking at the eye through jail bars. The fact that the movie version presents such a powerful symbolical scene indicates that Father Flynn may carry a burden in his conscience.

The tone of the movie is different from the tone of the play. We have more doubts in the play. There are reasons for that. I believe that if we had the conditions to compare the productions of the play *Doubt, a Parable*, held on Broadway and on Off-Broadway we would feel the differences there two. Each different environment presupposes a different kind of audience, different demands and expectations, and must adapt to that. As a contemporary author, in a time of capitalism and consumerism, besides being an artist Shanley must be pragmatic as well. A movie from Universal Pictures made at a cost of twenty million dollars³⁸ and meant to run for the Academy Award should not meddle too much with the audience's anxiety, as it seems. The third scene to be considered has been especially created for the film. It concerns the nose bleeding of William London. In the play, as William London does not have a physical presence as a character, we do not know if what Sister Aloysius says is really true or if it has to do with her opinion about the boy. The movie turns doubt into something explicit, because we see the smart smile in William's face, just as he is leaving school and lighting a cigarette. This predisposes the audience to accept Sister Aloysius's judgments on people as correct, and see her as an experienced woman, who has already performed different roles in her life – she has been a wife, a teacher and a nun. As to whether she has ever been a mother or not, that remains an open question to the end.

The fourth instance analyzed shows the contrast between the atmospheres in which the priests and the nuns have their meals, and the kind of relationship they bear to one another.

INT. THE RECTORY - THREE PRIESTS HAVING DINNER - NIGHT

The Monsignor, FATHER SHERMAN, and Flynn are eating a roast and washing it down with red wine. Boisterous laughter. The Monsignor is smoking a cigarette. The pack is on the table. Pall Mall unfiltered.

FLYNN: The climpity-clomp. Clomp clomp clomp. Harder than a herd of elephants.

MONSIGNOR

You are wicked!

³⁸ Information obtained from the IMDB (Internet Movie Data Base), indicating that the total cost of the movie was of twenty million dollars. Four months after being released, the movie had raised thirty-three and a half million dollars.

FLYNN

No, I told her, "You're her mother! You raised her, you fed her, YOU tell her she's fat!"

MONSIGNOR

Oh!

FATHER SHERMAN

But wait, how fat is she?

FLYNN

What, the mother or the daughter?

FATHER SHERMAN

The daughter.

FLYNN

I never met the daughter.

FATHER SHERMAN

What about the mother?

FLYNN

Fat!!!

INT. THE CONVENT DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Dinner's in progress. The Nuns eat. Silence. (DOUBT, p.26)

Adding to the contrast between the two scenes, and between the effusive (and almost disrespectful) dialogue about the fat lady, we have the disposition of the colors and the contrast among them. The priests are in a dark red room that is not well illuminated. There is this dark tone in the setting. They are drinking (red) wine and eating a portion of meat that is almost raw in a way that would first remind us rather of a throng of barbarians than of holy men ingesting substances that are akin to the blood and body of Christ. The meat is red and there are drops of blood drip from it. The scene evokes a number of symbolical patterns that directly affect the imaginary of the audience. The color red, and the dark shade of the room evoke images that are associated rather to the Devil than with godly men. Red is the color of sexual love, passion, heat, fire and hatred. It is also a color of impurity, because it is related to carnal love (HERDER LEXIKON, 1990, p.204). The choice to highlight the dark red aspect of this masculine environment does not exist in the play.

The drops of blood and the raw meat being eaten by the priests reinforce the archetype of the vampire, the evil creature who feeds from blood, as we have commented in the previous section. One of the priests is smoking, and Father Flynn also smokes in his scene with Sister James in the garden. Cigarettes remind us more of lay life than of holy priests,

they could be seen as another mark of the sensualist – as the nails and the sugar are. Father Flynn eats and drinks the wine and the red blood of the meat while laughing and telling improper jokes about one of his parishioners. In contrast, we have the sequential scene of the Sisters of Charity having lunch. They are in a very different disposition, all disposed around the table, eating quietly in a very dissimilar environment. The room is white, very well illuminated, and they are drinking milk. The scene is clean and silent. White stands for purity and perfection. Christianity has adopted white as a symbol for virginity, purity and the divine. This is one of the reasons why priests wear white habits. It is also the color of transfiguration, wisdom and innocence. In Western tradition, there is a contrast between the colors white and red, white symbolizing feminine and purity, and red being the color of male and carnal passion (HERDER LEXIKON, 1990, p.38). The disposition of these two scenes delivers a message to the audience.

The fifth scene consists only of actions, with no dialogues. Sister James is watching the dance class, enjoying it, seeing her students dancing and having fun. Then, Shanley describes this additional scene,

SISTER JAMES IS SITTING ON A FOLDING CHAIR WATCHING

Amused. She claps lightly. Then she sees something.

SISTER JAMES' POV - SOME LOCKERS - FLYNN APPEARS

He is somewhat furtive. He has something white in his hand. He opens a locker and puts the white thing in. It's fabric. He sees Sister James and smiles. He takes a sip of water from the drinking fountain and goes back upstairs.

SISTER JAMES SLOWLY WALKING TOWARDS THE LOCKERS

She goes to the locker. She opens it, a boy's white T-shirt. She returns it to the locker puzzled. (DOUBT, p. 29)

Sister James finds, in this version, Donald Muller's t-shirt in the locker she opens. This is a piece of information she will never tell Sister Aloysius during the rest of the filmic narrative. However, she is puzzled now. In the cinematic version, Sister James receives additional information to help her in her judgment of the priest's behavior. We do not know the reason that motivates her not to tell Sister Aloysius about this fact, but his credibility is already shaken and she cannot trust Father Flynn with the same disposition as before. Another relevant thing is the color of Donald's t-shirt. It is a white t-shirt, as if representing that the innocence and purity of the boy are now in the hands of Father Flynn.

A sixth important element to consider is the physical presence of Donald Muller in the movie. He is not an imaginary abstract entity anymore. Here he as an actor (Joseph Foster II) to perform and we can see him, with his sad eyes, and his sorrow about being bullied by his classmates, and by his father. We can witness the way his eyes shine when he is with his fellow Father Flynn, and feel that the boy loves this priest. We just do not know in which ways. There is a scene in which he throws a jealous look at Father Flynn when the priest is talking to another boy, Jimmy, asking if he wants to practice after school. Different spectators will interpret this scene, and the boy's needs, in different ways. No matter what the approach, however, one thing is clear: that boy is glad to count on the support of that adult. Whether as a protector, a father figure, a mentor, a teacher, or for sexual reasons, or for a number of those reasons it is for each spectator to decide.

On a practical level, however, neither Sister Aloysius nor Sister James have any proof to accuse Father Flynn with. Sister Aloysius is only equipped with her own certainty. So, she devises a strategy to beat the system, in order to achieve her goals. To underline this chase performed by Sister Aloysius, the movie introduces another additional scene, the seventh we will examine.

Mrs. Carson, the housekeeper of the nun's house, brings a female cat because she notices there is a mouse in the house. Since male and female cats are equally efficient in mouse-chasing, the mention to the gender of the cat as being a female invites us to associate the cat with Sister Aloysius (who is also chasing someone), and as a consequence the mouse stands for Father Flynn. After catching the mouse, Mrs. Carson says that we need a cat to get a mouse. Sister Aloysius agrees with the statement. It is interesting to notice, again, how the characters are approximated and put apart from the divine through symbols. Like in the sequence of scenes in the dark red and white rooms. The cat is an animal bound to the divine since the Ancient Egypt, even before that; whereas the mouse is an image vastly used to denigrate the morality of a character. The rat is an animal associated with the Black Death, which destroyed one third of the population of Europe during the Middle Ages, and which (probably as a consequence to that) provokes instinctive disgust and repugnance in humans. Rats move swiftly and surreptitiously, and live in the trash. They eat from the trash and can spread diseases. In the European imaginary, they are connected with evil figures as the Witch, the Vampire, the Devil and Leprechauns (HERDER LEXIKON, 1990, p.171). Cats, conversely, are independent, agile and sharply skilled. Still, in spite of their association with

divinity, they seem to refer to pre-Christian lines of religiosity. The more dichotomist our tradition became, the more the image of the cat was associated with the dangerous, devilish aspects of femininity. In this sense, Sister Aloysius reminds us very much of a cat when she decides that she will do what she must do even if, for that, she must “step away from God.” She seems to be answering to a primitive sort of feminine, motherly, sacred summon there, in which the rescuing of one single child seems to be worth more than two thousand years of institutional canons and dogmas.

The eighth instance to observe respects again the relation of the two antagonists to light and shadow. During the first confrontation of Sister Aloysius and Father Flynn, in her office, there is an appealing symbolical sequence. When Father Flynn suggests a secular song and a dance with one of the boys, Sister Aloysius asks him which boy he has in mind. As she does that, she flips the blind, letting the sun shine blazingly on the priest. It is clear that the light annoys Father Flynn, because one of his next moves is to close the window again. The same happens when Sister Aloysius turns on a lamp, and he sequentially turns off the same lamp. His aversion to light can be interpreted as one more symptom of the presence of the archetype of the vampire. Moreover, applied to this particular scene, light can be interpreted a symbol for knowledge, enlightenment, or even the Truth, with capital letters, that Sister Aloysius is chasing. As she wants to reach the truth about Donald Muller, Sister Aloysius opens the window and turns on the lamp, as in an attempt to clarify, to elucidate the situation. She needs everything to get clear, even because she needs to feel justified in her radical actions. On the one hand, the light annoys Father Flynn; he is not comfortable with it. On the other hand, regardless of how beautiful the symbolism of light may be, who would not feel annoyed at having a ray of sun projected into his/her eye? So, he closes the windows and turns off the lamp.

In the ninth confrontation, Father Flynn and Sister Aloysius are arguing again at the principal's office. Father Flynn is irate as he bursts into her office, shouting at Sister Aloysius and demanding that she stops her campaign against him. This is the scene, when in the play, in which Sister Aloysius attests she may even leave the Church, if necessary, to reach her goal. We have already examined it as it stands in the play. In the movie, the scene is visually directed as follows,

FLYNN: You haven't the slightest proof of anything.

SISTER ALOYSIUS: But I have my certainty, and armed with that, I will go to your last parish and the one before that if necessary. I'll find a parent. Trust me, Father Flynn, I will.

FLYNN: You have no right to act on your own! You have taken vows, obedience being one! You answer to us! You have no right to step outside the church!

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I will step outside the church if that's what needs to be done, till the door should shut behind me! I will do what needs to be done, though I'm damned to Hell!

[During last, she brandished rosary and then slammed it down.]

SISTER ALOYSIUS: You should understand that, or you will mistake me. Now, did you give Donald Muller wine to drink?

FLYNN: Have you never done anything wrong?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I have.

FLYNN: A mortal sin?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: Yes.

FLYNN: And?

SISTER ALOYSIUS: I confessed it, Father!

FLYNN: Then whatever I have done, I have left in the healing hands of my confessor. As have you! We are the same!

SISTER ALOYSIUS: No, we are not, we are not the same! (DOUBT, p. 86)

The two redirecting forces in this version of the scene come from the direction on the screenplay about the brandishing and tossing of the rosary, and the use made by Meryl Streep of her voice and body expression, especially in the lines when she confesses that she has done something wrong as well. The choice of the actress changes the mood of the scene completely. At this point we see a fragile and humanized Sister Aloysius, who knows about the sorrows and vicissitudes of life. This happens soon after she has showed her warlike disposition, when she says she will step outside the Church if that is what needs to be done. Sister Aloysius raises her crucifix as if she is holding a sword, as if she is in the battle field. As she does that she is invested with the archetype of the warrior maiden. This prospect underlines the growing of the character with her superior intentions of protecting the boy that elevate her to a level of paladin to humanization and justice. She is also the old and wise woman who knows what has to be done, and is willing to pay the price, dissolving doubts within the certainty of her beliefs.

The tenth and last scene in our discussion, which happens to be also the last scene in the movie, takes place in the garden, covered by snow, reminding us of Durand's remark about the visual utility of the snow in literature: adding to the color white and to all the imagery connected with water and with the feminine, it highlights what is relevant and covers up the rest. The setting reminds us of the conversation about the frost, in the beginning of the story, when Sister Aloysius says that when the frost comes, it is too late to do anything. Now some time has elapsed, frost has come and gone, and snow has settled down. Regardless of whether she has been right or wrong, Sister Aloysius's actions have - for good or for worse - separated Father Flynn from her boys.

Here, we have the final conversation between Sister Aloysius and Sister James, when Sister Aloysius bursts into tears, acknowledging she is in doubt. Doubt is the major feature in the movie. The white scenario helps to bring into light what was evident throughout – that this is an unsolved story. The fact that the movie results as ambiguous as the play indicates that the transposition from one media to the other has been successful. I have declared before, and repeat it here, that my reading of Shanley's reading of his work indicates that - as a reader - he ultimately sides with Sister Aloysius. But then this is only one of my readings, my seventeenth reading of the movie. Who knows what other symbols I will concentrate on in my future readings, and where that will lead me. As to Shanley, the person, and his possible motivations when he made, as a translator, the choices he made, that does not signify. What one artist "intended to do" as he started his work does not matter. What matters is what he did. After the work is ready the author is just one more reader/spectator. His personal view, as a person, ultimately, does not signify.

In this section we have examined ten symbolical patterns. There are zillions of others, but I chose to work with the ten instances that most attracted my attention at this stage of the research. They head towards Sister Aloysius and against Father Flynn. That is not important either, because another researcher, or myself under other circumstances, might have directed the focus on the opposite way. The point to be stressed here is how useful the tool provided by the Studies on the Imaginary is, not only to invest the world with meaning, but also to remind us that the meaning invested is not final, it depends on the previous agreement among the parts about the significance to be attributed to the symbol. Considering things this way, the emphasis on the negative symbols directed against Father Flynn might relate to extra-fictional

facts involving either Shanley's personal life³⁹ or the mood of a 2008 American movie audience concerning the discussion involving sexuality, pedophilia and the scandals related to the Catholic Church worldwide.



³⁹ "A child in my family was molested by a priest. The parents went first to the local level, then up the chain command to a highly placed church official, who took them by the hands and said: 'I'm so sorry this happened to you. I will take care of it.' And then he promoted him. They were so shocked that they left the church for 10 years. But they missed it, so they returned to a parish where the monsignor gave a sermon saying that with these church scandals it was the parents, not the clergy, who were responsible. They had to leave the church again." (SHANLEY, 2011, p.3)

CONCLUSION

*“Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd tow'rs, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep”.*

Shakespeare – *The Tempest*

There was a time when I did not have so many doubts. I remember it was a warmer and cozier time. There was this time when we, my drama group and I, were rehearsing to present the Passion of Jesus Christ during the celebration of Easter in our little town. So, we prepared ourselves, and made the most beautiful costumes, because we wanted the pageant to be perfect. I was fourteen, and as the director of the production, decided that after the Pontius Pilate scene we would use the backdoor to go outside, then we would walk around the church and enter again, through front door, to represent the *Via Crucis*. On the day of the presentation, the church was crowded with people. We were very nervous, but started our performance. I played the role of Pontius Pilate. After the scene when Pilate washed his hands the troupe should exit and leave the church through the back door. It was raining a lot. The actors stared at me, as asking for permission, and I nodded, as if saying “go”. That was a huge disaster. The actors left the church dry and clean and came back totally wet and dirty. The costumes were ruined. They were so annoyed that that they forgot to take off the garments of Jesus, who was crucified with his clothes on. “That was a fiasco” – I thought inside the sacristy, – “The worst play ever.” Nevertheless, when the play was over, I was surprised to see that the audience was delighted. Many people were crying out loudly, because they got emotional with our performance. Then, I realized that our role in that performance was a minor one. There were two other forces operating then. One was the fact

that the child actors were those people's children, or grand-children, or relatives, or friends. Regardless of the quality of the performance, those people were proud of the effort made by the children to please them and took it as homage. There second force was the huge imaginary implied in the theme of the presentation, the relation of the human to the divine, and people did not care if we were dry or wet. At that moment we were linked to those people because we were impersonating roles that meant a lot to them, we were dealing with imaginary matter they were connected with. This is, ultimately, the role of mythology, religion or art. There was no room for doubts in that scenario.

When I read *Doubt, a Parable* for the first time, it was a thrilling experience to realize how skilled Shanley was at weaving a mantle of doubts to cover his characters, who were inside a scenario that was supposed to be ideologically free of doubts. It was relevant and pertinent that the chosen settings to discuss doubt and its consequences were a church and a school. At this point, I connected with Shanley, because his childhood memories triggered my childhood memories and I responded, by filling the gaps in his text with my own personal experience. For I have lived similar experiences – as an altar boy, studying in a school run by nuns, who were always behind us to punish us for bad behavior. Most of all, I connect with Shanley's play because I know that we are living in a culture of doubts. Doubt permeates human knowledge and attitudes nowadays. I also know that there is a good side and a bad side to this, but that is the matter to another thesis. As Father Brendan Flynn puts it, doubt can be a bond as powerful and sustaining as certainty. When you are in doubt, you are not alone. We are linked, as human beings, more because of our doubts than for our certainties. The fictional world that John Patrick Shanley built evokes the one he once knew. However, Shanley was able to change the ordinary experience of a children world of certainties into a complex artistic construct that reveals so many things from our contemporary society. How vast is the gap that separates the realities of being a child in an ideologically bound environment in the 1960's or an adult in a cosmopolitan megalopolis in the opening of the twentieth-first century.

In the introduction to this thesis, some questions were posed concerning contemporary issues related to the act of doubting. Then we moved to the fictional field and considered *Doubt, a Parable*, concentrating on the kinds of doubt Shanley's play talks about. I select two to have a final word about in this closing of the work. On the one hand, there is the kind of doubt that can be solved by facts and evidence. The main question is whether or not Father Flynn has molested Donald Muller. Did the boy drink from the altar wine? Is Donald being

beaten by his father? Questions like these, in factual life, could be solved through medical examination and evidence would be gathered. In fictional life, however, we would depend on the revealing words that were not uttered by the characters; or in the movements of the camera and face expressions that were not made by the actors. The fictional choice was to leave the matter open. As there is no final answer granted by the play, the solving of the doubt depends on each reader/spectator, and it is never final. As the play/movie is revisited by the same person, the reactions might be different, depending on a number of different circumstances. There are many layers of subtlety to this story. As an example, let us consider the wine issue. A child drinking wine is a serious matter to the American culture. A child being offered wine by an adult is more serious yet. More than wine, that is *altar* wine, dogmatically a sacred substance (to the Catholic Church the very blood of Christ) that can only be handled by an invested priest. We also have the echoes of Donald's fragile condition. He is Black, poor, effeminate, and inserted in a social context where each of these characteristics make an outsider out of him. Donald's mother, arguably the only person he can really trust, is engaged in finding a way so that her husband does not kill Donald. We never meet Donald's father, but we can consider him a violent man *apud* Mrs. Muller's words, "you don't tell my husband what to do. You just stand back." (DP, p. 44) Then, there are the matters of racial segregation and the ethnical division of New York. The Bronx of the Sixties is no territory for Black children. In this scenario, who would help Sister Aloysius defend her point? The boy? The boy's mother? Not even Sister James or the reader are convinced of sister Aloysius's truth. We cannot identify to what extent she is a humanitarian or to what extent she is a political militant arguing about power issues, or to what extent Father Flynn shocks her because they hold different opinions about the role of the Church in the contemporary world.

There is then the second kind of doubt, even more difficult to answer, and we can address them through Sister Aloysius. When we scan the play, for the first time, we see that Sister Aloysius uses the word "certainty". Sister Aloysius belongs to the old school, she believes in not taking risks. If her function is to protect the children, and there is reasonable ground for doubt, she would rather turn doubt into certainty and act as to guard her flock. In case she is wrong, it is a pity that she may cause harm to the reputation of a decent man. In case she is right, she is saving a helpless child from being abused. Ultimately, there is a risk to each of these situations.

Sister Aloysius is convinced that Father Flynn is the kind of priest who allures young boys into inappropriate acts. What is the basis to her certainty? Is she as certain as she says? If one takes to her lines, it is easy to notice that she professes a great skepticism about human nature and its “fraudulent customs”. She believes in the value of authority and tradition, and defends that teachers should be more feared than loved. Her thoughts towards the Church go in the same direction. Sister Aloysius believes that the Church must be different, and claims that even the parishioners expect that from them. This position concerns both the role of the priest in the Church and the role of the teacher in the School.⁴⁰ Father Flynn represents all the dangers Sister Aloysius sees in this Post-Vatican II Church. Considering her opinion of the Monsignor, she does not seem to believe in the competence of men as administrators either. Sister Aloysius even insinuates that Father Flynn could have an understanding with his previous pastor, in his old parish. This entire conduct shows how discredited the Catholic Institution is for this nun.

Sister Aloysius overlooks the Church protocol as she proceeds into her investigation. The more she discredits the men who are in charge of the parish, and is certain they will not do anything about the matter, the more Sister Aloysius clings to her “certainty” about Father Flynn’s behavior. She seems to mistrust the human race in general, and the males in it in particular. She doubts the integrity of the clergy, especially of these two men. It is paradoxical - and yet revealing - that the character who shows to be the most certainty about the facts is ultimately, the greatest doubter.

On the other hand, we have the figure of the young and charismatic Father Flynn. We can see he that supports the thoughts of the Second Ecumenical Council, what could candidly also explain his promotion at the end of the play. He professes a strong belief in changing the Church into a more hospitable place for the community. But there is also the possibility that he may take further pleasure than solidarity as he interacts with the children. This is a matter never solved in the play. But Father Flynn does not seem to carry any heavy doubt, although he is the first one to present the argument in his first sermon at the opening of the play. Father Flynn is not in the play to be a doubter, he is rather the puzzle that triggers all our doubts. He is the one to be considered through different lights. But by whom? Sister James ends the play

⁴⁰ This thesis is being written in Brazil, where both the Catholic Church and the Educational System have also undergone great changes in their role last five decades. The positive result is that both have become more involved with the needs and problems of the community. The negative result is that both the priest and the teacher have lost considerable influence in society.

believing in his innocence, whereas Sister Aloysius, remains certain of his guilt, at least until she falters in the final act. Father Flynn is supposed to be doubted by us, readers and spectators, as we progress along the story. We meet him as a pleasing and kind creature, but we also have to consider the worries of Sister Aloysius, and the symbolical patterns presented in the plot. We arrive at an aporia, a dead-end, where it is hard to judge Father Flynn's guilt or innocence. In the factual world the verdict would go *in dubio pro reo*. In the fictional world, we have an open-ended story.

In the following sequence we find Father Flynn asking for justice,

Flynn: 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. I put myself in your hands. (DP, p. 55)

Such words may be account for his innocence or culpability. What could be so terrible that makes him beg in the spirit of charity? Why is he not allowed to tell Sister Aloysius all the truth? Does he know more about Donald and Donald's family than we do? Is he bound to secrecy because of a confession he got, or is all that just an easy excuse for him to keep silent? Not even Monsignor Benedict would have the power to force him into breaking the secret of a confession.

Father Flynn also says that, no matter what he might have done, he has already deposited that on the healing hands of his confessor. So, Father Flynn has confessed something. Perhaps, he has confessed to the Monsignor, and that would be the reason of his transference (and consequent promotion.) What might he have confessed? His attraction to the boy? Or that he has developed an aversion to the very sight of his co-worker Sister Aloysius, who keeps fretting him all along? Who is harassing who in this story, after all? There is no answer to that.

Nevertheless, in spite of the insolvable puzzle, we as readers/spectators impose our interpretation upon the text. According to Gilbert Durand all the senses and objects of human conscience are coordinated by imagination (DURAND, 1983, p.42). When we take into

consideration the symbolical patterns of an artistic work as rich as Shanley's is, we invest with meaning not the things that have been said in the play, but in the way they are related to our notion of factual life as well. We can also analyse the text and see in which ways it gets closer to or distant from its translation into the filmic version. In this sense, if we approach literature through the imaginary constructions of a determinate time and culture, we will be addressing not only this aesthetic construct, but also the world that gave birth to it and all the symbols that are bound to it.

Shanley, through his title, asks us to consider this play as a parable. This is a legitimate way to face an artistic work about the impossibility of being sure about things. Such parable mimics our own amalgam of uncertainties bringing to discussion established values. Sister James, both in the play and in the movie, underneath her apparent innocence, presents a healthy kind of common-sense. She, along with Donald's mother, Mrs. Muller, can be considered in practical terms important female figures in the life of Donald Muller – the teacher and the mother. The gathering of these three women, Sister James, Mrs. Muller and Sister Aloysius may account for the primeval triple archetype of the Goddess – the maiden, the mother and the old woman. Archotypically they represent, in emotional and intellectual aspects, the three phases of the moon – innocence and purity (Sister James/New Moon), strength and acceptance (Mrs. Muller/ Full Moon), wisdom and perspicacity (Sister Aloysius/Waning Moon). This interpretation would lead into a favorable view of Sister Aloysius. As a consequence, Father Flynn is seen in a negative light, he is the one who seduces innocence (forcing upon the credulity and loyalty of Sister James and Donald Muller), forces acceptance (on the part of Mrs. Muller and his superiors in the Church) and is fought by experience and seniority (in Sister Aloysius).

Literature is formed out of images and symbols. Open-ended works, as *Doubt, a Parable*, are even more open to different readings and interpretations. As the plot relates to the Catholic Church, we must also take into consideration the iconography of that established tradition. Anthropologically, the Church of Rome feeds its imaginary on the religious practices of each of the tribes and reigns that formed the Roman Empire. This is to say that the unclosing of symbols is endless in a play like this. In one layer the final interpretation can lead to Father Flynn's innocence and in the following reading to his guilt.

I am aware that, not only as a reader, but also as a researcher, I am constrained to the limits of my own knowledge. Umberto Eco, in his book *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (ECO, 1994, p.6), provides an interesting metaphor to the hermeneutic relation between the reader and the analyzed piece of literature. He compares the book to a dense forest, and the reader is the adventurer who will make his journey inside the woods. The success of the journey will depend on the stuff we carry in our backpacks. If we have the necessary tools to go through the woods, we can stay longer, visiting unknown places, climbing trees, lighting a fire camp, finding new directions. If we do not have the appropriate materials we can only follow a limited path. We manage to go through the woods, but straight away, without the possibility of finding new wonders.

Following Eco's metaphor of the wood, the discussion carried out in this thesis brought out the tools from my backpack. I used them by selecting some symbolical images that I judge important for the understanding of the play – at least my understanding of the play. Other readers, or myself in another stage of my readings, can select other symbols, or the same, and approach them in different ways. That is the wonder of literature, because symbols can open into numberless meanings and possibilities, that vary according to the eyes that are on them. Here, lies, for me, the importance of a theatrical work. The multiple layers of readings made by the author, the director, the actor, make complex things even more complex. This fits well in our time of uncertainties, in our world so full with information. We have access to all kind of news every day, through the newspaper, television, radio or internet. As a consequence, things are taken at face value, nothing is important, the processes involving knowledge and even taste need to be redefined. Along with the roles of priests, teachers, and all sorts of professionals. Shanley's play is about that. We live in a culture of doubts, but we are surrounded by information and technological innovations that taste like certainties. Many of these things change our life for better; others do not. If we consider the plot of Shanley's play, we see the characters as surrounded by pieces of information, like in an intricate puzzle, and they try to put the pieces together.

When Shanley transposes his play into a screenplay, as well as when he directs the movie, or even when he writes or talks about *Doubt, a Parable*, he performs a reading of his own work. In each of these readings, choices have to be made. These movements on the part of the author open very rich possibilities for a critic to study. In each adaptation of his play Shanley makes use of his hermeneutic apparatus to interpret his own words, and to change

them from one language into another. As mentioned in the thesis, this is the mark a new generation of artists, who do not fit in one single language anymore. They need to communicate in as many languages as possible.

Another interesting peculiarity of *Doubt, a Parable*, is its transit in different spheres. The play has been staged both on Broadway and on the Off-Broadway circuit, which operate with two different kinds of public. Broadway reaches (except for the price) a similar public to the public that go to the movies, while the Off-Broadway works with more intellectualized (and less expensive) productions. *Doubt* managed to travel well in both spheres. In 2008 we have the movie adaptation. Then, in 2009, the MTV Movie Awards presented, as a joke, a video game for Sega Genesis platform. The game was called *Doubt – Flynn’s Revenge*. In this game Father Flynn has to walk through the Church hallway while fist fighting nuns from the Sisters of Charity order. When he meets Sister Aloysius, she brings him down with a gigantic cross, which she uses like a sword. The game/joke performed by MTV is symptomatic of a peculiarity of our contemporary times of consumerism – when something is a success it has to be translated into as many languages as possible. As to the fact that Father Flynn has to knock down as many nuns as possible, this can also be dubiously interpreted either as an act of misogyny or as a post-human cyber stage in which male or female opponents can compete as equals. The boundaries that separate the implications of such artistic adaptations and semiotic translations intertwine with commercial purposes, opening new interesting horizons for our discussion, which unfortunately transcend the limits of this thesis. I will only say, about this matter, that I do not share the opinion that an artistic work of quality must not be taken as profitable business involving monetary gain.

In my opinion, Shanley’s work discloses the *topos* of our age, bringing it to the spotlight on the stage – the image of doubt, as a construct that can unite human beings in a web of uncertainties. The Enlightenment illusion has been dismissed and we are engaged now with the things we are not confident about. Knowledge is not entirely reliable anymore, as the same technology that heals can provoke destruction as well. Life is permeated with this feeling of uncertainty. Social interaction has so many components and faces, and all of them apply to different functions in our intricate social web. Literature feeds from such processes and (re)presents them at other levels – aesthetically, ideologically and linguistically. The literary fabric is related to our social functions as it represents and discusses our deepest yearnings and doubts. John Patrick Shanley, through his theatrical works, discusses such

questions relating important social issues – as doubt – to his artistic work. This is one fascinating aspects of literature – it brings the discussion of human values into the fields of imagination and art. This is something that can only be approached, in this way, by the arts. Through his plays, Shanley establishes a link with the world – a powerful bond, because he is developing artistically, ideologically and linguistically a relation between language, art and life. A wonderful life filled with doubts.

When one writes a thesis there is so much to be said. Nevertheless, in order to keep the track, one has to concentrate on some aspects, and leave others behind. One of the things I have learnt from my experience with our performance on *The Passion of Christ* is that it does not matter how well you prepare yourself, things just happen, and then you improvise, because the flow of life cannot be stopped. Although I had to cut out so many things to open my way through the woods of this thesis, I am incredibly happy to count on the equipment I got on my backpack. Now I feel better prepared for future incursions. The objective of this thesis was to investigate the play *Doubt, a Parable* and its movie adaptation relate to the discussion about our contemporary issues. Having approached the issue through a hermeneutics of the imaginary allowed me to reach other related areas of the historical, intertextual and social aspects that also contributed to the understanding of such a rich literary text. What can one conclude from all this intricate web of possibilities? Well, the play certainly works as a parable. And, as a parable, it is filled with symbolical patterns that direct our attention to both sides of the swing, like a pendulum – we are never sure about the side in which we should stand. Shanley's craft demands that his reader/spectator makes his choices. As we do in our factual world, no matter how aware we are of the complexity of things, we must move, and act, and make choices – such as the characters in the play. I am aware of the fact that the task I proposed to myself is an endless one, as symbolical patterns vary according to different eyes, to different points of view. So, to close this work, all I can say is that it has truly been a pleasure to write about John Patrick Shanley and his play to a Brazilian academic public. I hope the thesis proves useful for readers who love the American theater and literature, just as I do.



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APPENDIX A

John Patrick Shanley's plays:

- *Welcome to the Moon* (1982)
- *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea* (1983)
- *Savage in Limbo* (1984)
- *The Dreamer Examines His Pillow* (1985)
- *Italian American Reconciliation* (1986)
- *Women of Manhattan* (1986)
- *All For Charity* (1987)
- *The Big Funk* (1990)
- *Beggars in the House of Plenty* (1991)
- *What Is This Everything?* (1992)
- *Four Dogs and a Bone* (1993)
- *Kissing Christine* (1995)
- *Missing Marisa* (1995)
- *The Wild Goose* (1995)
- *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1998)
- *Where's My Money?* (2001)
- *Cellini* (2001)
- *Dirty Story* (2003)
- *Doubt: A Parable* (2004)
- *Sailor's Song* (2004)
- *Defiance* (2005)
- *Romantic Poetry* (2007) – co-written with Henry Krieger
- *Pirate* (2010)
- *Sleeping Demon* (2011)

APPENDIX B

John Patrick Shanley's Filmography:

- *Moonstruck* (1987)
- *Five Corners* (1987)
- *The January Man* (1989)
- *Joe Versus the Volcano* (1990; directed by Shanley)
- *Alive* (1993)
- *We're Back! A Dinosaur's Story* (1993)
- *Congo* (1995)
- *Live From Baghdad* (2002) (TV, Emmy nomination)
- *The Waltz of the Tulips* (2006)
- *Doubt* (2008; directed by Shanley and adapted from his play of the same title)

ANNEX 1

General overview⁴¹ of the face of the Church before and after the Second Ecumenical Council, or Vatican II:

Before Vatican II	After Vatican II
Mass is conducted exclusively in Latin.	Mass is read in local language, and everyone in the church may participate in the prayers.
Emphasis on the separation between the Church and the secular world: the idea is that the Church is a pure, perfect institution and the secular world does not live up to its standards.	Emphasis on community. Church services are intended to be less formal and intimidating, and a greater emphasis is placed on neighborhood outreach: picnics, softball leagues, and so on.
Women have a very limited role within the Church. They can be nuns, but they cannot be ordained. Priests and Bishops make all decisions regarding the parish.	Parish councils are formed to give to laypeople ⁴² of both genders input on the running of the Church: spending, outreach, education, and so on. Women still cannot be ordained, however.
Laypeople are expected to “pray, pray, and obey” – and are not allowed to do much else.	Laypeople make up parish councils and are allowed to aid in church ceremonies that were previously performed only by the clergy.
Religious services are seen as a time for quiet reflection. They are not social occasions. Anything that was “less than serious” worked against the ideas of the church.	Religious services were given a more social atmosphere. A pastor might bring in a guitar or tell jokes during his sermons.
Little attempt was made to reach out to other religious groups. The Catholic Church is seen as the only true Church.	Dialogue committees are formed to find common ground with other Christian churches and figure out ways to work together. Catholic groups begin to work alongside Jewish groups to combat anti-Semitism.

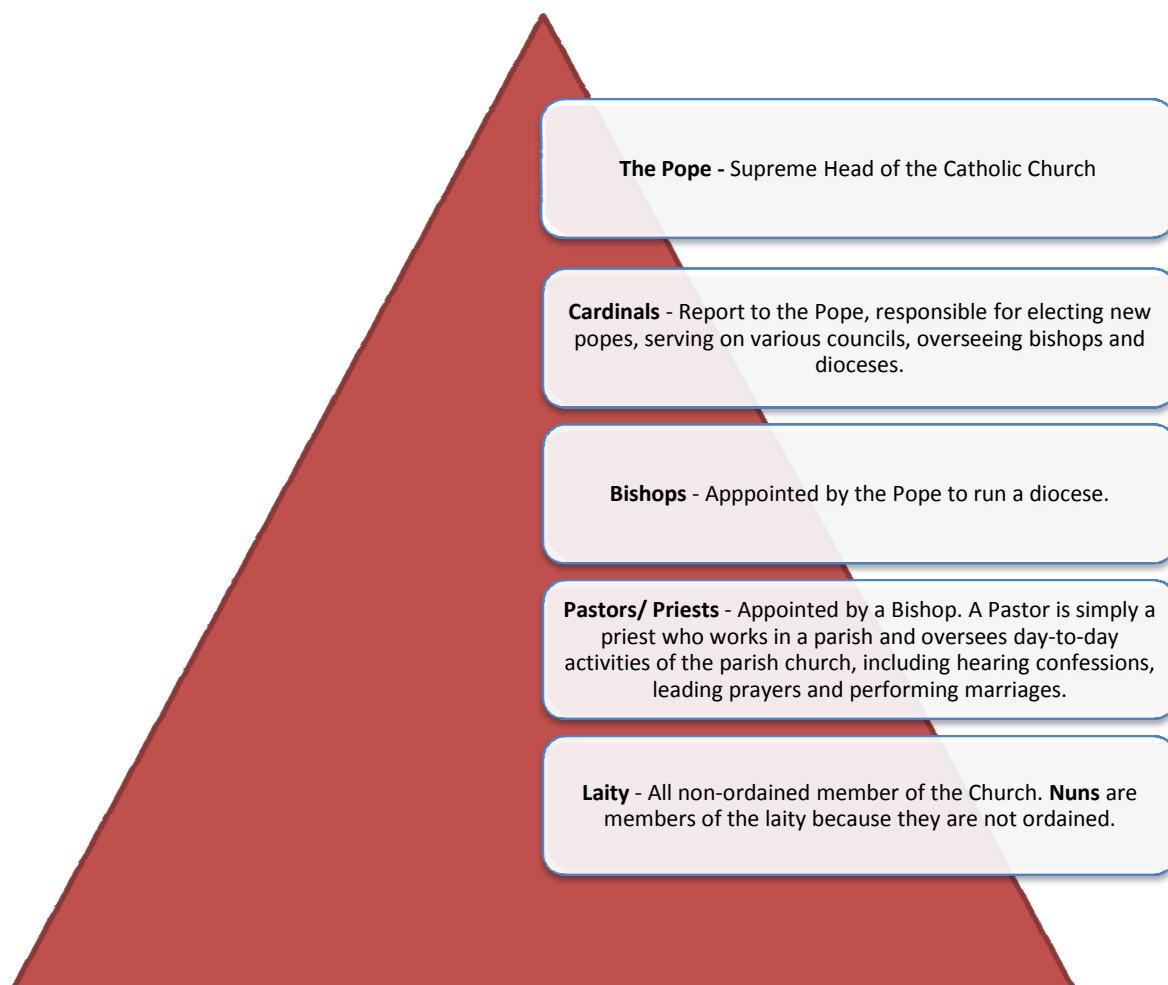
⁴¹ This general overview was created by Jenny Krosteva. It is available on <http://www.milwaukeeep.com/education/documents/DoubtSG_000.pdf> Access on Jan 3, 2012.

⁴² Members of the Laity. Non-ordained members of the Church.

ANNEX 2

ORGANIZATION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH⁴³

Church Hierarchy can be confusing if you are unfamiliar with the terms. Think of the rankings within the Church as you would think of the rankings within government: The **Pope** is the top authority, like the president, to whom everybody answers. He chooses **Cardinals** to assist him in specific areas. The Church is divided into **dioceses** which are controlled by **bishops**. Dioceses come in many different sizes; a single diocese may consist of several counties or an entire state. An especially large diocese is called **archdiocese**, and is run by the **archbishop**. Each diocese is divided up into **parishes**, which cover several neighborhoods. Each parish has a parish church and a **pastor**, who is appointed by the bishop.



⁴³ Text by Jenny Kostreva. Available on http://www.milwaukeeep.com/education/documents/DoubtSG_000.pdf. Access on Jan 23, 2012

ANNEX 3

The Symbology of the Eye

The essence of the question involved here is contained in the saying of Plotinus that the eye would not be able to see the sun if, in a manner, it were not itself a sun. Given that the sun is the source of light and that light is symbolic of the intelligence and of the spirit, then the process of seeing represents a spiritual act and symbolizes understanding. Hence, the ‘divine eye’ of the Egyptians—a determinative sign in their hieroglyphics called *Wadza*—denotes ‘He who feeds the sacred fire or the intelligence of Man’ —Osiris, in fact. Very interesting, too, is the way the Egyptians defined the eye—or, rather, the circle of the iris with the pupil as centre—as the ‘sun in the mouth’ (or the creative Word) René Magritte, the surrealist painter, has illustrated this same relationship between the sun and the mouth in one of his most fascinating paintings. The possession of two eyes conveys physical normality and its spiritual equivalent, and it follows that the third eye is symbolic of the superhuman or the divine. As for the single eye, its significance is ambivalent: on the one hand it implies the subhuman because it is less than two (two eyes being equated with the norm); but on the other hand, given its location in the forehead, above the place designated for the eyes by nature, it seems to allude to extra-human powers which are in fact—in mythology—incarnated in the Cyclops. At the same time the eye in the forehead is linked up with the idea of destruction, for obvious reasons in the case of the single eye; but the same also applies when there is a third eye in the forehead, as with Siva (or Shiva). This is explained by reference to one of the facets of the symbolism of the number three: for if three can be said to correspond to the active, the passive and the neutral, it can also apply to creation, conservation and destruction. Heterotopic eyes are the spiritual equivalent of sight, that is, of clairvoyance. (Heterotopic eyes are those which have been transferred anatomically to various parts of the body, such as the hands, wings, torso, arms, and different parts of the head, in figures of fantastic beings, angels, deities and so on.) When the eyes are situated in the hand, for example, by association with the symbolism of the hand they come to denote clairvoyant action. An excessive number of eyes has an ambivalent significance which it is important to note. In the first place, the eyes refer to night with its myriads of stars, in the second place, paradoxically yet necessarily, the possessor of so many

eyes is left in darkness. Furthermore, by way of corroboration, let us recall that in symbolist theory multiplicity is always a sign of inferiority. Such ambivalences are common in the realm of the unconscious and its projected images. Instructive in this connexion is the example of Argus, who with all his eyes could not escape death. The Adversary (Satan, in Hebrew) has been represented in a variety of ways, among others, as a being with many eyes. A Tarot card in the *Cabinet des Estampes* in Paris, for instance, depicts the devil as Argus with many eyes all over his body. Another comparable symbolic device is also found commonly in demonic figures: it consists of taking some part of the body that possesses, as it were, a certain autonomy of character or which is directly associated with a definite function, and portraying it as a face. Multiple faces and eyes imply disintegration or psychic decomposition—a conception which lies at the root of the demoniacal idea of rending apart. Finally, to come back to the pure meaning of the eye in itself, Jung considers it to be the maternal bosom, and the pupil its ‘child’. Thus the great solar god becomes a child again, seeking renovation at his mother’s bosom (a symbol, for the Egyptians, of the mouth). (CIRLOT, 2001, p. 99).

A Stained Glass Eye

