

## PERSPECTIVES: PLAYGOER'S GUIDE FOR DOUBT

### FAQs ABOUT *DOUBT* (excerpts from the original tour website)

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**Q:** What is Doubt about?

**A:** Doubt takes place at St. Nicholas, a Catholic church and school in the Bronx in 1964. Sister Aloysius, the school principal, suspects the young, charismatic Father Flynn of improper relations with one of the male students. Convinced that the priest will be blindly protected by the church hierarchy, Sister Aloysius sets out to take him down herself. The play examines the line between gossip and truth, discipline and compassion, certainty and doubt.

**Q:** Is Doubt a musical?

**A:** No, it is a dramatic play.

**Q:** What is the running time of the play and is there an intermission?

**A:** Doubt runs 90 minutes long with no intermission.

**Q:** What is the recommended age for Doubt?

**A:** Although there is no crude language or imagery in the play, Doubt concerns adult issues and is intended for audiences 13 years and older.

**Q:** Is Doubt still on Broadway?

**A:** No. Doubt opened on Broadway at the Walter Kerr Theatre in March of 2005 and closed July 2, 2006.

**Q:** Has the show won any awards?

**A:** Yes. Doubt has been honored with the 2005 Tony Award for Best Play and the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, as well as the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, the Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle, Drama League, Lortel and Obie Awards for Best Play.

**Q:** What do the critics have to say?

**A:** "Doubt is remarkable. One woman's monumental certainty shines as harshly as a naked light bulb amid the shadows in John Patrick Shanley's tight, absorbing and expertly acted new drama. Even as Doubt holds your attention as an intelligently measured debate play, it sends off emotional stealth charges that go deeper." -Ben Brantley, *The New York Times*

"Eloquent and provocative. A gripping mystery. Tightly written, elegantly directed and beautifully acted. If you haven't seen Doubt yet, see it. And if you have, see it again." -Adam Feldman, *Time Out New York*

"A terrific, marvelous new play. Astonishing theatricality. A tough, timely story, rich in character, language and ideas." -Mike Kuchwara, *Associated Press*

## **AWARDS and CRITICAL PRAISE for *DOUBT, A Parable***

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Pulitzer Prize for Drama  
Obie Award for Best Playwriting  
Tony Award for Best Play  
Outer Critics' Circle Award for Outstanding Broadway Play  
Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Play  
New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best American Play  
Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Play  
Touring Broadway Award for Best Play  
Hull-Warriner Playwriting Award

### **What the critics said:**

"Inspired and Extraordinary. Tight, absorbing" – *The New York Times*

"Eloquent and provocative. A gripping mystery" – *Time Out New York*

"A terrific, marvelous new play. Astonishing theatricality" – *Associated Press*

"Radiant" – *Los Angeles Times*

"Casts a devastating spell" – *Variety*

"A crackling, smart play" – *Daily News*

"You could actually hear a pin drop" – *San Diego Union-Tribune*

"A breathtaking work of immense proportion. Positively brilliant" – *Entertainment Weekly*

"It would be sinful to miss" – *New York Magazine*

"Enthralling" – *Newark Star-Ledger*

"Passionate, exquisite, important and engrossing" – *Newsday*

"Remarkable" – *Washington Post*

## PLAYWRIGHT'S PREFACE for *DOUBT, A Parable*

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What's under a play? What holds it up? You might as well ask what's under me? On what am I built? There's something silent under every person and under every play. There is something unsaid under any given society as well.

There's a symptom apparent in America right now. It's evident in political talk shows, in entertainment coverage, in artistic criticism of every kind, in religious discussion. We are living in a courtroom culture. We *were* living in a celebrity culture, but that's dead. Now we're only interested in celebrities if they're in court. We are living in a culture of extreme advocacy, of confrontation, of judgment, and of verdict. Discussion has given way to debate. Communication has become a contest of wills. Public talking has become obnoxious and insincere. Why? Maybe it's because deep down under the chatter we have come to a place where we know that we don't know...anything. But nobody's willing to say that.

Let me ask you. Have you ever held a position in an argument past the point of comfort? Have you ever defended a way of life you were on the verge of exhausting? Have you ever given service to a creed you no longer utterly believed? Have you ever told a girl you loved her and felt the faint nausea of eroding conviction? I have. That's an interesting moment. For a playwright, it's the beginning of an idea. I saw a piece of real estate on which I might build a play, a play that sat on something silent in my life and in my time. I started with a title: *Doubt*.

What is 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 do you. 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.

It is 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 your speechless soul breaks through the dead habits of the mind. Doubt is nothing less than an opportunity to reenter the Present.

The play. I've set my story in 1964, when not just me, but the whole world seemed to be going through some kind of vast puberty. The old ways were still dominant in behavior, dress, morality, world view, but what had been organic expression had become a dead mask. I was in Catholic church school in the

Bronx, run by the Sisters of Charity. These women dressed in black, believed in Hell, obeyed their male counterparts, and educated us. The faith, which held us together, went beyond the precincts of religion. It was a shared dream we agreed to call Reality. We didn't know it, but we had a deal, a social contract. We should all believe the same thing. We would all believe.

Looking back, it seems to me, in those schools at that time, we were an ageless unity. We were all adults and we were all children. We had, like many animals, flocked together for warmth and safety. As a result, we were terribly vulnerable to anyone who chose to hunt us. When trust is the order of the day, predators are free to plunder. And plunder they did. As the ever widening Church scandals reveal, the hunters had a field day. And the shepherds, so invested in the surface, sacrificed actual good for perceived virtue.

I have never forgotten the lessons of that era, nor learned them well enough. I still long for shared certainty, an assumption of safety, the reassurance of believing that others know better than me what's for the best. But I have been led by the bitter necessities of an interesting life to value that age-old practice of the wise: Doubt.

There is an uneasy time when belief has begun to slip, but hypocrisy has yet to take hold, when the 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.

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 to live with a full measure of uncertainty. There is no last word. That's the silence under the chatter of our time.

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## **John Patrick Shanley, Playwright**

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JOHN PATRICK SHANLEY is from the Bronx. He was thrown out of St. Helena's kindergarten. He was banned from St. Anthony's hot lunch program for life. He was expelled from Cardinal Spellman High School. He was placed on academic probation by New York University and instructed to appear before a tribunal if he wished to return. When asked why he had been treated in this way by all these institutions, he burst into tears and said he had no idea. Then he went into the United States Marine Corps. He did fine. He's still doing okay.

## Stage Plays

Defiance  
Four Dogs and a Bone  
Sailor's Song  
Doubt  
Dirty Story  
Cellini  
Where's My Money?  
Psychopathia Sexualis  
The Wild Goose  
Missing Marissa  
Kissing Christine  
What Is This Everything?  
Beggars in the House of Plenty  
The Big Funk  
All for Charity  
Women of Manhattan  
Italian American Reconciliation  
The Dreamer Examines His Pillow  
Savage in Limbo  
Danny and the Deep Blue Sea  
Welcome to the Moon

## Screenplays

The Waltz of the Tulips  
Live from Baghdad  
Congo  
Alive  
Joe Versus the Volcano  
The January Man  
Moonstruck  
Five Corners  
Four Dogs and a Bone

## **IMPORTANT FIGURES and TERMS from *DOUBT, A Parable***

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### **Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821)**

A Roman Catholic convert who founded the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's, the first new community for religious women to be founded in the United States. In an 1809 letter, she described her mission in the tradition of the St. Vincent de Paul Society: to "assist the Poor, visit the sick, comfort the sorrowful, clothe the little innocents, and teach them to love God!" Through her work as a dedicated volunteer, social minister and spiritual leader, Elizabeth Ann Seton left a legacy behind that included six religious communities with more than 5,000 members, hundreds of schools, social service centers, and hospitals throughout America and around the world. She was canonized in 1975 by Pope Paul VI.

Sister Aloysius and Sister James dress in the tradition of the Sisters of Charity in the play, ***DOUBT, A Parable***. They wear a bonnet and long cape-like dress that the Sisters of Charity adopted, like other orders, from women in mourning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### **John F. Kennedy (1917-1963)**

35th president of the United States who famously said "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." He served as president from 1961-1963 at which time he was assassinated (a death in which the identity of his perpetrator(s) is still being debated). Kennedy was Catholic, but during his campaign for president, found that some largely Protestant states didn't support him because of his religious status. To separate his religion from politics, he stated in a famous 1960 speech in Houston, Texas: "I am not the Catholic candidate for President. I am the Democratic Party's candidate for President who also happens to be a Catholic. I do not speak for my Church on public matters — and the Church does not speak for me." To this day, Kennedy still rates highly as a past president in public opinion ratings.

In *Doubt, A Parable*, Father Flynn refers to Kennedy's assassination as a time of "profound disorientation. Despair."

### **Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945)**

32<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States who served from 1933-1945. He was the only president to have served more than two terms in office (he was elected to office four times). During the Great Depression of the 1930s, Roosevelt initiated the New Deal, a program designed to provide relief for the unemployed, recovery of the economy, and reform of the economic and banking systems. He is also remembered for signing into law the Social Security system in 1935.

Sister Aloysius in *Doubt, A Parable*, cautions Sister James not to idealize Roosevelt because, although he was "a good president...he did attempt to pack the Supreme Court." This is in reference to the "court packing bill of 1937" in which the President would have power to appoint an extra Supreme Court Justice for every sitting Justice over the age of 70 ½. This law was proposed by Roosevelt after the Supreme Court overturned several of his New Deal measures.

### **Monsignor**

A title and an office conferred upon a male cleric by the pope.

### **Bishop**

A high-ranking senior member of a Christian clergy usually in charge of a diocese who oversees priests or ministers.

### **Desegregation**

The 1954 landmark case – Brown vs. the Board of Education – overturned the earlier ruling for segregation in the schools. As a result, black and white students were no longer required to go to separate schools. The issue of desegregation remained a highly charged topic well into the 60s, as is touched upon in *Doubt, A Parable*.