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Evil, Sin, or *Doubt*? The Dramas of Clerical Child Abuse

Elizabeth Cullingford

The refusal to practice what you preach provides a classic impetus for dramatic performance. Moliere's religious prude Tartuffe is undone by adulterous desire, while Shakespeare's sexual puritan Angelo, in attempting to seduce a young nun, breaks the harsh rules he imposes on others. The exposure of hypocrisy offers an enduring source of pleasure, both on the stage and in the world; when yet another preacher or family-values politician is revealed as a philanderer or a pedophile, we recognize a familiar piece of political theatre.

The clerical child-abuse scandals that have shaken the Catholic Church for the last two decades, and are currently threatening to engulf Pope Benedict XVI himself, embody this dramatic paradigm. The public unmasking of those who have not practiced what they preached has inspired numerous social and theatrical performances, from commissions of inquiry, demonstrations by survivors' groups, and papal apologies, to documentaries, plays, and films. Responses to the crisis have been fiercely contested. While compassion for the victims and condemnation of their abusers is more or less universal, many liberal Catholics fault the institutional cover-up more than the clerical crime, and feminists point to the secretive hierarchical patriarchy that has prevented male clergy being called to account.[1] Some religious conservatives, on the other hand, blame the liberal reforms of the Second Vatican Council and the spread of homosexuality among the clergy;[2] others regard the scandal as a moral panic whipped up by the media to damage the Catholic Church.[3] From the opposite perspective, the moral-panic argument is frequently used to defend gay men

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[1] Thomas P. Doyle, A. W. Richard Sipe, and Patrick J. Wall, *Sex, Priests, and Secret Codes: The Catholic Church's 2000-Year Paper Trail of Sexual Abuse* (Los Angeles: Volt Press, 2006). Well before the latest revelations, Philip Jenkins analyzed the liberal, conservative, and feminist interests within the Church that seized upon the issue to advance their conflicting agendas: *Pedophiles and Priests: Anatomy of a Contemporary Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 95–112, 113–24.

[2] Michael S. Rose, *Goodbye Good Men: How Liberals Brought Corruption into the Catholic Church* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2002), 55–87.

[3] Philip Jenkins, *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Despite his obvious biases, Jenkins is a serious scholar, but his work has been taken up by extremist Catholic ideologues like William Donohue, president of the Catholic League.

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against homophobia.[4] These ideological contradictions inform John Patrick Shanley's play *Doubt: A Parable*,[5] which stages the struggle of a possibly abusive, possibly gay, and certainly liberal priest against an impossibly dogmatic and conservative nun. *Doubt* confounds the expectations of audiences prepared for straightforward anti-clerical satire.

The success of *Doubt* suggests that "there's life yet in the well-made play."[6] It opened at the Manhattan Theatre Club in November 2004, transferred to Broadway in March 2005, and ran for 525 performances, winning a Pulitzer Prize and four Tony Awards (Best Play, Best Direction, Cherry Jones as Best Actress, and Adriane Lenox as Best Featured Actress). With thirty-four productions, *Doubt* was the most frequently performed contemporary American drama during the 2007–08 season.[7] Shanley also wrote and directed the film, starring Meryl Streep and Philip Seymour Hoffman, which opened in December 2008 and received five Oscar nominations.[8] Perhaps surprisingly, given its mainstream appeal, *Doubt* remains faithful to the sexual ambiguities of the crisis. According to Ben Brantley, Shanley "makes subversive use of musty theatrical conventions. *Doubt* hews closely to its reassuringly sturdy, familiar form the better to explore aspects of thought and personality that are anything but solid."[9] Despite its conventional aesthetics, *Doubt* manipulates and frustrates our desire to empathize with a character who represents our own convictions. Most strikingly, it refuses the denouement proper to its genre: the religious hypocrite is not unmasked, and the possibility that he is not a hypocrite remains open.

I approach *Doubt* through interwoven questions of genre and sexuality, contrasting the play with Amy Berg's award-winning documentary film *Deliver Us from Evil* (2006)[10] and Michael Murphy's well-received verbatim drama *Sin (A Cardinal Deposed)* (2004).[11] In so doing, I move from the liberal defense of gay men toward the more perilous fictional evocation of a queer child, defined as "the child who displays interest in sex generally, in same-sex erotic attachments, or in cross-generational attachments."[12] Despite the current vogue for cinematic documentary and documentary theatre,[13] I argue that *Doubt*, the least factual of these three works, is also the most challenging: that an imaginative drama, with its absence of forensic evidence or victim testimony, freedom to embrace contradictions, and dynami-

[4] Donald L. Boisvert and Robert E. Goss, eds., *Gay Catholic Priests and Clerical Sexual Misconduct: Breaking the Silence* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2005), 1–5.

[5] John Patrick Shanley, *Doubt: A Parable* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2005).

[6] Peter Marks, "An Unshakable *'Doubt'*: New Work Puts Faith in the Church to the Test," *Washington Post*, 16 December 2004.

[7] Eliza Bent, "Season Preview 2007–2008," *American Theatre* 24, no. 8 (2007): 47.

[8] *Doubt*, directed by John Patrick Shanley (DVD, Buena Vista, 2009).

[9] Ben Brantley, "A Nun Who Is Certain, Even If Truth Is Not," *New York Times*, 24 November 2004.

[10] *Deliver Us from Evil*, directed by Amy Berg (DVD, Buena Vista, 2007), won awards from the New York Film Critics Circle, the Boston Society of Film Critics, and the Los Angeles Film Festival.

[11] Michael Murphy, *Sin (A Cardinal Deposed)* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2005). For discussions of verbatim theatre, plus the text of *Sin*, see the "Documentary Drama" issue of *TDR: The Drama Review* 50, no. 3 (2006).

[12] Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley, eds., *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), x. In "Feminism, Child Sexual Abuse, and the Erasure of Child Sexuality" (*GLQ* 10, no. 2 [2004]: 141–77), Steven Angelides shows how queer theory diverges from traditional feminism over the question of child sexuality, while Margot Backus confronts the possibility of queer abuse in '"Things That Have the Potential to Go Terribly Wrong': Homosexuality, Paedophilia and the Kincora Boys' Home Scandal," *The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory*, eds. Noreen Giffney and Michael O'Rourke (Aldershot: Ashgate 2009).

[13] Paul Arthur, "Extreme Makeover: The Changing Face of Documentary," *Cineaste* 30, no. 3 (2005): 18–23; Carol Martin, "Bodies of Evidence," *TDR: The Drama Review* 50, no. 3 (2006): 8–15.

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cally fluctuating engagement with different audiences, may be generically better-suited than documentary to perform the ambiguities of this religious and sexual catastrophe.

In January 2002, the *Boston Globe* began reporting on Cardinal Bernard Law's cover-up of sexual abuses committed by over seventy Boston priests. Earlier cases in Louisiana and Boston had received considerable publicity, and the Canadian TV docudrama *The Boys of St. Vincent* (1992) had exposed abuses at the Mount Cashel Orphanage in Newfoundland,[14] but 2002 was the tipping point in America, ushering in a torrent of scandalous revelations and expensive lawsuits. Noting that bishops were resigning in Ireland, France, Wales, and Poland, the *Globe* nevertheless claimed Boston as the epicenter of the crisis and asserted that "nowhere else has the erosion of deference traditionally shown the Church been more dramatic."[15] Other dioceses might also have claimed this dubious distinction: the troubles of Cardinal Mahony in Los Angeles were equally spectacular. Other countries, Ireland in particular, continue to be traumatized by the issue.[16] When the pope visited the United States in April 2008, child abuse dominated his agenda, and although as Archbishop and Cardinal Ratzinger he had helped to cover up the scandal, as Benedict XVI he offered a public apology and met with survivors.[17]

Not all the casualties of this crisis have been children. Because the Catholic priesthood is an all-male institution and 81 percent of the victims were boys, media representations of the scandal frequently reinforce the idea that gay men are more likely than heterosexuals to abuse children. This stereotype is inaccurate. Pedophilia, even if the victim is male, is not the same as homosexuality; the orientation of a pedophile is determined by age rather than gender. If a straight man molests a twelve-year-old girl, the crime is not attributed to his heterosexuality.[18] The idea that all gay men are potential child abusers nevertheless persists, and the Vatican has reinforced popular prejudice by banning the ordination of homosexuals.

In 2005, the Church reiterated its view that gay men are "objectively disordered," and decreed that "those who practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called 'gay culture'" cannot become priests.[19] For laymen, the distinction

[14] *The Boys of St. Vincent*, directed by John N. Smith (1992; DVD, New Yorker Video, 2004).

[15] Investigative staff of the *Boston Globe*, *Betrayal: The Crisis in the Catholic Church* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002), 7.

[16] In Ireland, child abuse also meant starvation, brutality, and neglect. The 2,600-page *Report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse* (May 2009) documents the "endemic" physical, emotional, and sexual abuse that occurred in industrial schools, orphanages, and Magdalene laundries between 1930 and 1990, available at *http://www.childabusecommission.ie.*

[17] Gerard Baker, "Penitent Pope Meets Victims of Sexual Abuse by Priests," *Times* (London), 18 April 2008, available at *http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article3768268.ece.*

[18] Mary Gail Frawley-O'Dea, *Perversion of Power: Sexual Abuse in the Catholic Church* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2007), 109–27. Paul R. Dokecki, in *The Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis: Reform and Renewal in the Catholic Community* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), claims that "the sexual abuse of a boy by a man, either in pedophilia or ephebophilia, primarily concerns the abuse of power, not the manifestation of homosexual impulses. It is not that homosexuals are never clergy sexual abusers, but that they are not typically or usually so" (25). The preliminary findings of the updated John Jay Report, to be released in 2010, suggest that priests who are homosexual are not more likely to be abusers; see David Gibson, "New Catholic Sex Abuse Findings: Gay Priests Are Not the Problem," *Politics Daily*, 11 November 2009, available at *http://www.politicsdaily.com/2009/11/18/new-catholic-sex-abuse-findings-gay-priests-not-the-problem.*

[19] Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, *Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with Regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders* (2005), available at *http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20051104_istruzione_en.html.*

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between sexual orientation (tragic, but not sinful) and action (always sinful) persists, but for the clergy, orientation alone is a disqualification. Yet theologian Mark Jordan asserts that the Catholic priesthood is "one of the most homoerotic of widely available modern cultures, offering encouragement, instruction, and relatively safe haven" to many gay men. He adduces the all-male environment, the sensuous beauty of ritual, the chance to dress up in skirts, and the opportunity to avoid marriage without appearing socially abnormal.[20] In Eve Sedgwick's terms,[21] while the institutional structure of the Church is homosocial and much of its atmosphere and practice is homoerotic, its official teaching is profoundly homophobic. This paradox, says former priest Richard Sipe, is like "a gay bar refusing service to homosexuals."[22]

Reliable reports about long-repressed traumas are difficult to obtain, and all abuse statistics are problematic. Philip Jenkins suspects they are exaggerated to inflame anti-Catholicism,[23] while scholars of sexuality James Kincaid (1998), Kevin Ohi (2000), and Judith Levine (2002)[24] concur that the incidence of child molestation by nonfamily members, clerical or secular, has been inflated and deplore the homophobia fomented by moral panic about sexual threats to children. All their critical interventions predate the 2004 report commissioned from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, which concluded that during the last half-century, 4 percent of the American clergy have committed sexually abusive acts.[25] This figure may be equaled or surpassed by the percent-

[20] Mark Jordan, *The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 8, 179–208.

[21] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 1–2.

[22] W. Richard Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis: A Secret World Revisited* (Hove, UK: Brunner-Routledge, 2003), 133. By the most conservative estimate, 20 percent of American priests are homosexual; see Andrew Greeley, *Priests: A Calling in Crisis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 43–46; other estimates are much higher (e.g., Frawley-O'Dea, *Perversion of Power*, 113; Doyle et al., *Sex, Priests, and Secret Codes*, 211).

[23] Jenkins, *The New Anti-Catholicism*, 133–57.

[24] James Kincaid, *Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); Kevin Ohi, "Molestation 101: Child Abuse, Homophobia, and *The Boys of St. Vincent*," *GLQ* 6, no. 2 (2000): 195–248; Judith Levine, *Harmful to Minors: The Perils of Protecting Children from Sex* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2003), 23–29. Levine's publication date coincided with the *Boston Globe* revelations, and a reporter asked her: "Could a priest and a boy conceivably have a positive sexual experience together?" (Levine 227). Her affirmative reply caused a firestorm.

[25] John Jay College of Criminal Justice/CUNY, *The Nature and Scope of the Problem of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States* (Washington, DC: US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004), available at *http://www.usccb.org/nrb/johnjaystudy/*. Although this report was attacked as underestimating the problem, it was the first serious attempt to quantify it. Homophobic interpretation of the statistics was typical: "Eighty-one percent of sex crimes committed against children by Roman Catholic priests during the past 52 years were homosexual men preying on boys, according to a comprehensive study released yesterday on the church's sex abuse crisis" (Julia Duin, "Gay Priests Cited in Abuse of Boys," *Washington Times*, 28 February 2004). For Duin, all male-on-male activity is homosexual, but the Jay statistics tell a more complex story: 22 percent of all victims were under ten; their abusers were pedophiles, a label commonly though not accurately assigned to all accused priests. The American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV* (2000) defines pedophilia as "sexual activity with a prepubescent child (generally age 13 years or younger)" (302.2). A further 40 percent of the victims were boys between the ages of 11 and 14, many of whom must have been prepubescent; and 27 percent of the victims were adolescents, including girls. According to psychiatric taxonomies, the molesters of these adolescents were "ephebophiles"—adults who indulge in "sexual involvement with children aged fourteen to seventeen" (Dokecki, *The Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis*, 24). Ephebophilia is not necessarily congruent with homosexuality, although it may be. For a rebuttal of the "homosexual men preying on boys" thesis, see Grant Gallicho, "The Politics of Statistics," *dotCommonweal*, 14 June 2006, available at *http://www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog/?p=305*.

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age of abusers in other denominations or in the public schools, and it is certainly exceeded within that primary site of danger, the heterosexual family. Nevertheless, the Church has admitted much of the abuse that its defenders persistently deny: since 1950, it has paid out over $2 billion in settlements.

Even if Catholic priests are statistically no more disposed than laymen to the sexual exploitation of children, the drama of clerical child abuse retains its power, because of the disparity between the actions of individual priests and the moral claims of their Church. In prohibiting contraception, divorce, homosexuality, women priests, and married clergy, contemporary Catholicism has made the regulation of sexual desire and the imposition of traditional gender roles the cornerstone of its theology and practice. The latest Pew survey on religion in America indicates that Church teachings on gender and sexuality are even more important than abuse scandals in motivating the current turn away from Catholicism.[26]

While possibly underestimating its prevalence, Kincaid offers valuable insights into the representation of child abuse. He argues that the phenomenon as depicted in the mass media is the product of our culture's self-induced "moral panic" about children and sexuality,[27] emerging from the persistent eroticization of children and consequent fear that they will be molested.[28] The documentary *Capturing the Friedmans* (2003) demonstrates how moral panic constructed a monster out of a timid teacher with a taste for child pornography.[29] Arnold Friedman's possession of illegal magazines was conflated with anal rape, and he was convicted on the testimony of boys who had been coached by police interrogators and therapists. As we consider representations of abusive priests and innocent children, we should keep in mind the possibility of interpretations that complicate the narrative of predator and victim. To accept (as we must) that some priests are pedophiles and that some gay clergy have molested adolescents is not to uphold the homophobic equation between gays and child abuse, nor to stigmatize all intimate contact between adult men and adolescent boys as inevitably harmful. Both *Sin* and *Deliver Us from Evil* suggest that the Church's management style, characterized by lack of transparency or accountability, is the real scandal. Neither text eroticizes the child victims, and *Deliver Us from Evil* directly challenges the Vatican's view that the defense of children must entail the scapegoating of gay priests. Only *Doubt*, however, dares to suggest that love between a boy and a priest may be a positive force for good.

The Manichean ethics of *Deliver Us from Evil* and *Sin* are conditioned by their genre. Documentaries that explore political or social traumas usually adopt the perspective of the victims and deploy the melodramatic strategies of exposure, shock, and blame.[30] Although

[26] For every person who joins the Catholic Church in America, four leave it. Latin American immigrants bolster the figures, but "Catholicism has suffered the greatest net loss in the process of religious change"; see "Faith in Flux: Changes in Religious Affiliation in the US," Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (April, 2009), 1, available at *http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=409*.

[27] "Moral panic" as a concept derives from Stanley Cohen's *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972; reprint, London: Routledge, 2002). Philip Jenkins deploys it throughout *Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998). A flexible tool of cultural critique, it is used by radicals and conservatives alike.

[28] Kincaid traces the eroticization of the child to the Romantics, Gothic novelists, and Victorian writers like J. M. Barrie, Lewis Carroll, and Oscar Wilde. He is skeptical about attacks on the clergy; see his *Erotic Innocence*, 13–14.

[29] *Capturing the Friedmans*, directed by Andrew Jarecki (2003; DVD, Warner Home Video, 2004).

[30] For example, Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), Michael Moore's *Sicko* (2007), and Alex Gibney's *Taxi to the Dark Side* (2007). *Capturing the Friedmans*, which is exceptionally ambiguous for a documentary, is more closely related to *Doubt* than to *Deliver Us from Evil*.

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documentary and melodrama are situated at opposite ends of the aesthetic spectrum, they possess certain formal similarities: for example, the binaries of victim and villain, good and evil, are usually maintained. Documentary plays like Moisés Kaufman's *The Laramie Project* have clear (progressive) political objectives, as do the "verbatim" tribunal plays at the Tricycle Theatre in Kilburn, which, like *Sin*, use heavily edited transcripts of public proceedings (the Hutton Inquiry, the Bloody Sunday Inquiry) to expose the failings of the British military and political establishments. "The occasion of documentary theatre can be seen as a political affiliation in and of itself," writes Carol Martin,[31] and Nicolas Kent, artistic director of the Tricycle, corroborates her insight: "[B]y the mere fact we've chosen the issue we've chosen, we've actually made up our mind. . . . I wouldn't have done the Hutton Inquiry if I didn't believe the dossier for going to war in Iraq had been made up."[32] He has no doubts.

Deliver Us from Evil, which indicts Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles for enabling a pedophile priest who molested prepubescent children of both sexes, is similarly confident about its political positions. Oliver O'Grady, born and trained in Ireland, was transferred to California in 1971, where he spent over twenty years insinuating himself into the families of parishioners, using the respect accorded his collar to facilitate his sexual access to their children, the youngest of whom was a nine-month-old baby. Every time complaints reached the legal or ecclesiastical authorities O'Grady was moved to another parish, until, in 1993, he was prosecuted and jailed for fourteen years. In 2000, after serving half his sentence, he was deported to Ireland and had been living there for five years when Berg persuaded him to speak to her on camera.

Berg deploys a traditional documentary archive of survivor testimonies, letters, photographs, newspaper articles, and police reports. A chorus of expert "talking heads"—attorneys, canon law experts, and psychiatrists—agree with one another passionately. O'Grady's exclusive pedophilia makes him an ideologically uncomplicated subject: the film's expert psychoanalyst explicitly refutes the claim that homosexuals are more likely than heterosexuals to abuse children, and testimony from two women reminds us that most victims of child sexual abuse in the general population are female. A doomed visit to the Vatican by the women survivors and the canon law expert, Father Tom Doyle, is staged for the camera to produce the hackneyed trope, "turned away from the Pope's door." There are obvious music cues, sinister close-ups on O'Grady's hands and mouth, and obligatory mood shots featuring bad religious art. Documentaries have become popular during the last few years, grossing respectable sums and mobilizing public opinion, from the anti-Bush factions heartened by Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* to the environmentalists who knew that Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* would beat *Deliver Us from Evil* for the 2006 Oscar. What got Berg's generically formulaic film into the Oscar league at all?

The answer is simple: her interviews with O'Grady and her archival footage of the depositions of Cardinal Mahony, former accomplices turned adversaries. Although Ohi claims that "an account of the pedophile's point of view is . . . impossible,"[33] Berg eschewed the traditional documentary device of voiceover and got O'Grady to speak for himself. Attempting what he calls "the most honest confession of my life," he perkily anatomizes his desires during a disturbing sequence staged in a Dublin park full of children:

[31] Martin, "Bodies of Evidence," 11.
[32] See "Tribunals at the Tricycle: Nicolas Kent in Conversation with Terry Stoller," available at *http://www.hotreview.org/articles/tribunalsatthet.htm*.
[33] Ohi, "Molestation 101," 204.

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> If they say to me, well do you feel aroused when you see women I'd probably say no. Do you feel aroused when you see men, no. Do you feel aroused when you see children? I'd say, well, maybe. How about children who are in swimsuits? I'd say Yeah. How about children in underwear? I'd say Yeah, you know. How about if you saw children naked? And I'd say, um hum, Yeah.

As he verbally undresses the children, O'Grady denies any attraction to men. In a less-appallingly upbeat account of molesting a boy in his rectory, he admits that his young victim did not consent: "I did unbutton his pants, take out his penis and I began to masturbate him at that time. . . . Looking at his face, it told me that he was a little uneasy about this. I thought at one point he was going to cry. . . . I had an orgasm myself without him touching me." No clerical perpetrator has ever spoken so directly on film, although if this is "the pedophile's point of view," it does not challenge our negative valuation of pedophilia.[34] Counseling has afforded O'Grady a rudimentary grasp of his own psychology and he eagerly explains what it feels like to be in his shoes, but his garrulous banality and relentless cheerfulness are chilling.

Yet the priest's childishness contrasts favorably with the disingenuousness of Cardinal Mahony, the chief institutional target of Berg's crusade. In 1984, after a psychiatrist reported O'Grady to the police, Mahony assured secular authorities that O'Grady would never again work with children, then promptly appointed him pastor of San Andreas diocese. O'Grady, delighted to be promoted instead of jailed, sent Mahony a heartfelt "thank you" letter. Questioned by lawyers about this disastrous decision, which permitted a confirmed pedophile to continue his activities for another eight years, Mahony prevaricates, belittling O'Grady's incriminating letter as "overly effusive" and dismissing him as "not a priest I would golf with." To make the cardinal look shifty, Berg manipulates a series of out-of-sequence jump cuts, repeating the word "effusive" three times and ending with a damning close-up on the text of Mahony's "effusive" reply: "You have been such a part of my prayers consistently, and I assure you of those continuing prayers for the future. I look forward to meeting with you . . . so that we can discuss how you are doing and how I can be of more help to you personally." Juxtaposed with Mahony's conveniently faulty memory is the testimony of Bob Jyono, whose daughter Ann was abused by O'Grady for seven years and who can forget nothing. O'Grady frequently spent the night at their home, and Bob would come down to find "Ollie" reading his morning prayers; but "all during the night he's molesting my daughter. Raping her. Not molesting, raping her. At five years old. God's sakes, how could that happen?" The continuing pain of this family, whose forty-year-old daughter is still traumatized by her childhood experiences, makes a powerful case against Mahony.

Deliver Us from Evil belongs to the tradition of crusading documentary journalism and is frankly partisan: Berg's talking-head attorneys Jeff Anderson and John Manly are heavily invested in lawsuits against Mahony.[35] Berg's attempts to interview Church representa-

[34] Todd Solondz's *Happiness* (DVD, Good Machine International, 1998), in which a father honestly describes his pedophilic compulsions to his young son, and Pedro Almodóvar's *La Mala Educación* (*Bad Education*) (DVD, Sony Pictures Classics, 2004), in which the camera replicates the priest's desire through lyrical shots of the half-clothed bodies of swimming boys, both nudge us closer to "the pedophile's point of view" than Berg's factual interviews with O'Grady. For a review of recent films on this topic, see Jon Davies, "Imagining Intergenerationality: Representation and Rhetoric in the Pedophile Movie," *GLQ* 13, nos. 2–3 (2007): 369–85.

[35] Jeff Anderson and Associates is one of the leading child-abuse specialists in the United States.

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tives were rebuffed, and she makes no attempt at balance. Her dramatic juxtaposition of the survivors' grief with the cardinal's legalistic amnesia underlines the extent to which Mahony has surrendered his ethical identity to protect his own position and the finances of his Church. Just after the film's release in the fall of 2006, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, which had been fighting victims' lawsuits for years, announced a $60 million settlement in forty-five of the cases.[36] In 2007, the archdiocese offered $660 million to the other 500 claimants—a settlement that dwarfs the $85 million paid by the Boston archdiocese.[37] In January 2009, it was announced that the diocese was under a federal grand-jury investigation.[38] No wonder the Hayworth Theater in Los Angeles was eager to present dramatic readings of *Sin (A Cardinal Deposed)* in March 2009.

Sin, which opened in 2004 at the Bailiwick Theatre in Chicago, moved to the Regent Theatre near Boston, and was given a new, Off-Broadway production at the Clurman Theater, drew appreciative capacity crowds in these small venues, and subsequently played in several regional theatres. It served a public therapeutic function, connecting survivors with survivors' groups and permitting personal testimony during emotional post-performance talkbacks. *Sin* moves away from sexual pathology and toward the misuse of power, focusing on the institutional cover-up rather than the individual crime. Set in the Suffolk Superior Court in Boston, the play takes its dialogue verbatim from Cardinal Law's depositions in two civil cases brought on behalf of children molested by Father John Geoghan and Father Paul Shanley.[39] *Sin* relies upon an archive of trauma: tape-recorded words reproduced on the Internet, official documents, and letters. Throughout the play, testimony from victims and witnesses is read by two actors picked out by spotlights from the shadows at the side of the naturalistic set. Martin suggests that "[d]ocumentary theatre creates its own aesthetic imaginaries while claiming a special factual legitimacy,"[40] and Murphy's selection and organization of these archival texts is both creative and political. He knows that clerical conservatives blame homosexuals for the scandal, but rejects the gay hypothesis:

> Michael Murphy, who's gay but not Catholic, . . . admits he was drawn to the crisis because of its gay dimension. "I wanted to discover what was at the core of the problem—and I eventually realized it was the Church's culture of no accountability." This is in direct opposition to the claims of Catholic conservatives, "who have tried to frame the scandal as being about homosexuals out of control." "Sin," of course, is evidence to the contrary ("It's a play about management," says director Zak).[41]

A play about management sounds a lot less exciting than a play about homosexuals out of control, and some reviews suggest that *Sin* is "static."[42] The man at center stage is neither

[36] Jennifer Steinhauer, "Film on Pedophile Priest Revives Focus on Cardinal," *New York Times*, 7 October 2006.

[37] Gillian Flaccus, "LA Church to Pay $600 Million for Clergy Abuse," 14 July 2007, available at *http://www.bishop-accountability.org/news2007/07_08/2007_07_14_Flaccus_LAChurch.htm*.

[38] Scott Glover and Jack Leonard, "Cardinal Mahony under Federal Fraud Probe over Abusive Priests," *Los Angeles Times*, 29 January 2009, available at *http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jan/29/local/me-mahony29*.

[39] These depositions are to be found on the webpage of the *Boston Globe*: *http://www.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse/documents/law_depositions.htm*.

[40] Martin, "Bodies of Evidence," 10.

[41] Thomas Garvey, review of *Sin*, directed by David Zak, Regent Theater Arlington, 27 May 2004, available at *http://www.regenttheatre.com/press/sin_bay.htm*.

[42] Charles Isherwood, review of *Sin*, directed by Carl Forsman, Clurman Theater, *New York Times*, 27 October 2004; Elyse Sommer, review of *Sin*, 21 October 2004, *CurtainUp Internet Theater Magazine*, available at *http://www.curtainup.com/sin.html*.

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the pedophile Father Geoghan, who was strangled in prison in 2003, nor the gay "street priest" Father Shanley, whose assertion that in many situations "the 'kid' is the seducer"[43] and alleged connections with the North American Man/Boy Love Association made him a target of the anti-homosexual lobby. Although their actions occasioned the lawsuits, Geoghan and Shanley are never seen. Cardinal Law, seated impassively behind a table, is questioned by the plaintiff's lawyer, Krieger, and is advised by his own.

The theatrical mode of *Sin* is procedural and bureaucratic; it emphasizes not illicit desire, but Law's addiction to secrecy, lack of concern for victims, and failures of responsibility. The minutiae of a legal deposition drain the play of prurience or moral panic, though not of emotional effect: reviewers mention audience members gasping at the cardinal's denials of responsibility and breaking down in tears on hearing testimony from the victims or during the talkbacks that took place after every performance.[44] *Sin* gestures toward "courtroom drama" in the jousting between attorneys, the cardinal's flashes of sardonic wit, and the closing testimony from a previously silent victim, but there is no suspense, no moment of recognition or revelation. Law stonewalls throughout, and his final line demonstrates his refusal to act a conventional dramatic part, which should culminate with a cathartic confession of guilt. When Krieger demands: "Did you ever think that there was some need for action, even if it just involved getting the priests together and saying: This is intolerable. . . . Do you understand my question?" Law replies unemotionally, "I understand the answer you want me to give" (43).[45]

Murphy's vigorous editing of his voluminous source material creates an unrelentingly hostile perspective on the cardinal—this is verbatim drama, but it is also a rhetorical indictment. As Martin suggests, "most contemporary documentary theatre makes the claim that everything presented is part of the archive. But equally important is the fact that not everything in the archive is part of the documentary."[46] Some of Murphy's omissions are formally expedient: the eighty-eight plaintiffs are reduced to a single figure, Patrick McSorley, a young man traumatized by his abuse at the hands of Father Geoghan, and though other priests are mentioned, the play focuses tightly on the recognizable figures of Geoghan and Shanley. Numerous lawyers are condensed into Krieger for the plaintiffs and Varley for the cardinal. All the lines spoken by Law and the attorneys were uttered in the courtroom, but they are out of sequence and drawn from widely separated moments during the eight days of depositions, which occurred between May 2002 and February 2003. Seven of the eight days of depositions concerned the "out" priest Shanley and only one involved Geoghan, but the play deemphasizes homosexuality by devoting equal time to each man and ending with Geoghan's pedophilic act. From hours of rambling testimony, Murphy extracts Law's most striking legalistic and verbal evasions, such as "I have no active memory of that case," and places them in damning juxtaposition:

> CARDINAL: I can tell you that I don't recall receiving this letter at the time.
> KRIEGER: On the envelope, there's some handwriting. Do you know whose handwriting that is?
> CARDINAL: That would be my handwriting.
> KRIEGER: And what does your handwriting say? (15–16)

[43] *Sin*, 29.
[44] Stephen Kinzer, review of *Sin*, directed by David Zak, Bailiwick Repertory Company, Chicago, *New York Times*, 10 March 2004; Ed Siegel, review of *Sin*, *Boston Globe*, 23 March 2004.
[45] For a recording of this interchange, see Jason DeRose, *Sin*, Chicago Public Radio, 29 March 2004, available at *http://www.chicagopublicradio.org/audio_library/ram_2004/news/news_040329.ram*.
[46] Martin, "Bodies of Evidence," 9.

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The letter that Law cannot remember receiving, although he had written "urgent, please follow through" on the envelope, was from Margaret Gallant, seven of whose young nephews and grandnephews had been molested by Father Geoghan. Surely the sensational claim that there were seven victims in a single family must have lodged in Law's memory? His tortured syntax equates lying with accepting the truth: "That is my signature, I wrote that. I would be lying to you if I said I recall having seen this letter before, but I can't sit here before you and say that I saw it when I don't think I did, when I don't remember seeing it" (16).

Others were capable of speaking more plainly: in letters discovered when the archdiocese was forced to open its files, Bishop Darcy writes of Father Geoghan's "history of homosexual involvement with young boys" and advises against his transfer (20–21), while Bishop McCormack claims that "Father Shanley is so personally damaged that his pathology is beyond repair. It cannot be reversed." McCormack also asks: "How do we protect others from him?" (37). Law's lack of concern for the victims of the priests whose crimes he enabled by moving them from parish to parish is contrasted with his effusive letters to Geoghan and Shanley on their early retirements: "For thirty years in assigned ministry, you brought God's word and his love to his people," he wrote to Shanley (41).

Sin departs from its archive by informing the audience of Law's resignation in 2002, and his subsequent appointment to a sinecure in Rome. Juxtaposing Law's soft landing with the death of Patrick McSorley (which occurred just before *Sin* opened in March 2004), the play concludes with McSorley's memory of Geoghan molesting him on the way back from an ice-cream parlor:

> There was nothing I could do about it. You know, he must have sensed that I was very uncomfortable with what he was doing, 'cause he, you know, he ended up slowly taking his hand out and getting me back to my house. But I just remember him getting out of the car and him asking me if I wanted him to make a return visit—and I was standing there on the sidewalk in front of my house with the ice cream all melted, all melted down my arm, and I just remember him smilin' at me as his car was driving off. Before he took off, I remember him saying, Let's just—just you and me. No one else has to know about this. (44)[47]

The poignant image of a bewildered child covered with melting ice cream comes as if from beyond the grave, since Krieger interrupts the victim's testimony with another nonarchival line: "Patrick McSorley died of a drug overdose a year after the conclusion of these proceedings. He was twenty-nine" (44). Pablo Schreiber's low-key, halting delivery of this ghostly monologue "[left] the whole audience in a hushed silence."[48] Placed just after the cardinal's exit, it produced a stunning comment on the trail of wreckage he left behind on departing for Rome. Despite *Sin*'s equal focus on the openly gay Paul Shanley, the play does not scapegoat "homosexuals out of control"; it ends with a pedophilic act, an adult abusing and silencing an unwilling twelve-year-old boy. Throughout his career, Geoghan was sheltered by the Archdiocese of Boston, embodied in Cardinal Law. If audience members left the theatre in tears, they did not leave in doubt as to the identity of the criminal. Like *Deliver Us from Evil*, *Sin* conveys a straightforward moral certainty, backed up with voluminous textual and verbal evidence: sex with minors is always wrong, the Church is a privileged site of that transgression, and its leaders have corruptly concealed the wrongdoing of their subordinates.

[47] For a recording of this monologue, see DeRose, *Sin*.
[48] Sommer, review.

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Doubt: A Parable refuses all documentary certainties. Shanley does not dissociate his play from the question of homosexuality, but keeps it front and center. Unlike *Sin* and *Deliver Us from Evil*, *Doubt* challenges its audiences to reconsider their assumptions about the clerical scandals, asking whether a possibly gay priest who takes an intense interest in a vulnerable boy should be driven out of his parish. The twelve-year-old child is never shown onstage, and the distinction between pedophilia and homosexuality is not raised. Replacing moral panic with moral and definitional ambiguity, the play eschews its traditional generic denouement, the cathartic moment of revelation. Like *Oleanna*, David Mamet's play about sexual harassment, *Doubt* manipulates but ultimately enfranchises the judgment of its audience.

Closely modeled on Shanley's schooldays with the Sisters of Charity in the Bronx,[49] *Doubt* is set in 1964, during the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). The date is significant, because conservatives cite the liberal reforms initiated by the council to explain the fact that most reported child abuse occurred between 1965 and 1985. But clerical child abuse is as old as the Church itself;[50] moreover, the council reaffirmed celibacy, which some people regard as the root of the problem.[51] Since the majority of child abusers in the general population are men, feminists argue for the ordination of women, but celibate males are still the only acceptable candidates for the Catholic priesthood. *Doubt* introduces this problem of gender and power into the narrative of abuse, and as a result, its critique of the Church is far from absolute.

In what feels like a riposte to Peter Mullan's cinematic attack on abusive Irish nuns, *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002),[52] which is also set in 1964, Shanley's printed text reads: "This play is dedicated to the many orders of Catholic nuns who have devoted their lives to serving others in hospitals, schools and retirement homes. Though they have been much maligned and ridiculed, who among us has been so generous?" (v). (One of these nuns, Sister Margaret MacEntee, was the model for *Doubt*'s gentle young Sister James; she came to see the play and later acted as an adviser on the film.) The dedication confirms Shanley's affirmation of women religious, and his play's critique of their powerlessness: "These women, with their humility, generosity and invisibility, deserve some appreciation. . . . The hierarchy of the church, being completely male, was shocking and weird and wrong."[53] Sister Aloysius Beauvier may dominate the middle school of which she is principal, but she is subordinate to Father Flynn (the parish priest), to his superior Monsignor Benedict, and to the bishop. As Sister Aloysius says, the garden that separates the convent from the rectory might as well be the Atlantic Ocean. In his film, Shanley inserted a visual metaphor for this disparity: at dinner, the nuns silently sip milk and chew unappetizing gristle, while the priests uproariously consume glasses of wine and expensive cuts of meat.

I attended the Broadway production of *Doubt* on tour in San Francisco (December 2006)[54] and different stagings at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin (October 2006),[55] the Tricycle Theatre

[49] Shanley's DVD commentary emphasizes the play's autobiographical roots.

[50] The numerous decrees against clerical abuse promulgated by the early Church indicate that it was always a problem; see Doyle et al., *Sex, Priests, and Secret Codes*, 4–5.

[51] See, for example, Sipe, *Celibacy in Crisis*, 82, 321–23; but Greeley defends celibacy (*Priests*, 24–28, 114–15).

[52] *The Magdalene Sisters*, directed by Peter Mullan (DVD, Buena Vista 2002).

[53] "The Nun's Story," *Irish Independent*, 21 October 2006.

[54] Directed by Doug Hughes, with Cherry Jones (Sister Aloysius) and Adrienne Lenox (Mrs. Muller). Chris McGarry replaced Brían O'Byrne as Father Flynn, and Lisa Joyce replaced Heather Goldenhersh as Sister James.

[55] Directed by Gerard Stembridge, with Bríd Brennan (Sister Aloysius), Aidan Kelly (Father Flynn), Gemma Reeves (Sister James), and Starla Benford (Mrs. Muller).

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(January 2008),[56] and Zachary Scott Theatre, Austin (June 2008).[57] The most impressive Sister Aloysius was Cherry Jones, who opened the production on Broadway and took the play on tour. Jones gave the sister hideous glasses, a hunched figure, and a rasping voice:[58]

> I decided she'd had a hysterectomy and had no children, so she had no calcium in her bones, so she has terrible osteoporosis; she hunches over a great deal. The idea of this mission burning out of that fragile physical center—it seems to automatically have some heat about it. And her voice—I wanted it to be gravelly and unattractive and harsh. I heard Mother Teresa speak once, and she sounded like a Romanian truck driver, not a saint. . . . I thought how interesting if Sister Aloysius really is not some tall, cool, well-spoken kind of terrifying nun but a real woman of the people.[59]

Despite Jones's unattractive self-presentation, her verbal bluntness elicited frequent sympathetic laughter from the audience. Instructing Sister James to get a flirtatious girl through eighth grade "intact," or relishing the fact that the children are terrified of her, she radiated pedagogical confidence; this gruff, domineering conservative would do anything to protect her flock. Audiences bring their own history to the theatre, however, and those who had negative experiences with nuns took a less positive view of Sister Aloysius than I did. At the talkback after the Austin performance, one abuse victim wished there had been a brusque, tough Sister Aloysius to look out for him, but another remembered being terrorized by sisters just like her.

The power differentials between the genial Father Flynn and the forbidding Sister Aloysius are initially disguised by her dogmatism and intolerance. She considers art and dance a waste of time, she abhors the Christmas pageant, lipstick, and ballpoint pens, and she offends a contemporary audience's assumptions about the value of a friendly relationship between teachers and pupils. To Sister James, who loves teaching and adores children, Sister Aloysius seems joyless and cruel; to Father Flynn, a Vatican II enthusiast who champions "[p]rogressive education and a welcoming Church" (51), she embodies the stifling tradition that Pope John XXIII attacked when he threw open his windows to the spirit of modernity. Yet when Father Flynn enters her office and without invitation occupies her desk—the symbol of her authority—he dramatizes the ancient tradition of male supremacy and forces us to theorize their power struggle in feminist terms.

Father Flynn and Sister Aloysius enact the battle between the new Church and the old, between clerical men and religious women, between possible abuser and preemptive defender. Sister James, a contemporary Everywoman, is the innocent soul for whom the Good and Bad Angels compete; but Shanley refuses to tell the audience which is which, and his technique produces moments of certainty only to negate them. The play's absent center is twelve-year-old Donald Muller, the first black student in an Irish-Italian school, whom Sister Aloysius suspects Father Flynn of molesting. Donald's invisibility precludes the familiar documentary trope of victim testimony and preserves the mystery surrounding his relationship with the priest.[60] Even Donald's age is ambiguous: at twelve, is he a

[56] Directed by Nicolas Kent, with Dearbhla Molloy (Sister Aloysius), Pádraic Delaney (Father Flynn), Marcella Plunkett (Sister James), and Nikki Amuka-Bird (Mrs. Muller).

[57] Directed by Steven Dietz, with Janelle Buchanan (Sister Aloysius), Jamie Goodwin (Father Flynn), Sydney Andrews (Sister James), and Angela Rawna (Mrs. Muller).

[58] For video recordings of several scenes from the Broadway production, see *Charlie Rose*, "Panel Discussion on the Broadway Play *Doubt*" (23 August 2005) (DVD, Charlie Rose, Inc., 2006).

[59] Jean Schiffman, "Without a Doubt: An Interview with Cherry Jones," *Theatre Bay Area* (n.d.), available at *http://www.theatrebayarea.org/mag/article.jsp?thispage=archives.jsp&id=310*.

[60] The generic realism of Shanley's film requires him to put Donald on camera, but his presence does not give the game away. Donald is self-conscious about being plump, fascinated by the idea of

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prepubescent child or a budding adolescent? Sister Aloysius's evidence against Father Flynn is exiguous: she saw a child flinch away from his touch, his fingernails are effeminately long, and he uses too much sugar in his tea. More significantly, he has become Donald's protector and has summoned him for a talk alone in the rectory, from which he returns with a frightened expression and altar wine on his breath (22).

Shanley assumes that an audience accustomed to clerical scandals will enter the theatre predisposed to believe the worst of the priest. And indeed, most of the speakers at the Austin talkback assumed that he was guilty—Gale's study guide *Drama for Students* makes the same assumption.[61] To counterbalance this reaction, Shanley emphasizes the negative characteristics of Sister Aloysius, who anticipates Father Flynn's transgression, contaminates Sister James with her suspicions, and seems pleased when they appear to be confirmed. Shanley also gives Father Flynn three long monologues: Sister Aloysius is never allowed such privileged theatrical access to our emotions. Flynn's opening sermon on doubt, a parable about a sailor who has lost his bearings, appears to acknowledge that religious certainty is no more available to priests than to laypeople, but then modulates into something more intimate and potentially revelatory:

> How much worse is it then for the lone man, the lone woman, stricken by a private calamity? "No one knows I'm sick. No one knows I've lost my last real friend. No one knows I've done something wrong." Imagine the isolation. You see the world as through a window. On the one side of the glass: happy, untroubled people. On the other side: you. Something has happened, you have to carry it, and it's incommunicable. For those so afflicted, only God knows their pain. Their secret. The secret of their alienating sorrow. (5–6)

To Sister Aloysius, a woman with a hyperactive "gaydar" who embraces the stereotype that homosexuals are particularly prone to child abuse, this sermon sounds like a "parable" of the homosexual closet. Married and widowed before she entered the convent, Sister Aloysius is sure she knows more about sex than any of those around her, and she has previously dealt with an abusive priest: "Eight years ago at St. Boniface we had a priest who had to be stopped. But I had Monsignor Scully then . . . who I could rely on. Here, there's no man I can go to, and men run everything. We are going to have to stop him ourselves," she tells Sister James (22). This prior experience has prepared her to act on instinct: Flynn's sermon on doubt produces in Sister Aloysius a certainty that no one else shares. Cherry Jones needed more motivation: "So I created something in her past. I know what she saw because I had to create in my mind what set off this red alert. I have only one line that says what she saw, and I imbue it with as much meaning as I can."[62] The line's insignificance demonstrates the huge cognitive leap she is making: "I saw you touch William London's wrist. And I saw him pull away" (52).

The only symbolic object in the drab naturalistic set is a pruned rose bush that Sister Aloysius protects from the frost with burlap. "Have we had a frost?" asks Sister James. "When it comes, it's too late," answers the older nun (17). The action of wrapping the bush corresponds with her preemptive strike against Father Flynn. Shanley has said that one of the stimuli for *Doubt* was the enthusiasm for the invasion of Iraq demonstrated by

a priestly vocation, intimidated by other boys. His effeminacy is suggested by Father Flynn's present of a toy ballerina, which is subsequently smashed by the loutish William London. But this moment, when Father Flynn deliberately "puts out a hand" to Donald and gently embraces him in view of Sister James, reveals nothing but his genuine concern for the boy.

[61] David Galens and Lynn Spampinato, eds., *Doubt: Drama for Students: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Dramas* (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2006), 83.

[62] Schiffman, "Without a Doubt."

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those who believed that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction.[63] Sister Aloysius thus becomes a metaphorical spokeswoman for the Bush doctrine of preemptive war, and although there is nothing in the play itself to compel this allegorical reading, the disastrous consequences of Bush's determination to see in Saddam what he wanted to see haunt the margins of interpretation. Bush famously gambled on his gut instinct, and he lost. Will Sister Aloysius?

Father Flynn is more opaque than his female antagonist; his performance, not hers, produces the mystery. His modern attitudes and his attractive insistence on "warmth, kindness, understanding" (40) bring Sister James over to his side, and Sister James is the character with whom the audience will make common emotional cause. But although Father Flynn's assertion that his pedagogical work with Donald is founded on "love" may be theologically impeccable, it is open to interpretation. In all the productions I saw, and also in the film, his crucial scene with Sister James was performed as a queasy seduction, both of her conscience and the audience's sympathies.[64] It moves from an unpleasant threat that if she sides with Sister Aloysius she too may lose her job, to his uneasy pat on her shoulder as she tearfully surrenders to his insistence on love. But when a crow caws and he yells "be quiet," the spell is broken (42). After his praise of compassion, his impatience with the bird strikes a false note—whatever he is, he's no St. Francis.

Shanley deliberately reactivates the audience's memory of the abuse scandals by dropping familiar details like ice cream and sleepovers into the dialogue. "It's almost a joke for a priest to say 'let's take the kids on a camping trip,'"[65] he told Charlie Rose:

> FLYNN: I think a message of the Second Ecumenical Council was that the Church needs to take on a more familiar face. Reflect the local community. . . . Take the kids out for ice cream.
> SISTER ALOYSIUS: Ice cream.
> FLYNN: Maybe take the boys on a camping trip. We should be friendlier. (30)

Shanley distrusts this dissolution of boundaries: "I saw a dark side to the Second Vatican Council's message of 'go out into the community.' When I was a kid, priests were not going to take boys out of church . . . this explosive combination of celibacy and 'go out and make believe you're just one of the other folks' had a lot to do with the problems that followed."[66] Nuns who were the first to observe these problems in parochial schools were required to report to clerical rather than secular authorities, and Shanley knew from personal experience what would happen next: "A member of my own family was molested by Geoghan, the guy who was strangled in prison. And my family members went to Cardinal O'Connor . . . [who] said, 'I am so sorry this happened. I will take care of it.' And then he *promoted* him. Unbelievable."[67]

If Shanley agrees with Sister Aloysius about appropriate boundaries between children and clergy and condemns the hierarchy that promoted abusive priests while frustrating suspicious nuns, perhaps the theatrical code of *Doubt* can be cracked by reference to external sources. When I first saw the play, I was sure Father Flynn was guilty, despite his passionate denials, the flimsy evidence, and Sister Aloysius's unethical tactics. Only when

[63] *Charlie Rose.*
[64] In the DVD commentary, Shanley compares it to Richard III's seduction of Lady Anne.
[65] *Charlie Rose.*
[66] Robert Coe, "The Evolution of John Patrick Shanley," *American Theatre*, November 2004, reprinted in Galens and Spampinato, *Doubt: Drama for Students*, 99–100.
[67] Ibid., 100.

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I took my husband did I understand Shanley's repeated assertion that the final act occurs between audience members after the theatre has closed.[68] My husband insisted that Sister Aloysius was a persecuting harridan prepared to sacrifice even the child she claimed to be protecting and that the priest was innocent. Neither of us was in doubt, but we disagreed about the meaning of every detail.

Shanley told the director, Doug Hughes, the first Father Flynn, Brían O'Byrne, and the film's star, Philip Seymour Hoffman, his own back-story about the priest's behavior.[69] Onstage (as in 1964), masculine privilege keeps women in the dark, though both Cherry Jones and Meryl Streep share Sister Aloysius's belief that the priest is guilty. But Shanley's back-story was not passed on to other directors and actors; when Roman Polanski directed *Doubt* in Paris, he was not interested in the "truth."[70] O'Byrne told Charlie Rose, "I, the actor, know," and added: "I may be lying incredibly well; I may be telling some portion of the truth; or I may be telling the complete truth." Most reviewers and audience members preferred a binary choice: he's either a predator or, as O'Byrne put it, "an innocent man accused of an unpardonable act."[71] But when Sister Aloysius, fishing for evidence, summons Donald's mother to the school, the simple question "did an adult man molest a twelve-year-old boy?" becomes more doubtful. If he did, was the evil performed in the service of a greater good, and was there consent or even agency on the part of the boy? Donald's mother, who wants to get her son safely through St. Nicholas and into a good high school, is pleased that Father Flynn has been "watching out" for him. When Sister Aloysius claims that he "may have made advances on your son" (45), Mrs. Muller demurs: "Look, Sister, I don't want any trouble, and I feel like you're on the march somehow" (46).

Mrs. Muller, a secular character with only one scene, makes a late entry into the claustrophobic religious atmosphere of the chamber three-hander and introduces complex questions of race, class, and "natural" sexual orientation. As a black working-class mother, she is defensive about being summoned to the white principal's office; as a woman, she is realistic about Sister Aloysius's chances of calling the priest to account: "You're not going against no *man* in a *robe* and win, Sister. He's got the position" (47). And since Father Flynn has helped her boy to survive in the perilous environment of white privilege, she is willing to ignore whatever else may be between them, to remain in doubt: "Let him take the good

[68] *Charlie Rose*; Shanley, commentary.

[69] Shanley, commentary. Steven Dietz, who produced the play in Austin, received no back story from Shanley, who told him to make sure "the actors have plenty of secrets they aren't telling" (e-mail communication).

[70] Shanley, commentary. Polanski's production at the Théâtre Hébertot featured Dominique Labourier (Sister Aloysius), Thierry Frémont (Father Flynn), Noémie Dujardin (Sister James), and Félicité Wouassi (Mrs. Muller) and was well received; see, for example, Michel Cournot, "Avec *Doute*, Polanski distille le poison du soupçon," *Le Monde*, 14 April 2006. Polanski's recent arrest on old child-molestation charges casts an interesting retrospective light on his production of *Doubt*: the *Figaro* reviewer Philippe Tesson felt that the production leant heavily towards the sympathetic priest (see *http://www.lefigaro.fr/lefigaromagazine/2006/04/14/01006-20060414ARTMAG90360-_voir_sans_aucun_doute.php*). The theatre program/translation (*Doute*, L'avant-scène théâtre, numero 1201, 1 avril 2006) contains an editorial by Olivier Celik, "Le bénéfice du doute," which refers to the "procès d'Outreau," a 2004 miscarriage of justice in which ten people were wrongly imprisoned on false charges of pedophilia (3); and an essay by Gabriel Matzneff, "Le pédophile et la pharisienne," that attacks Sister Aloysius and argues for positive sexual relations between adults and children ("L'amour entre une jeune adolescente [ou un jeune adolescent] et un [ou une] adulte peut être une expérience très belle, très féconde pour l'un et l'autre") (67).

[71] *Charlie Rose*.

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and leave the rest when he leaves this place in June." A harder life than Sister Aloysius has known has taught Mrs. Muller to avoid moral absolutes and accept partial blessings: if Father Flynn is "after the boys," she defiantly argues, "maybe some of them boys want to get caught. Maybe what you don't know maybe is my son is . . . that way. That's why his father beat him up. Not the wine. He beat Donald for being what he is" (48).

In suggesting that "maybe some of them boys want to get caught," Mrs. Muller accepts the possibility of the desiring queer child; in defending Donald's "being what he is," she asserts a proto-gay identity for her twelve-year-old son. The words "gay" and "queer" are not in Mrs. Muller's vocabulary; I am distinguishing here between what she sees as her son's incipiently homosexual "nature" and what Eve Sedgwick or Steven Angelides would term his queer cross-generational desire. Her triple repetition of the word "maybe" underlines her willingness to avoid the clarity sought by Sister Aloysius and to resist essentialist classifications. Abused at home by his homophobic father, abused in the public school by homophobic peers, the "maybe" gay Donald has found at St. Nicholas a caring older man, whom he adores:

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

In all of the four productions I saw, as in the film, this was one of those theatrical moments that palpably alters the quality of the audience's attention, silences the bronchially challenged, and causes a communal holding of breath. Adriane Lenox won her Tony for it, and Viola Davis her Oscar nomination; it is, in Jill Dolan's words, a "utopian moment," an epiphany that moves the audience, exhausted by the combative protagonists, toward a different kind of empathy: compassion for a mother who is grateful for the priest's "love," whatever that may mean, and determined to "stand with" her unseen gay child.[72] As Dolan writes,

> [u]topian performatives describe small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense.[73]

Caught up in the "did he or didn't he" binary plot, the audience is suddenly required to ask themselves whether intergenerational sex with a kindly male, if that is what happened, is the worst abuse a boy can suffer. Donald is not a passive innocent nor a "little sheep" (21) who is easy prey for the adult wolf: his "nature" is already formed, and he has queer desires of his own. Granted dramatic credibility by her pained seriousness and anxious maternal love for her child, Mrs. Muller introduces an idea that audiences conditioned by the familiar narrative of clerical perpetrators and child victims might not spontaneously entertain. According to Ohi: "The fact that pedophilia and pedophilic relationships are

[72] Eve Sedgwick targets unsupportive parents in "How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay: The War on Effeminate Boys," in Bruhm and Hurley, *Curiouser*, 146. By comparison with the numerous parents who reject their gay children, Mrs. Muller's defense of Donald is heroically positive.

[73] Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 5.

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legible only under the rubric of abuse attests to the power of the bleakly monochromatic discourse around child abuse, pedophilia, and childhood sexuality."[74]

Mrs. Muller, whose class and race position renders bourgeois moral panic irrelevant and male homophobia actually life-threatening, accepts whatever allies she can get. Father Flynn is educated, kind, and good, and Donald can "leave the rest behind" when he moves on from St. Nicholas. Judith Levine was excoriated for repeating psychologist Bruce Rind's highly controversial conclusion that "not all minor-adult sex is traumatic at the time nor leads to long-term harm."[75] After drawing the ire of right-wing radio host Dr. Laura Schlessinger, Rind's academic research was condemned by Congress; were it to be cited in a documentary about clerical abuse, it would invite moral outrage. But because Mrs. Muller is such a sympathetic and surprising dramatic character, she can make the same suggestion with relative impunity. As an adult surrogate for her absent and presumably less-articulate queer child, she carries a weight of imaginative (not scientific) conviction disproportionate to her brief time onstage.

This scene asks harder questions than those posed in *Sin* or *Deliver Us from Evil*, which assume that villains and victims have no relation to each other. The mise en scène is ironic: a black woman tells a white woman, dressed in black and white, that "sometimes things aren't black and white" (49). For Shanley himself, things are not black and white either:

> Is what some of these guys do totally bad? That I also have doubts about. When I was growing up, at certain points I was championed by homosexual teachers who were the only people watching out for me. And why were they doing it? They were really into boys. They were really into my problems. Did they do anything *to* me? No. Did they want to? I don't know. Did they make a pass? No. Was that in the air? Somewhere yes, it was in the air. Did I take advantage of the good things they were offering me? Yes, because I needed to, because I was isolated and there was no one else. Did that make them bad people? Not to me. Not to me at all.[76]

Sister Aloysius cannot accept that despite what she believes to be Father Flynn's homosexuality, his relationship with Donald might be asexually nurturing; or, if not asexual, mutually desired and more beneficial than harmful. She refuses to entertain the perplexing question of the "child's possible inclination" in judging the "man's deeds" (48). If Donald's inclinations are a part of his "nature," then so are Father Flynn's, and Mrs. Muller's defense of her son also applies to the priest: "[Y]ou can't hold a child responsible for what God gave him to be" (48). Sister Aloysius, however, believes that a homosexual orientation is criminal as well as unalterable: "A dog that bites is a dog that bites!" (54). In threatening to expel Donald, she reveals that she cares more about her crusade against Father Flynn than about the vulnerable boy in whose defense she started that crusade. In the light of Mrs. Muller's compassion and endurance, her rigidity is repellant.

Yet sympathy continues to shift between the antagonists, and depends in production on the strength of the casting and the fluctuating empathy between actors and audience. O'Byrne and Jones noted that on some nights the audience leaned toward the priest, some nights toward the nun, causing them to increase their intensity levels to try to recapture the advantage.[77] If Mrs. Muller asks the audience to confront queer intergenerational attrac-

[74] Ohi, "Molestation 101," 195.
[75] Levine, *Harmful to Minors*, 228.
[76] Coe, "The Evolution of John Patrick Shanley," 100.
[77] *Charlie Rose*.

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tion, the feminist perspective reasserts itself toward the end of the play, as an act of female solidarity challenges the gendered relations of power between the nun and the priest.

In a climax that threatens the audience with whiplash, Sister Aloysius accuses Father Flynn of seducing Donald, he threatens to get her dismissed, and she claims to have spoken to a nun from his last parish who revealed his "prior history of infringements" (58). Her subversive woman-to-woman strategy infuriates him: "That's not the proper route for you to have taken, Sister! . . . You're supposed to go through the pastor." Armed with the knowledge that "this is your third parish in five years" (53), a damning fact that he does not dispute, she snarls: "I will find a parent, Father Flynn! Trust me I will. A parent who probably doesn't know that you are *still working with children*! And once I do that, you will be exposed" (54). Father Flynn explodes, towering over his accuser: "You have taken vows, obedience being one! You answer to us!" (54)—"us" being the chain of male hierarchy that Sister Aloysius has circumvented by her call to another nun. When she stands her ground, he switches from bullying to abjection, begging for charity without admitting guilt: "Even if you can't imagine the explanation, Sister, remember that there are circumstances beyond your knowledge. Even if you feel certainty, it is an emotion and not a fact" (55). Her compassion is inaccessible, however. As he calls the bishop to request a transfer, it appears that Sister Aloysius is right—that Father Flynn is an abuser.

But the brief final scene throws everything into doubt once more. Father Flynn has left St. Nicholas, only to be promoted to pastor of St. Jerome Church and School. The homosocial hierarchy has discounted a woman and closed ranks around one of its own, who is still working in close contact with children. Yet Donald Muller is "heartbroken," not relieved, by the departure of his supposed molester. And shockingly, Sister Aloysius reveals to Sister James that she never called the other nun. She insists that her untruth paid off: "[I]f he had no such history, the lie wouldn't have worked. His resignation was his confession. He was what I thought he was" (58). But Father Flynn could have been the closeted priest she thought he was without being a child abuser. His relationship with Donald might have provided a vulnerable gay child with invaluable positive mentoring from a sympathetic gay adult: permission (as the film suggests) to play with toy ballerinas and dream of dressing up in priestly skirts. The priest's flight might not have been an admission of guilt, but a recognition that his steely antagonist would never relent.

Sister Aloysius's own certainty crumbles in the last lines of the play: "Oh, Sister James! . . . I have doubts! I have such doubts!" (58), but Shanley maintains ambiguity to the last: she does not reveal what they are. Was she wrong to equate homosexuality with pedophilia, and to conflate orientation (tragic though not sinful) with action (always sinful)? Was Father Flynn innocent after all? Or was she wrong to drive him away from St. Nicholas into a school perhaps less well equipped with suspicious sisters? Has she unintentionally engineered the transfer of a problem priest into a new arena of sexual opportunity? Even more shockingly, was she wrong to equate pedophilia with abuse? Neither Sister Aloysius nor the audience will ever know for sure.

Without minimizing the victims' trauma, the misuse of trust and power by priests, or the world-wide cover-up by the Catholic hierarchy, we should remember that sexual abuse of children takes place more often at home than in the rectory and resist the assumption that all homosexuals are inclined to molest little boys—without dismissing the fact that some of them evidently did. *Doubt* invites a productive queer reading by challenging the certainty that a priest's love of a boy must inevitably be abusive, or that a boy may never love a

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priest. Although it is intellectually more complicated and emotionally harder to tolerate, doubt leaves room for the compassion Father Flynn implores and the tolerance Mrs. Muller advocates. A popular play that eschews moral absolutes and installs doubt as the foundation of its characterization, its narrative structure, and its aesthetics of reception, provides, in Kenneth Burke's famous phrase, more useful "*equipment for living*"[78] than the familiar documentary narrative of outrage and scandal. And if George Bush had had doubts about the weapons of mass destruction, we would all be better off today.

[78] Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 61.

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