

Imagery Interchange in John Patrick Shanley's *Doubt, a Parable*

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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 paper we 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 and on the screen.

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

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/expectador construir sua própria interpretação dos fatos. Além de ser o autor da peça, Shanley também transformou seu texto teatral em roteiro para cinema, e atuou como produtor da peça e roteirista e diretor do filme *Dúvida*, de 2008. Neste ensaio examinamos as estratégias utilizadas por Shanley para manter a possibilidade de interpretação aberta quando ele traduz sua obra para mídias diferentes – na página e no cinema.

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

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“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 paper - 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, and 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.

When John Patrick Shanley devised *Doubt – a Parable* (2004), 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 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 Charity³ 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.

The play *Doubt – a Parable* 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 imagination⁴, reason and

³ 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.

⁴ 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

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)

As this is a wide-spreading discussion, ranging through the territories of Philosophy, Ethics, Morality, History, Religion, and Anthropology, our efforts will be constrained, as much as possible, to the limits of the fictional context of *Doubt - a Parable*, lest we 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

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.

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 paper addresses such questions so as to put forward an argumentative balance among the paradoxes of the imaginary⁵ as perceived in John Patrick Shanley's play *Doubt – a Parable* (2004), through a reading engaged with a Hermeneutics of the Imaginary. This is not a paper meant to answer questions, but to provoke them. As Beatriz Sarlo⁶ suggests, questions are not always to be answered,

Precisamente, los problemas que enfrentamos no tienen, como nunca tuvieron los problemas sociales, una solución inscrita 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. (Sarlo, p.15)

The process of adapting art from one language into another one involves making choices. As we write this paper from the point of view of a Letters Course, we call the choices made by the intersemiotic translator “a reading.” Therefore, we concentrate our 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).

⁵ 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 to Literature. In Brazil, we have three representative names of the field in Ana Maria Lisboa de Mello, Castor Bartolomé Ruiz and Maria Zaíra Turchi. More than a review of these studies, however, the present paper aims to use them so as to analyze the tension between the symbolic and the rational aspects of the work.

The entire project depends on the new reading the artist provides from the original construct that is being adapted. In our 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 our particular view, we left the movie more inclined to accept Father Flynn's guilt than when we read the play. But then this might have happened because watching the film was not our 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 our reading of Shanley's reading of the play, we suggest that Shanley stresses a bit further the elements that stress the possibility of guilt on the part of Father Flynn. Our basis for this statement lies in some symbolical patterns. We choose ten scenes to illustrate our 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)⁷

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 our 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 stress the statement. The same happens when the camera focuses on the stout older man, as Father Flynn says "No one

⁷ 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.

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 eye." (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, 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. We 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 dollars⁸ 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.

⁸ 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.

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!

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. 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 is 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 basketball after school. Different spectators will interpret this scene, and the boy's needs, in different ways. No matter what the approach is, 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. We have declared before, and repeat it here, that our reading of Shanley's reading of his work indicates that - as a reader - he ultimately sides with Sister Aloysius. 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 paper we have examined ten symbolical patterns. There are many others, but we chose to work with the ten instances that most attracted our attention. They head towards Sister Aloysius and against Father Flynn. That is not important either, because another researcher, or ourselves 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 life⁹ or the mood of a 2008 American movie audience concerning the discussion involving sexuality, pedophilia and the scandals related to the Catholic Church worldwide.

An 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. The 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 paper. We will only say, about this matter, that we do not share the opinion that an artistic work of quality must not be taken as profitable business involving monetary gain.

In our 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

⁹ “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)

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 aspect 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 life filled with doubts.

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