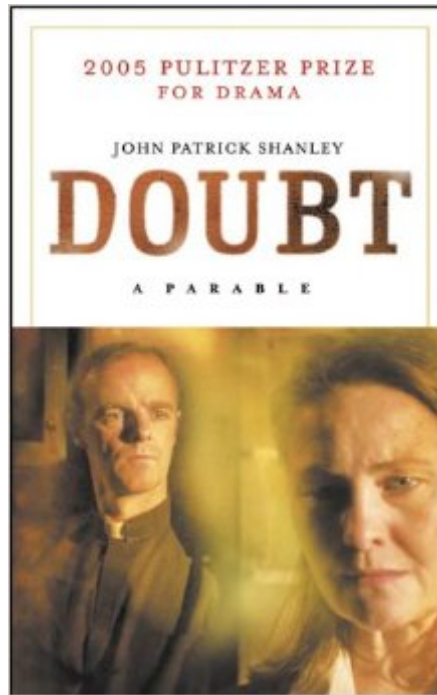


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Doubt: A Parable



Synopsis

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

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Customer Reviews

There's something about Father Flynn (Brian O'Byrne) that doesn't sit right with Sister Aloysius (Cherry Jones). The year is 1964. The shadow of the Kennedy assassination hangs in the air like a thin fog, integration has begun to spread throughout the country, and, at a Catholic grammar school in the Bronx, the traditions Aloysius relies upon are slipping away. No person represents this progression of time and society more than Flynn. He personalizes his sermons, takes three sugars in his tea, and treats the students with a familiarity that Sister Aloysius believes can only lead to disrespect. However, what makes Aloysius most uneasy about Flynn is the relationship between him and the school's first African-American student. It's a relationship she believes has gone too far. Though she has little more than her gut to go on, Aloysius, with the ambivalent assistance of a young, idealistic fellow sister, goes about a private investigation to correct the wrong she knows has occurred. The brilliance of *Doubt* (John Patrick Shanley's funny, suspenseful and finally devastating play) is its combination of Aloysius's forward drive with Flynn's compassionate intellect. Sister Aloysius could have been painted as a fire-and-brimstone kook, but Shanley allows us to see the steel rod of principle that supports Aloysius's stern demeanor and almost maddening certainty. Similarly, Father Flynn stands in for the forward-thinking, tender man of the cloth many long for in the wake of the sex scandal's of the Catholic Church. Yet there is also a subtle manipulation to Flynn's innocuous quirks that draws us in. We like Flynn while, like Aloysius, instinctively analyze his every word and action, for clues to the truth of the matter at hand.

Winner of the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, *Doubt* is, by turns, funny, shocking, stimulating, and ultimately, wise. Capturing the conflicts within St. Nicholas Church and its school in the Bronx in 1964, the play revolves around Sister Aloysius Beauvier, a rigidly doctrinaire school principal in her fifties who strictly controls both the staff and her students. A late entrant into the religious life, Sister Aloysius was married to a man killed during World War II, and the school has become her life. Sister James, a young teacher in her twenties, is temperamentally her opposite, a young woman who loves her students and is warm and generous towards them. When Sister Aloysius concludes that Donald Muller, the first black student at the school, is getting too much attention from Father Brendan Flynn, she sets the play's central conflict in motion. Though she has no evidence that anything untoward has occurred, she proceeds as if Donald has been sexually abused by the priest,

never doubting her conclusions. Sister James doubts Sister Aloysius and has faith in the priest. The issue becomes more complex when both Sister Aloysius and Fr. Flynn approach the same church hierarchy--she to ask for an investigation and he to protect his reputation. Questions of doubt multiply, both for the characters and for the audience: Does something called "the truth" exist? How much should one accept on faith? When is an issue so important that one must put aside doubts and act? When do one's doubts lead to growth?

John Patrick Shanley's script for the play *Doubt* is a masterpiece. It is basically about "truth" as a social construct with a broad range of consequences depending on how the construct is framed and accepted. Sister Aloysius Beauvier, the Catholic school principal, is convinced that she has discovered a truth about Father Brendan Flynn, a robust likable assertive priest. A great strength of this script is that Shanley leaves the mystery somewhat unresolved. Though some reviewers have concluded that Father Flynn did have some sexual involvement with the Black student, Donald Muller, there is still much room for doubt since Father Muller could have been transferred to another parish to avoid Sister Aloysius' continued assault on his reputation and his peace of mind. The script wisely begins with the central theme of the play, as given in a sermon by Father Flynn. He states: "What do you do when you are not sure?" The play cascades from this point with Sister Aloysius convinced of Father Flynn's guilt and Sister James wracked with moral uncertainty as to what is true or not true and what are the moral consequences for each decision. The play is masterfully written, much like a detective story, in which each clue that propels you toward one solution is then counter-poised with another clue drawing you in the opposite direction and conclusion.

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