

**Hot Emotions / Rigorous Criticism:
John Patrick Shanley's Adolescent Play, *Defiance***

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Shanley's *Defiance* is the second play in his trilogy of works investigating moments of American crisis. Interestingly, Shanley crafts each play to track the development of contemporary American society as one would track the emotional development of a youth: the first play, *Doubt*, is about "the birth of uncertainty," and *Defiance* chronicles the cynicism that creeps into individuals during adolescence (Shanley qtd. in *Manhattan Theatre Club*). The third play, which is not finished, will move past *Defiance*'s mistrust of authority and into maturity. Because *Defiance* represents adolescence, it is full of the contrary emotions often felt by young Americans: idealism, heroism, cynicism, and patriotism; and while these emotional aspects draw audiences into the play, it is Shanley's dramaturgy that ultimately constructs a play that inspires viewers' critical engagement. The purpose of this study guide is to offer a discussion about the play's structure and Shanley's own perspectives in order to investigate how *Defiance* moves readers and viewers from their emotions into critical thought. Throughout the interview process, Shanley and I paid special attention to our particular audience, the USNA class of 2014. Below, I present segments of our discussions about the play in topical sections, each framed by a brief introduction and a list of further questions that Midshipmen might consider.

A Biography of John Patrick Shanley, a Warrior Poet

John Patrick Shanley (1950-) is a leading American playwright who has written over twenty-three plays, and six screenplays, several of which he has directed. The success of his 1984 play, Danny and the Deep Blue Sea, brought Shanley to the attention of the national theatre scene and introduced the public to the themes that prevail across his work: the difficulties of communication, personal fears versus the courage to connect, and the shifting roles of gender relations. In 1988, his first screenplay, Moonstruck, won the Oscar, demonstrating Shanley's ability to attract audiences beyond Broadway. His greatest success to date, Doubt: A Parable, exemplifies Shanley's talent for creating critically demanding works that capture the concerns and imaginations of the American public through both live and film performances. Doubt's 2004 theatrical debut won the New York Drama Desk Award and the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Shanley's screenplay of Doubt, which he also directed, was nominated for five Academy Awards in 2009.

Shanley's background, growing up Irish Catholic in the Bronx's Irish-Italian working-class community, influences much of his writing; however, his path to becoming a playwright was somewhat unusual. He was the youngest of five children, the only one of whom graduated college. Much of his youth was spent getting expelled from various schools, and he never attended a professional play until he was twenty-two years old. His only exposure to plays had been two productions at Cardinal Spellman High School: The Miracle Worker and Cyrano de Bergerac (Hodges129-30). The image of the warrior-poet in Cyrano shaped Shanley's young imagination as he, too, became a lover of language who joined the military.

In the portion of the interview below, Shanley discusses his years in the United States Marine Corps and the ways in which the Marines helped him develop the focus he would need as a playwright. Many of the memories he relates directly connect to the setting and characters we meet in Defiance.

Interview

Shanley's introduction to USMC

John Patrick Shanley: I went into the United States Marine Corps when I was nineteen years old, during the last years of the Vietnam War. My brother, Tom, had been a Sergeant in the Air Wing in the Marine Corps before me, and he had been in Da Nang when Da Nang was bombed. My brother, Jim, was in the Navy before that, and basically. . . spent his time in the brig (laughter). I went into the infantry, went through Paris Island and then on to Camp Geiger for advanced infantry training. At that time, initial training was almost six months. Then we got our assignments, and I was assigned to Camp Lejeune. A couple of people were assigned to . . . Vietnam or Okinawa. But in fact, at that point, the Marines were mostly pulling out of Vietnam. They are first to fight, and—less advertised—first to leave.

Life in the Barracks

JPS: So, I was in a barracks. At that time, you lived in a communal squad bay, about eighty guys, with eight bunks to a section, separated just by lockers. Basically, you are all living in one big room. Then in the command building, about a five minute walk up the way, was the Battalion Commander. So, I was in First Battalion, 6th Marines in the Flame Thrower Unit. There was still a Flame Thrower Unit at that time. . . . We trained: went to Jungle Warfare School in Central America, in Panama, the Panamanian Jungle. We went to Guantanamo Bay up in the hills and refurbished gun emplacements and stuff like that. Basically, we went on maneuvers and trained for knocking out tanks and everything having to do with being in infantry during the time I was in.

But it was a very particular time. It was a period of extremely low morale in the Marine Corps, as anyone who was on the Command end of things at that time will tell you. The guys had been coming back from Vietnam for a long time at that period, and a lot of them were not in good shape. There was a decent amount of drug abuse; there was an incredible amount of racial tension, specifically at Camp Lejeune.

A few months before I got there [Camp Lejeune], there was a race riot. That was very much in the air from the day that I arrived. When you went into the weekend and you had liberty, if you didn't go anywhere, by the end of the weekend, the squad bay was disgusting. There was garbage flowing out of all of the garbage cans. It's not what you think of when you think of the Marines. This is not what you think of. During the week, no question: everything was run very tightly. But whenever the supervisory grip was loosened, things fell apart pretty quickly. There was also a lot of knowledge from command, and they felt that they needed to step back from

time to time because there was so much tension, and they felt these guys needed to let off some steam.

There were several murders in Camp Lejeune while I was there. I believe there was three in one week, at one point. There was male on male rape. I remember an incident of that, and the guy got caught because he took the wrong pants.

Christy Stanlake: And that's in the play, too! (Laughs)

JPS: People are in uniform: (laughs) one pair of pants looks like another. The command was really doing what they could to figure out these very serious problems. And it was really shortly after I got out that they started a massive reorganization of the Corps, and got rid of a lot of these people. When I got in, they had taken in a lot of guys who had committed minor felonies. Like, if you stole a car, the judge would say, "You can go to jail, or you can go in the Marine Corps." You get those guys, or guys with minor assault and battery, that kind of thing. So some scruffy types coming in as a result of that. And then you had all of these guys who'd been through combat and were back and saw absolutely zero point in being in the Marine Corps if you'd already fought. They just didn't get that at all. These were not people who were careerists. At that point, it was a mixture of the draft and of volunteers. It was leaning toward a volunteer group, but they were [also] drafting into the Corps because they were just running through so many men during the course of the conflict; and also because being a Marine, at that time, was to be completely flying in the opposite direction from Woodstock and that whole culture. So, there was a lot of animosity toward service people, especially in the metropolitan areas like New York City, San Francisco, Los Angeles. It wasn't necessarily a hero's welcome that you got when you got home, and it's in this atmosphere that I set the play.

Memories of Lejeune and the Cultural Setting of *Defiance*

First of all, I would say, 97-96% of all officers in the Marine Corps were white. So a black officer was like, "What is that?" That certainly had something to do with the racial tension that was going on. More generally, I was living in the squad bay with all these guys, eighty guys, and a lot of them were black. The black Marines were doing all of these Black Power handshakes, where they would bang their hands in a certain fashion, banging all four sides of another's fist, and sometimes this would go on for two minutes. Constantly. If you imagine what it is like on a Marine Corps base, where you're walking down the street and you pass an officer, and you salute. If you also look out and you see, like, twenty guys doing a black bonding thing that white Marines aren't doing, everywhere, everywhere you look. . . . [There was also] really aggressive behavior in the mess hall, where black Marines routinely were cutting to the front of the line and just daring you to say something, and fistfights were breaking out. . . . There was a lot of challenging going on, a lot of challenging.

Shanley's School Years and the Gift of the Corps

CS: Having come from the Bronx, were you surprised? Had you been witness to that sort of racial tension already? Or was this all new?

JPS: My neighborhood was filled with insane racists. There were no black people in my neighborhood; there were no Latino people in my neighborhood. If one came in, they were attacked. This was not my cup of tea: I was raised admiring John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr, but that was the milieu. And also I was very affected by the Woodstock generation and the idea of love, peace, and happiness. So, I was very aware of the dichotomy before I ever got to the Marine Corps. When I got to the Marine Corps, what I said was, “This is the most civilized place I’ve ever been.” Because at least there are rules, and when you do something like this, they throw you in jail, they throw you in the Brigg.

CS: I was reading your bio in *Doubt* that provides that litany of schools that you were expelled from, but ends with the note: “Then he went to the US Marine Corps. He did fine. He’s still doing okay.” So, I was curious, what was it that the Corps gave you that helped you find your way in life after your youth?

JPS: The Marine Corps was incredibly valuable to me in many, many ways. I have had a very fortunate life in that in fateful moments, what I needed showed up. I’d been thrown out of all these schools in the Bronx, and then I had been taken—in through, I can’t call it anything but a misunderstanding—into a school in New Hampshire, a private school on top of a mountain with fifty-five kids in the whole school: all boys. So I was up there for two years. It was on 500 acres, seventeen miles to the nearest town, and I went kind of haywire up there. But what really happened was [that] I was in an environment where you would notice that I was already haywire. That place slowly was bringing me back to some kind of better state, and it was also giving me the educa—I have peculiar educational needs because I was kind of an English prodigy—and the schools I had gone to before that had no facilities to deal with someone like me and had no interest in me; whereas, in this school, they did. So they brought me along to a certain place—and I almost got thrown out of there, again and again, but I managed to graduate—and so that was a fateful and good thing.

And then I went back to New York for about a year and a half and I went to NYU for a year, but it was just too big for me and I didn’t know how to be there, and so I was getting thrown out of there. So, I just wandered away and became the guy working in the deli, and I did that for maybe a year, and I was just kind of drifting. I was going to be drafted, I didn’t have a low number, but I didn’t have a high number in the lottery, so I was going to go eventually. So, I decided to take matters into my own hands, to take my fate into my own hands, and I said, “So, I hear the army is boring, but the Marines are not.” And I asked a couple of the guys I knew who’d been in the Marine Corps, “Is it boring?”

They’d all laugh in this kind of odd way, and say, “No, it’s not boring.”

And I said, “That’s all I wanted to know,” and I joined. And then after I joined, but before I went, which was only a couple of weeks, I really grilled the guys I knew who’d been in the Corps: “Just tell me exactly what happens from the moment you get on the bus.” That turned out to be a smart move because I was psychologically prepared. I knew everything that was coming. I knew that there would be the yellow footprints and not to look at the guy in the eyes, a lot of little tips about how to remain invisible—like CAPT King is always talking about, liking being invisible.

That is certainly one of the things that you learn in the military that is the opposite of what I learned in the culture—in the '60s the thing was, “wear as many bright colors, and stripes, and stars, and stuff as you can. Express your individuality.” In the Marine Corps, they cut off your hair; they gave you the same glasses—if you wore glasses—as the other guy; they put you in uniform; you spoke in unison or not at all. This was in basic training, and the expectation was, and the thing that you basically got approval for was: fitting in, blending, doing the same thing as everybody else, acting the same way when you got a command as everybody else acted. That was something that I'd not been totally exposed to before, and I found that that was very, very soothing to me.

Becoming invisible was very soothing to me, and it gave me a lot of time. When you're in formation, you're at attention, or you're standing at attention at the foot of your bunk, you have a lot of time to yourself, a lot of time to reflect. You don't have to reflect a lot to answer a command: it's, “yes, sir” or “no, sir,” basically. [. . .] So it was sort of like being in some kind of religious order where you cut off your hair, and you wear the same clothes as everyone else, and you answer in unison, and you spend a lot of time in silence. It gave me the contemplative center that I needed to continue to grow as a person, and to stop worrying about expressing how individual and different I was from everybody else, and just sort of *be*. [. . .]

When I got into the regular Corps, I was put into a barracks where it was basically a little bit like being in Vietnam, because that is all anybody talked about. All these guys had come back from Vietnam, so they talked about it nonstop. You sort of started to feel a little bit of the jungle in the barracks, and get a sense of what these guys had gone through, and what it was like, and also, for them, the incredible pointlessness of having served, done the things, you know. . . . Some of these guys had been incredibly gung-ho and had joined the Corps for four years, and gone and fought in Vietnam, sometimes for a couple of tours and were waiting to get out. But they wouldn't let them. They [the administration] did these early outs [. . .] and they were doing a few doing a few waves of those, but not enough for these very, very disenchanting guys who just didn't see the point anymore. You spent a lot of time with those people: a lot of idle time during hours of liberty, and the supercharged atmosphere, and these fights and stuff.

But the thing was for me: “Can I do this? Can I go through basic training? Can I physically do it? Can I follow the rules, or am I just going to get thrown out of everything for the rest of my life?” And I discovered that I could do it, and actually make decent rank, and get off with an E-4 (which is a Corporal) by the time my enlistment was up in two years, and get off as Sergeant, if I would reenlist, which I didn't want to do. But I was like, “Wow!” So, I did it. And I was eligible, if I stayed in for one more year, for the good conduct medal, which is hilarious. (Laughter)

Then I got out, and the GI bill was very good back then. It was the old GI bill. So, after many months of bouncing around—maybe even a year—I want back to NYU, and I said to someone, somebody who was a friend of mine, a teacher there, “You know, when I left, I wasn't doing well; they were going to throw me out.”

And he said, “You go in the military: all sins are forgiven.”

So, I went and I met with the Dean there, and I brought a notebook of things I'd written and really made my case. She barely looked at the notebook. She just got brighter and brighter the

more she realized that she had a guy here that, if she let him back in, would treat the educational experience as an incredible opportunity, rather than the usual thing when you leave your parents' house, go to college, and you're just sort of clueless—and maybe you figure out what you want to do in two years. She knew that out of the gate I was going to work hard and I was going to be focused.

So she let me back in, and I had a 4.0 for the next four years. I was her poster boy to say, "I let this guy back in NYU." [...] I became valedictorian of all the schools at New York University. And I was impoverished. They wouldn't give you any sort of financial aid if you were a certain age, like still young, claiming you were getting no support from your parents. They figured you were getting money from your parents; you just weren't claiming it. So, I had to pay for my whole education and to make that even possible, the good news was, the GI bill gave me several hundred dollars a month to go to school. They did it for nine months a year for four years, and that made it possible.

CS: And that allowed you to focus at school, too?

JPS: Yeah.

Warrior Poets

CS: I read somewhere that you said, as a young man, you were inspired by the concept of a warrior poet, and I think that that is also an idea that often resonates with many of our Midshipmen. Yet, it is also a contested image in that, both inside and outside the military, people sometimes discredit it. In your experiences—joining the military when you also had that love of language, and then finding within the military the focus to come back to embrace the freedom education can give you—if you were to help shape our nation's understanding of a warrior poet, how would you do that?

JPS: The place where I first saw that was when I was thirteen years old and I saw *Cyrano de Bergerac*, which is about a military guy in France who's got a very long nose, and he is a poet; he's brilliant, and he's the toughest guy in the barracks, and they're all terrified of him. They never mention his nose because if they did, he'd kill them. I thought, "Wow, there's a poet, and he's the toughest guy in the room." Certainly, you know, William Styron was in the Marine Corps and wrote about it. . . and became one of the premiere novelists of our country. And Harvey Keitel, who will never tire of saying "Simper Fi" to me, was in the Marine Corps, and goes to the Marine Corps Ball; anything to do with the Marine Corps, he is right there. My most influential teacher at New York University is still teaching. He was my teacher when I was 17: Professor Terence Moran. He's an ex-Marine, and celebrates the Marine Corps Birthday every year, and goes to the Marine Corps Ball and all of that. These guys, clearly Moran and Styron and others, these are scholars who not only were in the Marine Corps but carry that distinction as a great achievement of theirs. If you were in the Marine Corps and you go in the direction of the fine arts, those people are blown away by the fact you were in the Marine Corps. It's incredibly impressive to them because many of these people went to college, and then graduate school, and post graduate work, and that's all they know. They never went out into the other world, and wore a uniform, and went overseas and bonded with people, and had these experiences; and they are openly envious. I realized the first time people were envious of me—and I came from the

Bronx, I fell down laughing. Whatever experiences you have in life that are intense and specific, and not generally shared: they are great badges in society, and they are also tremendously useful to draw on in whatever line of work or occupation you choose to pursue after that.

Questions for Further Thought

1. In what ways is the 1971 setting of *Defiance* similar to and different from the experiences servicemen and women face in today's military?
2. After joining the military, have you found moments to, as Shanley says, develop your "contemplative center?" In what ways does the Naval Academy offer you either more time to reflect, or deeper subject matter to reflect upon?
3. What are your thoughts about "warrior poets" and "scholar warriors?" Why does popular culture often draw distinctions between warriors and poets, between warriors and scholars? In what ways can your generation help overturn the stereotypes about the value of language and scholarship in the military?
4. What does literature and theatre give to the military? What does the military give to literature and the theatre?

Defiance's Dramaturgy: Plot Structure, Characters, Critical Thinking

In *The Poetics*, Aristotle defines **plot** as the selection and arrangement of actions from the storyline. When we imagine the difference between storyline and plot, it is helpful to compare the concepts to that of lines versus line segments in geometry. A storyline has no definitive beginning or end; whereas, in a plot, the playwright chooses what segments of that storyline we see—from what action begins the play to what action ends the play. These actions can be arranged chronologically, but a playwright can also choose to show them out of chronological order through flashbacks, simultaneous scenes, and other means of sequencing actions. Playwrights make these choices of selection and arrangement according to how they hope to affect their viewers. The same can be said of **characters**, which Aristotle defines as the agents (or doers) of action. Just as with plot, a playwright chooses which agents of actions to include and how to use them in order to best awaken aspects of his audience's imagination. Together, the specific choices a playwright makes and the methodology behind those choices is called the play's **dramaturgy**.

Defiance's dramaturgy works to draw the audience into the world of the play. We see this from the opening scene, which takes the form of a **direct audience address**. When the Gunnery Sergeant and then COL Littlefield speak directly to the members of the theatrical audience, Shanley breaks down the barriers between the world of the play and the world of the audience, thus transforming the audience into a company of recalcitrant Marines. Although the remainder of the play shifts to a realistic plot structure, in which we quietly observe the Littlefields' and Captain King's private struggles, we must never forget that Shanley has already made us an integral part of Camp Lejeune's 1971 setting; consequently, personal implications resonate for us in all of the following scenes, including the final one, when Shanley leaves the ending open for audience members to imagine and judge for ourselves what comes next.

In addition to making the audience “the final character” in his plays, Shanley also uses both plot and character to transform large historical/political moments into personal issues that any American might face. In Doubt the child abuse scandals in the Catholic Church are the backdrop to more personal conflicts occurring between an idealistic man, a silenced woman, and an outcast child in need of an education. In Defiance, we see the racial and political conflicts of the Vietnam era brought home through just six characters. In both plays, Shanley presents his small cast of characters as character-types that we first believe we understand. However, once the audience gets comfortable, Shanley unveils our lack of understanding through a series of scenes from multiple perspectives that challenge our assumptions and force us to view contradictory sides of each major character.

In the interview segment below, Shanley and I speak about his philosophy of theatre, his inspiration for Defiance, and his dramaturgical choices.

Interview

Responsibility: *Defiance*'s Inspiration

Christy Stanlake: Thinking about how you described Camp Lejeune when you got there in the 70s, and also thinking about how you've said that *Doubt* was inspired by the emphatic positions people took after September 11th, what inspired you to write *Defiance* in 2007?

John Patrick Shanley: When I was in Camp Geiger, I had a friend, a bunkmate, who I deeply, deeply cared about. He was a sweet, sweet boy. He was from the deep south; he was married. I guess he must have got married the minute it was legal to do so because he was like eighteen years old, and they got military housing in a trailer park. As soon as he got out of basic training and went to advanced training, his wife came to be with him, and she was eighteen or nineteen years old, staying at this trailer park. He would get to go there on weekends, or one day a week, or something—not much. They were befriended by a staff sergeant, and then the staff sergeant slept with his wife. He was beside himself. It went to command, and the guy was disciplined, reprimanded, busted—I don't know what else—but my friend was devastated, and was not the same person after that. He became extremely cynical, and ended up a drug dealer, while I was in the Marine Corps. He couldn't have transformed more.

It really brought home to me the extraordinary responsibility that people in superior positions in the military have to the people who obey their orders. They can have a seismic effect on the people under them, and it's a burden as well as a responsibility, because they are men and women, as well as officers. We all do things we are not necessarily proud of, but if you are an officer, or a noncommissioned officer, and somebody under you puts their trust in you and you violate that in a substantive way, it has a lifelong effect on that person. That is something that those people [commissioned and noncommissioned officers] have to understand

So, when I got to the point of writing *Defiance*, that was certainly the issue, that happened all those years ago, that certainly came to mind.

CS: And then we've got so much going on today with these long wars that we've been engaged in.

JPS: Yeah, well, certainly I was writing about the fact that we have these people who are— We now have this *professional* military that has been overused, in terms multiple rotations into warzones for years at a time, just continued repeated exposure, and what that does to a person's core. . . these people suffer. [They] carry a burden and bring that war home with them.

Shanley's Philosophy of Playwriting

CS: With both *Doubt* and *Defiance*, I really appreciate how you tackle moments of crisis in American history, moments that have become quite politicized, but you're doing it through quite a personal lens, with just six characters in *Defiance*, for example. Could you talk a little bit about your process of taking such large, politicized moments of American history and structuring them into plots that are complex, and personal, and focused?

JPS: I think that I have the ambition because of my personality, my identity. I do not want to write a Democratic play or a Republican play. I want to write a play where it doesn't matter if you are a Democrat or a Republican or anything in between to respond to the play. It's not about that. It's not a polemic where I'm trying to convince you of a political position or that "this is wrong," or "this is right." I'm actually interested in presenting you with a knotty, moral problem that I've walked around with and would like some help with. So, the audience is the last character in these plays, and I leave room for them. These plays don't talk at the audience: these plays ask the audience to come in and help out because there's a lot to do.

CS: In some ways, I think of these plays as being very classic, in terms of Greek classical theatre—when one of the objectives was to have a thinking audience.

JPS: Certainly, I'm very influenced by Socrates. Socrates just kept asking questions until you have a person who has a nervous breakdown. (Laughter.) Socrates was a teacher. He taught in the Gardens of Academe, and people would come to study with him. And they'd go for a walk with him, and he would just ask them questions. The truth of the matter was that he was a great intellect and that he knew he didn't need to convince you of anything: he needed to reveal to you what it was that you were uncertain about, or that you had never spoken out loud, the questions that you had. He would get you to the point where you could formulate what the heck was so difficult, so confusing, about a given moment of life, or about a choice, or about a direction. And he was very fair, for the most part, and if you had a point, he would take it. That would be the next step in the road that he would walk. I'm interested in trying to do similar things.

The Creation of Characters/The Destruction of Assumptions

CS: With the plot structure and the characters, as well, I feel as if when I read both *Doubt* and *Defiance*, that we're introduced to these characters almost—they don't seem to be stereotypes, but we come at them with a stereotypical perspective, as audience members, but then quickly they change, and they become—

JPS: It's not that they change; it's that everybody has assumptions. The plays start with people that a lot of us have assumptions about. We think we recognize them and we have a sense like, "Oh, I know this kind of guy." Then, the assumptions don't hold. It's like, "Oh, this is the stupid guy in the play," and then, "Wow! He just said something really smart. I'm going to have to adjust what I think this guy is," which is my experience of life. I've done it to people. You get an assumption going about who they are, and then they say something and you have to go, "Wow. I'm surprised. This person has another dimension than I suspected was there." That is my experience of life, and that is what I am trying to share.

CS: I feel like, in some ways, it is a play teaching the audience how to see the world again. . . how to see with different lenses—

JPS: That's really a beautiful sentence you just said: "How to see the world, again." That's sure because I think assumptions blind us, and we don't actually see what's there. You need a lot of assumptions: you wake up in the morning and you throw your feet over the side, you assume there's going to be a floor there. We assume things right from the get go, and you need to. You need to. But it is important to know when to turn the automatic pilot off, and that's when you face other people.

CS: Chaplain White in *Defiance* is somebody I'm still trying to wrap my brain around because at first I feel embarrassed for him, and then I think he's this awful villain, and then I just don't know what to feel about him by the end. What he says makes sense: I really love some of the things that character says about cynicism. What have people's responses been to him, or actors who have played him?

JPS: Oh, I think that's the character in the play that just throws you for a loop because he brings up the things that the people in the play haven't thought of, and they all have very strong assumptions about him. Then they realize that he's formidable. You can agree with him, or disagree with him, but you cannot discount him. His point of view is powerful, and he sort of points the way to things to meditate about.

The wife, Margaret, does as well. [In the ballroom scene] there are these two people, the black Captain and the Colonel's wife: they are basically the two people who sit at the dance on the side when everything is happening onstage because that was sort of the truth of the matter. The two people that didn't have a particular voice in this country, certainly in the military at the time when I was in, were black people and women. But there they are, the two people who don't have a voice; and what are they going to do? They're going to talk to each other and realize that they have some things in common.

CS: I love the Magic Shaver conversation, the moment they hit on their commonalities. And both of them are reading characters, too. I appreciate in *Defiance*, how you've got these two characters who are readers, and they talk about the books they are reading, especially Margaret [who speaks about] what she's reading at the time, what she's thinking. I actually picked up *On Aggression* and *Future Shock*, and was reading them a little bit. I'm curious how you decided to include different books.

JPS: Those were all in the Marine Corps BX at that time, and I read those books at that time, in the barracks. There were a tremendous number of books that were big picture books about how to think about things, like *On Aggression*, like *Future Shock*, and Norman Mailer's *Of a Fire on the Moon* [. . .]. There was no attempt to shape the private opinion of the Marines. The movies in the Marine Corps cinema were just bizarre, *bizarre*; bizarrely not like the Marine Corps! But they had movies like *The Boyfriend*, *Women in Love*: these were the movies that were playing when I was there. They were the movies that, I guess, they could get cheaply.

CS: Hmm. [Laughter] This was all economical?

JPS: And everybody would go because it was only twenty-five cents!

Shanley's Theatre and Cynicism

CS: Going back to Chaplain White, and then something else you said about cynicism: I've heard you say that you want your audiences to walk out of the theatre with their cynicism destroyed. You've likened cynicism to a blind, defensive belief system that disables people's will to act. Cynicism is something very pervasive here at the Naval Academy. You can imagine: a lot of early 20's/ late teens who are "locked" on the yard for four years. I wonder, what sorts of things can help young people, especially those in our military, overcome cynicism?

JPS: I think cynicism comes out of, like—you're *terrified*! Cynicism starts in the teenage years, and it starts because you get this know it all veneer because it works for you to keep a lot of stuff out that you don't know what to do with. So, it's important. It's an important defense mechanism for a lot of people during certain points of their lives. They can't bear to face the complexity and pain of letting everything in. It is hard to just let in huge amounts of undifferentiated experience that doesn't fit into any kind of explanation of the way things are that you have, and not become nonfunctioning. That's why Socrates was helpful to young people; he was showing them how you can let stuff in, how it is okay to not know. That's what he was doing. He was the guy asking the questions, "Why do you say that? What does that mean?" [He modeled how] to have that humility, because humility is the antidote to cynicism.

CS: I think that maybe why that's doubly hard, here, is because our students are often taught—in terms of military training—to have an answer right away, and there's not much time to think. Having time to think is viewed as "weak," if you're taking time to mull things over.

JPS: You're definitely straddling two worlds because you're supposed to obey the order without reflection, especially if you're a junior officer, and I'm the guy saying, "Reflect, reflect!"

Ethical Questions in *Defiance* and in Military Leadership

CS: Thinking about the military, and obeying orders without questioning when you're a junior officer: at some point you've got to be giving the orders. You're trained not to question, yet at some point you should be reflecting in order to lead.

JPS: Well, I guess every man and woman will have to decide at some point—and it's not easy: where does authority come from? And if you go into the military, you have to figure that out. You should spend serious time thinking about that, and what your belief system is, how this is going to work so that you can continue to grow as a human being and still feel comfortable with the chain of command.

CS: And we see that debate in *Defiance*, with Chaplain White speaking to King who's arguing for democracy. It's a beautiful conflict there between the two of them and how to view authority.

JPS: Yeah, because the Chaplain is saying, "Where does authority come from, Buddy? Where does it come from? That snake eats its own tail. You got to figure that one out." You can't just coast along without meditating and talking with other people whose opinion you respect, open spaces people, those ideas. There are things you can come to embrace that will make it possible for you to understand why you're obeying the people over you and that don't, at the same time, shut down your brain. It takes a sophisticated person.

CS: It takes an active person as well, an active thinker. Even as you have figured out what that belief system is, I imagine it still shifts.

Shifting Gender Roles in Shanley's Trilogy

CS: Along with race relations in *Doubt* and *Defiance*, it seems that an omnipresent aspect of America [in your trilogy] is the gender discrimination that the women face. Is that a theme you can see continuing, as well [in the third play]?

JPS: First of all, the role of women and the role of men has always been very interesting to me. In institutions, those roles are revealed. They're dramatized. So, as those roles change in society, they change in institutions. For instance, the role of women in the military has changed a tremendous amount from the time when I was in. The role of women in the Catholic Church has changed much less so, and as a result, they've left in droves. But the feminine identity and the masculine identity continue to evolve and change. How that works, what that is, I'm interested in. But it's definitely tough. It gets tougher and tougher. In a proscriptive sense, it gets very tough.

I'm interested in the masculine/female relationship in *Defiance* because in some way, I think it's a really adult relationship. And I like that. I'm interested in that.

CS: I like how Margaret is very much an equal to her husband in the play. . .

JPS: Yeah.

CS: . . . which, when I first read it, the very first time, and I was reading the first scene when she appears, I thought, "You've got to be kidding me!" (laughter) until that moment when the Chaplain leaves and her husband turns to her and says, "What are your thoughts?" And I thought, "Oh! I get it!" (Laughter.)

JPS: But you know, also, at that time in the military— In other words, the military tends to be several years behind, or in a different time than the rest of the culture, much more formal and traditional than the rest of the culture. So, imagine: this is 1971, so that's like the 50's.

On Midshipmen Viewing a Play for the First Time

CS: When the Midshipmen see the staged reading, there will be some of those warrior poets in the audience, but also there will be others who've never seen a play in their whole lives. This will be their first exposure to live performance, even though it's a staged reading. Do you have any advice for young people preparing to see their first play, or hear one, in their case?

JPS: No one has ever asked me that before. You know, I had my cousin, Anthony, come from Ireland to see *Doubt* when I did it at the Abbey Theatre. And he works his farm in central Ireland, and he's in his early fifties. He'd never seen a play in his life. And he saw the play, and I said afterwards, "What did you think?"

And he said, "You know, it's the damndest thing I ever saw." (Laughter) I don't know what he meant by it; he was satisfied by his answer.

I think it's a very organic thing. Plays. It might seem weird for a few minutes, and then you kind forget that it's weird.

Questions for Further Thought

1. One of the challenges of being an officer is balancing the tremendous responsibility you have for the lives of those in your care with the reality that you are a human being with human frailties. Colonel Littlefield experiences this conflict between human frailty and responsibility when he sleeps with Private Davis's wife. What do you make of Colonel Littlefield's defense that he slipped up just once in his long career of military service? Are lapses in an officer's personal integrity as dangerous as lapses in an officer's professional record? How do successful officers create a healthy balance between their responsibilities for others and their human frailties?
2. What are your first assumptions about the following characters: Colonel Littlefield, Margaret Littlefield, Chaplain White, and Captain King? By the end of the play, how would you describe each of these characters? Do your opinions of the characters change between the first time you see them and the last time you see them on stage? If so, what scenes help you to see them differently?
3. Shanley is an individual who experienced the racial conflicts that occurred in Camp Lejeune during his service there. Comparing his reflections of his time at Camp Lejeune (above) to the many ways in which his characters in the play talk about the racial conflicts, does Shanley succeed in providing *Defiance's* audience with multiple/differing perspectives of racial tensions on the base? If so, how? If not, why not?

4. Do you buy what Shanley says about cynicism being a defense mechanism for fear? What about cynicism destroying one's will to act? Does Captain King begin this play as a cynic? If so, what might he be afraid of? What makes him choose to act?
5. What do you make of Chaplain White? Do you agree with any of his actions or statements?
6. Both Colonel Littlefield and Captain King discuss feeling somewhat tarnished after their combat experiences in Korea and Vietnam, respectively. Captain King deals with his feelings by wanting to become invisible. Conversely, Colonel Littlefield speaks of wanting to retire with one shining accomplishment, having won one clean fight. Is Colonel Littlefield's desire more heroic than Captain King's? How might you describe the difference, if any, between heroic actions and heroic ideals?
7. Define what "moral authority" motivates each of the play's main characters (Colonel Littlefield, Margaret Littlefield, Chaplain White, and Captain King). Is each character truly motivated by what he or she claims motivates him or her? How or how not?
8. Captain King speaks about Black Power at the beginning of the play, but later he speaks of becoming disillusioned after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. What does this confession reveal to us about Captain King?
9. What questions does *Defiance* leave you with at the end of the play? What do you think happens after Littlefield hangs up the phone?
10. If you were to write Shanley's final play in the trilogy, one that focuses on a moment of American crisis that occurs after *Defiance*, is concerned with hierarchy, but moves toward a more mature and healing resolution, what would you choose as your topic, and why?

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