

# THE PLAYWRIGHT AS A TRANSLATOR OF HIMSELF: *DOUBT, A PARABLE ON THE PAGE AND ON THE SCREEN*

Sandra Sirangelo MAGGIO\*  
Valter Henrique FRITSCH\*\*

*Doubt can only be removed by action.*  
(Goethe, 2005, p.105)

- **ABSTRACT:** John Patrick Shanley's play *Doubt, a Parable* (2004) revisits the world he knew as a child, 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. She 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 his own interpretation of the facts implied. Shanley is more than the author of the play. He is also the producer of the stage version, the author of the screenplay and the director of the movie version. This essay examines 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.
- **KEYWORDS:** John Patrick Shanley. *Doubt, a Parable*. Contemporary American drama. Studies of the imaginary.

When John Patrick Shanley (2004) 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 an important role in his plays. As one can notice, the Bronx is recurrent in Shanley's works such as in *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea*, *Welcome to the Moon*

---

\* UFRGS – Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. Instituto de Letras – Departamento de Línguas Modernas. Rio Grande do Sul – RS – Brasil. 91540-000 – maggio@cpovo.net

\*\* Doutorando em Letras. UFRGS – Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. Instituto de Letras – Pós-Graduação em Letras. Rio Grande do Sul – RS – Brasil. 91540-000 – valter.fritsch@yahoo.com.br

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 – attended 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 at St Nicholas School, Father Flynn, the priest responsible for 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, involving as varied thematic lines as relations of power, sexuality, gender, color, morality and ethics. Despite the setting, however, Shanley (2004) says that this is not a play about Catholicism, Sisters of Charity<sup>1</sup> or a discussion on religious beliefs or racial segregation. The author sees the 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. This happens after a meeting he had with Father Flynn. This triggers 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 denies 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 – two of them 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. In this aesthetic construct we can see 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 positive side and a negative 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

---

<sup>1</sup> The Sisters of Charity 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. Shanley dedicates his play to the many orders of Catholic nuns who have devoted their lives to serving others in hospitals, schools and retirement homes.

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 articulations between reality and imagination,<sup>2</sup> 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 into an investigation of this present tension, by approaching the issue of doubt. The receptors (readers and spectators) are provoked into considering the different sides of the notion of Truth, which foments our uncertainties about what is real in a world that sometimes seems unreal. According to Shanley (2004, p.8),

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.

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 doubts, or even about what doubts really are. According to Louis Althusser (2005), if we trust, we subscribe to a certain ideology; and if we suddenly find ourselves acting against the things we believe, that means that we have been exposed to more ideologies than the one we accept as the true one. Being exposed to a plethora of information is the trademark of our present time. As a consequence, uncertainty plays a main role in our perception of the world; this is the archetype of our days. But what is the role of individuality in this massively globalized society? What is true and what is not? What is doubt? Shanley's work poses these questions. In his 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

---

<sup>2</sup> In this work reality and imagination are treated as dichotomies, according to the philosophical views of Gaston Bachelard's and Castor Bartolomé Ruiz's (2003) *Hermeneutics of the Imaginary*. Reality stands for materiality, or those aspects that can be grasped through reason, whereas Imagination refers to images conceived by the human mind that do not have necessarily a connection to materiality. This also applies to Comparative Mythology, as approached by Mircea Eliade (1996) or Joseph Campbell (2002).

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, 2004, p.8).

We addresses such questions so as to put forward an argumentative balance involving the paradoxes of the imaginary<sup>3</sup> as perceived through Shanley's play, through a reading engaged with the Hermeneutics of the Imaginary. We do not mean to ask questions, but to provoke them. As Beatriz Sarlo (2004, p.15)<sup>4</sup> suggests, questions are not always meant 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.<sup>5</sup>

The process of adapting art from one language into another involves making choices. As we write this essay from the point of view of Literature, 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

---

<sup>3</sup> The Studies of the Imaginary investigate images that reverberate through time and that are related to the theory of symbols and archetypes of Carl Gustav Jung (1978). This school is specially active in France, with Gaston Bachelard's Hermeneutics of the Imaginary, in philosophy; Gilbert Durand in anthropology; and with Mircea Eliade (1996) in Comparative Mythology. Other exponents are Joseph Campbell (2002) in the United States and Northrop Frye in Canada. The two latter approximate these discussions to the field of Literature. In Brazil we have three renowned critics in Ana Maria Lisboa de Mello, Castor Bartolomé Ruiz (2003) and Maria Zaira Turchi. In the present analysis of *Doubt, a Parable*, the studies of the imaginary help us investigate the tension between the symbolic and the rational aspects of the play.

<sup>4</sup> Beatriz Sarlo is an Argentine literary and cultural critic. She is also founding editor to the cultural journal *Punto de Vista*. Sarlo has taught in several US universities, held the Simón Bolívar chair at the University of Cambridge, and has been a visiting fellow at the Wissenschaftskollegzu Berlin. She also writes regularly for Argentinian newspapers such as *La Nación* and *Clarín*.

<sup>5</sup> Our translation: "Indeed, the problems we face do not have, as 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, than to find the answer. It is not about what to do, but about how to find a way to perceive. If something could define intellectual activity, that something is the ability to address what is hidden in the nature of things, so as to show that the course of events is not unchangeable".

revealed in two forms, in the screenplay, and in the movie itself, if as we consider the influence the director has in the casting process, the performance of the actors, the use of camera, sound, color, and all the rest. As a screen player and director, Shanley reads Shanley. He needs to reconsider how to reach the effects to be achieved, what will change and what remains. The expression “intersemiotic translation” is used by several theorists of adaptation, such as Phyllis Zatlin (2005), in *Theatrical translation and film adaptation*.

The entire translation project depends on the new reading of the original construct that is being adapted. The choice for the open-ending, allowing the possibility for either of the two solutions, remains. Some elements are lost, and other are added, twisting the flow of interpretation here and there. The strategies to get the same result by using different means are worth commenting.

As a playwright, Shanley uses words, written on white paper and on the imagination of his reader, to build his fictional world. The possibilities of construction are as many and numberless as the readers that read those pages. In the movie we 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, the movie opens more possibilities for Father Flynn’s guilt than 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 in need of 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 movies. 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 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 popular roles with more intellectualized and sophisticated parts, so as to avoid

being too closely associated to a certain role type. Meryl Streep accepted the role of Sister Aloysius when the movie *Mamma mia!* was being released. The drastic difference between the characters she plays in the two parts is something stirring in the career of a great actress. Also, when the actors are competent and experienced, they usually exchange opinions with the director, to the effect of changing some scenes.

In the play we have only four characters, and three settings, whereas the movie adaptation introduces 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/translator, so that we consider the moves of Shanley as reader of himself. In our reading of Shanley's reading of his play, we suggest that the elements that stress the possibility of guilt on the part of Father Flynn are slightly enhanced. The basis for this statement lies in some symbolical patterns. We choose ten scenes to illustrate this argument. The first relates to some movements of the camera, when Father Flynn delivers his first sermon:

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 (SHANLEY, 2008, p.7).<sup>6</sup>

When we read the sermon on the page, we create the images. When we watch the play, we direct our eyes in the direction we choose and select what actors we will focus on. 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. When the camera moves to the pale woman as he says "No one knows I'm sick", we suppose she is sick, because the look and the performance of the actress stress that statement. The same happens when the camera focuses on the older man, and Father Flynn says "No one knows I've lost my last real friend". The man reacts as if he has lost his last real friend. The camera closes on Father Flynn when the priest says, or confesses, "No one knows I've done something wrong". The choices for the focus of the camera can be taken

<sup>6</sup> Quotations from the movie are taken from the text of the screenplay.

as 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 as if 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" (SHANLEY, 2008, p.18). A glass eye, surrounded by solar light, as showed in the movie, is not there without rhyme or reason. The image of the eye refers to the symbolism of Light and the Sun. It represents spiritual vision, and is also a mirror of the soul. When an eye is surrounded by sunlight, it represents God, signifying omniscience (LEXIKON, 1990). 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 may indicate that Father Flynn carries 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. 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 too. 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 consumerism, besides being an artist Shanley must be pragmatic as well. A movie from Universal Pictures made at a cost of twenty million dollars<sup>7</sup> and meant to run for the Academy Award should not meddle too much with the audience's anxiety.

The third scene to be considered has been especially created for the film. It concerns William London and the bleeding nose. William London does not have a physical presence in the play, he is only referred to by Sister Aloysius, so we do not know if what she says is real 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, 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 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, that remains an open question to the end.

---

<sup>7</sup> Information extracted from the Internet Movie Data Base (IMDB), indicates that the total cost of the movie was twenty million dollars. Four months after its release, it had raised thirty-three and a half million dollars.

The fourth instance shows the contrast between the atmosphere 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 clomplomp. 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 (SHANLEY, 2008, p.26).

Adding to the contrast between the two scenes, and between the effusive (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 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 dripping from it. The scene evokes symbolical patterns that directly affect the imaginary of the audience. The color red, and the dark shade of the room evoke images 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 (LEXIKON, 1990). 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 beckon to the archetype of the vampire, the 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. 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 all disposed around the table, eating quietly in a very different environment. The room is white, well illuminated, and they drink 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. 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 carnal passion (LEXIKON, 1990). The presentation of these two scenes delivers a message to the audience.

The fifth scene consists only of actions, there are no dialogues. Sister James is watching the dance class, enjoying it, seeing her students dancing and having fun. Then, we have 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 (SHANLEY, 2008, p.29).

Sister James finds 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. 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 Father Flynn's credibility is already shaken and she cannot trust him 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. In the play he is only referred to by the characters. Here he is not an abstract entity anymore. Now there is an actor (Joseph Foster II) to perform his part, we can see him, with his sad eyes, in his sorrow for being bullied by his classmates, and by his own father. We can witness the way his eyes shine when he meets Father Flynn, and we feel that the boy loves this priest. We just do not know in what 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 Jimmy 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, 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, for sexual reasons, or 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 it takes 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 symbol, as in the previous sequence of scenes in the dark red and in the white rooms. The cat has been bound to the divine since Ancient Egypt, even before that; whereas the mouse is an image vastly used to denigrate the morality of a character. The rat is associated with the Black Death, which destroyed one third of the population of Europe in the Middle Ages, and which (probably as a consequence of that) provokes our instinctive disgust and repugnance. Rats move swiftly and surreptitiously, and live in the trash. They eat from the trash and can spread disease. In the European imaginary, they are connected with evil figures as the Witch, the Vampire, the Devil and Leprechauns (LEXIKON, 1990). Cats, conversely, are independent, agile and sharply skilled. Still, their association with divinity refers to pre-Christian lines of religiosity. The more dichotomist our tradition became, the more the image of the cat became associated with the dangerous, devilish aspects of femininity. In this sense, Sister Aloysius reminds us of a cat when she decides that she will do what she must do – even if she must “step away from God.” She seems to be answering to a primitive feminine, motherly, sacred summon here, in which the rescuing of one child is worthier than two thousand years of institutional canons and dogmas, or the risk of being unfair towards an arguably innocent person.

The eighth instance to observe respects the relation of the two antagonists, and light and shadow. During the first confrontation of Sister Aloysius with 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. The light clearly annoys Father Flynn, and 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 one more time as the presence of the archetype of the vampire. Moreover, applied to this particular scene, light can be taken as a symbol for knowledge, enlightenment, or even the Truth, with capital letters, that Sister Aloysius is chasing. She wants to reach the truth about Donald Muller, so Sister Aloysius opens the window and turns on the lamp, as in an attempt to clarify, to elucidate the situation. She needs things to get clear, because she needs to feel justified in her radical actions. 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 argue again at the principal's office. Father Flynn is infuriated as he bursts into her office, shouting at Sister Aloysius, demanding that she stops her campaign against him. In the original play, this is the scene in which Sister Aloysius attests she may even leave the Church, if necessary, to reach her goal. 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! (SHANLEY, 2008, p.86)

The two changing elements 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 in her past. The performance of the actress changes the mood of the scene completely. At this point we see a fragile and humanized person, who knows about the sorrows and vicissitudes of life. This happens right 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 growth of the character with her superior intention to protect the boy that elevates her to the level of a paladin to justice and humanity. She stands also the elderly wise woman who knows what has to be done, and is willing to pay the price, dismissing doubts within the certainty of her beliefs.

The last scene to be discussed is also the last scene in the movie. It takes place in the garden, now covered by snow, reminding us of Gilbert Durand's (1988) remark about the visual utility of the snow in literature: the color white – with all the imagery connected with water and the feminine – highlights what is relevant and covers up all the rest. This setting reminds us of the conversation about a 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, 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 very 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 “has intended to do” does not matter. What matters is what he has created. After the work is out into the world, the author is just one more reader/spectator. His personal view, ultimately, does not signify.

In this paper we have examined ten selected scenes. 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. Another researcher, or ourselves under other circumstances, might have directed the focus to a different track. The point here is how useful this tool provided by the Studies of the Imaginary is to examine the ways in which we invest the world with meaning. We do that constantly, even if we are not aware of that. The most important thing to remember is that the meanings we invest are not final, and that they depend on the previous agreements 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 aspects of Shanley's personal life<sup>8</sup> or the mood of a 2008 American movie audience concerning the discussion of subjects as sexuality, pedophilia, or even 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* manages to travel well in both spheres. In 2008 we have the movie adaptation. 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 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 essay. 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

---

<sup>8</sup> In an interview to NYT. "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" (WITCHEL, 2004, p.3).

our age, bringing it to the spotlight – 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, for 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 work, 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. 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 that is filled with doubts.

MAGGIO, S. S.; FRITSCH, V. H. O dramaturgo como tradutor de si mesmo: *Dúvida, uma Parábola* na página e na tela. **Itinerários**, Araraquara, n.36, p.65-79, Jan./Jun., 2013.

- **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 dívida – 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 cinema, e atuou como produtor da peça, roteirista e diretor do filme Dúvida, de 2008. Este ensaio examina 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.*

## References

ALTHUSSER, L. Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. Tradução de Ben Brewster. In: ADAMS, H.; SEARLE, L. (Ed.). **Critical theory since Plato**. 3. ed. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005.

CAMPBELL, J. **Isto és tu**: redimensionando a metáfora religiosa. Tradução de Edson Bini. São Paulo: Landy, 2002.

DOUBT. Direction: John Patrick Shanley. Production: Goodspeed Productions; Scott Rudin Productions. Screenplay by John Patrick Shanley. Cast: Meryl Streep; Philip Seymour Hoffman; Amy Adams; Viola Davis. USA: Miramax Films: 2008. Feature film 104 min, color., dolby digital.

DURAND, G. **A imaginação simbólica**. São Paulo: Cultrix, 1988.

ELIADE, M. **The sacred and the profane**: the nature of religion. Tradução de Williard Trask. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1996.

GOETHE, J. W. Von. **Faust**. Tradução de Bayard Taylor. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 2005.

LEXICON, H. **Dicionário de símbolos**. Tradução de José Paschoal. São Paulo: Cultrix, 1990.

IMDB (Internet Movie Data Base). **Doubt**. Disponível em: <[http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0918927/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_2](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0918927/?ref_=nv_sr_2)>. Acesso em: 28 dez. 2012.

JUNG, C. **Man and his symbols**. London: Picador, 1978.

RUIZ, C. B. **Os paradoxos do imaginário**. São Leopoldo: Ed. da Unisinos, 2003.

SARLO, B. **Escenas de la vida posmoderna**. Buenos Aires: SeixBarral, 2004.

SHANLEY, J. P. **Doubt**. 2008. Disponível em: <<http://www.screenplaydb.com/film/scripts/doubt/>>. Acesso em: 28 dez. 2012. Roteiro baseado na peça.

\_\_\_\_\_. **Doubt, a Parable**. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2004.

WITCHEL, A. The confessions of John Patrick Shanley. **The New York Times**, New York, 7 nov. 2004. Disponível em: <[http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/07/magazine/07SHANLEY.html?\\_r=1&ref=johnpatrickshanley](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/07/magazine/07SHANLEY.html?_r=1&ref=johnpatrickshanley)>. Acesso em: 28 dez. 2012.

ZATLIN, P. **Theatrical translation and film adaptation**. London: Cromwell Press, 2005.

Recebido em: 31/12/2012

Aceito em: 19/05/2013



