Contemplatives in Action:
Jesuitical Communal Mission since 1540 and its links to Contemporary Jesuit Theatre

DISSEPTION

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Christopher Marlowe Roche, M.F.A.
Graduate Program in Theatre
The Ohio State University
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Dissertation Committee:
Dr. Joy Reilly, Advisor
Dr. Lesley Ferris
Dr. Richard Dutton
Abstract

Through the eyes of the modern Jesuit theatre community there is a clear awareness of vision and mission evolving from the institution of The Society of Jesus since its founding in 1540 by St. Ignatius of Loyola.

This document examines Jesuits involved in the creation of theatre, as well those Jesuits involved in the scholarship and propagation of theatre. The dissertation focuses on the evolvement of this mission and practical use of sound philosophical, ethical and pedagogical tools to establish communities, schools and universities which spread these principles initially throughout Europe, and eventually blossoming into a worldwide pedagogical and didactic network influencing cultures and civilizations beyond any anticipated boundaries foreseen by Ignatius.

Primary in these endeavors was the recruitment of very intelligent, studious, and practical men driven by religious and pragmatic principles and intent on furthering those principles by enfolding students within the doors of its schools and beyond the school into the realm of commercial theatrical endeavors.

Emerging from this pedagogical blossoming was an ever impressive growth of dramatic writing and performance structure which suffuses both religious and secular communities with an appreciation for theatre not only as a
didactic tool, but also as a source for true visual entertainment far beyond previous dramatic entertainments that still appear on stages today.
Dedicated to my Mother and Father.

The faces of modern progressive Catholicism.
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Vita

December 18, 1968................................. Born, Bristol, Pennsylvania

2002......................................................... B.A. Musical Theatre,

The Catholic University of America

2006......................................................... M.F.A. Acting/New Works,

The Ohio State University

2003 to present ....................................... Graduate Teaching Associate,

Department of Theatre, The Ohio State University

Fields of Study

Major Field: Theatre
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Introduction


Jesuits take their cue from Ignatius in terms of a practical spirituality. One joke has a Franciscan, a Dominican, and a Jesuit celebrating Mass together when the lights suddenly go out in the church. The Franciscan praises the chance to live more simply. The Dominican gives a learned homily on how God brings light to the world. The Jesuit goes to the basement to fix the fuses. i

This is one of many humorous anecdotes told about the Jesuits. What makes this particular funny quip quotable is that a Jesuit is telling it. The men of The Society of Jesus are not above self-deprecation and pointed humor. No, these priests are contemplatives in action, as they would say. In other words, they are not behind stonewalls of a monastery transcribing Latin into French. They are among us, working in every facet of society, even theatre.

Ignatius of Loyola founded the Society of Jesus in 1534 and the Roman Catholic Church confirmed the religious order under Pope Paul III in 1540. The Jesuits are known for their educational commitment and they founded numerous colleges and schools throughout Europe and beyond. Their curriculum included
theatre production, which was already established and accepted as part of Humanist vision. But, as scholar Henry Schnitzler explains, “The Jesuits . . . at once recognized the theatre as a dynamic force which might be used for much broader and, in terms of the Order’s missionary program, more significant ends.” Schnitzler goes on to explain that dramatic activity gave the Jesuits an ideal tool for teaching Latin and a methodology for implementing “counter-reformatory propaganda” through the productions at Jesuit schools. Theatre production became a defining aspect to Jesuit education: “During nearly two and a half centuries, Jesuit priests and their students devoted a large portion of their time and energy to work in every conceivable area related to the stage.”

My interest in this topic of Jesuit theatre comes from an intersection of two strands of my own experience. Prior to my study and research as a doctoral student, I spent many years as a professional artist; a theatre practitioner who has worked in various capacities on stages from Philadelphia to New York, Washington to Ohio, and Ohio to Seattle. I have also been a member, for a time, of the Jesuit community and continue my journey as a practicing Catholic. Because of this intersection I feel it is necessary to provide a brief autobiographical statement.

As a student at a Philadelphia Catholic school, a Franciscan priest, who was director of theater, cast me in several roles at Bishop Egan High School. This experience gave me an early love of performance and an increasing fascination
with the role of the Catholic cleric, who had served as mid-wife to my own personal theatrical dream; one could almost suggest it as a clerical-oedipal syndrome. Following this I was awarded a scholarship to The Catholic University of America in Washington DC. During the course of study there I began to work professionally in musical theatre. While living in Chicago, Illinois in 1998, I began my vocational studies with Fr. Bryan Paulson at Loyola College in Rodgers Park. The time spent at Loyola became a series of self-discoveries that would lead to an explorative sojourn within the Jesuit community itself during which time I seriously considered joining the order.

In 2003 I started the Master of Fine Arts in acting program at The Ohio State University. My thoughts of life as a Jesuit were neither to be worn above the heart, nor on the sleeve. Full immersion into studies and performance on a wonderfully secular level had begun in earnest. Oddly enough, it soon became quite apparent that the secular was not without its spiritual component, and indeed the spiritual seldom lacked the secular as had been evident in the Jesuit community. Such revelations would often manifest themselves in the studies pursued, the characters portrayed, and the performances applauded and criticized alike. Perhaps more evident, and more personal would become an interrelationship between teacher and student. Having been on both sides of that larger desk there was a genuine awareness dawning. That which was perceived in microcosm was in reality, truth. Perhaps it was best said by Carl Jung, “bidden
or not bidden, God is present”. I completed an MFA in Acting and New Works in 2006. After much consideration I decided to pursue the PhD to further develop my interest in history, dramatic literature and criticism and with this dissertation to bring together my two strands of study and practice, namely theatre and Jesuitical education principals.

Clarity, it has been said, requires perspective. With the above as a foundation, it seems there is enough height to look back at all the past experiences, and focus now on the root of Jung’s quotation. Certainly, the believer might interpret Jung’s statement that God, with absolute certainty, as a divine being, is everywhere; but more pertinent to this topic, is that even the non-believer, having heard of the concept of god, will devote at least a portion of energy in affirmation or rejection of the principles of a deity. Having arrived at this point, it is both comforting and somewhat disconcerting to tie all these principles together at least in some fashion by drawing the links among them.

My original interest in Jesuit theatre research began with considerations of cross-dressing in 16th and 17th century in Jesuit drama. Did young male students ever play female roles? Edna Purdie’s well-known essay on Jesuit Drama in the second and third editions of The Oxford Companion to the Theater states: “The early prohibition of female personages and costumes was modified in a revision of the rules in 1591; female roles were to be limited to what was absolutely necessary.”iii Purdie’s essay, considered to be the best available introduction in English to
Jesuit drama for years, was a significant starting point. But the dearth of extensive material available in English was prohibitive. Before I realized the full impact of this, I put out feelers on this topic to established Jesuit scholars. I e-mailed one of the preeminent scholars on Jesuit activity in the arts: Fr. John O’Malley at Georgetown University. When I posed the question to him, concerning the possibility of Jesuit student performers cross-dressing on the sixteenth century stage, O’Malley replied:

Thank you for your note. I read your piece. [He refers here to a preliminary essay I wrote on this topic.] It is of course on the speculative side, but I suspect to do more would mean trying to write a dissertation on it. If the Jesuits did not allow boys to play female parts, I suspect the motivation was not anti-feminism but a concern for the boy playing the partiv.

‘Concern for the boy playing the part’. Just when I thought my thesis was smart, under-researched by past historians, and intellectually titillating, this honest and informed response from Fr. O’Malley forced me to reevaluate my ideas on the topic. Such empathy is one of the reasons for my advocacy of Jesuit education. Jesuit teachers have guided many in searching for answers, while reveling in the questions. I was so fascinated by the idea of proving my hypothesis of negative phallocratic behavior in a religious order towards women
on stage that I forgot about the humanist ideals that Jesuits have followed since
the order began. I began to reconsider the focus of my research.

In an interview with Bill Curry, the founder and artistic director of the
National Theatre Workshop for the Handicapped, he states:

You know, Ignatius said we should build theatres before we build
rectories or churches. People asking the anathema question are the
Puritans, not the Jesuits. The life of the theatre is the life of the
human spirit. Do I proselytize? Yes--because I speak of theatre. The
life of the imagination is the life of the human spirit. Theatre was
put into the curriculum because Ignatius wanted to give people the
power of language; as Ignatius would say, ‘the perfection of
elegance’. In giving students the tool of eloquence of speech,
Ignatius found a means of allowing poor boys to enter the
mercantile, law, and the church. It’s Aristotelian, ‘To say, a thing is,
as it graces.’

My encounter with Bill Curry’s work helped me to clarify my thesis
statement. Instead of spending the majority of my time in a literary excavation of
the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, I decided to focus on the contemporary
theatre, to utilize my tools as an actor, director, dramaturge and academic to
explore, examine, and explain the lives of American Jesuits who continue to
make indelible marks in the construction and propagation of theatre creation here in the United States. My question which I hope to answer in the following chapters is: To what extent does the historiography of the Jesuit community, in its use of theatre as a tool, reveal itself using the eyes of dramaturgy, directorial vision, and an actor’s perception in relationship to Jesuits working in the field of theatre in contemporary America?

My journey in answering this question is as follows: Chapter one is an explanation of the Jesuit Order and its founder, Ignatius of Loyola. This chapter is meant as a touchstone for the reader as to the mission and identity of the Jesuit ministry. Chapter two is an examination of Early Modern Jesuit writers and their plays; specifically Joseph Simons and his play *Vitus*, as well as Edmund Campion and his play *Ambrosia*. The third chapter is Jesuit influence on today’s stage by a non-Jesuit playwright, John Patrick Shanley and his play *Doubt*. In addition to an analyses of *Doubt*, Chapter three discusses the framework of the Second Vatican Council of the 1960’s and its effect on Catholicism. Chapter four focuses on contemporary American Jesuits somehow involved in the propagation of modern theatre, with a focus on playwright Bill Cain (*Equivocation, How to Write a New Book for The Bible*). The Jesuits in chapter four are Jesuit theatre historian Fr. John O’Malley; Artistic Director for The National Theatre Workshop for the Handicapped, Fr. Rick Curry; Religious/spiritual consultant for the LABrynth Theatre company, Fr. Jim Martin; and most
thoroughly, the playwright Bill Cain. Following the conclusion of the document are three appendix sections. The first: Appendix A is a full copy of interview I conducted with Fr. John O’Malley and Fr. Rick Curry at Georgetown University on November 12, 2011. Appendix B is a copy of an interview conducted with Fr. Bill Cain that appeared in the Berkeley Repertory Theatre and Seattle Repertory Theatres production of *How to Write a New Book for The Bible*. The final appendix is a full list of the twenty-eight Jesuit universities in the United States.
Chapter 1: The Founding of an Order—An Overview of Jesuit History

When Ignatius of Loyola, Spain founded the Jesuits in 1540 the Protestant Reformation in England was still finding its footing. This order of men was not intended for a monastic life, but for an active service of counter reformative deeds that included but was not limited to becoming soldiers for the Catholic Church. As Jesuit historian Father William McCabe points out in his book, *An Introduction to Jesuit Theater*:

With military mobility in mind, Loyola gave to his Church an order which he called the Company of Jesus...vi

A former Spanish soldier of noble descent, Ignatius wished to create a practical, intellectually equipped warrior to defend his mother church. This eclectic group of ecclesiastical men would later become as well known for educational drama, as much as they were for being spies.

And while their cloak and dagger reputations blacklisted them in England and parts of the European continent, their popularity grew from the unlikeliest of places: their commitment to education.

The Jesuits were interested in moralizing and didactic theatre. In theory in literature. But, it would be too simple to say solely that education was the
reason they embraced theatre. The main reason they did it was that it was part of their educational program. Active engagement of the student. You just didn’t read the play, you performed the play. The main purpose was Thomistic, because they had to study Thomas, and no one is more acquainted to the world as Thomas Aquinas. He did his best to reconcile faith and reason. vii

Loyola himself never intended to become involved in higher education, but ended up creating a popular institution in Jesuit learning. He had hoped, after finishing his own education in Spain and Paris, to recruit members for his company from universities, and as Fr. William McCabe points out:

Ignatius of Loyola did not found his order for teaching. The Jesuit College was not in his original plans. Courtier and soldier during his youth, he began his elementary education all over again when he was thirty three and studied at the universities of Alcala and Salamanca and then Paris, where he became licentiate in arts and master of arts in his early forties. And his first recruits were all master of arts of Paris. viii

In order to staff his organization he needed more men, and was forced to bring in younger uneducated men who needed training. Demand became so great for entrance into Jesuit academia that, according to McCabe:
There arose three kinds of Jesuit college: The strictly Jesuit, the mixed Jesuit and lay, and the completely lay college. All three types interested themselves in the college theatre.ix

The success of the educational system and its subsequent influence through theatrical endeavors went hand in hand. By the time of Ignatius’ death in 1556, only sixteen years after the formation of the order, there were close to one hundred Jesuit Colleges on the European continent and theatre which had been part of the Jesuit curriculum since the development of the schools became more substantial due to the success it was afforded by its audiences:

Executing a play was entire community collaboration. This was a fundraiser, it wasn’t just a show. It’s been said that the nobility that attended these Jesuit productions would just take the jewelry off their hands at the end of the show, and hand it to the teachers. So, yes, there was definitely a level of commodification, a commercial aspect to these Jesuit school productions. If the show was a success, it would become known, and then bring in more men to the colleges. And as the productions became more popular, the colleges, and the order would get more financial support.\textsuperscript{x}
When Ignatius died in 1556, his secretary James (Diego) Lainez took over as Jesuit General and a power vacuum, most likely due to loss of Ignatius’ clarity of vision, came into play with a recently installed Pope Paul IV and a lack of funding for Jesuit colleges. “The next Pope, Paul IV (1555-9), gave nothing to the institution.”

Jesuits were not in agreement as to where to place their loyalties. This being said, the popularity of Jesuit education and drama created a certain amount of leverage with a Rome that was desperate to be once again at the center of the universe. While the laws of the Ratio Studiorum (the constitutional guidelines that make up the rules and regulations for the Jesuits), and The Council of Trent were meant to reflect a new form of Jesuit aesthetic, and in some cases they did, the questioning of Papal authority in terms of its approach to drama was a reaction to the Church’s desire to move backward.

In 1773 came the Jesuit Suppression. While corruption involving money, title and land was running rampant in many Jesuit Provinces, it might also be stated that another religious denomination, the Jansenists, a radical conservative branch of the Catholic Church, were integral to the suppression of the Jesuits:

Well, I mean in the 17th and 18th century the Jansenists were very opposed to the form that Jesuit theatre took, I think they opposed any type of theatre as well. Certainly they were opposed to dance.
They were sort of the Catholic puritans of the day. In England, Catholics were all considered against the Reformation, and this became part of the Jesuit identity.\textsuperscript{xii}

As James Van Horn Melton states in his work, \textit{The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe}: “Jansenist agitation reached its apogee in the early 1760’s, when the movement helped orchestrate the successful campaign to expel the Jesuits.”\textsuperscript{xiii} Jesuits were being expelled throughout Europe. As a result, and perhaps to make an example of, Rome banned the practice of the Jesuit Order:

Portugal acted first, in 1759, and was followed by France, Spain, Naples, and Parma. Finally, in 1773 Pope Clement XIV, unable to resist pressure from the Bourbon courts or from bitterly anti-Jesuit ecclesiastic Rome, suppresses the Society throughout the world.\textsuperscript{xiv}

Pushing through the Puritan era that saw the closing of theatres in England and witnessed changes to designation of religious affiliation, came the Age of Enlightenment. An embrace of scientific ideas began to take shape in Europe. Such attention to science had its detractors, and the Jansenists were
some of the strongest opponents of enlightenment ideals. James Van Horn
Melton illustrates the dangers of didactic debate.

Jansenism emphasized the sinful nature of human beings and their
dependence on God’s unmerited grace for salvation. xv

Jansenist emphasis on the sinful nature of fallen man as opposed to the
salvatory example of the risen Christ that the Jesuits espoused created a religious
divide between the two factions and is pointed to as a possible trigger that led to
Jesuit suppression. The departure of the Jesuits from France was ironic in light of
France’s eventual struggle for free thought, and the Jansenists generated much
less influence but also signaled the “…general process of dechristianization.”,
according to Van Horn Melton.

Applying the lens of the hermeneutic circle one may be able to ascertain
several important and fascinating links to Jesuitical influence both as communal
and spiritual influences. While the Jansenists fought for expulsion of the Jesuit
community, it must be recognized that it was the Jansenist adherence to strict
counter-papal dogmas of their own that they sought to remove. It must further
be noted that while some entities within Catholicism were denying sacramental
comfort, there was another, potent, Jesuitical groundswell that refused to allow a
growth of the theatre to wither, but rather viewed theatre as a tool to further not
only its own, but also communal spiritual social values.
This inclusion, though it may be viewed as propagandist by some, was in fact more than that. Less professional than secular theatre, scholastic theater provided spiritual credibility and acceptability to what had become a mostly enthusiastically accepted form of entertainment. Such a move, while fortuitous, was also a shrewd communal maneuver by the Jesuits to ground both its community and spreading pedagogical institutions; a foothold that remains to this day.

What had once been the most powerful Catholic Order during the Renaissance was now forced to go underground. It would remain off the grid until Pope Pius VII restored the office in 1814. When the Order re-emerged, it was more conservative, and had far less leverage than before. As O’Malley states: “Throughout the century they suffered confiscation of property, suppression, and exile in one European country after another.”

Through a new found humility, Jesuits were forced to give up the prestige of being wealthy church lords, and return to the service which made them great: education. A return to a spirit of learning, writing, and teaching would result in a new respect for the Jesuit Order, and in many ways create a fertile soil for a renewed Jesuit Theater.
After the Suppression: Jesuits and Theatre

It would be more than four decades till the Jesuits were reinstated as an order of the Catholic Church:

When Pope Pius VII formally restored the Society of Jesus with the promulgation of *Sollicitudo Omnium Ecclesiarum* on 7 August 1814, there were about 600 Jesuits. By 1820, they numbered about 1,300; in 1850, 4,600; and in 1900, 15,073. xvii

While the Order was banished from much of Europe during the suppression, Catherine II (The Great) of Russia was instrumental in keeping the Jesuit order alive in Russia and her provinces. O’Malley writes:

The unusual form in which the brief of suppression was promulgated meant that Catherine II’s refusal to accept it in her domains, despite Jesuit pleas that she do so, allowed the society to continue as an organized community. The Empress described the Jesuits as ‘the wisest and most submissive citizens of Belarus’, not only valuing their educational reputation but also looking to the order to foster the loyalty of the Polish nobility in the newly annexed provinces. xviii
It has been said she resisted such action because she valued Jesuit education. Under Catherine, Jesuit universities were able to continue their vocation of education. Much the same was happening in the United States. The United States was one of the few places, besides Russia, where Jesuits could practice their faith as a communal body:

Late colonial America also presented challenges and opportunities for the Society in the suppression era. Jesuits had been in Maryland since 1634, and the colony’s Old Catholic families supported the order, sent their sons to short-lived Jesuit schools there and to established Jesuit colleges on the Continent, and generated a number of vocations. xix

While Jesuits were not suppressed in the United States, it is not until after the suppression, that we see the revitalization of Jesuit vision once again take foothold in American education. History has shown that by redefining themselves through education and scholarly pursuits, the Jesuits have re-emerged as important contemporary contributors to theatre as well. In doing this, they have strengthened that which was weakened --- their reputation. By committing themselves to active work not only in their university positions, but by participating in the secularized community, they have demonstrated that they are capable of much more than being errand boys for the Pope. They have been,
and continue to become, dedicated practitioners of theatre in contemporary society.
During the early modern period a movement towards Greco-Roman philosophy and art came into vogue throughout Europe. In Elizabethan and Jacobean England writers of plays, such as Lyly, Jonson, Marston, Middleton, Marlowe and Shakespeare, reveled in the reexamination and execution of the classical models of the Roman playwrights Plautus, Terence, and Seneca. This gravitation towards Roman playwrights was not only relegated to England. As Robert Miola writes in *Theatre and Religion, Lancastrian Shakespeare*, Jesuit writers were also following the Roman mode of writing plays. Miola cites the early modern Jesuit Playwright Jakob Biderman as a prime example of such literary techniques:

Biderman writes a robust and slangy Latin, filled with technical terms and echoes of Plautus and Terence…soon Senecan rhetoric, spoken by tenebrous visitors from hell, darkens and deepens the action; the gathering gloom culminates in the chilling triumph of the demons and the frightening darnation of Cenodoxos. xx
While the Romans translated the Greeks, the English adapted the Romans. The Jesuits chose to embrace Humanist and Sophist philosophies in the form of Erasmus and Isocrates and the structure of the playwright Seneca:

Throughout his Jesuit career, which entailed such a range of responsibility, Simons’s reputation as a dramatist was augmented. His five tragedies were all written in Latin verse, mainly in the iambic scenarios or six foot iambic line, after the metrics of Seneca, and in five acts, according to the models of Terence, and all but one first performed at St. Omers between 1623 and 1631. xxii

In choosing to embrace Isocrates, the Jesuits chose to differentiate themselves from their English counterparts. As Georgetown professor, and noted Jesuit historian Fr. John O’Malley writes:

Plato may have bested the Sophists in philosophy,

but it was the Sophists through their most eminent thinker Isocrates and his followers, who won the battle to educate fourth century Greece and subsequently the Hellenistic and Roman world with arguments. xxii
The embrace of Sophist argument combined with humanist thought, created a perfect breeding ground for theatre. The Sophist technique of enwisened argument fused with humanistic self-awareness and enlightened personal intellect are key components of good drama. As O’Malley said in his interview:

For one thing, they didn’t know they were rooting for the Sophists, they thought they were rooting for Cicero and Quintilian, and then for the Renaissance Humanists, for Erasmus. Isocrates was sort of the beginning of the whole thing. What he had was sort of the beginning of the whole thing. What he had was the germ of an idea, an interest in education, which was, that education was for the public, for the civic good. He believed that you had to have moral individuals supporting the civic good. So rhetoric was a key discipline, a civic discipline, because it trains you for the law court, the senate, to speak in public. It is public and active. To be skilled in public speaking, that’s the ideal. We fashioned this, formulated this, to be an alternative to what was happening in the universities. What was wrong with the universities? They didn’t give a darn about the student. It was professional training. As such, they were not going to deal with you as a human being. And that’s what our educational system is all about. The whole person. The physical,
moral, religious, emotional, the many aspects of the individual. It was student centered.xxiii

The other important aspect of Jesuit Theatre as a learning tool was the Jesuit belief in the student as a qua individual (total individual). The desire to look not only at veritas, the truth, in a desired outcome for a pupil. More important than veritas was, for the Jesuit teacher, pietas, the heart of the individual. Developing a whole person is key to Jesuit pedagogy. As Curry points out:

Well, to get back to theatre, Ignatius believed in conversion. Conversion of the heart. That is pietas. So what Ignatius wanted to come from theatre was that he wanted the audience to have a conversion. We, in theatre, recall a cathartic moment, which is the same thing. Therefore he wanted people to be able to choose the good. Now, okay. Hang on, that was not Ignatius’ chief goal. His chief goal was to have the audience choose the greater good. Ignatius’ hope with theatre is not a question of evil and good. It’s a question of choosing the greater good. Now, let me explain this; if you dramatize an example of good and evil on stage, you want evil to be attractive. Greed is attractive, lust is attractive, and debauchery is attractive. So he didn’t want it to look like the devil and the angel, no, he wanted you to struggle. He wanted to show
the attractiveness of evil, but the triumph of the good; and not only
the triumph of the good, but the triumph of the greater good. So,
when Fr. O’Malley talks about pietas and veritas, he is talking more
philosophically. I’m talking more about what you want the
audience to feel when they are sitting in that audience. I mean
that’s what I tell my disabled students when they deliver their
monologues. What do you want the audience to feel? That’s the
purpose of the dramatic monologue. What do you want them to
feel? Then you scan your monologue to find that one you want
them to feel. Take the attention off of the self. That’s what you are
saying to the student actor. Show your heart, which is the kind of
Pietas Ignatius is looking for. It becomes veritas, the truth. What
theatre does is break open the truth through pietas. At least that’s
what I do as a director.xxiv

It is this very combination that separates oratory and recitation from the
dramatic action of play production. Even in their earliest days, the Jesuits
realized this, and placed this edict into their constitutional guidelines. “Plays are
not to be neglected for poetry perishes when drama disappears.”xxv
The Jesuits and Theatre: Restrictions & Practice

While many English playwrights were creating pieces based on application of praise and abuse (the classical playwriting mode that encourages satiric comparison of characters in the play with the aristocracy in the audience), the Jesuits created pieces built in an allegorically medieval mode. That is, that themes of vice and virtue, saintly martyrdom, and allegiance to Rome were central to the plays. Questioning and imitating prominent political and religious figures was taboo. Unlike certain English playwrights who subtly jabbed at King James in plays like Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus*, Jesuit Drama did not allude to corruption in the papacy.

The Renaissance period of the sixteenth century is where Jesuit Theatre began its journey with such Jesuit playwrights as Jakob Bidermann, Edmund Campion and Joseph Simons. While all wrote plays as Jesuits for their respective colleges, it is Joseph Simons that is arguably the best known of the three. It must be said; that the rare copy of Simon’s play obtained at auction at a rather exorbitant price from London is included in such extensive form due to its rarity and importance. In the 1983 translation of the Jesuit approved collection of Simons’ plays, the editors, Louis Oldani and Phillip Fisher translate Joseph Simons prefatory note:
Simon’s prefatory note (to his play texts) ad laectorem reads, in English, as follows: ‘to the reader: I would like to advise you, kindly reader, that these tragedies were primarily intended for production in the theater. Therefore the chorus has been dropped and replaced by interludes. Also the number of roles and the variety of incident are greater than those found in the ancient plays. Thus the rules of Classical Tragedy have been rather freely interpreted since regard must be had for contemporary tastes. xxvi

The Jesuit playwright Joseph Simons (1594-1671), wrote educational plays in the Renaissance during his tenure with the Jesuits. This being said, there are only five plays that have been approved by the Holy See in Rome for translation from the original Latin text. These five unique pieces of Jesuit history are found in a 1983 collection of his plays called: Jesuit Theater Englished, Five Tragedies of Joseph Simons. The five plays (Zeno, Mercia, Thoctistus, Vitus, and Leo the Armenian), have all been translated by Jesuit scholars in the 1983 edition and cite their goal on the opening page of the collection:

Each translator’s goal was to make his prose version of a Simon’s play clear and cogent, conveying to present-day readers something of the dramatic impact that the Latin production had on contemporary audiences. xxvii
The first play in the Simons collection is titled: *Zeno or Ill-Starred Ambition*. *Zeno* is a cautionary tale about the perils of believing that one can force the change of one’s own death by murdering others:

In the year 492 after the Virgin Birth, Zeno, an Isaurian, ruled the Empire of the East. He was a man notorious for his debauchery and savageness. Being told by astrologers that he was destined to suffer a violent death, he tried by murdering various members of the nobility either to cheat fate or, something very much like that, to devolve the succession upon his brother Longinus, who was likewise a monster of passion and ferocity.\textsuperscript{xxviii}

The second play in the collection is *Mercia or Piety Crowned* is a conversion tale. While conversion was a part of many Jesuit plays, the conversion of two members of one family, both princes, makes this play unique to the collection:

In about the six hundred sixtieth year after the birth of Christ, the king in that part of England called Mercia was Ulferus, a bitter defender of false gods. He had two sons, young men of excellent talent: Ulfadus and Ruffinus. For a hunting expedition King Ulferus had established quarters in the fortress called Ulfercester, which was surrounded by a dense forest. Not far distant from there, with a few of his priests, lived Bishop Caedda, later reckoned
among the number of the saints. When the princes happened upon
him while they were hunting, they were led by him to belief in
Christ and received baptism.xxix

*Theoctistus* or *Steadfast Virtue at Court* is the third play in the collection and travels outside of Europe to the Far East:

Theophilus, emperor of the East, died and left behind a son,
Michael, still too young for wielding dominion, to his uncle Bardas
and Theoctistus, the logothete or chancellor, as designated
guardsians. By that time disgraceful liberty had completely
corrupted the court. Thereafter, young Michael, in company with
roguish pages, rushes into a world of vices. He is driven on to ruin
by his teacher, Stilbo, a man dissolute to the ultimate in
wickedness. Yet the boy so loves Stilbo, though underserving, as to
struggle to heap upon him the fullest honors. Stilbo murders the
innocent Theoctistus. Michael paves the way for this crime the
more willingly because, at the persuasion of Bardas, he believes
that this one man, arrogating the authority of the empress is
preventing him from taking sole possession of the scepter.xxx

*Leo the Armenian* or *Impiety Punished* once again allows for the Far East to
serve as the locale as it did in *Theoctitus*. The play also addresses the protestant
distaste for adoration of sacred images, a theme that reappears in many early modern Jesuit plays.

Leo the Armenian, emperor of the East and a bitter foe of sacred images, has long strenuously persecuted Catholicism. At length he pays the penalty for his impiety. For, although he discovers the conspiracy of Michael Balbus, a leader among the nobles, and condemns him to death by fire, friends of Balbus kill him on the very eve of Christmas. Balbus is released from his chains and made emperor; he banishes Leo’s entire family.xxxi

The play with the most dramatic impact in terms of directing and Early Modern Jesuit play is Vitus. Not only is the story of a young man possessed by a demon who undergoes an exorcism, somewhat frightening, thematically, it is also a prime example of Jesuit ingenuity in terms of spectacle and set design. The play calls for a floating bed, the levitation of a body possessed by an evil spirit, angels bursting through the ceiling, and a cauldron of molten liquid on stage. It is also allegorical and religious in its construction, making his text considerably didactic, and a shrewd example of Jesuit proselytization. In my interview with O’Malley, he describes the significance of proselytization as a propaganda tool in these Early Modern Jesuit plays:
Let me say something about the propaganda element, because this is true. These plays were used for propaganda for the schools to make money and bring attention to the schools; and especially in Germany and northern Europe. Some of them would be anti-reformation, certain amount of political or apologetic tone. Of course they were educational, and they were meant to fulfill a moral function for the student.xxxii

The story of *Vitus* concerns Valerius, the son of the emperor Diocletian. Valerius is possessed by an evil spirit which torments him at every moment. After trying every type of remedy to alleviate Valerius's suffering, the emperor commands a boy named Vitus from Lucania, to travel to Rome. Vitus is a Christian, and close to fourteen years old. He is also widely known for his inexplicable miracles. In the play, Vitus (with the help of God), expels the demon, and wins favor with Diocletian. But when Vitus cannot be coerced into abandoning his devotion to Christ by offers of rewards or promises by the Emperor, he is sentenced to die upon the rack. However, he is snatched from the rack by an angel and taken home to die in peace. What becomes interesting in terms of theatre, are not only the nature of the written text by a Jesuit, but references to the world of theatre and art itself, the first of which is Vitus referring to Christ as an artist:
Vitus: Lucifer, who outshone the chorus with his godlike powers, was the first to strive for the throne he was denied. He loathed to be subjected to command. He felt shamed to be content with second place, to be obedient to the sacred Artist of the universe. He sought supreme rule for himself.xxxiii

It has been said that God’s name is “I am”, however the above term “sacred Artist” supports the importance and fusion of incorporating religiosity and theatre within the Jesuit ideal of finding god in all things, a task Simons undertakes in Vitus. The following monologue is foreshadowing a key scene in Vitus; the play-within-in the play. Lupus tells us that Genesius, the patron saint of actors according to those who practice the Catholic faith, will be performing for the Emperor and his court. This is a combination of the Genesius conversion tale, within an Early Modern Jesuit play:

Lupus: I’ll tell you briefly. As night draws near, the festive theatre within the royal mansion will produce his plays. Genesius will play his roles with customary skill, famed Genesius, foremost delight of Aeneas’s descendants. No one can excel him at making the hours pass swiftly with clever jokes and relaxing his audience with timely wit. This actor, disguised as a Christian, once gained knowledge of that tribe’s sacred rites. Whatever he has learned he will soon bring upon the stage for Rome’s amusement. Vitus will be there as a
spectator, companion to Augustus. What courage do you think the boy will have when he is made the butt of ridicule? He cannot bare the mimicry, the mockery of guffawing Rome. When he sees Christian rites reviled by many a mocking grin of the howling crowd, yield he must! No one can approve of things that have been hissed from the stage amid the world’s laughter and now lie prostrate in defeat.xxxiv

Perhaps the most potent line from the aforementioned quote is, “No one can approve of things that have been hissed from the stage.” It is, at very least a partial commentary on the important aspect of audience reception to that which was seen on stage; it further constitutes and perhaps clarifies a lens of reception theory. In the following scene we see not only the play within the play; we see a strong case for Jesuit proselytizing, and stage directions that offer a glimpse into Jesuit spectacle:

Scene Four: Genesuis the renowned actor has been bribed to mock the Christian sacred rites upon the stage before the emperor with Vitus present. Genesius suddenly becomes a Christian.

Genesius: Good father, pray and sprinkle the water I have long wanted. This is the sum of my prayers: that I be added to Christ’s flock.
Priest: Do you believe in God the Son, coeternal with the Father, God born of the supreme god, and the god equal to them both, who burns with everlasting love?

Genesius: I believe whatever stands hidden beneath every page of the secret law.

Priest: Do you forswear the gods and goddesses of the Latin race?

Genesius: I do forswear them.

Priest: Are you ashamed of your life so burdened with numerous sins, and do you detest it?

Genesius: Yes I am ashamed and detest it. Tremendous sorrow for my sins burns my spirit and strikes my heart with repeated blows. [He beats his breast and weeps.] Father, give me the water that brings salvation. Prostrate on my knees I beg for that heavenly rain.

With the above portion of the scene Simons imbues his text with references to the Catholic Mass; specifically the Nicene Creed and the Penitential Act. As the priest questions Genesius as to his allegiance to God and forswears all other gods, Simons borrows from the Nicene Creed. The creed begins with, and continues to read: “I believe in one God, I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, I
believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life.” When Genesis begins to
strike his chest and beat at his heart we see Simon’s looking to the Penitential Act
in the Catholic Mass as a guideline. In addition to members of the congregation
saying “through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault”,
the congregation is asked to strike their hearts three times. As the scene
continues we see reference to a baptism in the sprinkling of water on Genesius to
wash away his sin:

   Priest: Since you make request, being eager for eternal salvation, I
baptize you. [He splashes copious water upon Genesius’ head and
into his face] I drench you all over with the joyous dew of the
waters. [Two angels suddenly appear and stand on either side of
Genesius, visible to him alone. From a cloud a hand stretches forth
above his head.]

   Genesius: I am terror stricken! My courage is vanished. The cloud
extends a hand! On each side of me stands a boy with star bright
face. Where am I?

   First Angel: [displaying a book filled with black marks] Here you
see the deeds of accursed Genesius. Every page is blackened. But
because of your genuine sorrow of soul, God has forgiven your
sins.
Second Angel: This water even though it was sprinkled in mocking pretense, has washed away all the foulness of your impure heart.

[The first angel once more opens the same book and discloses that the black smudges have been expunged.] This book bears witness, turned into snowy brightness. Not a trace of black remains. Its pages sparkle pure and clean. Therefore go happily on your way. The palm of victory awaits you in your struggle.

Priest: Why are you standing there with gaping mouth? Haven’t we poured enough water on your face? [He tries to pour more, but Genesius prevents him, speaking very seriously now.]

Genesius: Restrain your sacrilegious hand, priest of hell! Up until now I have been a vicious scoffer. I acted out the Christian rites as a joke for Rome’s amusement. My wit made sport of Christ, my faces mocked him. Now it is high time to lay aside this damnable playacting, Genesius is called to play a different role. A better god has taken possession of my heart. Forgive me, Caesar. I have rejected Jove. I have abandoned the gods.xxxvi

Powerful in terms of not only the subjects involved in the text, the scene induces excitement from the demand it places upon a director in terms of
executing scenes of spectacle that call for an onstage exorcism and angelic
manifestation onstage. As Fr. John O’Malley related to me:

Well it wasn’t intended to be commercial in the past. The Jesuits
were interested in moralizing and didactic theatre. But, it would be
too simple to say solely that education was the reason they
embraced theatre. The main reason they did it was that it was part
of their educational program. Active engagement of the student.
You just didn’t read the play, you performed the play. The main
purpose was Thomistic, because they had to study Thomas, and no
one is more acquainted to the world as Thomas Aquinas. He did
his best to reconcile faith and reason. I’ve not seen a play produced,
but I have seen a Jesuit opera. I saw it at Boston College; I guess it
was 1991 or 1992. It was written in honor of Ignatius in, I believe,
1622. I can’t recall the title, but it was allegorical of course, and all
in Latin. The person who produced it was Fr. Frank Kennedy at
Boston College.xxxvii

It is possible that such a mode of entertainment was not only beneficial to
a young actor in terms of rhetoric and verbal alacrity, but to imagine the effect
that such a graphic scene as an on-stage exorcism would have on an audience.
Another Jesuit playwright of note is Edmund Campion. While also an Early Modern Jesuit playwright, Edmund Campion differs from Joseph Simons in not only the tone of his writing, which comes across as more direct and less esoteric than Simons but in the subject matter as well. Campion’s play *Ambrosia* is an unfiltered response to the Protestant Reformation in the form of the playwright’s support for the sacrament of Penance (The Catholic sacrament of reconciliation). The exaltation of Catholic relics and saints is another major theme in *Ambrosia*, and once again, as was seen in Simons’s *Vitus*, the act of an exorcism on stage is a stage device:

*Ambrosia* relates some important events in the life of St. Ambrose who confronts and defeats the Empress Justina, defender of the Arian heresy. Ambrose celebrates the discovery of holy relics, the remains of two martyrs, Gervasius and Protasius. Miraculously he performs an exorcism on stage and returns a blind man to sight. After Emperor Theodosius falls prey to infernal forces and massacres seven thousand at Thessalonica, Ambrose deniers him entrance to the church. The Emperor makes a confession, performs appropriate penance and receives absolution. The action also portrays St. Augustine’s reformation and Arsenius’s imprisonment and release.
Veneration of such holy relics as bones or teeth of a martyred saint were seen by Protestants as a false veneration for God and the argument being that there should be no veneration of anything other than God. Adoration of saintly statues was also considered heresy by proponents of the Reformation. One of the key sacraments in Catholicism, Holy Penance, was also seen as papist propaganda by the reformers, and is poignant in Campion’s Ambrosia:

Campion’s play vindicates each of the three parts of the Catholic sacrament. The contrition expresses specific sorrow and betokens a change of heart; the confession takes two forms, private and public; the satisfaction cleanses the sinner of the specific sin. Throughout the process Ambrosia ratifies the authority and power of the priest administering the sacrament, a point of strenuous debate between Catholics and Protestants.

Campion’s *Ambrosia* may have vindicated the Catholic sacrament of Penance, but it came at a very high price. In 1581 Edmund Campion arrived in England as a missionary, and was arrested a year later for treason. He was hanged, drawn and quartered. Edmund Campion is a reminder that Jesuits, especially Jesuit writers who spoke out against the Reformation, were not welcome in England.
It was as though another interview presented itself under the title
*Shakespeare’s Jesuit Schoolmasters* by Jesuit scholar Peter Milward. Born in 1925 this recognized literary scholar, now approximately 87, is an emeritus professor of Sophia University, Tokyo as well as director of the Renaissance Institute of Tokyo.

One insight from Milward which would be difficult to exclude is an important insight into The Order’s early respect for and inclusion of, the theatrical:

As for the field of dramaturgy, it was another important task for the Jesuits from their earliest days after the founding of their society in 1540 to engage in the formation of Catholic youth…in this formation of catholic youth, they laid emphasis not only on religious and moral instruction, but also on a humanistic education based on the classics of Greece and Rome, including dramatic productions. Indeed by the mid seventeenth century the Jesuit drama had become famous throughout Europe, with Jesuit masters composing their own plays, usually on sacred subjects for their students to enact; if in Latin for the entertainment of the local people and dignitaries.xl

Milward continues with a nod towards the subject of his essay:
Campion himself, before being chosen to go on the English mission, had been teaching boys at the Jesuit college of Prague in Bohemia and he had composed his own Latin plays for them to perform, some of which have come down to us.xli

From the same collection as Milward’s writings comes a treatise by the aforementioned Robert S. Miola, Gerard Manley Hopkins professor of English and lecturer in classics at Loyola College in Maryland. Perhaps most enlightening in Miola’s, Jesuit Drama in Medieval England, is his pragmatic view of this dramatic force that emerged through Jesuitical influence:

The Jesuit Theater came naturally for reasons spiritual and material. At the center of Ignatian spirituality lies the imagination...there were also mundane motivations and practical advantages. Rhetorical and theatrical skill characterized Jesuit disputation and preaching. And working in dangerous places such as England, Jesuit missionaries practiced impersonation to survive. As the autobiographies of John Gerard and William Weston amply illustrate, Jesuits frequently changed horse, clothing, names and identity.xlii

I admire the practicality and utilitarian adaptation of Jesuit pedagogical tools not only for survival of their colleges and the propagation of their mission,
but for the creative leeway that allowed for the writing of these plays by Joseph Simons, Edmund Campion and other Jesuit playwrights. Hopefully at some point in the near future, these fascinating playwrights will once again have their plays produced and performed on the world stage.
Chapter 3: Post Vatican II Theatre-The Jesuit Influence

Mr. Shanley is on no one's side. It seems safe to say the playwright agrees with Father Flynn when he explains his preference for parables over reality: "The truth makes for a bad sermon. It tends to be confusing and have no clear conclusion." But "Doubt" presents each point of view with reasonableness and an eloquence that never seem out of sync with the characters' Bronx accents and ecumenical backgrounds.\textsuperscript{xiii}

With the above portion of a theatre review by Ben Brantley of the \textit{New York Times}, the critic captures the author John Patrick Shanley's mission in the writing of Shanley's play, \textit{Doubt}. The truth is confusing and has no clear conclusion, but confusion in truth is on full display in \textit{Doubt}. It is not only the Jesuits who have been involved in creating plays with Jesuitical or Catholic themes in recent years. In recent years there has been a strong interest in religiosity, with an emphasis on Catholicism (\textit{A Man for All Seasons} by Robert Bolt and \textit{Sister Mary Ignatius Explains it All} by Christopher Durang come to mind), and most recently with John Patrick Shanley in the play \textit{Doubt}. While Shanley is not a Jesuit author, his play \textit{Doubt} touches on many concerns of the Jesuits; the tension between conservative and liberal mindsets, the fight for social
justice, the ways in which theatre can stage an argument, a debate, a dialogic exploration of what it means to be human and how trying to come to terms with what that means can lead to enormous doubt. It is for these reasons that *Doubt* makes a solid companion piece to Jesuit theatre and mission in this dissertation.

As Shanley point out when interviewed on his reasons for writing *Doubt*:

> I found myself living in an era of extreme advocacy, of people yelling at each other and everybody being in very entrenched positions, and not really listening to anybody else. It was all about power, and true discourse had fallen by the wayside. And anybody that expressed the idea of being in doubt about something was perceived to be weak. I thought doubt was a hallmark of wisdom and an active and ongoing enterprise, and that dogma was a dead end and the shutting down of the frame. So I wanted to write about those issues – a time of change, when valuable things are going to be lost and valuable things are going to be found.<n

* Doubt originally opened Off-Broadway at the Manhattan Theatre Club on November 24, 2004. The play then moved to the Walter Kerr Theatre on Broadway where it opened in March of 2005 and closed in July 2006 after over five hundred performances. Doubt went on to win a Pulitzer Prize in drama and
a Tony Award for Best Play and was eventually turned into an Oscar nominated movie in 2008 directed by the author himself.

In his award winning drama *Doubt*, the author, John Patrick Shanley, efficiently writes a play that pits traditional Pre-Vatican II thinking, tradition, and ritual against the revolution of Liberation Theology (A movement in the Catholic Church that places the parishioner before the patriarchy). Shanley’s play thrusts a middle-aged matriarchal Sister of Charity in the Diocese of New York against a younger socially driven Diocesan Priest such as Flynn. Sr. Aloysius and Fr. Flynn mix as well as orange juice and milk on an empty stomach.

The play is set in 1964 in a Catholic School in the borough of the Bronx of New York City. It is this specific time frame that adds a temporal tension to Shanley’s parable. We are on the cusp of entering the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican (1962-1965). The Catholic Church, facing political, civil, social, economic and technological change throughout the world, has decided to make reformations within the establishment that were more accessible to its constituents of faith. It was Pope John the XXIII that pushed for a shift in Roman Catholic philosophy and doctrine when he convened the Second Vatican Council:
The Council was a series of meetings of the bishops of the entire world which began at St. Peter’s on October 11, 1962 and concluded on December 8, 1965. The Council also produced a series of documents, sixteen major works, adding up to many hundreds of pages. But the Council was, and is, more than a meeting of bishops, more than a hefty tome of difficult reading. What would the Council be about? John himself did not dictate the agenda. Instead, when a tired Cardinal asked him what the purpose of the Council would be, the Pope simply walked to a window and flung it open. The purpose of the Council, in a word, was aggiornamento—bringing up-to-date. The Council would open the windows of the Church, and let in fresh air.\textsuperscript{xlv}

This “fresh air” that the Vatican II Council was to unleash upon its congregations differed from previous church doctrine in the form of turning the altar around to face the congregation, priests saying the Mass in the native language of each country as opposed to Latin, and contemporary music performed instead of traditional church music. These changes were in many ways revolutionary and not to the taste of everyone, especially one of the key characters in \textit{Doubt}: Sr. Aloysius.

The conflict in \textit{Doubt} arises when Sr. Aloysius, the principal, becomes worried about one of her students Donald Muller. Donald is a young black male
who has class with Fr. Flynn and is also part of his cadre of altar boys in the parish. Donald has been waning in his studies and seems to become more and more emotionally removed in the eyes of Sr. Aloysius. She comes to believe that Fr. Flynn is sexually abusing Donald, yet she has no proof. What is quite brilliant about the script that Mr. Shanley has constructed is that there is no clear information as to whether this accusation of abuse is true or not; Shanley lives up to the title of his play in his written product. The tale gives ample face-time to both Aloysius and Flynn in their reasons for mutual suspicion and defense of their beliefs.

*Doubt* is an exploration of circumstance vs. evidence, tradition vs. revolution, priest vs. nun, and ultimately doubt vs. faith. Yet as I have learned as a Jesuit Candidate, a student of Catholic Education, and as a participant in the liturgy of life; there is no doubt without faith, and vice versa. Whether looking at *Doubt* in the context of the scandals of Cardinal Bernard Law and his ilk, or seeing this work solely as a piece of drama, one must admit that John Patrick Shanley has crafted a well written piece of literature. It is the three homilies of Fr. Flynn that strike me (actor, director, dramaturge) as the most fascinating aspects of this written word, but first some notes on the author.

As a playwright, screenwriter and director John Patrick Shanley has had a commercially and critically positive career in the world of entertainment. He won an Academy Award for his screenplay of the film *Moonstruck* in the 1980’s,
wrote the much-produced play *Savage in Limbo*, and directed the movie version of *Doubt* with Meryl Streep and Philip Seymour Hoffman. He has done something much closer to his Irish roots in writing *Doubt*. The Irish American identity in correspondence with his Catholic upbringing is not to be dismissed in terms of artistic sensibility. As Shanley states in the following portion of an interview question on the topic of his youth spent in Catholic education:

> I was in a Catholic Church school in the Bronx, run by the Sisters of Charity...Looking back, it seems to me, in those schools at that time, we were an ageless unity. We were all adults and we were all children. xlvi

Shanley, like the characters in his play, was also on the edge of radical reformation in the Catholic Church. He has extracted elements of his own Irish American existence in writing *Doubt*. He has carefully constructed the large theological debates of the times through his two protagonists: Aloysius and Flynn. Specifically in writing the homilies of Fr. Flynn he has given the reader a glimpse into the ecclesiastical behavior in a church of reformation.

The homilies of Fr. Flynn speak much to the times and character of this young physical education teacher and priest. Shanley has written them in such a way that they are seen as personal points of view that are not seemingly forged by any parable, scripture, or excerpt from the Bible. This not only speaks to the effectiveness of casting a shadow of doubt on Fr. Flynn’s innocence or guilt, but
makes for excellent theatre as well. Such homilies are inherently indicative of religious life in a Post-Vatican II world.

Homiletics is the term used for the composition and delivery of a sermon by a preacher in front of a congregation. Homiletics is not exclusive to Catholicism as such instruction is utilized by all facets of Protestant theology as well. Such instruction is utilized by all facets of Protestant theology as well. What makes the homilies in *Doubt* so interesting is that these are the sermons of a revolutionized Catholic Church. Up until 1962 the Catholic Mass was not only performed entirely in Latin, but homilies and homiletics were tied to the prescribed readings of the liturgical calendar. In other words, if someone was speaking the Gospel of Mark on a particular holy day, then the homily that followed would be in sync with that particular gospel. This changed with the Second Vatican Council. The changes in church dogma and doctrine not only stripped the Mass of Latin but allowed each region to dictate what tongue would be spoken at mass, but it also allowed the priest to speak to the communal need of the congregation to which he was speaking. This ties in to an almost theatrical dialogue within liturgical drama that is the Mass.

This type of dialogue was inspired by a movement called Liberation Theology. This school of thought focused on Jesus Christ as not only a divine redeemer, but as a liberator of the oppressed. There is something socially active and driven in terms of the needs of the people versus the need of the patriarchal
church. Such thinking was not always part of the church. The Protestant theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) was one of many that found any type of theological liberation to the sermon quite dangerous. In his groundbreaking book *Homiletics*, the German born preacher rails against such liberties. Barth’s ideology makes it seem as though once again theater is being removed from altar, and an attempt was made to restrict the use of the sanctuary:

>We should not look for allegories, giving the Word more or less beautiful spiritual meanings. We should not practice our own arts with the word, because the Word that ought to be spoken will not be heard….The sermon should not be for a specific purpose. Thus we should not try to promote church music or start a movement of song by using Psalm 96:1. And at Thanksgiving we should not use the passage in John 4 to discourse brilliantly on the possibilities of harvest.xlvii

Perhaps St. Patrick and St. Columba would disagree with Karl Barth. While we see the importance of God’s word in relation to the homily; it would seem somewhat out of touch with the congregation. Many have wondered how St. Patrick of Ireland was able to convert so many in such a short amount of time. It was not by speaking to the masses about the Bible that he was able to win so many, but the integration of religion with the populace’s culture. As one
religious scholar explains: “His preaching was remarkably successful, for by the end of his life, he had won the whole of Ireland.”

The same may be said of Patrick’s successor Columba in the 6th century:

The second factor that enhanced the success of the Celtic monks, and no doubt has given us an important clue to the power of Columba’s preaching, is his defense of the Celtic bards. The Celtic bards had cultivated poetry, storytelling, and music to a high art. Some felt that they, like the Druids, were a part of paganism and should be left behind as part of the culture of superstition. But Columba was not of this mind....The Celtic church, more charismatic than hierarchical, was apparently not concerned about such things.

The homilies of Fr. Flynn would seem to make St. Columba beam with pride as they approach sermonizing with a flair for the sense of dramatic storytelling that made the Celts embrace Catholicism. Yet, playing devil’s advocate since they lack the specificity of Barth’s “Word of God”, they at times seem to approach self-fulfillment and personal bias. In Flynn’s first homily, at the very beginning of *Doubt* he states: “What do you do when you’re not sure? That’s the topic of my sermon today.”

The very use of the two words “topic” and “my” indicate that the personal perspective will hold forth on his pulpit. He moves forward in the
homily one can see why this type of Liberation Theology has merit on a human level. It is a direct link to audience reception and perspective. As the character of Flynn says from the pulpit:

    Last year when President Kennedy was assassinated, who among us did not experience the most profound disorientation? Despair. ‘What now? Which way? What do I say to my kids? What do I tell myself?’ It was a time of people sitting together, bound together by a common feeling of hopelessness. But think of that! Your bond with your fellow beings was your despair. It was a public experience, shared by everyone in our society. It was awful, but we were in it together! \( ^{11} \)

This sermon is aurally hypnotic because it is rooted in that which we believe to be true. After the attacks of September 11, 2001 Americans were quite kind to each other for about two weeks, and then it was back to socially acceptable ambivalence towards one another. Having a spiritual leader guide a congregation through such events as Kennedy’s assassination and 9/11 seems infinitely more relatable and messianic in its authenticity than not discussing topical facts for the sake of scriptural detail. But it is this very technique of Vatican II homiletics that brings down the guillotine of guilt on Fr. Flynn in the eyes of people such as Sr. Aloysius. It has the tendency to sound more like therapy than theology.
The second homily isn’t a sermon per se, but is constructed as a sermon by Shanley. It takes place on the basketball court of the school. Since Fr. Flynn also serves as the gym teacher he speaks to the boys while he coaches them. What is striking about this exchange is that he is working in front of a much younger group, and speaking to a small amount of people. He acts as coach, educator, and in many ways the priest. Not only does he speak to the need of cleanliness next to godliness (although when referencing his preference for long, clean nails on men he does not help his case as a heterosexual male in the eyes of the audience), he also speaks to the nature of psychology. Psychology as a technique of communication continues to reappear in Flynn’s homilies:

Now the thing about shooting from the foul line: it’s psychological. The rest of the game you’re cooperating with your teammates, you’re competing against the other team. But at the foul line, it’s you against yourself. And the danger is: You start to think. When you think, you stop breathing. Your body locks up.

The use of psychology in the twentieth century was stimulating and exciting with psychiatrists such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung forging a new path towards personal enlightenment. This was not the case in the Catholic Church. To place too much faith in the science of the mind was to allow “the error” of relativism to occur, and as we see even today with the current papal authority of Pope Benedict, relativism is seen as a threat to faith in the Catholic
world. Asked about Pope Benedict and his current reforms, Fr. O’Malley was quite candid:

Well, we have to realize that Benedict is an Augustinian. And that is to say, he has this… has this, very suspicious attitude toward the world. There is more of an emphasis on sin. And when you have more of an emphasis on sin, you feel that you need to have more say, more control over people. So you could say that Augustinism is sort of anti-humanist. Now, if you are Thomist say, the mystery you focus on is the Incarnation. If you are an Augustinian the mystery you focus on is the fall from grace and the crucifixion of Christ. Of course you need both to be a Christian. If you focus on the fall and the crucifixion, with perhaps a secondary view of the resurrection, you really have a different world view. Even during the Second Vatican Council Ratzinger did not like the final document. He thought it was too optimistic. So he rallied the German bishops to his point of view, and they worked out a sort of compromise. I mean, I look at this whole thing as not purely horizontal or vertical, but more like a cylinder. It is hermeneutic in my view.

Thus Fr. O’Malley brings us to the principle of interpretation, a key and central element to Jesuit theology.
The third and final homily in *Doubt* is the most severe of the three Fr. Flynn delivers throughout the course of the play. He has just had a confrontation with Aloysius, and is clearly unnerved by the exchange, as Flynn says:

A woman was gossiping with a friend about a man she hardly knew-I know none of you have ever done this-and that night she had a dream. A great hand appeared over her and pointed at her. She was immediately seized with an overwhelming sense of guilt. The next day she went to confession. She got the old parish priest, Father O’ Rourke, and she told him the whole thing. ‘Is gossiping a sin?’ she asked the old man. ‘Was that the Hand of God Almighty pointing a finger at me? Should I be asking your absolution? Father, tell me, have I done something wrong?’ (Irish Brogue) ‘Yes!’ Father O’Rourke answered her. ‘Yes, you ignorant badly brought up female!! You have borne false witness against your neighbor, you have played fast and loose with his reputation, and you should be heartily ashamed!'
It would almost seem that Shanley is allowing Fr. Flynn to have his cake and eat it too. Rather than cite an example from scripture, Fr. Flynn uses a personalized parable of sorts that even includes a nasty Irish priest. The woman in the story is culpable of gossip against a man. Fr. Flynn gains no moral high ground against Sr. Aloysius as the play proceeds, even though he makes numerous attempts to do so.

*Doubt* is a well-crafted piece of drama that easily ebbs and flows between its characters. True, there is a carefully veiled approach to the assignment of blame in this story, but looking at the homilies of Fr. Flynn in conjunction with the surging popularity of Liberation Theology of the 1960’s, a reader sees through the chinks in Fr. Flynn’s armor. With each dramatic sermon Fr. Flynn’s responses become more personal and telling. By the time he gives the final sermon towards the end of the play he is practically calling out Sr. Aloysius’s name. Looking at the text with theologically enhanced reading glasses has proven to be even more riveting in uncovering the truth about Fr. Flynn.

As I said at the start of this chapter, Shanley may not be a Jesuit playwright, but his timely work is an important example of the ways theatre has been used to dramatically stage a moral argument which cannot be finally resolved.
Chapter 4: Contemporary Jesuit Theatre in America and the Men behind the Movement

I’m a Jesuit priest, and the Jesuits weren’t founded to live in a cloister or a monastery. We’re supposed to go into the world, find the presence of God there and celebrate it. I’d say that was a pretty good description of what all of us in theatre do as well. Theatre is always proclaiming “attention must be paid” to what is neglected and holy. Willy Loman. Antigone. Blanche.

As the playwright Bill Cain states in the above quote, originally from Arthur Miller’s classic play, Death of a Salesman, “attention must be paid”. Indeed attention is beginning to be paid to Jesuit theatre artists. Today there are a number of Jesuits working in the theatre profession and this chapter considers their work and provided me with the opportunity to ask them questions about their positions and accomplishments. Four interviews were arranged: Fr. John O’Malley, SJ (Author, Jesuits and The Arts I and II), Fr. Rick Curry, SJ, (Director/Artistic Director National Theatre Workshop for the Handicapped), Fr. Jim Martin (Author, A Jesuit Off-Broadway), and Fr. Bill Cain (Playwright, Equivocation and How to Write a New Book for The Bible).

While I considered interviewing other Jesuit theatre artists such as George Durance (who is a Jesuit actor holding an MFA degree in acting from Columbia
University, and who performs as an actor, working at Off-Broadway theatres like La Mama), I thought it best to focus on the four I have mentioned because they were primarily writers and directors. Preparing for these interviews I formulate a series of questions to encourage open dialogue with the participants. Of the four subjects, only two were able to respond as anticipated to all of the questions (Fr. O’Malley and Fr. Curry), one answered two of the questions before stopping the interview (Fr. Cain), and one was inherently too busy to participate fully but none-the-less has been in significant communication with me throughout the process (Fr. Martin).

Fr. Jim Martin was the first to respond to a potential interview. He was kind enough to agree to an interview and provided me with his phone number in order to schedule the interview. After a few botched attempts to meet in New York City (where he was the editor of the Jesuit publication, America), I was able to catch up with Jim by phone. He was extremely supportive, but quite busy. Martin is on a tight schedule as he is quite always in demand and is known as an outspoken voice for progressive ideas in the Catholic Church. He often appears on National Public Radio, and The Colbert Report on Comedy Central.

Fr. Martin informed me that everything I needed to know about his time with the LAByrinth Theatre Company working on the play, The Last days of Judas Iscariot by Stephen Adley Giurgis was to be found in his book A Jesuit Off-Broadway. Indeed Martin’s book fit exceptionally well with the concepts to be addressed in interviewing
contemporary Jesuits involved in modern theatre creation. One such inclusion was this insight from *A Jesuit Off-Broadway*:

The prospect of a Jesuit priest working alongside an Off-Broadway acting troupe is not as odd as it might seem. The image most people have of the daily life of the catholic priest is a prosaic one: celebrating mass, baptizing babies, marrying couples, presiding at funerals, and hearing confessions, all the while knowing little about the larger culture—except maybe where to buy the best brand of single-malt scotch—and certainly nothing at all about popular culture. If priests are seen in a positive light—an increasingly rare phenomenon in the wake of the church’s sexual abuse scandals—they are imagined as leading a hidden, almost monastic existence. But in my experience, the lives of most Catholics priests bring them into contact with more
suffering, more craziness, and more humanity—in short,

more reality—than do the lives of many of those with

other, ‘real-world’ jobs. lvii

Fr. Martin makes a strong point when he emphasizes the perceptions by many
that priests know “nothing at all of popular culture.” Indeed, it is this very
misperception by most laity that drew this writer to examining contemporary theatre
connected to Jesuits as to their own places in theatre history. Part of the crackdown on
American Catholicism executed by Pope Benedict has been the restructuring of the
Jesuit magazine, America. Restructuring by the Vatican in Rome, not the Jesuit order
itself. Jim Martin was the editor-in-chief of America magazine, and was replaced. Fr.
Martin is significant to the landscape of theatre in terms of his work with LABrynth
Theatre Company but at the moment he is more important to the Catholic community
at large as an activist for liberation theology.

The next Jesuit to respond to my inquiry was Fr. John O’Malley. While Fr.
O’Malley was the third to respond to the interview, he has been involved in my
research for three years. O’Malley was first contacted before my candidacy exams in
2010, and has been a source of strength, humor, and wisdom on my vision quest
through the doctorate. O’Malley is a Jesuit historian and author whose responses to my
questions are seen throughout this document. Fr. Rick Curry (Founder of the National
Theatre Workshop for the Handicapped) was also interviewed at the same time as
O’Malley in November 2011 on the campus of Georgetown University in Washington DC. In the interview with Fr. Curry he informed me how he came to be involved with theatre:

Let me first-- well, I was finishing my doctorate in theatre at NYU (New York University), and one of my final assignments was to audition for a commercial an advertising agency at the corner of 55th and 6th. I walked into the office, and the receptionist began laughing. She thought that her boyfriend was playing a practical joke on her by sending in a man with one arm for an audition. Now this was 1977, and understanding diversity wasn’t common. It hurt, but I left that audition knowing that I wanted to create a course in acting for people with physical disabilities.

Fr. Curry gives a moving personal insight into his own position as a disabled person and how this lead to his formation of a theatre company:

As far as my own disability is concerned, well, everything was fine till I went to first grade-and then I was sort of, out of my comfort zone. Yes-you ARE different, but you don’t feel different. I started to develop a stutter so my father sent me to acting school to get rid of the stutter. When I entered the Jesuits, and told them I wanted to create a theatre for people with disabilities, they told me to study the topic first. So they sent me to St. Joseph University in Philadelphia; then I got my MA in theatre from Villanova; then I got my PhD in Theatre.
Fr. Curry launched his theatre company, the National Theatre Workshop for the Handicapped (www.ntwh.com) in 1977 in a loft in the Tribeca area of New York City. Later the company purchased an old high school in Maine, which became the base for the company and as Fr. Curry explains the mission of the company transformed:

In December of 1977 I got a loft in Tribeca to start the National Theatre Workshop for the Handicapped. We bought an old high school in Maine to create a base for NTWH. We sold the place in Tribeca, because now, as I see it, the mission has changed for me. I decided to start the Wounded Warrior program for vets returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with disabilities resulting from injuries on the battlefield. Walter Reed [Hospital] brought me down, and we decided to work on this together. What we are going to do is start a bakery called, The Dog-Tag Bakery in Washington DC, and gives these returning soldiers a place to work, and a skill. Then we intend to work on self-generated monologues that each of the employed soldiers will perform. So, we are giving them a job, a skill, and a voice, through theatre.

Fr. Curry is giving war veterans a voice though the use of theatre as well as through learning new skills as a laborer. Blending the artistic with the practical is Jesuitical in terms of the Jesuit mission of being contemplatives in action. Forging that which is spiritual and pragmatic and utilizing that combination to help others reintegrate into society. His assignment to Georgetown University and commitment to
the Wounded Warriors program leaves little time for writing or directing plays, though this past season at Georgetown he collaborated on a piece titled *Visible Impact* with faculty member Susan Lynskey. As stated on the Georgetown University Department of Theatre’s website:

*Visible Impact* is an ensemble-created production that weaves monologue and memoir, scene-work and Shakespeare, poetry and movement, to explore and enact diverse experiences and perspectives from the Deaf and disabled communities. This revealing and often autobiographical piece dramatizes the intertwined relationships between biology, language, culture, and identity. Created on the premise that disability, deafness, and diversity enrich the artistic experience and advance aesthetic innovation, *Visible Impact* artists celebrate difference, inclusion, and the evolving capacity of all people.

*Visible Impact* seems to be another shift for Curry in that the play is being produced within a university system rather than a commercial space. The play garnered positive reviews for the recent production. As one critic stated:

*Visible Impact* is blunt and unflinching in the way it describes the hardships and challenges that disabled and deaf members of our community face. But at the same time, the play reminds us of the
strength and perseverance of these two communities and how their stories create powerful theatre (like this production), and how diversity enriches our lives.lx

Meeting Father Bill Cain was a most intriguing and beguiling adventure. While Father Martin was both professionally and personally involved so as to allow for only scheduled appointments, Bill Cain seemed at times almost reclusive in a rather Salinger way. So it was that with this second Jesuit, playwright Fr. Bill Cain or “Bill,” as he preferred to be called, that several avenues were explored.

An interview was arranged with Bill for the first week of November, 2011. His play *Equivocation* was being produced by Arena Stage in Washington DC, and I purchased a ticket to the show, and was to interview him after the performance. The night of the performance we met before the show, and were to meet after that evening’s presentation. As the light’s dimmed, the performers took their bows, and after the majority of the patrons had left, Bill met me in the lobby of the theater. We sat down. He would not permit me to record him. I asked two questions: “What did he think of Jesuits moving from educationally supported theatre, into the commercial realm of professional theatre? And I secondly inquired, “What was his own experience as a Jesuit making theatre”
Cain first informed me that he didn’t really know of any other Jesuits in theatre beside himself. Somewhat sheepishly, I offered the names O’Malley, Curry, Martin and Durance. He took a moment, and agreed with me that “yes”, these men were involved in theatre. It was at this point that the sharing began and I was both encouraged and guarded as to the direction this conversation would take. The reply was wonderfully candid and opened new insights into the world upon which my door had been opened:

The Jesuits didn’t support me when I first started out. I remember when my first show became big, and I wanted to stay in New York and write. They gave me an ultimatum, either theatre or the Jesuits. I chose theatre, and they didn’t kick me out, but they didn’t fund me for a couple of years. I had to fund myself. lx

Something changed in Bill after he answered this question. He said it was getting late, and he had an early morning; he was willing to meet me at Union Station in Washington DC, before I caught my Amtrak train back to Philadelphia. We were to meet at eleven am on Monday morning.

Eleven came, then eleven thirty, then twelve. The train to Philadelphia was at 1:00 pm. I had only his email address as understandably Bill did not feel comfortable giving out his phone number. I had e-mailed Bill Cain three times, and still heard nothing. Frustrated and not just slightly confused I returned to
Philadelphia, saddened that the interview given was so short, and disappointed that the invited second portion never took place.

A few weeks later I was speaking to a producer/director friend in Seattle, Washington about my experience with Bill Cain. He had worked with Bill, and was sympathetic to my experience. He also informed me that Bill would be working on his new play, *How to Write a New Book for the Bible* in Seattle the month of January, 2012. Having secured work as an actor in Seattle in the winter of 2012, I optimistically thought this might be an opportunity to track down Bill Cain. Such was not to be the case: Bill had left the day before I arrived in Seattle.

The reason for the importance of this lengthy documentation of an interview that really never occurred is to share the process of obtaining an interview as well as to contextualize the part of our meeting where Bill shared his story of a financial lack of support from the Jesuit hierarchy in his early days as a playwright.

Luckily at this stage in history we have a contemporary Jesuit playwright such as Cain who continues to contribute to the commercial stage. While Cain is not as direct in his allegorical approach to spreading the word of Christ, he is placing us in a contentious moment in history with his play *Equivocation*. The play examines a contention that Jesuits engineered the Gunpowder Plot (also known as the Jesuit Treason) that threatened to blow up the Houses of Parliament in London in 1605. Two of the play’s characters Shag (playwright,
William Shakespeare) and Robert Cecil (confidante to King James I) discuss the Jesuits as follows:

Cecil: Jesuits-they are the arithmeticsians of the religious world, and as the power behind the plot, I’m sure they found ways of working it out.

Shag: Then I need to speak to the priests.

Cecil: As do I, but I haven’t been able to find them.

Shag: I thought you were well informed.

Cecil: I am, but they have an advantage of me in that I am not in league with the devil.

Shag: You don’t expect me to believe that.

Cecil: Which part? That the priests are in league with the devil or that I’m not? Because I assure I’m not or I would know where the devil they are.

Shag: (Leaving) Well, send for me when you find them.

Cecil: You know, it’s a shame your father isn’t alive. He knew priests, didn’t he? Knew them well.

Shag stops.
Cecil: (More than a hint of threat) He entertained Jesuits? Had them in his home? Your home? Didn’t he?

Shag: Is that what this is about? My father?

Cecil: It can be.

Shag: (Truth) My father was not a spiritual man. He was, as you say, a glover. A leather worker. It’s easy to cheat with leather. It stretches. He liked the priests because they never changed their measure.

Cecil: I will give them this. You can stretch them a full foot taller and they will give you nothing.\textsuperscript{ix}

Robert Cecil in the above scene is speaking to not only the accusation of Jesuit propensity for stretching the truth, Cecil also speaks to the punishment for equivocation: the rack. The rack being a medieval torture device made of wood and metal. A person would be placed on a large wooden rack, then each of their arms and legs bound with chains or ropes and the person would then be stretched on the rack resulting in unimaginable pain.

It is in the following scene of Cain’s \textit{Equivocation} we get to the meaning of the title; the term equivocation. To answer the “back” question asked; to examine the question beneath the question, and posit that response to the inquisitor. This
type of verbal gymnastics is what made the Jesuits so dangerous to their adversaries, and so valuable to the Catholic Church. The scene shows the suspect Fr. Garnet, a Jesuit priest and alleged conspirator of the Gunpowder Plot on the stand, being interrogated by Coke. Fr. Garnet defends his life at this harrowing trial:

Cecil: (Book in hand) Mr. Garnet, did you write a treatise—a learned treatise called—“On Equivocation”? (To the court) a treatise which teaches that lying may be justified in certain circumstances?

Garnet: I wrote such a treatise. It does not teach lying.

Coke: what does it teach then?

(A moment. Then-)

Garnet: How to speak the truth in difficult times.

Cecil: and even this is equivocation. The scriptures say, “Let your speech be yes, yes, or no, no.” (To Coke) Let the defendant’s answers be confined to plain English YES and to plain English NO!

(The courtroom murmurs approval. Then-)

Garnet: I have answered “yes” to three questions each of which is punishable by death I am a priest of the old faith, a Jesuit priest and indeed, superior of the Jesuits. What could be more plain than that?
Even so-are “yes” and “no” altogether “plain” these days? (To Coke) I wonder, Mr. Coke, to illustrate my point, if I might pose you a Yes or No question?

Coke: Proceed.

Garnet: (Years of teaching behind him) Let us say, Mr. Coke, that a hostile foreign power has occupied our beloved country. Let us say Spain. (Hisses from the court) yes. Precisely. And let us say further that his majesty has sought safety from these Spanish in a house. Let us say you housed me. As an honest man and friend to the king, you would protect him, would you not?

Coke: It is my proudest boast as an honest man that I am friend to the king-as indeed are all honest men.

All: Hear, hear!

Garnet: Let us say these invaders arrive at your door and ask you upon your oath-upon your sacred oath—“Is your King within?” What answer would you make- a plain English “yes” or a plain English “no”? Would you protect your king?

Coke: I would!
Garnet: (Pleasantly intrigued) So you would lie on your oath and say, “The king is not within”?

Coke: (Outraged) Lie? I would never-

Garnet: Then you would tell the truth-

Coke: Certainly!

Garnet: And expose your king to mortal danger?

Coke: Certainly not! I-, I-

Coke is trapped and looks to Cecil.

Garnet: Come, come Mr. Coke. Is the king within? It’s a simple yes-or-no question-is it not?

Coke begins. Hesitates as he sees the complexity. Starts to speak. Hesitates.

Garnet: I’ll wait.

Garnet: In plain English, “Yes the King is within” is the honest answer, but were you to give it; I would say that you are no friend the King.

Coke: (Outraged) I! Not a friend to the King!
Garnet: Or were you to be a friend to the King and lie upon your oath, I would say that you are not an honest man.

Coke: I! Not an honest man!

Garnet: So, Mr. Coke-your king or your soul? This is the choice you have given me.\textsuperscript{lxii}

This essential scene is a clear definition of equivocating written by a Jesuit. It has been included in this document as it gives the clearest example of the definition of equivocation. It may also be seen by many as proselytizing on behalf of the Catholic Church. Garnet bests Coke, and wins the argument. More importantly, the piece is a history play. It is not only for entertainment, or possible proselytizing; it is meant to inform, and to that end, educate. The biggest question this dramaturgical academic has for the playwright, (with the hope of interviewing Bill Cain for future scholarship), is, “Do you do this for the greater glory of God?”, as the Jesuits would say. This question arises, and I think it pertinent to \textit{Equivocation}, because as a theatre creator/artistic producer Fr. Rick Curry, told me in an interview: “We should be waking up every morning and, as Jesuits, be doing our mission for the Greater Glory of God.”

In his new play, \textit{How to Write a New Book for the Bible}, Bill Cain takes a more autobiographical approach with his writing than previously. On the cover of the script, below the title for \textit{How to Write a New Book for the Bible}, Cain writes
“A play for an older actress”. The character that he has written for this older actress is a mother, his mother.

This play is an homage to not only his mother (Mary), but to his entire family. His father (Pete) and brother (Paul), but also Bill’s place in the family of Jesuits, and his own role in the family as a brother, a son and a priest:

Bill: How come I’m the one that gets to do this?

Paul: Hey, you’re the priest.

(Paul leaves. Silence. Then, to audience-)

Bill: It’s not really a job. It’s.

(Shrug)

I don’t know what the fuck it is.

(Then-)

The first funeral I did was my fathers. I preached on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle. “All things work together unto the good.” It was my father’s motto.\textsuperscript{33}

The play examines life in the family unit: a mother, father and two sons who live in the suburbs of a city in the United States. It begins with the return of the oldest son, Billy, coming home from his life in the priesthood to take care of
his elderly mother Mary who is dying of cancer. Mary is a widow, and used to
taking care of herself. Paul, Bill’s brother, has a wife and family of his own, and
believes that since Bill is a priest and has no family of his own, he should be the
primary care-giver for Mary. Throughout the course of the play we watch Bill
navigate the path between being a son and a priest. As Bill Cain states in an
interview on his character of “Bill”:

“Bill” says early in the play that he’s keeping a journal and writing
it all down. “Bill” is faithful to that. Some of the funnier
sequences—including the biggest fight in the play—are virtual
transcriptions of the events. If I were going to fictionalize, I would
have taken out some of my more boneheaded, selfish behavior, but
I decided to let it stay as it was.\textsuperscript{41v}

While the play is set in the “present”, there are sequences that examine
the family in the past. Usually these scenes in the past deal with the relationship
of Bill’s deceased father interacting with his sons, or spending time with his wife.
The play also uses asides and direct address (Bill addressing the audience in the
first person) to dissolve the fourth wall between audience and actor. The direct
address in \textit{How to Write a New Book for the Bible} is a device for Bill to share and
step out of the scene but it is also utilized as an instructional tool on his mission
as a priest:
Bill: (With some reverence for the moment)

A hand on the head. That’s a ritual gesture. Ritual is a good form of prayer for a writer. It’s a story-often a Biblical story-reduced to a single gesture-polished by centuries of use to unmistakable simplicity. With that same gesture- (Then, as Pete removes his hand, Bill raises both of his-) I can forgive sins…It’s an old technology, but it actually works. Just not for your family. And those were the sins you became a priest to heal in the first place.\textsuperscript{lxv}

Cain’s inclusion of himself as a priest in this play, which includes using his own first name for the character, is both honest and human. Human, because as he states, being a priest are not a job, it is a calling from God. Becoming a priest is typically called a vocation, a call from God. Something beyond the realm of the sphere of earth that calls on a person to serve Christ is what Catholics cite as a vocation driven by grace from God.

In Cain’s \textit{Equivocation} he steers clear of revealing too much autobiographical information. In \textit{How to Write a New Book for the Bible}, we see the courageous. It is no small feat to reveal the truth of one’s family dynamic, and
even more risky to reveal such truths when you are part of a larger, more traditionally conservative entity like the Catholic Church.

In the play the role of Cain’s mother Mary is a straight-talking, sports loving, news junkie from the suburbs of city. Throughout the play we witness Mary’s journey of being diagnosed with cancer and the relationship that builds and re-defines itself with her son Bill is lovingly and sparingly written in the following scene:

Bill: Mom, turn off the TV.

Mary: But it’s the playoffs.

Bill does not respond. Mary turns off the TV. Quietly between the two of them-

Bill: He didn’t say you needed more tests. The doctor? He said you have cancer and there’s. There’s nothing he can do.

(Then)

I didn’t tell you before because-. Well, because.

Mary: (Get’s it, then-) I sort of knew.

Bill: Paul said you did. I didn’t think you understood “lesions on the liver.”
Mary: (A small laugh) I didn’t. But still.

Bill: Why didn’t you say anything?

Mary: I didn’t want to believe it I suppose.

Bill: How did you know?

Mary: The doctor. He wouldn’t look at me. (Then, amused) And he did his best to lose the file. He’s a nice man, Billy, just-frightened.

Bill: Well, what did you think?

Mary: It seems like a shame to have gone through all this pain and still not get better. (Silence, then-) I’ll do the best I can. (Silence, then-) I’ll do the best I can. (She becomes still)

Bill: Then I waited for what she would say. (Silence)

Mary: Billy?

Bill: yes, mom. (A moment. Then-)

Mary: Can I watch the playoffs now?

Rather than dealing with topics of equivocation or allegorical themes of conversion as Jesuit playwrights have done in the past, Cain in writing his new play, has taken the theme of family, a topic used by playwrights for centuries, and woven a tale that addresses not only family dynamic, but the role of priest as
part of the family. This is something distinctly contemporary for a modern Jesuit playwright.

Recently, while performing at Seattle Repertory, I was fortunate enough to see Cain’s most recent play, *How to Write a New Book for the Bible*. It can only be said that Bill Cain’s writing continues to move me. By the end of the performance at Seattle Rep you could hear the sniffling, and attempts to hold back tears. This work contains some very powerful material. Bill Cain is an excellent playwright, and one day I hope to interview him at length.

Individually Cain, O’Malley, Martin and Curry are impressive but even more so as a collective. They all share the mantle of Jesuit priest. To think of each solely is to forget about the Jesuit mission of living in community. This is not to say that all agree on the mission of the church, but what has been discovered in this chapter is that they all share a passion for theatre that is not restricted to religious mandates.
Conclusion

All religions assert that the invisible is visible all the time. But here’s the crunch. Religious teaching—including Zen—asserts that this visible-invisible cannot be seen automatically—it can only be seen given certain conditions. The conditions can relate to certain states or to a certain understanding. In any event, to comprehend the visibility of the invisible is a life’s work. Holy art is an aid to this, and so we arrive at a definition of a holy theatre. A holy theatre not only presents the invisible but also offers conditions that make it perception possible.\textsuperscript{lxvi}

With this excerpt from Peter Brooks’ \textit{The Empty Space}, the author addresses the nature of what he calls: Holy Theatre. It would seem that Brook defines such theatre as a safe, philosophical construct designed to lull the viewer into a sense of comfort, which leads to an apathetic audience. Such theatre exists in many community theatre productions of plays by Arthur Miller, or musicals by Rodgers and Hammerstein. Productions that became weary from overproduction, lack of understanding on the part of the players, or a lack of attention to the material. The quote is not necessarily being applied to religious
theatre, but referring to the ritualistic stagnation of underexplored productions of popular plays. Such an observation is relevant in terms of how a reader or an audience view Jesuit Theatre. As is the word holy, the word Jesuit elicits an immediate, if misunderstood definition in terms of religion or spirituality. All this being said, where Peter Brook and this writer meet eye to eye, is my favorite part of the above quote: “To comprehend the visibility of the invisible is a life’s work.”

Every time an audience enters a theatre, and an actor walks on stage, a sacred invisibility occurs within the performance space. With Jesuit involvement in the arts we see this need, this calling, exacted from playwrights, directors, dramaturges and scholars, who just happen to be Catholic priests. Such is the uniqueness and genius of live theater. There is a large diaspora for the many types of people involved in theatre creation.

The point of this dissertation is to explore the complexities of the Jesuit Order and its participation in secularized contemporary theatrical practice. This is a time when the Catholic Church is under siege (perceived or realized) for reprehensible acts of immorality. There is a belief, by some progressives in the Holy See that if Pope Benedict XVI were to step forward and address the issue, reconciliation could begin. Many of these outspoken progressives are Jesuits, and typically labeled as liberals.
Therefore, it is to be surmised that the collaboration of Jesuits with playwrights, actors, and artists in general, would be labeled liberal behavior to many in Vatican City. The answer for the Jesuits may potentially be yes. The Society was founded to encourage not only devotion and vocation to God, but to enact social justice for all members of the human race.

In the April 10, 2010 Arts & Leisure section of the New York Times there was an article featuring Loyola Productions, a California based film production company run by Jesuits. Not only are Jesuits moving into cinema but as Fr. James Martin states in the New York Times article:

The same way that Jesus used the medium of Parable and St. Paul used letters and St. Augustine used autobiography and Fulton Sheen used television, priests, sisters and brothers are using the most contemporary media to proclaim the gospel. It’s actually encouraged.

Where is theatre (educational and commercial) in a redefined Jesuit world and how do links from the Jesuit Theatre of the past affect contemporary Jesuit Theatre of today? The answer this document has attempted to elicit is that Jesuit Theatre may be seen both inside and outside the university setting.

Theatre is still active in many Jesuit schools as a course of study, but where the Society has really taken off in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries,
is within its own Order. In recent years, Jesuits solely working in educational institutions have evolved into Jesuits also working in commercial theatre.

It is difficult to deny the extraordinary influence that Jesuit pedagogy, play writing, performance, and literary self-reflection have had on the history of both theatre and pedagogy. It would also be naive to ignore that such incursions while propagandist at times in form, were directed more to the didactic nature of theatre and as a sub-set to the spiritual awareness of those immersed in either performance or pedagogy.

Through Renaissance plays, modernist literature, contemporary religious or secular works of theatre, the Jesuit notion of “finding God in all things” has lasted for more than four centuries, and seeps into many forms of the written word. Whether they are former Catholics such as John Patrick Shanley, ordained Jesuit priests like Joseph Simons and Bill Cain, a questioning of spirituality and religiosity has been and continues to be a fascinating and noteworthy part of the greater literary body of the humanities.

The many interviews, including the rather startling but revealing Bill Cain non-interview interview (which is included in this dissertation because of the need to contextualize the quotes I did get from Bill), provide rather luminous insights with their own hermeneutic links.

It must be noted: the very fact that these men have been permitted the scholarly time, within the Jesuit spiritual community, to continue such work appears to
demonstrate awareness on the side of the community to perpetuate the work and ideals begun so long ago.

There seems little doubt that more will be written of Jesuit Theatre in the future as members of the Society continue to embrace artistic creation as part of their mission towards becoming contemplatives in action.
Bibliography


http://www.nytimes.com


Appendix A: Conversations with Jesuits

On November 12, 2011 I travelled to Washington DC to interview two Jesuits at Georgetown University, Fr. John O’Malley and Fr. Bill Curry. The following interview was conducted in their offices at Georgetown University.

1. (Chris Roche) First, thank you for agreeing to this conversation. I was wondering if you could tell me what brought you to becoming a Jesuit, and what drew you to theatre, and in any way do you find participating in theatre is anathema to being a priest? One of the advisors on my Candidacy Exam Committee (Dr. Alan Woods) proposed that theatre was anathema to the Catholic Church. I took issue with this as Jesuit Theatre has been part of Catholicism for over 400 years. If theatre was (truly) detested as a thing of evil by the Church, how could it have been sanctioned for four centuries? I believe this type of thinking to be common to those who aren’t informed on the many facets of Catholicism and Catholic education. Is this a view shared only among the lay or are there Church factions that view it in this light?

O’Malley: Well, I mean in the 17th and 18th century the Jansenists were very opposed to the form that Jesuit theatre took, I think they opposed any type of theatre as well. Certainly they were opposed to dance. They were sort of the Catholic puritans of the day. Also, I think the reason for
perception of Jesuit theatre as anathema is a lack of understanding and bias. It’s both. You know, by and large, the Catholic Church doesn’t fare too well out there in the historical world. It’s become much approved in the last ten to twenty years. The Jesuits, and it’s been known, the theatre of the Jesuits, has been known by a few interested scholars, but overall, it’s been a well-kept secret up until the last decade or two. Most of the interest in the Jesuits, up until the last few decades, has been in their politics, their theology, and their alliances. In England, Catholics were all considered against the Reformation, and this became part of the Jesuit identity. What is happening now is that people are looking at Jesuits as cultural agents.

Curry: That’s a big question! Let me first—well, I was finishing my doctorate in theatre at NYU (New York University), and one of my final assignments was to audition for a commercial an advertising agency at the corner of 55th and 6th. I walked into the office, and the receptionist began laughing. She thought that her boyfriend was playing a practical joke on her by sending in a man with one arm for an audition. Now this was 1977, and understanding diversity wasn’t common. It hurt, but I left that audition knowing that I wanted to create a course in acting for people with physical disabilities. As far as my own disability is concerned, well,
everything was fine till I went to first grade-and then I was sort of, out of my comfort zone. Yes-you ARE different, but you don’t FEEL different. I started to develop a stutter so my father sent me to acting school to get rid of the stutter. When I entered the Jesuits, and told them I wanted to create a theatre for people with disabilities, they told me to study the topic first. So they sent me to St. Joseph University in Philadelphia; then I got my MA in theater from Villanova; then I got my PhD in Theatre. In December of 1977 I got a loft in Tribeca to start the National Theatre Workshop for the Handicapped. We bought an old high school in Maine to create a base for NTWH. We sold the place in Tribeca, because now, as I see it, the mission has changed for me. I decided to start the Wounded Warrior program for vets returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with disabilities resulting from injuries on the battlefield. Walter Reed brought me down, and we decided to work on this together. What we are going to do is start a bakery called, The Dog-Tag Bakery in Washington DC, and gives these returning soldiers a place to work, and a skill. Then we intend to work on self-generated monologues that each of the employed soldiers will perform. So, we are giving them a job, a skill, and a voice, through theatre. As far as the anathema part of the question, well, I think the answer is that we, as a society suffer from not knowing history.
2. My thesis posits the above question. By examining three notions as to the “Why” of this matter, I hope to better inform theatre historians and practitioners of the rich history of Jesuit Theatre, and its importance in contemporary theatre today. The three potential reasons for Jesuit Theatre that I am examining are: 1. Jesuit Theatre is strictly a tool for education. 2. That Jesuit Theatre is a tool for proselytizing. 3. That the Jesuit mission of “Finding God in all things” is a conduit towards theatre. I gravitate toward number three, yet wonder about the evolution of Jesuit Theatre in education, moving into secular society, and commercial theatre. Might you be able to prioritize these notions historically and culturally?

O’Malley: Well let me say something about the propaganda element, because this is true. These plays were used for propaganda for the schools to make money and bring attention to the schools; and especially in Germany and northern Europe. Some of them would be anti-reformation, certain amount of political or apologetic tone. Of course they were educational, and they were meant to fulfill a moral function for the student. As far as contemporary Jesuit colleges, well yes, plays are still being done of course, but they are nothing close to the productions of the old society. The reason for this being that the theory of education has shifted, they would be too expensive to produce, and uh, well you have too much commercial theatre around now. When the Jesuits of old were doing this, there wasn’t a lot of theatre around.
Curry: You know, Ignatius said we should build theatres before we build rectories or churches. People asking the anathema question are the Puritans, not the Jesuits. The life of the theatre is the life of the human spirit. Do I proselytize? Yes—because I speak of theatre. The life of the imagination is the life of the human spirit. Theatre was put into the curriculum because Ignatius wanted to give people the power of language; as Ignatius would say, ‘the perfection of eloquence’. In giving students the tool of eloquence of speech, Ignatius found a means of allowing poor boys to enter the mercantile, law, and the church. It’s Aristotelian, ‘To say, a thing is, as it graces.’ As far as the move from educational theatre into that which is commercial, that is what education is supposed to be for! You go into education, to go into the real world. I am convinced that the same regarded artists painting pictures of Ignatius in Rome were the same guys painting the sets for the plays in the schools. Executing a play was entire community collaboration. This was a fundraiser, it wasn’t just a show. It’s been said that the nobility that attended these Jesuit productions would just take the jewelry off their hands at the end of the show, and hand it to the teachers. So, yes, there was definitely a level of commodification, a commercial aspect to these Jesuit school productions. If the show was a success, it would become known, and then bring in more men
to the colleges. And as the productions became more popular, the colleges, and the order would get more financial support.

3. In your article *How Humanist is the Jesuit Tradition?* (Jesuit Education 21), you defend (rightly so, I believe), Isocrates and the Sophist movement. This stance was a radical departure from my PhD studies at Ohio State which seemed to reinforce Aristotelian and Platonic mindsets. Why do you think higher education’s love is to teach the *Ion*, and root for Plato against the Sophists?

O’Malley: Well. Because for one thing, they didn’t know they were rooting for the Sophists, they thought they were rooting for Cicero and Quintilian, and then for the Renaissance Humanists, for Erasmus. Isocrates was sort of the beginning of the whole thing. What he had was sort of the beginning of the whole thing. What he had was the germ of an idea, an interest in education, which was, that education was for the public, for the civic good. He believed that you had to have moral individuals supporting the civic good. So rhetoric was a key discipline, a civic discipline, because it trains you for the law court, the senate, to speak in public. It is public and active. To be skilled in public speaking, that’s the ideal. We fashioned this, formulated this, to be an alternative to what was happening in the universities. What was wrong with the universities? They didn’t give a darn about the student. It
was professional training. As such, they were not going to deal with you as a human being. And that’s what our educational system is all about. The whole person. The physical, moral, religious, emotional, the many aspects of the individual. It was student centered.

4. When discussing Jesuit Education in one of my critical theory classes a few years ago, I discussed the idea of Pietas in Jesuit education as opposed to Veritas. Some of my classmates thought it ludicrous that veritas (truth) was less important than pietas (heart) was not at the center of the Jesuit mission. I explained, as best as I could, that I didn’t believe truth to be absent from the ideal, just not the nucleus. There are many truths. Can Pietas exist outside of the individual?

O’Malley: There is no box of truth. In this student centered education, you want the student to find truth. The pursuit of truth, the acquisition of knowledge, that sort of thing. Pietas and Veritas are overlapping things. I mean the humanists were not opposed to veritas, they were also concerned with pietas, an attention to the whole individual. The qua individual.

Curry: Well, to get back to theatre, Ignatius believed in conversion. conversion of the heart. That is Pietas. So what Ignatius wanted to come from
theatre was that he wanted the audience to have a conversion. We, in theatre, recall a cathartic moment, which is the same thing. Therefore he wanted people to be able to choose the good. Now, okay. Hang on, that was not Ignatius’ chief goal. His chief goal was to have the audience choose the greater good. Ignatius’ hope with theatre is not a question of evil and good. It’s a question of choosing the greater good. Now, let me explain this; if you dramatize an example of good and evil on stage, you want evil to be attractive. Greed is attractive, lust is attractive, and debauchery is attractive. So he didn’t want it to look like the devil and the angel, no, he wanted you to struggle. He wanted to show the attractiveness of evil, but the triumph of the good; and not only the triumph of the good, but the triumph of the greater good. So, when Fr. O’Malley talks about PIETAS and VERITAS, he is talking more philosophically. I’m talking more about what you want the audience to feel when they are sitting in that audience. I mean that’s what I tell my disabled students when they deliver their monologues. What do you want the audience to feel? That’s the purpose of the dramatic monologue. What do you want them to feel? Then you scan your monologue to find that one you want them to feel. Take the attention off of the self. That’s what you are saying to the student actor. Show your heart, which is the kind of Pietas Ignatius is looking for. It becomes Veritas, the truth. What theatre does is break open the truth through pietas. At least that’s what I do as a director.
5. Do you believe Pope Benedict and the Curia are moving away from Humanism with the recent changes to the Mass? It seems counterproductive to the needs of the Vatican. If so, where do the Humanities fit into this new model? Pope Benedict, Father Ratzinger at the time, was a key player in the construction of the Second Vatican Council. Why does he seem to be doing such a reversal? Do you see this movement as returning both ritual and learning to a more (mysterious) dramatic and controllable performance?

O’Malley: I agree, it’s ridiculous. I don’t know if it’s a retreat from humanism as such. Well, we have to realize that Benedict is an Augustinian. And that is to say, he has this… has this, very suspicious attitude toward the world. There is more of an emphasis on sin. And when you have more of an emphasis on sin, you feel that you need to have more say, more control over people. So you could say that Augustinism is sort of anti-humanist. Now, if you are Thomist say, the mystery you focus on is the Incarnation. If you are an Augustinian the mystery you focus on is the fall from grace and the crucifixion of Christ. Of course you need both to be a Christian. If you focus on the fall and the crucifixion, with perhaps a secondary view of the resurrection, you really have a different world view. Even during the Second Vatican Council Ratzinger did not like the final document. He thought it was
too optimistic. So he rallied the German bishops to his point of view, and they worked out a sort of compromise. I mean, I look at this whole thing as not purely horizontal or vertical, but more like a cylinder. It is hermeneutic in my view.

Curry: I mean, I wish I could tell you that I cared.

6. Jesuit Drama has moved beyond the classroom and into commercial theatre, as well as other mediums such as television and movies. How is this received by Rome? For years everything from Trappist fruitcake to Franciscan Choirs have sold for profit—why has Church Theatre not been marketed before, or has it?

O’Malley: Well it wasn’t intended to be commercial in the past. The Jesuits were interested in moralizing and didactic theatre. In theory in literature. But, it would be too simple to say solely that education was the reason they embraced theatre. The main reason they did it was that it was part of their educational program. Active engagement of the student. You just didn’t read the play, you performed the play. The main purpose was Thomistic, because they had to study Thomas, and no one is more acquainted to the world as Thomas Aquinas. He did his best to reconcile faith and reason.
7. In reading a translation of Joseph Simons’ play *Vitus* (1623), there are many wonderful examples of spectacle. An exorcism where the bed shakes, angels flying, a cauldron of molten lead, to name a few. Was he consciously moving away from the Aristotelian convention of not showing violent acts on stage, or was this driven by Early Modern conventions such as Kyd’s *Blood Tragedy*, and Marlowe and Shakespeare’s incursion into the occult?

O’Malley: I have no idea.

8. In the translations of the Simons plays the writers point out, many times, that these plays were, and are, for educational training only. They were not meant to be performed professionally. Why is this stated over and over? Have you ever seen an Early Modern Jesuit play produced? Were the plays in any way partially responsible for the suppression of the order? Why is Simons not produced today?

O’Malley: I’ve not seen a play produced, but I have seen a Jesuit opera. I saw it at Boston College; I guess it was 1991 or 1992. It was written in honor of Ignatius in, I believe, 1622. I can’t recall the title, but it was allegorical of course, and all in Latin. The person who produced it was Fr. Frank Kennedy at Boston College.
**Curry:** I think that people don’t know about it, but the truth is it’s terribly expensive. We didn’t pay the brothers, Fathers, scholastics. We asked the nobility for their clothing, jewelry and money. We asked for everything. And then just did the plays. So any time we try to reproduce a Jesuit play, an opera, it is a really expensive thing to do. And no matter how we try the spectacle on stage, or how interesting the material, it just doesn’t seem to have the contemporary edge that people want. I, you know, if the plays were as well-known as Shakespeare, you could see that someone would want to do it, give it a try, but because they are not, they are crap shoots. To put a lot of money into something that might not please the audience is a little scary.

9. **What draws you toward theatre, and can you see it as communion between performer and spectator? If this is a communion, can one assert that if not a spiritual responsibility, at least an ethical bond is to be assumed amongst all participants?**

**O’Malley:** I think you’re right. It is a sort of communion between the two. What draws me to theatre is that it is fun! And I think there was some of that with the Jesuits in the old Society. Aside from the educational aspects, it was fun. The Ratio Studiorum stated no more than two or three plays a year, but
there is evidence that many schools were doing four or five a year. I think they enjoyed it.

10. Will Jesuits continue to participate in the greater arts community in the coming decades, or will they return solely to education? Will the two bond again, and might such a spiraling connection be considered a hermeneutic interfacing?

O’Malley: Well I can’t predict the future, but I don’t see the order returning to that model, perhaps. I think with guys like Curry, and Jim Martin we see movement outside the university. I will say this; don’t try to connect this too much to the Catholic Church, because I think you’re not going to get much there. I don’t think the qua Catholic Church was really paying attention to this at the time.

Curry: The answer to your question is there is certainly no longer any resistance from the Jesuits about priests involved in the arts. Jesuits in the arts are represented in many forms: Musicians, Dancers, Painters, Photographers. My only fear would be a lack of numbers. I don’t at any time think the arts have been suppressed by the Jesuits, but it is much more accepted within the community now. I think where Jesuit Theater is growing is in Africa. The
numbers are growing in Africa. And so, I would look to Africa as the new Comedies’ Françoise, the new look. The tribes are filled with theatrical stories to be narrated, with new stories to be told from the gospel. When we go to foreign lands, Ignatius would encourage us to look to the fables of the land we were in. We have incorporated this better than others, sometimes not, but most times better; especially Indian and Japanese theatre. So, I think Africa will be our next theatrical venue. Along with that we will always be getting doctoral students into Jesuit doctoral programs, and, ‘Uhm’, we will benefit from people like you and your study. When I started out, we didn’t have access to the amount of information as we do now. I had to translate a lot from the Latin, and it was really painful. I had to figure out a paradigm to work at, in and of itself, because there wasn’t the material available. So I had to do a reflective, assumptive study on the material, and focused on Stanislavski and Ignatius, and how they would deal with the disabled. That is why Bill Cain is so important, because he is doing contemporary theatre.

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Appendix B: Berkeley Repertory Theatre Interview with Bill Cain

A key Bill Cain interview of interest is a conversation conducted by Madeline Oldham from the Berkley Repertory Playbill for Cain’s new play, How to Write a New Book for The Bible. The same interview was used (with permission) for the Seattle Repertory Theatre Production in 2012. It was most fortunate; and what follows is a rather lengthy but extremely important interview that will allow a wonderfully clear and cogent insight into both the man and the playwright Bill Cain:

His first play achieved success on the West Coast, went to New York, and closed after 13 performances. It was not until 20 years later that his second play, Equivocation, debuted at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and here at Seattle Rep and also ran at New York’s City Center. 9 Circles premiered at Marin Theatre Company last year, this production of How to Write a New Book for The Bible is having a co-premiere, first at Berkeley Repertory Theatre and now here, and in an unprecedented repeat performance, Bill won the Steinberg/American Theatre Critics Association Award presented at the annual Humana Festival of New American Plays in both 2010 and 2011. With this current
momentum behind him, his career is right in the middle of
seriously taking off. Bill was nice enough to take a moment and
answer some questions posed by Berkeley Rep Dramaturge,
Madeleine Oldham, with special help from Berkeley Rep Public
Relations Director Terence Keane.

Why write this particular play?
The play focuses on three people: my father, my mother, and my
brother. These are exquisite human beings, and I wanted to
ritualize in some way the wonder of their lives as a way of
celebrating them. I think the history of both religion and drama is
the sins of the parents are visited on the children—as told by the
children. And whether that’s Adam and Eve have ruined our lives
or James Tyrone and Mary Tyrone [Long Day’s Journey into Night]
have ruined the lives of their children. This is not my experience.
My experience is the opposite of the general tradition; I have a
huge sense of the blessing of my parents’ lives being passed to the
next generation, and I wanted to make a ritual of that passage of
life visible. Most of drama really is pointing the finger backwards.
And comedy is where we get to celebrate. There’s a drama in
generosity as well. I don’t think the only drama is in the scarring or
the losses. I think there’s great drama in self-sacrifice and kindness
and the cost of kindness. And that’s a ritual I would like people to enter. And exit less afraid and more joyous.

**What do you hope people will walk away with when they see this play?**

I hope they walk away with a great sense of joy, walk away carrying less fear about how life ends. My parents both gave off light as they died, and they found a way to make their deaths a summation of the goodness they had received and given for their whole lives. The play is very funny. And I think the reason for that is my parents understood that death does not negate life, but it’s one of the things in life. I hope the play works as a celebration of all of the darkness and light and not just some of it.

**Was this a play that’s been building inside you for a long time, or did it come to you in a particular moment?**

The first part of this play was actually written shortly after mom died. I had cleaned out the apartment and I found myself unable to leave. I stayed in the empty apartment an extra day just hanging out. Then I knew I had to go or what needed to happen—which is the final scene of the play—wouldn’t happen. The apartment needed to be empty of everything. Certainly empty of me. So I took
the one thing I hadn’t been able to throw out before—the ironing board—and left—knowing what event would take place in my absence. That sequence—the play’s ending—was written immediately on leaving the apartment. After that—bit by bit—over the next 10 years I wrote the story of the play as a book—which I then adapted into this play.

**Plays are full of decisions about what the right information is to tell a story. Were there things that were particularly hard for you to leave out?**

Not really.

**Does the play cause you to relive painful moments? If so, do you find it cathartic?**

I think of the play as joyous. I don’t feel any regrets about any of the events of the play. Compassion certainly. I feel that my parents and my brother are absolutely exquisite people and I see the play as a celebration of them.

**Is this the most autobiographical thing you’ve written?**

No question.

**Is the play pure autobiography or is it a blend of fact and fiction?**

“Bill” says early in the play that he’s keeping a journal and writing
it all down. “Bill” is faithful to that. Some of the funnier sequences—including the biggest fight in the play—are virtual transcriptions of the events. If I were going to fictionalize, I would have taken out some of my more boneheaded, selfish behavior, but I decided to let it stay as it was.

**Were members of your family supportive of your writing this play?**

It was a book before it was a play, and my brother loved reading the (still unpublished) book. He’s a little more concerned about the play, but he’s decided to trust me on it—for which I am very grateful.

**How does being a priest affect your playwriting and vice versa?**

I’m a Jesuit priest, and the Jesuits weren’t founded to live in a cloister or a monastery. We’re supposed to go into the world, find the presence of God there and celebrate it. I’d say that was a pretty good description of what all of us in theatre do as well. Theatre is always proclaiming “attention must be paid” to what is neglected and holy. Willy Loman. Antigone. Blanche. In this play—Mary. The jobs of writer and priest—as “Bill” says in the play—are closely
related. In both, you point and say, “Look. Look there. That person you haven’t noticed—he, she matters.”

Can you talk a little bit about why you included the subtitle “A play for an older actress”?

It just is.

Religion in contemporary America can be a fraught conversation at times. Have you encountered any pushback about drawing on the Bible in your play?

I think we all sense the religious nature of family and this play places that—as does the Bible—at the center of revelation. It’s hard to quarrel with that. The Bible—it’s not a rule book. It’s the story of a family.

Did your family have a family bible?

We had bibles, but not the hand-me-down kind from generations before. The Bible for us wasn’t so much the physical book, but the stories. My family lived in stories and both mom and dad were storytellers. Dad couldn’t tell a joke. He’d get laughing so hard he couldn’t get to the punch line—which annoyed us as kids—but he was a champion storyteller. When we were little, he would make up stories with us and all the neighborhood kids in them. Mom’s
stories always had a point and the point was usually “Work harder!” But Bible stories mixed in with Irish lore, sports stories, neighborhood gossip, literature, and history to create a rich stew of beginnings, middles, and endings.

**When did you decide you wanted to be a playwright?**

I had been a director for many years and was working at the Boston Shakespeare Company when I saw the Royal Shakespeare Company’s production of Nicholas Nickleby and knew instantly I wanted to write. Four years later, I had a play called *Stand-Up Tragedy*. It took me 20 years to write the second one, but I seem to be picking up pace at the moment.

**Do you write in other formats? What attracts you to writing for the stage?**

I wrote for television for many years and loved doing that. *Nothing Sacred* for abc-tv was one of the great experiences of my life. It won the Peabody Award and the Writers Guild Award with a bunch of others. We didn’t last long—one season—but, while we lasted, we created a national community and it was an extraordinary experience. I don’t find much difference between stage and television. I love them both for the same reasons—gathering a
community around a story—with any luck, with some laughter—
always widening the circle of inclusion. I love theatre for its
intimacy and television for its vast reach.

Does the process of creating a play look the same for you each
time? If not, how was this one different from others?
All are time-consuming, wracking, lonely, and….Why do I do this?

What’s next in your writing world after this play?
I just workshoped a play called thirty.three. at the Ojai Playwrights
Conference, which has been kind enough to host all of my plays so
far. It’s also biblically based, which is odd for me. Jesus refuses to
rise from the tomb. Just to get out of the Bible, I’m working on (not
really working, it’s recreational writing) a screenplay about the
sexual coming of age of lifeguards on the Jersey shore. It’s an
emotional comedy. Then, finishing an overdue film script about
Greg Boyle—a Jesuit who works brilliantly with gang members in
Los Angeles. He talks about the basic quality of love being “no-
matter-what-ness.” I love that.

What haven’t you done yet that you’d like to?
I’d like to try pole-vaulting at least once. Skydiving at most once.
I’d like to live in Florence for a while and soak up some Dante,
Canterbury and soak up some Chaucer, Dublin and read the second half of *Finnegans Wake*. Someday I’d like to really clean my room. I’d like to, for once, fold my laundry as soon as it comes out of the dryer. I’d like to do a one-man show—or maybe I’d just like to be the kind of person who could do a one-man show. There is a great deal of writing I would like to memorize—James Agee’s poem “Dedication” and Teilhard de Chardin’s “Hymn of the Universe.” I’d like to go back to studying karate—that feels like unfinished business. I’d like to go back to teaching middle school in the Bronx—nothing was ever better than that. I’d like to write a play a year for the next 10 years. Or a really good play every two years. Or a great play—once. I’d like to write a new book for the *Bible*. lxviii
Appendix C: List of Jesuit Universities in the United States
(The Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities. www.ajcu.net)

Boston College
Main Campus
140 Commonwealth Avenue
Chestnut Hill, MA 02467

Canisius College
Main Campus
2001 Main Street
Buffalo, NY 14208

College of the Holy Cross
Main Campus
1 College Street
Worcester, MA 01610

Creighton University
Main Campus
2500 California Plaza
Omaha, NE 68178

Fairfield University
Main Campus
1073 North Benson Road
Fairfield, CT 06430

Fordham University
Rose Hill Campus
441 East Fordham Road
Bronx, NY 10458
Lincoln Center Campus
113 West 60th Street
New York, NY 10023
Westchester Campus
400 Westchester Ave.
West Harrison, NY 10604

Georgetown University
Main Campus
37th Street and O Streets, NW
Washington, D.C. 20057
Gonzaga University  
Main Campus  
East 502 Boone Avenue  
Spokane, WA 99258  

John Carroll University  
Main Campus  
20700 North Park Blvd.  
Cleveland, OH 44118  

Le Moyne College  
Main Campus  
1419 Salt Springs Road  
Syracuse, NY 13214  

Loyola Marymount University  
Main Campus  
1 LMU Drive  
Los Angeles, CA 90045  

Loyola University Chicago  
Lake Shore Campus  
1032 W. Sheridan Rd.  
Chicago, IL 60660  
Water Tower Campus  
820 North Michigan Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60611  
Medical Center Campus  
2160 South First Avenue  
Maywood, IL 60153  

Loyola University Maryland  
Main Campus  
4501 North Charles Street  
Baltimore, MD 21210  

Loyola University New Orleans  
Main Campus  
6363 St. Charles Avenue  
New Orleans, LA 70118  

Marquette University  
Main Campus  
Post Office Box 1881
Milwaukee, WI 53201
Regis University
Main Campus
3333 Regis Boulevard
Denver, CO 80221
Rockhurst University
Main Campus
1100 Rockhurst Road
Kansas City, MO 64110
Saint Joseph's University
Main Campus
5600 City Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19131
Saint Louis University
Frost Campus
221 North Grand Boulevard
St. Louis, MO 63103
School of Medicine
1402 S. Grand Boulevard
St. Louis, MO 63104
Saint Louis University - Madrid Campus
34 Avenida Del Valle
28003 Madrid, Spain
Saint Peter's College
Main Campus
2641 Kennedy Boulevard
Jersey City, NJ 07306
Englewood Cliffs Campus
Hudson Terrace
Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632
Santa Clara University
Main Campus
500 El Camino Real
Santa Clara, CA 95053
Seattle University
Main Campus
901 12th Ave.
PO Box 222000
Seattle, WA 98122
Spring Hill College
Main Campus
4000 Dauphin Street
Mobile, AL 36608
University of Detroit Mercy
McNichols Campus
4001 West McNichols Road
Detroit, MI 48219
University of San Francisco
Main Campus
2130 Fulton Street
San Francisco, CA 94117
University of Scranton
Main Campus
800 Linden Street
Scranton, PA 18510
Wheeling Jesuit University
Main Campus
316 Washington Avenue
Wheeling, WV 26003

Xavier University
Main Campus
3800 Victory Parkway
Cincinnati, OH 45207
End Notes


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