

BA I – SEM II – PAPER IV – UNDERSTANDING DRAMA IN ENGLISH***SAINT JOAN*****By G.B. SHAW (1856 – 1950)****Introduction**

Nobel Prize Winner dramatist of the century, George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan: A Chronicle Play in Six Scenes and an Epilogue* was first premiered in 1923, three years after Joan of Arc was canonized by the Catholic Church, and 492 years after she was burnt at the stake by the English for heresy. Some call the play, *Saint Joan*, Shaw's masterpiece.

In *Saint Joan: A Chronicle Play in Six Scenes and an Epilogue*, George Bernard Shaw tells a historically faithful version of how Joan of Arc went from being a provincial adolescent, to military hero, to executed heretic, to rehabilitated venerable by the Roman Catholic Church twenty-five years later and to saint in 1920. Shaw's prefaces and postscripts to the play explain his knowledge and admiration of Joan.

Historical Background

Sometime around 1412, Joan of Arc was born in Domremy, France. It was a small village, and Joan grew up in a peasant family. Although she was known for her skill and her hard work, she seemed fairly ordinary except for her extreme piousness. In 1425, around age 13, Joan started hearing "voices" which she claimed were the voices of Saint Catherine, Saint Margaret, and Saint Michael. She said these voices commanded her to aid the Dauphin, Charles, in his fight against England and Burgundy, and to see him crowned as the King of France at Reims. Reims was the traditional location where French kings were crowned. But because Reims was in English hands, Charles had not been able to hold a coronation ceremony yet, though his father had been dead for years.

When Joan went to Vaucouleurs to offer her aid, she was initially laughed away. In February of 1429, however, she was granted an audience with the Dauphin. He was superstitious and in dire straits in his battle against the English and Burgundians, so he sent her with a contingent of troops to aid in the Siege of Orleans, a long stalemate in which the English had surrounded the city of Orleans with fortresses. Joan followed sudden commands from her voices and stumbled upon a battle between English and French forces. Rallying the French troops, she drove the English out of fort after fort, decisively ending the siege and earning herself popularity throughout France as the miraculous "Maid of Orleans."

After subsequently defeating the English again at the Battle of Patay, Joan brought Charles to Reims, where he was officially crowned King Charles VII on July 17. On the way from Reims, Joan and the Duke of Alencon suggested that the French attempt to take English-controlled Paris. But after a promising first day of fighting, Charles called off the assault on Paris; he was running low on funds. He recalled the army south and disbanded much of it. Charles then named Joan and her family to French nobility, in thanks for Joan's services to France.

Joan continued to fight for Charles's interests, but her luck had run out. In May of 1430, while holding off Burgundian troops at the Battle of Compiègne so the French townspeople could flee, Joan was captured by John of Luxembourg. Joan was so popular and such a valuable symbol to the pro-Charles

side that the English and Burgundians knew killing her immediately would cause an outrage and create a martyr. Instead, they enlisted the church to discredit her first.

After two escape attempts, including a leap from sixty-foot tower, Joan came to trial under Bishop Pierre Cauchon for suspected heresy and witchcraft. Cauchon, who continually tried to make her admit that she had invented the voices, found her guilty of heresy. Before being handed over to secular authorities, Joan signed an abjuration admitting that her previous statements had been lies. But after a few days, she said she hadn't meant the abjuration, and she was sentenced to burn at the stake. Only nineteen, Joan was burned on May 30, 1431.

Twenty five years later, the Roman Catholic Church recognized her potential of miracles and later in 1920 it declared her as the Saint.

Characters of the Play – Saint Joan

Joan of Arc: often referred to as The Maid Joan is, of course, the central character of the play. Based upon the historical character, Shaw presents her as a simple country girl who is uneducated but not unintelligent. For the public, Joan, according to Shaw's Preface, offers her brilliant ideas in terms of voices from heaven which speak to her. Early in the play, she establishes her superiority in terms of military tactics and strategy, always knowing where to place the cannons and other artillery. Until her capture, she proves that her military strategy is flawless. Throughout the play, in all sorts of situations, Joan's basic honesty and her innocence shine through all of the hypocrisy of the others, and when her judges use complicated ecclesiastical terms to trap her, her basic common sense makes them look stupid. She is, however, inexperienced in the ways of the medieval society and ignorant of the jealousies of the feudal system. Her belief in the rightness of her own conscience and her refusal to yield to the authority of the Church have caused Shaw and others to refer to her as the first Protestant to be martyred by the Catholic Church.

Robert de Baudricourt A gentlemanly squire from Joan's district, Lorraine; he is the first person of position or rank to back The Maid's plans. Through him, Joan is able to obtain her first armor and her first chance to show her military skills.

Bertrand de Poulengy (Polly) One of Joan's first converts, he aids Joan in getting an audience with Robert de Baudricourt, and he later rides with her in the Battle of Orleans.

The Archbishop of Rheims The churchman who, at first, sees Joan as a pious and innocent girl, one who is in close service with God. As Joan proves to be constantly right, however, and, later, when Joan is responsible for crowning the Dauphin king, the Archbishop becomes disheartened with The Maid and, ultimately, sides against her.

Monseigneur de la Trémouille The Lord Chamberlain in the court of the Dauphin and also the "commander-in-chief" of the French forces. He has been accustomed to bullying the Dauphin, and, therefore, he deeply resents Joan when she is given command of the French forces.

Gilles de Rais (Bluebeard) A captain in the army and a devoted follower of The Maid even though he is not a religious person.

The Dauphin Later to be crowned Charles VII in the Rheims cathedral, the Dauphin is portrayed as weak, sniveling, and unconcerned about matters of the court or of the country. He is forced by The Maid to become more manly and to assume an authority that he does not want.

Dunois (The Bastard) The young, popular, and efficient leader of the French forces who recognizes Joan's military genius but in the final battle is not convinced that she should be saved.

The Earl of Warwick The English earl in charge of the English forces and Joan's most bitter and avid secular opponent. He sees Joan's simple opinions that the people should give their allegiance directly to the king as being a threat to the loyalty that the feudal lords demand from their serfs. He demands Joan's death as a way of retaining the status quo of the feudal system.

John de Stogumber The Earl of Warwick's chaplain. At first, he is seen as a vicious and ferocious accuser of Joan's. He sees her in the most simplistic terms as a witch who should be burned without delay. He does not understand either the most complicated or the most subtle arguments concerning Joan's threat to the Church and to the aristocracy. However, the most dramatic change of the entire drama occurs in the person of de Stogumber; after he has witnessed the burning of The Maid, he becomes a weak, broken man who spends the rest of his life trying to do good deeds for others in order to alleviate his guilt for his vicious attacks against The Maid.

Peter Cauchon The academic theologian who represents the "considered wisdom of the Church." For him, Joan represents a direct threat to the historical power invested in the Church, and he is proud that he has never asserted his own individuality and has always yielded to the opinion of the Church. For Joan to assert her own private conscience, to rely upon her own judgments, and to commune directly with God without the intervention of the Church is, to Cauchon, heresy in its highest form.

The Inquisitor Physically, the Inquisitor should look like a kindly and sweet elderly gentleman. However, he represents the institutions of the Church in their most iron-clad disciplines. He believes strongly in the rightness of these institutions and in the collected wisdom of the Church. The individual conscience must be subjected to the authority of the Church, not just in this particular instance but throughout all time. His long rambling speech on heresy shows him to be a defender of these institutions and one who rejects any type of individualism.

Brother Martin Ladvenu A sympathetic young priest who wants to save Joan's life and who is seemingly deeply concerned about Joan's inability to intellectually distinguish or understand the charges made against her. He feels her only sin is her ignorance, but once she is sentenced, he declares her imprisonment to be just. However, he holds up the cross for Joan to see while she is on her funeral stake, and he is instrumental in Joan's rehabilitation.

The Executioner He represents the horrors of the stake. His other importance is that he reports that The Maid's heart would not burn.

An English Soldier: He is the common soldier who makes a cross out of two sticks and gives it to Joan. For this deed, he receives one day a year out of Hell.

Plot / Summary of the play - Saint Joan

In scene 1, in 1429, Robert de Baudricourt, on the River Meuse in France meets Joan of Arc for the first time and sees her extraordinary personality, complete with candidly announced dream visions and messages from saints Catherine, Margaret, and Blessed Michael, who tell her to lead the French army to victory at Orleans. To get the job, she wants an audience with the Dauphin.

In scene 2, March 8, 1429, Joan is in Chinon in Touraine, where she asks the Dauphin to let her lead the French army. She must first go through the rough scrutiny of La Trémouille, the archbishop, Monsieur de Rais (Bluebeard), and Captain La Hire, who has stopped swearing along with the soldiers in the presence of Joan. In reality, the trial for heresy of Joan begins here. The archbishop's views represent the medieval Roman Catholic Church. "She is not a saint. . . . She does not wear women's clothes." Joan arrives late to meet the Dauphin and other members of the court, who are in disguise to test her. Joan instantly, and with casual humor, picks out the Dauphin.

Ominously, the archbishop says to Joan, "You are in love with religion." Joan asks, "Is there any harm in it?" The archbishop replies, "There is no harm in it, my child. But there is danger." Subsequently, Joan begins to prepare the Dauphin for the military leadership he has to assume and the kingship he will have to receive at Rheims. The scene ends with Charles giving immediate command of the army to Joan.

Scene 3, April 29, 1429, describes the signal victory of the French at Orleans under Joan's command. A short scene, it repeats the story of the charmed change of the wind on the River Loire, filling the sails of the French rafts of soldiers to drive them upriver to overrun the English position. The wind is seen by the troops as a miracle. Following Orleans are French victories at Jargeau, Meung, Beaugency, and Patny.

Scene 4 dramatizes the English side, represented by Richard de Beauchamp, earl of Warwick. The earl converses with the French bishop Cauchon on the political versus the theological merits of the case against Joan that the English, French, and Roman church will conspire to bring.

Scene 5 takes place after the coronation of Charles as king of France in Rheims. Joan and Dunois discuss Joan's cool reception from both secular and church authorities in spite of her spectacular military success for France. The archbishop and Dunois advise against the plan to take Paris. However, Joan takes the army to Paris and is defeated.

Scene 6, May 30, 1431, depicts the arrest and condemnation of Joan to death. First Joan recants her heretical view that her visions are more authoritative to her than the Church, and the Church sentences her to life in prison in solitary confinement. She subsequently retracts her recantation, which is viewed as a relapse into heresy, and is burned at the stake. Shaw's preface to the play states he believed all parties, English, French, and Roman, were sincere in their intentions. Their casuistry was submerged in their sincerity.

The epilogue, a dream of King Charles VII, allows Joan to return alive to the stage, thus complicating the audience's experience of the play as a tragedy. It also locates the play in history by jumping ahead to June, 1456, when the Roman Catholic Church pardoned Joan. A male character from the 1920's appears to report that the Church has canonized Joan.

Theme of G.B. Shaw's *Saint Joan*

Saint Joan is a play by George Bernard Shaw. First staged in 1923, it is a dramatization of the life of 15th-century French military icon and religious martyr Joan of Arc, based on the historical records of her trial in 1431. The published version of the play included a lengthy preface by the author. Shaw was inspired in writing the play by the Catholic church's 1920 decision to canonize (to declare as a Saint) Joan of Arc. *Saint Joan* has since become one of Shaw's most popular plays.

In the beginning of the play, Joan, a teenage country girl, shows up at the castle of Vaucouleurs. She's determined to kick the English out of France and to crown the Dauphin, Charles, as King. Joan has heard voices from God telling her that this is her destiny. Through sheer confidence and natural charisma, she manages to sway the skeptical Captain Robert de Baudricourt. He therefore gives her soldier's clothes, armour, and other supplies to assist in getting to the Dauphin.

Upon arriving at Charles's court, Joan wins over most everybody. First, she's able to pick Charles out of a crowd, which some view as a miracle. Her humility and reverence for the Church get the Archbishop on her side. Then of course, there's the Dauphin himself. It takes a little doing, but she convinces him to stop messing around and stand up for France and himself. Charles grants her control of the army.

She's then off to Orleans, a town under siege by the English. Joan meets Dunois, the leader of the French troops at Orleans. He has been waiting for a while for the wind to change. It's the only way he can sail his soldiers up the river and launch a sneak attack on the English. When the wind switches directions upon Joan's arrival, Dunois is convinced that Joan has been sent by God. They march off together, to liberate Orleans from the British.

Meanwhile, Joan's enemies are plotting against her. The Earl of Warwick and the Chaplain de Stogumber, both Englishmen, meet with Peter Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais. Warwick wants Cauchon to try Joan for heresy. The angry little Chaplain just wants her to die and die painfully. Cauchon agrees to try Joan, but refuses to be a political tool of the English. He says that he will do his best to save her soul.

Joan and company have been busy little bees. They've liberated Orleans, won a bunch of other battles, and have just crowned Charles as King in Rheims Cathedral. Joan, however, is unsatisfied. A good chunk of the country, including Paris, is still not under French control. She urges Charles, the Archbishop, and Dunois to press on and liberate the capital city. When they refuse she says she'll just do it without them. They tell her that, if she gets captured, they'll do nothing to help her escape.

Joan gets captured and put on trial for heresy. Sure enough, her "friends" do nothing to rescue her. The Bishop Cauchon does everything he can to try and save her. He's helped in this effort by the Inquisitor. It proves to be impossible, though, because Joan's personal beliefs just don't jibe with the Church's. She thinks God's messengers speak to her directly. They think God's voice on Earth is the Church and the Church alone, meaning the voices she hears must be demons. They also just can't handle with her wearing men's clothes. She absolutely refuses to dress like a woman as long as she's a soldier. In the end, they're forced to condemn her to death.

Twenty-five years later King Charles has a dream, in which Joan and good number of the other

characters show up to have a chat in his royal bedroom. We learn the fate of everybody and, more importantly, we learn of Joan's legacy. King Charles now rules all of France. He sets up a hearing to have her name cleared. We also learn from a time-traveling cleric that, many years afterward, Joan was made a saint by the Catholic Church. Everybody tells Joan how awesome she is and how they're sorry that they sold her out. Joan says, great, now can I come back to Earth as living person again? No way, says everybody and they all make excuses to exit the dream.

At the end of the play, Joan is left alone in a pool of light. She asks God when the world will be ready to accept saints like her.

Thus, in the female protagonist of *Saint Joan*, G. B. Shaw has created his most lasting embodiment of the Life Force, a figure who is superior in character and vision. The dramatist did more than just to dramatize historical record in this masterpiece. His telling of Joan's story in this play marks the glory and catastrophe of human progress: our need for visionaries and our resistance to them, our insistence on and despair of change. Joan was probably 17 when, in 1429, she went in pursuit of French victory in the Lancastrian phase of the Hundred Years' War. Instructed by the voices of saints to drive the English out of France and to crown the Dauphin at Reims, this remarkable girl urged support from a magistrate, made her way to the French Court, and from there to the besieged Orléans. Her entrance into the fray raised the siege and with it the hopes of prince and country. Joan's progress aroused suspicion, faith, and terror, in variegated sequence.

In the character of Joan, Shaw locates genius and imagination. Shaw makes Joan's imagination a playing field for truth and conscience. It is through imagination that "the messages of God come to us." For his part, Shaw seems less invested in divine voices than he is in Joan's own. Her appeals and assertions are impressive. Her enemies, too, find her compelling.

Shaw would challenge the word 'enemies' as it applies to Joan's judges. He insists that there are no villains in the work. That part of Joan's tragedy is that honest judges confronted her at trial. Their crimes lay in the ideas they defended and in which they believed. Shaw ennobles these men, and has them speak hard truths.

Saint Joan is also considered Shaw's most Shakespearean play, due to his announcement of a 'chronicle' in the title, and mostly for the play's overlays of genre: history and tragedy infused with comic impulse throughout. Shaw's consideration of Joan, however, is markedly different from Shakespeare's. In spite of her devout Catholicism, Shaw identifies her as an early Protestant martyr because she proclaimed the legitimacy and value of her direct communications with God. Joan challenged religious and secular authority. She put her conscience against the judgment of Church and State.

It is our consciences that we recognize at the play's close. His *Epilogue*, presses us to look into the future of humankind's relationship with Joan, and, by extension, with all its saints and upstarts. Twenty-five years after the play's action, Joan's willingness to serve her God and people remains constant. Other characters' ambitions in the play are more narrowly defined. The *Epilogue* treats us by turns to comedic irony and wit, albeit with the worry that dreams offer saints occasions to call us to reckoning.

=== x ===

References

<https://www.enotes.com/topics/saint-joan>

<https://www.folger.edu/events/saint-joan/dramaturgs-notes>

<https://www.sparknotes.com/biography/joanofarc/summary/>

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/s/st-joan/character-list>

<https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/Saint-Joan/>

www.dr-prafull.ga