



Saint Joan

George Bernard Shaw , Dan H. Laurence (Editor) , Imogen Stubbs (Introduction)

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One of Shaw's most unusual and enduringly popular plays. With SAINT JOAN (1923) Shaw reached the height of his fame and Joan is one of his finest creations; forceful, vital, and rebelling against the values that surround her. The play distils Shaw's views on the subjects of politics, religion and creative evolution.

Saint Joan Details

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From Reader Review Saint Joan for online ebook

Arcadius says

An interesting and entertaining take on Joan of Arc – historically very controversial (especially Shaw's insistence on Cauchon's political impartiality), but that needn't worry us. Historically justifiable or not, the acid exchanges we get between this Cauchon, principled upholder of canon law, and Warwick, who simply needs whatever PR cover he can get for Joan's politically imperative disposal, are one of the best things in the play.

There are many other good things too - notably the opening comedy at Vaucouleurs, the cut and thrust of the trial, and imho (though this is a minority view) the imaginative and wry epilogue.

The main problem is with Joan herself. Understandably, GBS wanted to sandblast away all the Creeping JesuRY which had encrusted her in the run-up to canonisation but, Shaw being Shaw, he overdoes it. I can accept the rustic manners, the tactless frankness, the adolescent insistence on principle at all costs. All this makes her real enough. But the most important thing about Joan of Arc, surely, was the very powerful charismatic effect she had on other people, and I don't think this is conveyed at all successfully. In context, she must have inspired a strong sense of religious awe which is entirely lacking here. His Joan claims a hotline to heaven, is very sure of herself and is remarkably bossy - that's about it. Various characters inform us that, yes, they have been reduced to jelly by her, but it is not at all obvious why they should have been.

Contrast this with the portrayal of the great charismatic characters in Shakespeare, and Shaw's limitations as a dramatist become very apparent.

Christopher says

If you missed the last 600 years, let me tell you about the famous Jeanne d'Arc. Joan, as you're more likely to know her, began as a young farm girl, but when she heard the voices of her Lord and myriad saints beseeching her to take action against the horde of English soldiers encroaching upon her French homeland, she showed up on the doorstep of the uncrowned King Charles VII with a divine mission. King Charles was so impressed by her ambition and confidence that he gave her charge of a battalion and she defeated the English troops at Orleans. Her career continued with several more victories. She became a national, if not international, superstar - a feminist icon in an age before feminism. She even crowned the new King of France in the beautiful Notre-Dame de Reims.

And then tragedy struck. Joan was captured by the English at Compiègne and instead of being given the traditional prisoner of war's ransom, she was subjected to a politically motivated trial in which she was found guilty by the Church of twelve counts of heresy. Turned over to the secular authorities for punishment, she was burned at the stake.

That's the gist of the story. Certain points are debated by historians - her military role may have been more in the morale department than fighting and planning; my use of the word "feminist" could be challenged (and

would be challenged by Joan herself). But she is a larger than life figure. That you didn't need me to tell her story to you at all shows that history has not forgotten her. In 1920, Pope Benedict XV canonized Joan as a Saint of the Roman Catholic Church. And that's when George Bernard Shaw began work on this play, which was published in 1923.

The play itself is not terribly exciting. It does what I just did in this review; it is a pretty standard retelling of the Joan of Arc story. It will keep your attention, but it won't thrill you. Shaw dispenses with battle scenes and we're left with political and philosophical exchanges between the cast of soldiers, officers, priests, servants, and the ever inspiring Joan.

When things get really interesting, though, is after Joan's death. The epilogue features King Charles twenty-five years after Joan is burned, dreaming in his bed, visited by ghosts from his past. It is in this very Shakespearean ending that Shaw finally finds his inspiration, so read the first scenes of this play quickly to get to this, the good part.

Jonfaith says

Images of Falconetti burned into my mind as I read, perhaps music of Messiaen. *Fete des belles eaux*? This is a very orthodox tale of moral and legal convulsion. Add a dash of divine nationalism and voila.

This Joan was rather quick witted, other representations have as a nascent martyr. Her oppressors, oppressively oafish--while Bluebeard muses of the Divine Rights and the souls of lumpen children (entertaining something ghastly--only Allah knows.

GB Shaw has impressed me this week, not only for the scale of his vision but the complexity of his characters. There is always tenderness and treachery afoot, often in the same character on a single page.

Suzie Toumeh says

Joan. 'Minding your own business is like minding your own body: it's the shortest way to make yourself sick. What is my business? Helping mother at home. What is thine? Petting lapdogs and sucking sugar-sticks. I call that muck. I tell thee it is God's business we are here to do: not our own. I have a message to thee from God; and thou must listen to it, though thy heart break with the terror of it'.

This is my favorite play of all time.
because let's face it.
I love everything Shaw writes.
and Joan is AWESOME.
so just imagine a play written by Shaw about Joan.

LADVENU [reading quietly the paper that was given to Joan to sign before her burning] [...] I have clipped my hair in the style of a man, and, against all the duties **which have made my sex specially acceptable in heaven**, have taken up the sword [...]

which have made my sex specially acceptable in heaven. which have made my sex specially acceptable in heaven. which have made my sex specially acceptable in heaven. which have made my sex specially acceptable in heaven. which have made my sex specially acceptable in heaven. which have made my sex specially acceptable in heaven. which have made my sex specially acceptable in heaven. which have made my sex specially acceptable in heaven.

THE ARCHBISHOP. You are not so accustomed to miracles as I am. **It is part of my profession.**

digital says

What a goddamn brilliant play. I've gone round in my head about this a lot since I finished it three weeks ago, because parts of it don't fit together quite well to me, and parts of it are hilarious, and parts of it seem overlabored, but those speeches stick in your brain like an earworm and overall reading this left me with weeks of that sense of wonder we all chase after when we read.

The thing about Shaw is that he has a vision for this play, and the vision is a huge and grand one, worthy of Joan herself, about how history and mysticism and culture and an individual's daemonic genius act together and at odds, and of course the ending lament for the world's collective lack of imagination, the sense that Joan could have been even more even though she was so much. And Shaw is not particularly interested in anything beyond maintaining fidelity to this vision.

As such, bits of it seem kind of sloppy. The speed is breakneck at points, and ploddingly tense at others; the characters show their cards too quickly and all talk like the most self-aware individuals you've ever met (cue Dubois rambling about how practical he is compared to Joan); everyone is a bit too consistent and clever (that snarky Dauphin! I wanted to hit him); the speedy humor of the first act doesn't hold up well later on; there's not much subtlety to be found, anywhere; the dialogue's anachronisms are inevitably jarring; and (for instance) Shaw can't seem to make up his mind about the miracles and the voices. He's willing to use the miracles for dramatic effect, but his rationalist, symbolic-minded brain can't really think of a convincing overarching thematic reason for them to be there, so we're left with events like the hens laying eggs as dangling modifiers.

More damningly still, he doesn't know what to do with Joan's recantation and re-cantation. In his defense, who knows what was going on there? But his depiction of a simple, straightforward, and violently vital Joan doesn't allow for her temporary abdication to play out convincingly.

However, case in point, that recantation scene serves to set up her magnificent passage on freedom. It's up to the actress to carry that scene, since the passage itself is all vigor--nothing profound or nuanced-- but when it's well done, it's a Saint Crispin's day moment.

And all of those speeches by the inquisitors -- how would we know what was at stake for the Church and for society in general if they *didn't* show their hand to us, and so eloquently?

Basically the flaws in the play work in service to trying to convey Joan, the phenomenon of Joan, in all of her flawed human grandeur.

Read this with Shaw's preface and annotated, if you can: his preface is wonderful and the notes on his staging recommendations are delightful.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

Saint Joan: A Chronicle Play in Six Scenes and an Epilogue, George Bernard Shaw

Saint Joan is a play by George Bernard Shaw about 15th century French military figure Joan of Arc.

Premiering in 1923, three years after her canonization by the Roman Catholic Church, the play dramatises what is known of her life based on the substantial records of her trial. Shaw studied the transcripts and decided that the concerned people acted in good faith according to their beliefs. He wrote in his preface to the play: There are no villains in the piece. Crime, like disease, is not interesting: it is something to be done away with by general consent, and that is all [there is] about it. It is what men do at their best, with good intentions, and what normal men and women find that they must and will do in spite of their intentions, that really concern us.

Shaw characterised Saint Joan as "A Chronicle Play in 6 Scenes and an Prologue or Preface". Joan, a simple peasant girl, claims to experience visions of Saint Margaret, Saint Catherine, and the archangel Michael, which she says were sent by God to guide her conduct.

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Erik Graff says

I first heard St. Joan performed on Chicago's WFMT as a radio play as a little boy. This is to say that my parents listened to it and allowed me to stay up for the whole thing. The production included the voices she claimed to hear. I had had auditions myself in feverish states and the portrayal was fascinatingly reminiscent. The whole while a spider was building her web on the lamp at my right hand, a web finished and already catching moths by the time of the play's conclusion.

I next read the play, quickly, as a homework assignment for the required high school course in English literature. Now, having some European history under my belt, I began to understand Shaw's purposes.

All of Shaw's plays have high purpose. Of them, and I've read or seen quite a number, "Saint Joan" is the

best--not the easiest, that might be "Androcles and the Lion, but the best.

Taryn says

4.25 stars, to be exact

It was difficult for me to get into this one until the very end. The second half of the last scene and the epilogue made this play, to me. Its themes are critical of the 15th century Catholic Church and of its insistence of the priest being the intercessor and interpreter of doctrine rather than the people interpreting for themselves. Joan, who respects the church and its leaders, is adamant that the "voices" she hears are voices of God, despite what the church figures say. A key tenet of Joan is her unwillingness to be swayed away from her own convictions. She believes what she believes and wants what she wants. It is in this way that her character appears childlike in this play.

In the end, Joan is burned alive for heresy. Some in the church and state are forever changed by having witnessed the brutality of her burning and work hard after her death to clear her name of the heresy charges.

Throughout the play, the author emphasizes that Joan is not of this world. Lastly, Joan is often referred to as a "girl from the village." She herself says she will return to that village one year after she has completed the task God has laid out for her. What this means, exactly, is up for interpretation. Nevertheless, is up to the people of this world to either accept Joan and what she is tasked to do, or to deny her.

In the end, Joan is essentially denied twice, the first at her burning and the second time being a twist of irony at the play's conclusion.

Lina AL Ojaili says

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Edward says

Chronology of the Life and Times of Bernard Shaw

'On Playing Joan', by Imogen Stubbs

Introduction, by Joley Wood

Preface

--Saint Joan

Principal Works of Bernard Shaw

Duaa Ahmed says

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Cemre says

?? Bankas? Kültür Yay?nlar?n?n yay?nlam?? oldu?u Bernard Shaw'un dört oyunundan olu?an kitab?n son oyunu "Jan Dark" idi. Jan Dark Engizisyon Mahkemesi taraf?ndan "cad?" ilan edilip yak?lan birkaç yüz y?l sonra da kilise taraf?ndan "azize" ilan edilen inançlar?ndan vazgeçmeyen cesur bir kad?n... Çocuk denecek ya?ta hem de "kad?n ba??na" pek çok i? ba?arm?? olmas? kiliseyi rahats?z etmi?tir. "Bir köylü kad?n?" olarak ?ngiltere ve Fransa aras?ndaki Yüz Y?l Sava?lar?nda önemli bir rol oynam??t?r. K?l?c?n? z?rh?n? ku?anm?? sava?a kat?lm??t?r. Tanr?ya arada hiçbir vas?ta olmaks?z?n ibadet edilebilece?ini savunmu?tur. Tabii tüm bunlar da kilisenin ç?karlar?n? zedelemi?tir ve Jan Dark politikan?n kurban? olmu?tur.

Bernard Shaw da bu oyununda Jan Dark'? ele alm??. Asl?nda ya?ad??m?z dönemin ne Jan Dark'?n cad? denilip yak?l?p sonra da azize ilan edildi?i y?llardan ne de Bernard Shaw'un bu oyunu yazd??? y?llardan bir fark? var. Hele ya?ad??m?z günleri dü?ününce bu oyun daha fazla anlam kazan?yor. Siyaset ve onun kirli oyunlar?, kirli planlar? hiç de?i?miyor.

Tracey says

Joan of Arc is one of those figures from history who is hard to categorize. I have long been fascinated by her and whilst in France I visited Rouen and the Church of St. Joan of Arc. Nearby the church is the spot where she was burnt at the stake.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_...

I find Joan to be a very moving historical figure and one who if alive today would have had great impact on the world. A woman who took her value not from the standards of the day, but the standards of heaven. A woman who still acts as an example to other women who also strive to live according to their beliefs and faith rather than what the world expects of them.

Shaw portrayed a lot of his own beliefs and views in the play and I found him quite insightful. He researched intensively about Joan and I appreciated that he made Joan a very human figure who had a divine calling

rather than a divine figure involved in human events. A saint is someone who despite human frailties gives their all to following divine instruction to assist their fellow men. Shaw portrayed Joan in this way and thus conveyed that she was a woman who totally believed her mission and carried it through to its fatal conclusion.

Bookdragon Sean says

“Don't think you can frighten me by telling me that I am alone. France is alone. God is alone. And the loneliness of God is His strength.”

Thus spoke Joan when her allies, those she had made great, abandoned her to death. Such loyalty they showed her in life. Without her they literally would have got nowhere. Joan was a solider, and in the end they treated her like a solider; they pointed her at France's enemies and when her work was done they cast her aside. She was expendable to them, a mere commodity they tolerated when she was useful and never afterwards when her “miracles” began to diminish.

And this is the true tragedy of this play and tale. Joan believed in her visions; she thought the voices she heard were divinely sent. By today's standards, she would probably have been diagnosed with a disorder such as bipolar or schizophrenia. But who can say what is real and what is not real? For Joan it was very much real, and for those that followed her it was real too. The story of Joan is almost impossible to believe; it is so extraordinary: it defies logic. It's like an anomaly on the historical timeline. There must have been something truly incredible about her, something that defies rationality, for her to achieve such success.

Archit Nanda says

A Passage to the Preface:

George Bernard Shaw has the unique ability to use his wits to tickle to your bones. This is as much evident in the play as in the preface that accompanies it. In the preface, he talks about practically everything from St. John to Medieval History to Critics and Playgoers. Shaw's satire leaves nothing untouched, not even Shakespeare, and he makes fun of everything that he chooses to ponder upon.

Saint Joan's character is in the league of those 'manly women' characters who rebel against the society. The only problem is that she doesn't understand that her ideas are totally antagonistic to her society. She is unable to make sense of the world around her. Thus she becomes an amiable rebel. Everybody loves her and yet it is necessary for her to be burned at stake. She is one of those common creatures who can gain respect only after their death.

Shaw succeeds in transferring us to the medieval period with its feudal system and its unquestionable authority of the Church. He showcases how the seeds of Protestantism were being sowed during the medieval period. He does justice to both the simplicity of Joan's views and the necessity for her persecutors to burn her.

However the best part of the play lies in its humor. Shaw's humor has a profound quality to it. It's a humor

that arises from the deep understanding of human psyche and the world that surrounds it. It's similar to that of Woody Allen and Oscar Wilde. A humor that provokes us to think long after it has provoked us to laughter. It is this provocative humor that takes surface during the play and forces us to think about Joan's condition and that of ours.

AB says

The first scene of this play is one of the most perfect, most hilarious things I've ever read; it's probably my favourite single scene of any play, or at least my favourite comedic scene. The interplay between de Baudricourt and his squire -- "Positive! Now see here. I am going to throw you downstairs," -- never stops being funny.

I was hesitant to actually read through the whole play, lest it somehow disappoint me and tarnish my love for Scene I, but I did, and it didn't.

Connie says

George Bernard Shaw took theater patrons in 1923 back to the Fifteenth Century in his drama "Saint Joan". Joan of Arc declared that she heard voices from God and the saints directing her to save France in the Hundred Years War, and have the Dauphin crowned as the king of France, Charles VII. The teenage Joan, dressed in men's clothes, led the soldiers in the Siege of Orleans in 1429. She was later convicted as a heretic by the Inquisition, and burned at the stake. After papal investigations she was later acquitted and canonized as a saint.

Shaw wrote the character of Joan as a strong, intelligent woman who spoke very directly to the male soldiers and clergymen in the play. People have wondered for years whether she was a divinely inspired saint, a lunatic, a genius, or an early feminist. Although Shaw portrays some of the members of the Inquisition as corrupt, many were characterized as people who thought they were doing the right thing for their Church. Political and religious organizations feared strong leaders who might question their authority. The feudal system and the Church were both very powerful at that time. Overall, I found "Saint Joan" to be an interesting historical play with a complex main character.

Manny says

Shaw usually gets tagged as a liberal, progressive, left-wing type, but he was a very idiosyncratic one: you often find things that don't fit the stereotype. In particular, he thought that nationalism was a good thing, and that wars between countries were sometimes good too. This led him to support strange positions. In *Major Barbara*, he ends up arguing that what we would now call the military-industrial complex is positive, because it creates the wealth needed to rescue people from poverty. I think most people would agree that this is much more of a right-wing position, so it sounds odd to hear him say it. In one of his last plays, *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* (1934), he goes even further; he brings in Hitler and Mussolini as characters, and the portrayal is far from being one-sidedly negative. The modern reader wonders what they

should think; my perhaps over-charitable reading was that he was old, and had lost touch with reality. He supported the Soviet Union, and even the crazy doctrine of Lysenkoism.

In *Saint Joan*, generally regarded as among his three or four best plays, we again get a strange mixture. It's another retelling of the story of Joan of Arc, written shortly after she was officially rehabilitated and canonized. The character of Joan is sympathetically presented, and it's impossible not to like her and be moved by her story. Yet, at the same time, he underlines that he sees her as historically important because she's an early hero of the nationalist movement; she's fighting for France, her country, against the pan-national Catholic Church. This is portrayed as positive, but excessively nationalistic attitudes would soon result in the catastrophe of the Second World War. Shaw had the misfortune to live through that; he died in 1950, at the advanced age of 94. I wonder what he thought of the events that occurred during his last ten years.

Manab says

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Sookie says

Joan of Arc was a strong woman, a feminist and acted on the voice of God that she heard.

When she spoke, the clergy and the military listened. She led her country to victory before getting captured and dying after the trial.

As is the case with Shaw, his dialogues are brilliant and offers socio-political commentary on the time period.

