

La Pucelle

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“La Pucelle” or “the maid” Jeanne d’Arc or, as Anglicized, Joan of Arc, is the most loved of all famous French persons, more loved than Napoleon, Charles de Gaul, Bernadette, or Madame Curie. There are statues and portraits of Joan throughout France, and there is a museum in Orleans dedicated to her life, which spanned all of nineteen years. She was truly a remarkable person. Her story is a saga of improbability, courage, treachery, and redemption, all six hundred years ago.

In the United States, there are churches, schools, and hospitals named in her honor. Once, there was a brand of kidney beans named Joan of Arc. There have been many books including one by Mark Twain (who once visited this club), plays, movies, oratorios, and other celebrations of her life. One movie, a 1916 production by Cecil B. DeMille entitled *Joan the Woman* strays markedly from reality and even introduces a love interest via a handsome Englishman, Eric of Trent, but Joan’s only real loves were for family, the church, and France. The movie also shows her accusers at trial wearing Ku Klux Klan style hoods. (Remember, this was 1916!) A 1948 movie introduced American audiences to the Swedish beauty Ingrid Bergman, but she was too lovely to portray a seventeen-year old illiterate country girl. While the Cincinnati Art Museum has no images of Joan, the Taft does have a porcelain tea set. Joan’s appearance differs greatly amongst the various renditions; she is both blonde and brunette, shown riding a white horse and sometimes a black one, both tall and short. Since her actual appearance remains a mystery, any depiction of her is simply a matter of artistic interpretation.

Joan is not without her detractors. Chief among them was William Shakespeare, who in part one of *Henry VI*, a century and a half after her death, has characters call her a harlot and claim she was impregnated by one or more suitors. The impetus for these dastardly claims is that all Englishmen were embarrassed by Joan's victories over their countrymen in the latter stages of the Hundred Years War. They simply could not imagine that any French force could defeat an English army in the field and thus determined that it could only have been the result of some form of sorcery, that Joan must be a witch, which was one of the charges against her during the infamous trial that led to her death. Other dissenting views would argue that the English forces in France were tiring of war after a century of conquests, increasingly lengthy supply lines, and instability at home from rising tensions between the houses of Lancaster and York, tensions that would later lead to the War of the Roses and which tore England apart in the days following the Hundred Years War. (A Literary Club diversion, there once was an Interstate baseball league with teams in York and Lancaster, PA who were called the Red and White Roses. Our own Tuck Asbury played in that league before becoming a noted Ophthalmologist.)

Will Durant, in his expansive series on the *History of Civilization*, mentions Joan only once in the volume on "The Age of Faith", and he does so only as a subject of inquiry by faculty at the University of Paris. Thomas Bokenkater, Cincinnati priest, offers Joan as a mere footnote in his book, *Concise History of the Catholic Church*- concise, six hundred pages. Still, Joan lives on beautifully and significantly in French history.

As with any heroic figure, much fiction has sprung up over the years that cloud the facts. In this paper, I shall attempt to cut through the fiction and offer some views to clarify her extraordinary life.

First, I will share a memory of having attended a performance of the play, *Saint Joan*, at the old Cox Theater on Seventh Street during my undergraduate years at the University of Cincinnati in about 1954. I was drawn there by some early interest in the subject and the desire to see a play by George Bernard Shaw. (Later he would drop the first name, “George”.) He wrote *Saint Joan* at the height of his prodigious powers in 1923 and retained some notoriety in the late 1930’s for his supposed sympathies for the USSR and German National Socialism. Whether or not those charges are accurate, there was a steep decline in the productions of his plays. Shaw was one of a series of Irish born notables who left the island to pursue opportunities in more inviting circumstances. The list includes Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, Bono of U2, our own Doctor Robert Smith, and my great-grandfather. Shaw’s current popularity is enhanced by the Shaw Festival, a summer-long series of plays, held at Niagara on the Lake in Canada, a beautiful little town that Anne and I once visited to enjoy several plays.

My recollections of that night in the Cox Theater include how dark and gloomy it was, the sparse attendance, and some of depictions of the characters. The Cox was back-to-back with the Schubert Theater and presumably shared some services. In any case, they are both gone now, replaced by an office building. Regarding the portrayal of characters, Joan was heroic and witty; she called the English the “Goddams”, the dauphin “Charlie”, and the Duke of Orleans “the Bastard”. She displayed remarkable wisdom for a teenager. The dauphin was a weak, sniveling figure under the influence of his willful mother, and the court was most interested in its own self-preservation. In fact, the dauphin became King Charles VII under the influence of Joan, and, after some truces, skilled leaders such as the Duke of Orleans continued driving the English from French soil after her death, and he eventually became Charles the Victorious. The play, despite being good theater, adds to the distortions regarding Joan’s life and death. Shaw was awarded the

Nobel Prize for Literature the next year but refused the monetary stipend. Caroline Cox founded the Cox Theater in 1920 as a memorial to her late husband, George B. Cox, a one-time political boss of Cincinnati.

While much about Joan remains a matter of speculation, there are some definite probabilities. Joan's life began in 1412 as Jeanette d'Arc in the village of Domremy in the Duchy of Bar in Lorraine, a largely autonomous district in Eastern France along the River Meuse. She was the oldest of five children born to Jacque d'Arc and Isabelle Romee. Jacque was a working farmer, small landowner, or village headman, or perhaps all three, with added responsibilities for the upkeep of a nearby deteriorating castle in which residents took refuge during raids by various bands of marauders. The family of seven lived in a basic dwelling with a dirt floor, thatched roof, and minimal comforts. Some animals came indoors in cold weather, and the family drank cider, weak wine and unpasteurized milk, which some authors claimed were the cause of Joan's deranged mental state and visions. This was eighty years after the Black Death had ravaged much of Europe, and families were relatively large as human fecundity sought to restore the population. By most measures, Joan enjoyed a happy childhood. She was devoted to her parents, learned the expected skills of spinning and weaving, helped her father in the gardens and orchards, received the sacraments, and said her prayers regularly. She had a large sheep dog that accompanied her when she helped with her father's flock or roamed the domain. There was minimal schooling available at the time, and Joan remained illiterate throughout her brief life. After chores, the children sometimes danced around a fairy tree in the meadow, but rarely ventured into the nearby forest because it was said to contain dragons, as well as wolves and wild boars. They believed in the devil and in taking all precautions to save their souls, because life

was relatively short, and they must constantly be ready to face the unknown. Her dancing and beliefs in fairies and dragons would later be used against her during her trial as devil worship.

(Historical note: This area where Joan grew up saw some of the most bitter fighting in World War I involving the American Expeditionary Force in the Meuse Argonne offensive. My father served in the AEF- not sure if he was in the Meuse Argonne.)

When Joan was entering adolescence, strange things began to happen. She heard voices and believed that she saw spectral images of Michael the Archangel and Saints Catherine and Margaret. Puzzled by these visions and voices, she kept them to herself. As the messages became more strident, Joan actually became fearful, because their instructions were to leave home, take up arms, lead France to rid her country of the English, and to see the dauphin, the French prince, crowned in Rheims as Charles VII. This was pretty heady stuff for a teenage girl. When Jacques d' Arc noticed changes in her behavior, he was understandably disturbed. The expectations for young girls were to be married by age seventeen and begin having families, with the only viable alternative being to enter a religious order. Joan, however, wished for neither of these paths and began instead to prepare for carrying out the instructions from her voices and visions. At this point, Jacques was alarmed and told her brothers that if she did not begin to mend her ways that they should throw her into the Meuse.

Let's talk about hearing voices. Obviously, Joan's detractors have historically been skeptical of this, but the Bible is full of prophets talking to God; Abraham and Moses, for example, and many revelations are attested to messages from God. Joan did not claim to talk directly to God. Her natural modesty would forbid such, so instead she conversed with Michael, Catherine, and Margaret, the latter perhaps because she was one of the patron saints of Scotland,

and the Scots had aided the French in their wars with England. Later, she did indeed invoke God as her guidance. She, and many of her countrymen, saw France's ill fortune as punishment for the nation's inadequate religious practices, particularly amongst the nobility.

What was the historical climate in which Joan was moving through adolescence? England and France had been at war off and on for nearly a century, thus the name "The Hundred Years War". It had begun in 1337 when Edward the II of England claimed the French throne while both France and England were vying for trade deals with Flanders and other countries. Between various truces, the English managed to occupy large chunks of northern and southwestern France and laid waste to much of these territories. With the aid of their later allies, the Burgundians, they even managed to occupy Paris in 1418. Internal strife in France led to the diminishment of the French King, Charles VI, the dauphin's father. His bouts of insanity allowed France to devolve into fiefdoms along ducal lines. French Armagnacs stayed loyal to the king, but the Duke of Burgundy (the King's nephew) had become quite strong and allied his forces with England. Most battles in the Hundred Years War were lost by the French, the most famous being at Agincourt in 1415, a battle celebrated by Shakespeare in *Henry V*, and remembered in the passage of "we band of brothers". The flip side of glamorizing such battles is that it downplays the awful toll taken in military and civilian lives. After Agincourt, the English slaughtered a thousand captured French soldiers, and hundreds on both sides soon died of dysentery from contaminated food and water. (King Henry himself would succumb to the disease a few years later in Paris.)

This was all pre-Reformation, and both England and France were Catholic countries. Soldiers of both sides wore crosses on their armor. Supposedly, Henry even attended mass before attacking the French. Thus, agnostics claim that Christians have been killing each other for

centuries. Joan was three years old when Agincourt took place, but surely she would have eventually learned of it, making it an impetus for her future heroics.

Regarding the Reformation, Martin Luther's fame was a century away, but the stirrings were emerging. John Wickliffe in England was challenging Papal authority, and Jan Huss, an ordained priest in Bohemia, had gathered a large following and sought changes to church authority. After a decade of open warfare, Huss was captured in 1415 and burned at the stake, but his followers carried on. Joan later heard of this, and some reports indicate that she approved of his execution since she was a faithful Christian. After victories in France, she offered to go to Bohemia, but fate intervened. The church was quite concerned with heresy, seeing it as a challenge to its authority, and charged the Church Militant with carrying out its mission of suppressing heretics. The office of Inquisition was reinforced. Fire had long been seen as a means of purification. As such, burning people at the stake (though a really gruesome practice) was seen as the ideal method of driving out demons and sanctifying an individual's soul.

So, much of France was in turmoil by the time Joan was called by her voices at age sixteen or seventeen to save the country. Though her father was not supportive of her mission, an uncle agreed to take her to Vaucouleurs to see the district representative of the French government, shaky as it was. This is where Shaw's play, *Saint Joan*, begins, and it is quite enjoyable writing. The district knight, Robert de Baudricourt, is complaining to his steward about the lack of eggs for breakfast. The steward fearfully explains that the hens have stopped laying and blames the problem on the young girl who came from Domremy with wishes to see Robert. He scoffs that the girl should be sent back to her father for a good hiding. In the meantime, Joan became something of a local celebrity as her visions became known and her piety recognized. Upon finally meeting Robert, she breaks through his rancor by announcing

another French defeat at Rouvray, when such news would not have normally reached Vaucouleurs for days. After confirming the news, Robert agrees to provide two aging knights to accompany Joan to Chinon to visit the dauphin. He finds himself both impressed by her persistence and also annoyed, and as he wishes to get rid of the pesky girl. The hens begin laying again. Joan bobs her hair and dons boys' clothing. One of the knights reminds Joan of the prophecy that a maid from Lorraine will save France. To add motivation to her mission, a Burgundian raid occurs and causes damage to her family's home in Domremy. After meeting with Robert de Baudricourt, Joan never again saw Domremy.

Joan, the two aging knights, and two pages set out for Chinon 250 miles westward, near the Loire River where the dauphin, son of Charles VI, was holding together his shaky court. The trip was through English held territory, and the small group traveled mostly by night. This was Joan's first time on horseback and the time that she began wearing male attire as both a practical measure for horse riding and a means to conceal her identity as a young woman. Later, this male dress will be an issue at her trial. Mark Twain depicted this journey as being full of peril and punctuated by clashes with brigands. This probably was an exaggeration.

In any case, Robert was able to get news to the dauphin that this strange young woman was on her way. Once in Chinon, Joan and her small troop were made to wait for several days while the dauphin's advisors pushed and pulled him in various directions. The advisors were a motley group of churchmen, nobles, wives, and hangers-on, all with conflicting opinions in the face of impending doom for France. By this time, the English had surrounded Orleans and were building six bastilles or siege towers around the walled city in preparation for starving out the inhabitants. The importance of Orleans, seventy-five miles south of Paris, was that it was the last barrier to England's full defeat of France. Joan knew of this and fretted about the delays in the

dauphin's decision-making. As well as the siege towers, the English had seized the bridge linking Orleans to the southern suburbs, including the Tourelles, formidable towers on the bridge. The fate of Orleans looked bleak.

Many in the dauphin's court were suspicious of the prince's heritage, sanity, and ability to lead. Some urged abdication. When Joan was finally admitted to meet him, the court had created a ruse to confuse her by setting an imposter on the throne. Joan saw through this and identified the dauphin, dressed down as a commoner and enveloped by the crowd. She knelt before him and explained her mission. He was impressed but still not persuaded, and his advisors remained dead-set against this impetuous teenage girl.

A compromise was reached to send her thirty miles south to Poitiers to be examined by the learned faculty at the university there. Poitiers was famous for Charles Martel's victory over the Moors near there in 732. It had also been captured by the English under Edward (the Black Prince) early in the Hundred Years War and then was abandoned by the English for being too difficult to maintain. The university there had continued, and the town was moderately prosperous. Joan and her small band traveled there, a two-day journey, and the faculty examined her during the day and by the ladies of the town by evening. Imagine those scenes- a young girl, all of five feet tall and illiterate, being in a room with skeptical, mature adults analyzing her every utterance. They were amazed at her piety, her devotion to France, and her mission to save the country. She passed their examination.

She returned to Chinon, met with the dauphin, and explained that her voices had said that relieving the siege of Orleans would be a sign of the divine nature of her mission. Against the adamant advice of his court, he gave Joan command of his army. As radical as this was, his

motivations must have been multi-faceted. Everything was going so badly he really didn't have much to lose. She would most likely be killed and, as such, he would be free of her pestering. He was also reportedly making plans to sue for peace with the English and, most likely, to run off to Switzerland. Also, Joan told the dauphin of her plans to have him crowned at Rheims when no one else had ventured such a thought; he figured she might just pull this off. His generals, led by Jacques "the Bastard" Dunois, were none too enthusiastic about having a teenage girl for a commander, but she boldly donned white armor, took up a sword and lance and white banner decorated with images of Jesus, Maria and many fleur de lis. She met the army leaders, and demanded obedience, which included daily mass, regular confession, and the banishment of prostitutes from the camp. They marshaled supplies at the town of Blois and marched toward Orleans.

There are a few things worth noting about medieval armies. The feudal system prevailed, whereby dukes and vassals held land grants from a king, and, in return, provided knights, soldiers, and pike men when needed. Knights maintained their battle-readiness through tournaments and games, soldiers received various sorts of training, and pike men were serfs pressed into service. It was a highly variable system, and the English had had the most success. Their archers had become skilled by the mere necessity of putting food on the table. Pay of all troops was spotty and many joined bands of marauders looting the countryside. It was an awful situation of bad food, open latrines, and, as Jacques d'Arc warned, not a place for his daughter, but she endured.

While en route to Orleans, her generals tried to trick her by directing her to the wrong side of the Loire. Joan found out and reminded everyone that she had been given command by the dauphin and that she fully intended to lift the siege of Orleans. The city is on the north side

of the Loire River, and the English, with their large timber forts on both sides of the river, essentially controlled the city and were slowly starving the inhabitants. Joan ingeniously discovered a gap in the English lines on the north side during a thunderstorm and brought provisions to the city. Her fame preceded her, and her grand parade the next day, with supplies, erupted in a tumultuous welcome, a scene that has been captured in numerous paintings. Her skeptical generals, who at first had excluded her from war councils, were beginning to believe that this slip of a girl had special powers. She had achieved her first objective without losing a soldier, and the legend of the Maid of Orleans was established. A few days later, another supply train arrived and entered the city without English interference. They were clearly spooked by La Pucelle.

There remained, however, the issues of attacking the formidable siege towers on both sides of the river and the Tourelles that were manned by elite English troops. Based on past experience, the French leaders would not have had the courage to attack, but Jacques Dunois (without Joan's assistance) approached one of the north towers and was engaged in fierce combat by the time Joan was roused and rallied the forces to victory. It was her first time witnessing an actual scene of bloody corpses, and she wept for the casualties on both sides of the conflict who had not had confession before their deaths. When it came time to take the Tourelles, the wind was blowing the current in the wrong direction for a river crossing. Joan's powers presumably shifted the wind, boats were launched across the Loire, and attacks on the turrets could begin, which were led by Joan, who was first up the ladder. Her tactics were simple; go boldly and trust in God. The English thwarted the initial efforts, and Joan found herself back on the ground, with an arrow lodged in a gap in her armor. She was carried from the field crying like a seventeen-year old, and the French troops began to withdraw. But Joan, with magnificent fortitude, pulled

the arrow from her body and brazenly led the troops back against the English. The French soldiers were so impressed by her bravery that they rallied and defeated the English for the second French victory in days. Several English noblemen were killed in the fight, and the remainder withdrew. Joan entered the city once again to a riotous response.

After a couple days of recuperation, the French army (now fully believing in this remarkable girl and her amazing military prowess) scored several more victories over the English with the astute use of artillery, and cleared them out of the Loire Valley. The crowning glory was the battle of Patay, at which the French cavalry crushed the vaunted archers. The English then fled as fast as their feet would carry them from the maid in white armor, carrying her fleur de lis banner. They were now convinced that Joan was an invincible witch, even though she disdained the idea of killing, would sometimes spare her enemies, and forbade fighting on Sundays and holy feast days like the Ascension.

Joan returned to Chinon in triumph and persuaded the dauphin to accompany her to Rheims, now out of English control, for his crowning as Charles VII. Rheims was the traditional setting for French coronations since 816, and the act of coronation was a solemn religious ceremony, now in the cathedral built in the 1200's, linking the king to the grace of God and to predecessors of the French throne, such as Saint Louis. Charles, still somewhat dazzled by the rapid turn of events and wary of Joan's increasing popularity, asked her what she wished for in exchange for her victories, and she responded simply that she desired her home town of Domremy to be free of taxes.

On the way to Rheims, many towns had pushed the English out and hailed La Pucelle as the savior of France. At the conclusion of the triumphant procession through the city of Rheims,

Joan announced that she would return to Domremy and a domestic life there. Charles, now knowing the value of her presence, urged her to stay on. She agreed, on the condition that the army would continue pushing the English out of France. The king, however, had other ideas, including a truce with the Burgundians. He had no stomach for continued warfare, and, as the newly crowned monarch, overruled his daring Pucelle. Thus, it was a time for Joan to cool her heels. Joan dictated letters to her parents and to English nobles, urging them to leave France or suffer the consequences, as the English and the Burgundians used the pause to fortify Paris.

In time, the truce was not a success, and Lord Bedford, with an English army, lurked near Paris. Eventually, Charles gave Joan permission to take the French army to the field. Bedford, still wary of her, retreated to English-held Normandy.

The French, under Joan, attacked Paris, but the English and Burgundian garrison repelled the attack, and, once again, Joan was wounded but ambulatory. Now wearing a cape, Joan went to the aid of Compiègne, which was besieged by Burgundians, and was captured, literally being pulled off her horse by her cape. Knowing the value of their prize, they carried her to their prison at Beaufort castle in eastern France and notified the English of their good fortune. Thus, Joan's military career was over. In just over one year, she had engaged in a dozen battles or major skirmishes and had won ten. She predicted living only one more year.

Then began six months of haggling about Joan's value. She tried to escape by jumping sixty feet from a prison window into a moat. Miraculously unhurt, Joan was recaptured and placed in more confining circumstances in Arras. The English finally agreed to the Burgundians' price, and she was transferred to Rouen, the English capital in Normandy. The price of the transfer is speculated on in several sources as being ten thousand livres (French gold coins), but

it is officially unknown. What is known was that the discussion went all the way to London, and the English authorities mentioned at trial that they had paid dearly for this witch. The English thought that since the Burgundians were their allies, the transfer should be automatic. The shrewd Burgundians were looking out for themselves. In fact, they took moderately good care of Joan, knowing her monetary value. In Shaw's play the amount is stated as sixteen thousand pounds, and Joan says she is not worth that much.

Joan had become stupendously popular among the ordinary French. They saw her as a mythological sort of figure sent from heaven to improve their lot in life. Her fame, in fact, caused her to dictate several letters, including one offering to go to Bohemia to battle the Hussites. The nobility and clergy, however, were beginning to have doubts. France was still a feudal society; significant landowners with the proper pedigrees and links to royalty were at the top, and learned clergymen were ranked in the middle along with superior artisan types. The great age of cathedral building was largely over in France, but skilled artisans were still largely admired for their craft. Some merchants had become wealthy and loaned money to the spendthrift nobility. But the vast majority of people were lower class, and Joan was one of these commoners. Members of royalty, even though Charles' own birthright was suspect, were suspicious of Joan and her voices. After her failure in the assault in Paris, those doubts grew. Her own actions did not help matters. The Archbishop of Rheims pointed out following Charles' coronation that Joan was exhibiting aspects of pride, one of the seven deadly sins. (The other six, incidentally, are gluttony, covetousness, lust, envy, and sloth, none of which were evident in Joan, except perhaps some battle lust toward the Goddams.)

There is the question of why Charles did not try to rescue Joan in either Burgundy or later in Rouen. Some sources say that his generals did attempt to do so, but, in fact, there is no clear

evidence of such an effort. Charles was now faced with the problem of holding his army together. Most soldiers had not been paid, and many were drifting away into the countryside to forage or join bands of brigands or simply go home. Joan had inspired them, but now she was gone. The most probable scenario was that Charles was glad to be rid of her after her capture, as she was a constant reminder of his own inadequacies. Her valor, competence, and bravado outshone his capabilities. The English had been pushed out of critical areas thanks to her efforts, and, in time, he would get his act together and, with skilled generals, drive them out of the rest of France (except Calais). Also, as mentioned earlier, political problems at home were dividing English attention and weakening their resolve, and they were gradually diverting their resources back home across the channel.

The clergy had become concerned with Joan's popularity with the masses and her stealing loyalty from them. Many willingly embraced her downfall. They were suspicious of her voices and her tendency to obey their instructions rather than the church's guidance.

Thus, the stage was set for the great trial at Rouen. The English brought their prize from Burgundy and imprisoned her in the castle, under the guard of rough soldiers. The bishop of Beauvois, Pierre Cauchon, an English sympathizer, was chosen to lead the examination. He was answerable to the English Cardinal Winchester. Pierre assembled sixty churchmen known to support his cause. The charges were witchcraft and heresy, with the English pursuing the former count and the church pursuing the latter. The trial continued for three months (after three months of captivity) as charges were mounted against the girl, who was now nineteen years old. Joan was denied independent legal council, but she represented herself well, maintaining that her voices were from saints, not the church, and that those voices were superior to any earthly doctrine. Essentially, she was challenging the church's authority, angering Cauchon and most of

the court. However, her piety and calm manner did manage to impress several of the attendants. Indeed, how did this uneducated country girl manage to stand up to her inquisitors? Very well, in fact! In spite of atrocious conditions, no bathing or sanitary facilities, poor food, and no privacy, Joan continued to confound her inquisitors.

The faculty at the University of Paris (still in English hands) drew up twelve charges against her, including disobedience towards church authority and the wearing of male attire. A great deal was made of this latter point, with those against her saying such behavior was an abomination before God. Joan calmly explained that it was a practical necessity in her warrior days and now to protect herself from the English guards. At one point, she was placed in an iron cage. At another point, she was given a piece of spoiled fish, which nearly poisoned her and outraged the English; they wanted her to survive for burning. She was bled and survived and threatened with torture, which the English forbade, fearing it would be fatal. On Palm Sunday, Joan was denied communion. Her accusers, via secret peepholes, observed her in her dungeon.

A commonly held belief at the time was that the devil could not tempt virgins. So, to determine whether Joan was a maid, she suffered the indignity of examination by English ladies to confirm her physical purity and prove she was not under the influence of the devil. This was just one of the shameful acts heaped upon the girl. Finally, the predetermined sentence was reached for her guilt of heresy and witchcraft, as well as schism thrown in for good measure. The last charge had to do with the claimed efforts that she tried to destroy unity in the church. Though certainly Joan had no intent to do such a thing, the Church Militant was suspicious of any non-doctrinaire thinking. In fact, in the later stages of her trial, she stated the wish to appeal her case to the Pope in Rome, an appeal that was refused under Cauchon's argument that, "the Pope was too far away, and we are perfectly capable of handling this case."

A platform and pyre were assembled before the church of Ouen (a fine Gothic structure near the cathedral) for the purpose of executing Joan. A long-winded oration was delivered about the necessity of protecting the Church from those who would call on angels and saints for guidance rather than the Holy Mother Church. Pierre Cauchon gave Joan one last opportunity to reject her sins or face a death in the flames. He demanded that she abjure, and Joan asked the meaning of the term, which was to recount her sins. The alternative to death would be life imprisonment in a French castle. In a moment of panic, she agreed and placed her mark on a pre-prepared confession. Wanting to witness the burning, the English were outraged, as were most of the townspeople, who threw rocks at the assembled clergy. The maid was removed to prison as a riot was breaking out. Cauchon demanded that she wear female attire and when she refused, having been recently assaulted by an English nobleman, the bishop declared that she was not just a heretic, but also a lapsed heretic who must burn. Cauchon was clearly the heavy in this play, but he was caught between the demands of the English and his own conscience in carrying out what he saw as church law.

At this time, the English had been holding Rouen captive for twelve years, had made the city the capital of their French provinces, and most of the inhabitants had grown acclimated to English rule. It was also a typical medieval city with no sewers or waste disposal system, and it was filled with a citizenry that was poorly fed and clothed, rarely bathed, and never brushed their teeth. One is reminded of the passage in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* where Casca is describing Caesar's presentation to the masses in the Forum and nearly swooning when encountering so much stinking breath. The odors were quite similar in 1431 Rouen.

Personally, two of my sons and I visited modern-day Rouen last year. It is clean, active, and has many sidewalk cafes and pedestrian walkways. The great cathedral, frequently painted

by Monet, predates Joan, as does the Gothic church of Ouen a block away. The city thrives on Joan's legend. There is a handsome, modern church near the marketplace that is presumed to be Joan's final act. We were there on Ascension Thursday, and the cathedral bells were ringing gloriously, having been fully restored following wartime damage in 1944. We thought of Joan hearing those bells from prison, where she was denied sacraments.

If Joan's confessional signature had led to her long-term imprisonment in the care of French nuns, she would still have been a much-loved figure amongst most of the French. However, being burnt at the stake made her a martyr and her immortality was assured. But the whole episode of a signed confession had been merely a ruse by the clergy and the English to allow them to justify the carrying out of her death sentence; they never intended to grant her clemency or to let her leave their presence alive.

So, on May 30, 1431, a large pyre of wood, straw, and pitch was erected in the marketplace, flanked by platforms for viewing by the clergy and nobility. Joan was wheeled into the square through all the acrid smells, not looking or smelling very good herself. A year of captivity by the Burgundians and the English had taken its toll. She was pale, haggard, dirty, and weighed all of ninety pounds. Her once bobbed hair was long and straggly, but her dignity remained intact as she now accepted her fate. A sign was placed above her that read, "Heretic, relapser, apostate, idolater." The English executioner tied her atop the pyre; a friendly friar, Isambart, was allowed to accompany her and pray with her. The onlookers, clergy, and common folk grew apprehensive, some fearing that Saints Michael, Margaret, and Catherine might somehow save her, or perhaps even Charles himself.

The fire was lit. Joan urged Brother Martin Isambart away for his own safety as the straw, pitch, and wood were being consumed by flame. Some claim to have seen the word “Jesus” in the fire. Joan asked for a cross, and an English soldier broke a stick in two and gave it to her, an offering she embraced as the flames were devouring her. Another friar, Ladnenu, rushed to a church and brought a crucifix for her to witness. Joan asked for water, but none was given. She looked at Cauchon and said, “Bishop, I die through you.” Then, as her head sunk into her bosom, Joan shrieked, “Jesus!” and died. An English soldier swore he saw a white dove escape from her mouth when she expired. Several other hardened English soldiers were stunned and took refuge in a nearby tavern. Pierre Cauchon looked visibly bereft. The clergy sullenly dispersed. After letting the fire burn out, it was re-ignited by the executioner to destroy all the remains; he then scooped them up and threw them into the Seine to prohibit curious people from retrieving relics. He reported that Joan’s heart would not burn. The executioner then broke down and turned to a priest and asked forgiveness for burning a saint.

Joan’s martyrdom was complete, but her fame was only set to increase. Charles VII, who did not mount any effort to save her, was inspired to attack the English forces and did manage to push them out of most of France. He brought the Burgundians in line and went about restoring the French nation. In 1456, twenty-five years after the burning, he and Pope Callixtus III established a court of inquiry into Joan’s trial. They found that she was the victim of gross negligence and irregular procedures and should not have been declared guilty. To most ordinary people, these findings were satisfying but unnecessary. Already a beloved martyr, her trial was widely perceived as a rigged deal. Mark Twain wrote that Joan’s death shocked Jacque d’Arc fatally, but that her mother testified at the court of inquiry.

One would wonder, then, why it took so long to officially declare her sainthood (four hundred and sixty years in fact) when most French people already saw her as a saint. The church would not act so fast, because to many clergy Joan was still considered to be a lapsed heretic for having placed her celestial guidance above that of church doctrine. The French Revolution would interrupt proceedings, when all things connected to the monarchy were disdained. It wasn't until 1920 that Joan would be granted sainthood; right around the same time that Bernard Shaw was writing his play about her.

In our travels to France, my sons and I encountered numerous depictions of Joan. At a stop in Orleans, at the museum dedicated to her, we saw an animated chronicle of her life. While the French today are not particularly religious, they do love Jeanne d'Arc as their own saint. It is dubious to say whether or not latter day feminists embrace her. She was, after all, quite pious and admired by her male colleagues. She also wished to return one day to her village and the simple domestic life that was expected of her. And, in fact, her spirit did return there and throughout all of France.

In Normandy, in one roadside rest stop/restaurant, we encountered a mannequin dressed as a 1944 American paratrooper, seventy-three years after the invasion. Some French retain fondness for liberators who then go home.

Bernard Shaw wrote an epilogue to his play. He places it in 1456, after Joan is exonerated by Papal review. It is dreamlike and set in Charles' bedchambers. One by one the players in the trial appear to him. First to arrive is the monk, Ladnenu, who held the crucifix for Joan to witness as she burned. He also testified at the Papal review and assures Charles that his coronation was not the work of a heretic, which pleases the king. Joan then comes and calls him

“Charlie”, while assuring him that she really is dead and out of body. Then the men in the trial arrive to explain how it was all political. Finally, an English soldier appears and chastises the inquisitors and then departs for Hell with all her accusers.

So, what do we make of all this, particularly Shaw’s copious introduction to his play and the epilogue? Was Joan divinely inspired? Shaw dances gingerly around the topic, but finally determines that she was a country genius, with all the attributes and flaws of that class, with a brilliant imagination and ability to see things that the king, her generals, and her accusers could not see. She was also fatalistic, possibly suicidal, and a co-conspirator in her own fate.

Shaw has little regard for religion, and at age sixty-six, will live twenty-eight more years. Yet, he is dealing with mortality and immortality in this epilogue. By making Joan immortal, perhaps he believes he could be immortal as well. She is the instrument of his immortality. We all have pondered what lies beyond, and, if there is an afterlife, Shaw surely hopes to encounter her there, La Pucelle, the Maid of Orleans.

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