# JOAN OF ARC

## THE IMAGE OF FEMALE HEROISM

Marina Warner

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Marina Warner is a novelist, historian and critic. Among her acclaimed works on myth, symbolism and fairy tale are *Joan of Arc, Monuments and Maidens* (winner of the Fawcett Prize), *From the Beast to the Blonde, No Go the Bogeyman, Phantasmagoria*, and most recently, *Stranger Magic: Charmed States* and the Arabian Nights. In 1994 she gave the Reith Lectures and in 2000, the Oxford Clarendon Lectures, published as *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds*. Her fiction includes *Indigo*, *The Lost Father* (shortlisted for the Booker Prize and winner of a Commonwealth Writers' Prize) and *The Leto Bundle*.

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ALSO BY MARINA WARNER

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*For Thierry*

That which we now call the world is the result of a host of errors and fantasies which have gradually arisen in the course of the total evolution of organic nature, have become entwined with one another and are inherited by us as the accumulated treasure of the entire past – as a treasure: for the value of our humanity depends on it. Rigorous science is in fact able to detach us from this ideational world only to a slight extent . . . but it can gradually and step by step illuminate the history of how this world as idea arose . . .

NIETZSCHE

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# *Introduction to the New Edition*

## I

In 1954, I was a pupil at Les Dames de Marie, a French-speaking convent school in Uccle, an expansive and pastoral suburb of Brussels. Every morning, as we crocodile-filed into our classrooms, we sang patriotic hymns. One of these, the 'Marche Lorraine', has a rousing chorus; in rapid ascending arpeggios as in a trumpet voluntary, we blasted out a paean to 'the young shepherdess in clogs and woollen skirt' who took up arms and walked out fearlessly to confront her king and restore him to his throne. One of the many verses goes:

> Fiers enfants de la Lorraine
> Des montagnes à la plaine,
> Sur nous, plane ombre sereine,
> Jeanne d'Arc, vierge souveraine![1]

The song was adopted by the Resistance during World War Two, because Domrémy, Joan of Arc's birthplace, stood in that part of the province that had not been ceded to Prussia after the French defeat in 1871, and from that time till the end of the First World War, the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine was the touchstone of French national pride. Joan of Arc, who had thrown an earlier occupying power out of France (or so traditional history had it), became the patron saint of the movement to expel Germans from French territory. In 1940, when France had once more suffered a humiliating defeat at Germany's hands, Joan was again cast as the symbol of resistance and became the figurehead of De Gaulle's

movement against the Vichy regime and the Third Reich.[2] Sharing a history of warfare, death, occupation and deliverance, Belgian Catholics gladly adopted the French heroine.

Les Dames de Marie occupied a vast Gothic pile, decorated throughout in polished marble with busy polychrome wall paintings, recalling stirring episodes in the history of church and state in Belgium. Although I can't remember the exact subjects now, the atmosphere of those pictures remains pungently present in my mind: nationalism and piety, conservatism and propriety (*bienséance*) combined. In that era before Vatican II and the Common Market, Belgium observed any number of rituals, religious and secular: on the eve of feast of St Nicholas, good children were given marzipan fruits while bad ones found their shoes filled with coal; on May 1st, the queenship of the Virgin Mary, bunches of lily-of-the-valley were exchanged. Joan of Arc was one adoptive saint and heroine among many whose memory was kept with incense, flowers, singing and procession on her feast day, another spring festival since it fell on May 30th. The liturgical calendar afforded a counterweight to the cycle of the patriotic, secular year; it was inward-looking and folkloric, the dedicated creation of a national culture for a small, culturally divided country, laden with desire for a strong retrospective personality and strict social order and with a longing for historical definition. A pervasive Victorian medievalism characterised its vision of the past, the fifteenth century acting as a reflecting pool for recent history, the recent wars, and with the twofold defeat of the invading Germans, the hardwon peace. The effect was stultifying and often strained, even for a child who wasn't conscious of the motives. But it was also potent: the Belgian convent that prepared me to become a historian of Joan of Arc.

When the figure of Joan of Arc came into focus, the depressive national mood was countered, for my childhood self, by a vision of gallantry under pressure, of a young woman's heroism. The convent itself stood on the rue Edith Cavell, named after another heroine of the same selfless, courageous mould Cavell (born 1865) worked as a nurse, a teacher and a spy in Belgium before and during World War One; after confessing that she had helped wounded soldiers to escape, she was shot as a traitor in Brussels in October 1915.[3]

It was only when I returned to live in England years later and saw the monument outside the National Portrait Gallery in London, with the resounding slogan, 'Patriotism is not enough', that I realised Cavell was English, not Belgian. But like Joan of Arc, she embodies a form of female

independent-mindedness and courage and adventurousness. Both women stretched my horizons far beyond the dull observances of Uccle, and their experiences, even though they ended in horror and tragedy, offered an exciting contrast to the way the future looked to a well-brought-up girl in the 1950s. At the same time, they were martyrs, and martyrs were, I was raised to believe, the ideal expression of female virtue.

Although Joan was a martyr in the sense that she was an unflinching witness to her principles, neither she nor Cavell was strictly speaking persecuted for her faith. It remains one of the many rough ironies of Joan's story that she is not enrolled in the ranks of the virgin martyrs in the Church's pantheon because she was condemned for heresy, apostasy and idolatry by the Church to which she belonged and to which she steadily proclaimed her total loyalty.[4]

Nevertheless, at the level of her legend, her sufferings during the trial and her death at the stake make her the successor of the early Christian martyrs whose marvellous fortitude was recounted to us. In 1959, I went as a boarder to St Mary's, Ascot, where my education in the faith continued through Catholic Truth Society pamphlets as well as bedtime stories by the nuns: Joan of Arc was like the young saints Perpetua and Felicity in Roman North Africa who faced the wild beasts in the arena of Roman North Africa, and her torments recalled the sadistic horrors which any number of martyrs in the *Golden Legend* undergo before they are finally despatched by their executioners.[5]

The parallels between Joan's sufferings and Jesus' on Calvary are explicitly drawn out in her modern cult: *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928), Carl Theodor Dreyer's masterwork of cinematic poetry, dwells in close up on the ravaged face of Renée Falconetti, as if making a devotional icon of the face of Christ. In a sober twist, the original film, which had disappeared, was found in a cupboard in a Norwegian mental hospital in the 1980s.

## II

The fame of Joan of Arc began in her lifetime and, though it has dipped a little now and then, she has never vanished from view. Her image acts as a magic mirror of personal and political idealism and, in particular, of changing ideas about women's heroism. She has proved an inexhaustible source of

inspiration for writers, playwrights, film-makers, performers, and composers. Several of the essential mythopoiec characteristics that have defined the charismatic leader throughout history are powerfully and intensely condensed into one brief life: she was young (nineteen, she thought, when she was sent to the stake); she spoke directly with God and his angels and saints; she was courageous, convinced, lucid and eloquent, especially in defiance; she appeared from nowhere and had no normal, legitimating officialdom behind her at a time of terrible violence and unrest (she spoke truth to power). She was a virgin: 'Jeanne la Pucelle' (Joan the little flea, the maid), the troops called her. She was eccentric: she insisted on wearing men's clothes though she wasn't in disguise (everyone knew she was a girl). Above all, she was lucky – at first, and luck is a quality the Ancient Greeks knew was a divine gift. Her presence in the battle at Orléans rallied the soldiers after months of stalemate, and the long terrible siege of the city was lifted.

Even while she was still alive, but far more so after her death, the heroic part of her story sparked narratives of all kinds, in pictures, ballads, plays, and also satires – most notoriously by Voltaire.[6] But more, far more, followed the publication in 1841-9 of the proceedings of the Inquisition trial which had examined Joan for witchcraft and heresy. The transcript of the interrogations gives us the voice of this young woman across the centuries with almost unbearable immediacy; her spirit leaps from the page, uncompromising in its frankness, good sense and courage, and often breathtaking in its simple effectiveness. Some of her answers are justly famous. When asked if she were in a state of grace, she answered: 'Si je le suis, que Dieu m'y garde; si je ne le suis pas, que Dieu m'y mette.' ('If I am, may I remain so. If I am not, may God put me there.')

Mysterious virtue still radiates from the figure of Joan of Arc far beyond the borders of belief and nation, and all kinds of factions and interests have claimed possession of her. A deep fissure runs between her admirers, reproducing the historical French opposition between believers and free-thinkers, monarchists and republicans, conservatives and progressives.[7] These cultural expressions are part of a political struggle, in France and beyond, to own the symbol – or, you could say, the brand. She's the heroine every movement has wanted as its figurehead. Suffragettes dressed up as Joan in demonstrations and carried her banner; a huge, frenzied equestrian statue of her in full battle dress, sword upraised, by the sculptor

Anna Hyatt Huntingdon, was erected on Riverside Drive in Manhattan, with copies following in Blois, San Francisco and Quebec. In modern times she has been cast as the supreme patron of female interests and feminist causes. In St Jude's Church, Hampstead Garden Suburb, designed by Lutyens and opened in 1911, the Lady Chapel enshrines a pantheon of women; in the west dome, St Joan holds pride of place over an English heaven, populated by a mixed bunch of writers, philanthropists and reformers gathered under her aegis – Edith Cavell is there, and so are Queens Victoria and Alexandra, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Angela Burdett-Coutts.[8] St Joan's International Alliance, a Catholic body that was founded by suffragettes and is recognised today by both the Vatican and the United Nations, celebrated its centenary in 2011, and still distinguishes itself by its progressive campaigning for equal rights for men and women, focusing especially on contemporary problems – female circumcision, trafficking, poverty – and the persistent exclusion of women from the Catholic priesthood. Joan offers a perfect counter-example, holding her own under questioning by prelates and canons. Without formal education, unable to read or write, she responded with such luminous clarity that when she repeated her voices had returned to her, the scribe was moved to exclaim 'Responsio mortifera' (a fatal reply), in the margins of the court record. Benedict XVI recently advised : 'Hers is a beautiful example of holiness for lay people involved in politics, especially in difficult situations. Faith is the light that guided all her choices.'[9] He wouldn't warm to all the company who gather round her standard: just as socialists, feminists, and liberal Catholics rallied to her as the champion of the wrongly accused, so gay rights activists now claim her for themselves. In Lille in 2010, her statue was draped in pink: 'le *relooking queer* de Jeanne d'Arc', ran the headline in citegay.com, showing that, during her afterlife at least, English has not been kept out of French.[10]

Joan of Arc has remained a spur to powerful political passions to an unexpected degree. Far from dying down, the storms of the last decades of the nineteenth century have continued to rage; Joan's militancy and subsequent execution during a bitter civil war raises sharp questions about struggle, sacrifice and fanaticism which have new resonance today in the many conflicts where women are engaged as soldiers, terrorists, and victims. These issues have been raised in an unstoppable flow of books, films,

and other media. When Dreyer made his extraordinary film in 1928, and Arthur Honegger and Paul Claudel composed the oratorio *Jeanne d'Arc au Bucher* ten years later, both were working in the light of modern wars and prejudice. And their works are prophetic: the civil war in fifteenth-century France presages the treacheries both of the Occupation in France and of Dreyer's native Denmark during the Third Reich, and similarly, the libretto for Honegger's piece warns of the coming horrors of World War Two. In France today supporters of tainted causes also wish to sanctify their movements by association with her *mana*, or holy power, and Joan's cult is once again dominated by anti-Semitic, xenophobic and extreme right parties.[11] Like Action Française in the first half of the 19th century, so the Front National in the present time proclaims her their patron, arguing that she personifies the patriotic cause of France for the French.

Once in the late 1990s, when I was on my way to the Bibliothequé Nationale in the rue Richelieu, I passed a shop window in which a book about Joan of Arc was displayed. It was a study I hadn't come across, so I went in and began browsing. Very soon, in mounting horror, I realised that I was in no ordinary bookshop; after glancing through the Joan of Arc materials, I found shelfloads on the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, embedded in fresh anti-Semitic propaganda; many privately published cheaply printed documents were for sale, alongside terrifying, hideous postcards of the kind I have seen only in documentation of the Third Reich. In the back of the premises, a young man wearing a stiff high collar and cravat, no doubt in some gesture towards an imaginary ancien règime, was handling sales. Beside him, on a shelf, was a bust of Hitler.

It seems hardly to be believed, as I tell it, and it was frightening and distressing and very sobering that Joan of Arc was being used as bait for such activities. When I left the place, I realised there was no name over the door, and the window was taped up where someone had no doubt lobbed a cobblestone. For a while after this encounter, "But apart from feeling defiled, for a while after this encounter I also felt robbed of a heroine."

Looking at the situation today, a few years later, it has only deteriorated, since Marine Le Pen, who inherited leadership of the Front National from her father, is profiting from the disarray in the Eurozone. She is the daughter of its disreputable founder, Jean-Marie Le Pen has nauseatingly called Joan 'my little sister', Marine Le Pen holds the party's rally on the feast day of Joan of Arc and in 2011 invoked her at immense length,

claiming that Joan's campaign against the *godons* in France anticipated the Front National's vision of an ethnically purified population.

When I wrote this book, I was fired up by the idea of Joan of Arc's heroism, but in the last decade or more, I have found myself keeping the wrong company (I no longer have 'all the right enemies'), and it has left a hole in the imaginary map, and created a need for another way of thinking about heroism, female as well as male. The claim on Joan of Arc as the guiding force of reaction and racism demands vigorous rebuttal. Some efforts have been made, but less successfully than one might wish. In 1997, a powerful group of writers, including the philosopher Alain Badiou and the political theorist Alain Finkelkraut, assembled in the Théâtre de l'Odéon in Paris to rescue Joan's memory from the grip of these propagandists, chiefly by recourse to the poet who put the case most fervently for her generosity, tolerance, humanity, and her universalism: Charles Péguy, the Socialist utopian and author of the long miracle play, *Le Mystère de la charité de Jeanne d'Arc*, which he dedicated to her and 'a toutes celles et tous ceux qui ont vécu leur vie humaine'.[12] One of the speakers was Florence Delay who, under the pseudonym Florence Carrez, played the title role in *Le Procès de Jeanne d'Arc,* the classic film made by Robert Bresson in 1962; Delay became a writer not long after her role in Bresson's film, and is now an académicienne. She drew attention to Péguy's dream of fusing faith, hope, and charity with the three Republican virtués in order to establish a universal socialism as the means of deliverance for France – and following France, for other nations. She then made a less fuzzy and more contemporary point when she quoted an exchange between Joan of Arc and her interrogators about her vision of the archangel Michael:

> 'How did you know that it was St Michael?'
> 'By the way he spoke and his language of angels.'
> 'How did you know it was the language of angels?'
> 'I soon believed it was. I wanted to believe that it was.'
> (J'ai eu la volonté de le croire.)

Delay singles out this answer - 'J'ai eu la volonte de la croire' - as an example of Joan's sublime gift of honest avowal, as well as her way of turning a phrase. She then goes on to relate her reply to French liberty of conscience in a form that depends on a deep commitment to the rights of subjectivity.[13] By asserting the truth of personal belief, Joan's riposte opens the road towards accepting that ideals, if they are to be realised, must be

formulated and held beforehand; they must then be believed in intensely. Delay's perspective belongs in the individualist tradition recognisable from the radical protest movements of the Sixties, and identifies Joan as a symbol of artistic integrity and personal truth – the highest and most cherished freedoms. But from this position, uncompromising commitment to a principle becomes a good in itself, or, as Bernard Williams explores in his last book, a higher authority is now accorded to truthfulness (sincerity, assertion) than to truth (precision, accuracy).[14] Ardent conviction proves more persuasive than accurate witnessing; intensity trumps scepticism and hesitation. Joan holds out a hope of certainty.

In recent decades, many developments in civil and international conflict have shown that personal conviction does not create ethical grounds for action (Yeats anticipated this long ago when he wrote on the Easter Rising, 'the worst are full of passionate intensity'). Joan of Arc exercises the thrilling spell of self-belief and sacrifice, but it is shadowed now by the danger that such positions lead to 'conviction politics', to faith wars and fanaticism. That is why Joan of Arc has been held hostage by the far right and why it has proved so difficult to extricate her from their claims.

Another, rather different, development has contributed to the altered character of Joan of Arc. One aspect of Joan's proto-feminist claim for equality has twisted into an unexpected shape as superstars and supermodels have been magnetised by her story, and especially by her physical prowess. With young women aspiring to hard-bodied muscle power, gyms filling with ever more ingenious machinery devised to build up their strength, and classes booming in an increasingly exotic range of martial arts, some interpretations of Joan of Arc have given stars a way of showing off the new aesthetic of female beauty. The significance of her adopted androgyny – her short hair, her male attire – has once again mutated.[15] For the inquisitors in 1430-1, cross-dressing contravened the laws of nature and of God and fuelled the most ferociously pursued accusations against her; during many centuries of her subsequent cult, artists overlooked this guise and depicted Joan with long flowing hair, while her armour was moulded to a womanly body and was often worn over skirts. But the Sixties fashion for urchin looks allowed Joan a new boyishness. The acceptability – even desirability – of a masculine appearance can be measured rather neatly in the difference between the womanly Ingrid Bergman, cast as Joan of Arc in 1948 and the gamine Jean Seberg of Otto Preminger's film of 1957. In the postwar reign of the teenager, Joan of Arc became a symbol of a rebel with

a cause, a Rimbaud with a halo.[16] She stood for civil disobedience and youth protest, especially against pressure from the state, and was embodied by vulnerable figures – the waif-like Seberg and the more impressive yet also beguiling Sandrine Bonnaire in Jacques Rivette's monumental two-part meditation from 1994.[17]

Current ideals of female beauty are leaner, tougher, and stronger by contrast to the not so distant past when hard-bodied, gym-sculptured physiques still struck a conventional eye as mannish. The tomboy heroines who beckoned to my generation of girls – Jo in *Little Women* and George in Enid Blyton's Famous Five books – have faded, since a certain degree of emancipation has achieved some freedoms for women. There's no longer any need to dress as a boy when hampering petticoats, tight-lacing, keeping your knees together, and mincing belong to the past, or when you can win Olympic gold in Taekwondo or join the army if you wish and, if you're in the US army, fight in the front line. Robert Mapplethorpe's studies of the body-builder Lisa Lyon in his 1983 book (purposely called *Lady: Lisa Lyon*) were deliberately disturbing to conventional concepts of gender. But by the mid-Eighties, super-models and film stars (Jennifer Lopez; Angelina Jolie) were familiarising the public with an Olympian, virago ideal. Madonna, no giantess, is more muscular than Marilyn Monroe or Joan Crawford was. But it would be a mistake to think that fashionable ideas of beauty and appropriate appearances are sealed from realities; rather, the new acknowledgement of female physical strength matches a rise in female fighting, sports, and, to some extent, action - from leadership (Mrs Thatcher ruled in that decade) to crime. The image of Joan of Arc continues to act as a barometer of these social changes, but not only that. Her representations interact with the shifts in gender expectations and endorse them: she is the most significant Amazonian heroine of recorded history, and her life of ardent action continues to inspire and shape the way passionate female engagement is depicted and narrated. For a long time Madonna was hoping and planning to play her, while the director Luc Besson cast the supermodel Milla Jovovich as a sword-wielding superwoman in his violent and repellent film *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc* (1999). In that film she witnesses the rape and murder of her sister; revenge becomes her motive. This heroine has little of the interiority or vision of other Joans in literature or cinema. In a similar vein, Dinos Chapman, one of the bad boy brothers of Britart, who revel in profanity, recently encased the Russian model and fundraiser Natalia Vodianova in golden armour for a Christmas special

feature in a glossy magazine. He wanted Vodianova to pose as Joan because, he said, she 'is an archetypal strong woman . . . a female symbol of might and resilience.' The photograph was shot so that she would look 'as if she's just stepped out of a force field . . . a post-apocalyptic avenging angel.'[18] The most recent episode in the video game series called *Final Fantasy* features a nameless apocalyptic redeemer along similar lines: a child like, tousled young hoyden in a crustaceous suit of sci-fi medieval armour, who wages the just war against 'the false gods enslaving mankind'.[19] But Joan still enthrals girls: the writer Bidisha tells me that the 'bronze breastplate' ideal dominates teen romances; this logic brought the *Twilight* idol Kristen Stewart to the screen as Snow White in the recent epic *Snow White and the Huntsman*. The fairy-tale heroine was no longer to be seen sweeping up – she donned armour cap-à-pie and charged into battle.

What had been transgressive and strange, contributing a crucial element to Joan's uncanny powers during her lifetime, has become an erotic desideratum of the art/fashion/entertainment industry. As a result, the ethical questions her choice originally raised and which brought her before the Inquistion (should a girl act like a boy?) and the historical difference it embodied (the rarity of a young woman taking such a step) seem unimaginably distant.

There are signs, however, that in spite of the loud claims of the French right and the her current fashionable avatars, Joan of Arc has become once again the focus of a thoughtful examination of sincerity, faith, and individual freedom.

In a poem called, 'An Alphabet of Goddesses', Edwin Morgan invoke her in a bleak and powerful litany to Lethe, in which he chants the names of women in history. He observed no hierarchy: sibyls, anonymous prisoners, celebrated writers each take their place, side by side, and Joan is one of them:

> She has been lobotomized with Naomi Ginsberg but she does not forget.
> She has been stoned in Khomeini's brickyard but she does not forget.
> She has hung in a cage at Cumae wasting away but she does not forget.
> She has burned in Israeli phosphorus for hours but she does not forget.
> She has crackled in the market-place at Rouen but she does not forget.
> She has been injected with kerosene in Belsen but she does not forget.
> She has drunk the lees of Chappaquidick but she does not forget.

There is nothing you can pay her for the waters
of oblivion. High in a glittering sieve
she holds them, pans for grains of mercy.
There is no ferry, no other life.
Hunger and thirst after righteousness.[20]

The American composer Richard Einhorn has written an oratorio, *Voices of Light*, to accompany the Dreyer film in live concerts. The piece is huge, composed for full symphony orchestra and chorus, and it engulfs the listener in rapturous, *Messiah*-like *choruses*, which cast Joan as the promised saviour, and then sets flying a single voice or pair of voices to rise and lament alone. It follows the intense close-ups of the film, but accompanies the unfolding of Joan's trial obliquely, feelingly, providing a profound emotional response to the suffering visible on the screen.[21]

Einhorn is not a believer, and his composition, like Morgan's poem, is rooted in a sense of Joan as a universal witness to the dangers of injustice and corruption. The montage of writings that he has set for the choir and soloists juxtapose passages from passages from scripture such as the denunciation of cross-dressing from Deuteronomy, medieval women's mystical lyric poetry (some of it by contemporaries of Joan), and extracts from her initial trial and her letters and from the rehabilitation trial of 1452. 'I sought a religious figure,' Einhorn wrote in the programme,[22] 'a hero, that wouldn't easily fit a preconceived mould, someone who had combined a joyful, perhaps even erotic yearning for transcendence with the courage to confront the intense physical and emotional pain that so often accompanies a deep spiritual journey.'[23] *Voices of Light* dramatises Joan of Arc as the symbol of the unjustly accused, the prisoner of conscience, the resoluteness of innocence.[24] It conveys the reasons that made me want to write a book about her in the first place: an everyman and everywoman who knows what suffering is.[25]

Historiographic honesty can also illuminate present circumstances; in other words, a *lieu de mémoire*, as Joan of Arc is for France and beyond, can be explored to discover what happened and own up to it. It is surprising but encouraging, for example, that in Notre Dame de Paris today, the new plaque in front of the statue of Joan of Arc announces that in this very place, in 1452, twenty-five years after her death at the stake in Rouen, the assembled prelates and doctors of the Church declared null and void the earlier Inquisition trial which had sentenced her. For a long time, the

history of the Church's involvement in Joan's death was obscured: the English, helped by a few French quislings, were chiefly blamed. Joan remained rehabilitated, a hero of the nation, but not sanctified. But in the 1890s, when anti-clerical, Socialist movements were strongly gaining ground, Joan of Arc was first made 'Venerable', then beatified, and finally, in 1920, canonised as part of a wave of modern saints claimed for modern times - her companions were Thérèse of Lisieux, the cure d'Ars and John Bosco – in order to recapture the faithful. In those proceedings, the church did not admit fault as it does now. Rivette's film also draws on the rehabilitation trial far more deeply than those of his predecessors, for whom Joan's persecution in Rouen and her death were the climax and end of the story. By contrast, Rivette and his co-screen-writers Christine Laurent and Pascale Bonitzer punctuate his cadenced, intense recreation with the testimony of witnesses in their own words from the 1452 records. Speaking straight to camera in close-up, they bring a human roundness, warmth and touchingness to Joan's character and give her story the depth of personal memory.

Since François Hollande's victory in the French presidential election, another phase in the public struggle for Joan has begun. Laurent Fabius, the former prime minister and now foreign secretary, is determined to wrest Jeanne from the right, and is supporting a new museum to tell her story in Rouen, where Fabius himself comes from and where she died. A *historial*, the museum is being devised with the help of scholars and promises to be a virtual reality son-et-lumière journey (visitors will enter the fire). It will occupy the Gothic archbishop's palace, where Joan was held during part of the trial. Monseigneur has given it up smilingly, in a symbolic show of ecumenism and solidarity with the modern state in the all-important memory work on the *patrimoine*. Another place associated with the historical Joan, the tower at Beaurevoir where she was held prisoner and from which she fell, gave me a glimpse of this purposeful heroine's doubts and falterings. I found its ruins, one of the most inspiring sites I visited as I retraced her footsteps. They afforded a deeper insight into the cost of her vocation – she knew her voices did not want her to throw herself down, but she was in despair. Allowing her to feel doubt admits more than a human weakness to her nature; her sense of desolation at Beaurevoir reveals how important the interactions with others' beliefs were in the forwarding of her mission.

Stressing her state of individual exception and autonomy excludes ideas of collectivity and representation, and throws the weight of ethical choice on to the person acting alone. This vision has high romantic value, but social dynamics give the lie to it, while the politics of present conflicts ask for a different heroism, one founded in cooperation. Brecht ruefully challenges the role of heroes in the celebrated exchange towards the end of *The Life of Galileo* (1938). When the astronomer's friend Andrea comments, 'Pity the land that has no heroes', Galileo ruefully ripostes, 'No, pity the land that needs a hero'. If a society is working harmoniously together, it should not need to turn to a sole and inspired leader.

I used to believe that Galileo's wishful thinking could come true, but now I doubt it. National rituals came to seem to me like elements in the machinery of state repression, and organised historic ceremonies a form of brainwashing. But this position is too blunt, and ultimately defeatist. On the one hand, historians' work on memory, led by the French commitment to *lieux de memoire* and the records of the *patrimoine*, have sparked unprecedented interest in telling the story of the past in terms that bring its meaning to life; on the other, the writings of someone like W. G. Sebald or the film-making of a director like Rivette have uncovered the perpetual, productive interplay between fact and fantasy, memory and forgetting, reliable and unreliable witness. Both disciplines – historiography and the arts – have developed a paramount concern with narrative. What is remembered and what is forgotten are narrative choices that will always have moral implications.[26]

Heroes and symbols are the compass points and moorings of our shared stories; abandoning the search to identify and define them, out of a high-minded distaste for propaganda, lets political factions manipulate them to their own ends. When Marine Le Pen calls on Joan's name, she needs to be confronted about her abuse of history. Joan multiple resurrections and transformations show how charged symbolic figures like her remain. Surrendering this mythic territory to the forces of reaction allows them far too easy a victory.

Kentish Town, 2011

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# *Chronology*

1380 Charles VI, king of France, accedes.

1399 Henry IV accedes. Richard II of England murdered.

1403 Charles, future king of France, born.

1404 John the Fearless becomes duke of Burgundy.

1407 Louis, duke of Orléans, murdered.

DOMREMY

1412? 13? Joan of Arc born.

1413 Henry V becomes king of England.

1415 English victory at Agincourt.

1416 Anglo-Burgundian alliance.

1418 John the Fearless becomes master of Paris. English take Rouen.

1419 John the Fearless murdered. Philip the Good becomes duke of Burgundy.

1420 By the treaty of Troyes, Charles is disinherited and Henry V's heir named heir to the throne of France.

1421 Henry, future Henry VI of England, born.

1422 Henry V dies. Charles VI dies. John, duke of Bedford, becomes regent of France. Charles VII proclaimed king of France at Mehun-sur-Yèvre. Henry VI proclaimed king of France in London and Paris.

*c.* 1425 Joan first hears voices.

1428 *c.* JUNE–OCT. Joan and family flee to Neufchâteau.

Siege of Orléans begins.

VAUCOULEURS

1429 *c.* JAN.–FEB. Joan leaves Domremy for Vaucouleurs. French defeated at Rouvray in Battle of the Herrings.

CHINON

LATE FEB./EARLY MAR. Joan arrives at Chinon.

POITIERS

*c.* MAR.–APR. Interrogated at Poitiers by Parlement in exile.

24 APR. Leaves Tours, with military equipment, for Blois.

28 APR. March on Orléans begins.

ORLÉANS

29 APR. Joan enters Orléans.

4 MAY Fall of bastion Fort St Loup.

7 MAY Fall of bastion Les Tourelles, Orléans.

8 MAY English retreat from Orléans. Siege raised.

THE SUMMER OF VICTORIES

4 MAY Joan and Dunois meet Charles at Loches.

14 MAY Joan with Charles at Tours.

11–12 JUNE Jargeau falls to French.

15 JUNE Meung-sur-Loire falls to French.

17 JUNE Beaugency falls to French.

18 JUNE Victory of French at Patay. Joan rejoins Charles at Sully. Army assembled at Gien.

MARCH TOWARDS RHEIMS

29 JUNE Charles begins march towards Rheims.

30 JUNE Auxerre changes allegiance and recognizes Charles.

5–12 JULY Troyes changes allegiance and recognizes Charles.

14 JULY Châlons recognizes Charles.

RHEIMS

16–21 JULY Joan and Charles at Rheims.

17 JULY Charles VII crowned king of France.

21 JULY Charles performs ceremony of the king's evil.

23 JULY Arrives at Soissons.

29 JULY Arrives at Château-Thierry.

2 AUG. Charles begins to withdraw back to Loire, reaches Provins.

6 AUG. Charles at Coloummiers and Château-Thierry.

10 AUG. Charles at La Ferté-Milon.

11 AUG. Charles at Crépy.

14–16 AUG. Skirmishes at Senlis; battle at Montépilloy. Joan does not take part.

18–22 AUG. Compiègne, Senlis and Beauvais recognize Charles. Cauchon, bishop of Beauvais, leaves his see.

29 AUG. Edict of Compiègne, declaring Franco-Burgundian truce till Christmas, signed.

PARIS

8 SEPT. Joan assaults Paris; fails.

13 SEPT. Charles leaves headquarters at St Denis to withdraw to Gien.

END SEPT. Army disbanded at Gien.

THE DIFFICULT WINTER

25 OCT./2 NOV.? Joan attacks St Pierre le Moustier.

9 NOV. Joan at Moulins.

24 NOV. Joan lays siege to La Charité-sur-Loire.

19 DEC. Joan revisits Orléans.

29 DEC. Joan and her family ennobled.

1430 3–28 MAR. Joan at Sully.

APR. Joan fights at Lagny.

COMPIÈGNE

22 MAY John of Luxembourg lays siege to Compiègne.

23 MAY Joan captured at Compiègne; news reaches Paris, 25 May.

26 MAY University of Paris urges her condemnation; Joan taken to Arras.

14 JULY Cauchon, bishop of Beauvais, begins proceedings to bring her to trial. Joan held at Beaulieu and Beaurevoir.

25 OCT. Siege of Compiègne raised.

NOV. Joan handed over to Cauchon.

ROUEN

1431 DEC./JAN. Joan arrives at Rouen castle.

9 JAN. Court of judges and assessors assembles.

21 FEB./3 MAR. Public sessions of Joan's trial

10–17 MAR. Sessions in prison cell.

27 MAR. Charges read to her.

18 APR. Joan 'charitably' admonished.

19 MAY University of Paris condemns Joan; letter read to her.

23 MAY Final admonitions.

24 MAY Joan led to cemetery of St Ouen; abjures.

27 MAY Withdraws recantation.

28 MAY Condemned as heretic; handed over to secular arm for burning.

30 MAY Joan at the stake.

16 DEC. Henry VI crowned king of France in Paris.

1435 21 SEPT. Treaty of Arras between Charles VII and duke of Burgundy.

1436 Paris returns to Charles. Claude des Armoises claims to be Joan.

1437 Charles VII enters Paris.

1448 The French regain Rouen.

1450 English struggle in Normandy ends. First inquiry, by Bouillé, into Joan's sentence.

1452 Second inquiry, by Cardinal d'Estoute-ville, into Joan's trial and sentence.
1455–6 The *procès en nullité*: the 1431 verdict on Joan rescinded.
1869 Case of Joan's canonization placed before Vatican.
1903 Joan declared Venerable.
1909 Joan beatified.
1920 Joan made saint.

# *Prologue*

A story lives in relation to its tellers and its receivers; it continues because people want to hear it again, and it changes according to their tastes and needs. Joan of Arc is the centre of a story so famous that it transcends the media or the forms that have transmitted it: she is a heroine of history. Unlike a fictional character, she does not belong to the mind of a writer or the imagination of a painter. She has objective reality; and in her solid and material existence, she bears the mark Carlyle considered the primary stuff of heroes, 'sincerity, a deep, great, genuine sincerity'. She had a calling, which she phrased with great clarity and simplicity: to throw the English out of France and bring her Dauphin to his throne. She pursued it with great bravery; she was loyal to her innermost convictions, in the face of terrible ordeals. These composing parts of her greatness have invited generation upon generation of enthusiasts to identify with her and to adopt her as the palladium of their cause.

It is usual, when telling of Joan of Arc, to attribute the extraordinary and compelling quality of the story of which she is the heroine to the specialness of her personality. Her individuality created the reality of the story she dominates. But this is only one way of understanding a story and of writing history: to give an account of the deeds of the great. To reserve all understanding of a story to its protagonists and their characteristics is limiting. With Joan of Arc, we are faced with a phenomenon so exceptional that it is essential to examine the context on which her personality scored its deep mark in order to understand her at all.

The story, in its most familiar, chapbook-like form, tells of the glory of a national heroine. According to this perspective, Joan of Arc's presence and activity changed the course of the Hundred Years' War between England and France, the war which had begun in 1337 when Edward III claimed the throne of France through his mother. The two great dynastic powers of medieval Europe, Lancastrian England and Valois France, were still struggling for supremacy in France in 1429 when a peasant, a girl, a seventeen-

year-old – that triple cluster of exceptional attributes – appeared from her home village on the borders of the duchy of Lorraine, introduced herself to the Dauphin Charles of France as his God-given saviour and reversed his fortunes.

Before Joan's appearance, Charles was a vacillating, uncrowned pretender to a throne he had almost forfeited through defeat in battle and at the negotiating table. Henry V, renewing his grandfather Edward's ambitions, won the great victory of Agincourt in 1415 and then, by the treaty of Troyes of 1420, appointed his heir, Henry VI, the future king of France and England. This claimant to the double crown was the son of Charles's own sister, and so he united Henry V's august blood and the Valois lineage. The duke of Burgundy, Charles's uncle, who with his large and rich possessions held the balance of power in France, had allied himself to the English cause. In 1429, Paris was in Anglo-Burgundian hands; the Parlement, loyal to Charles, was in exile in Poitiers; the English occupied territories north of the Loire and were laying siege to Orléans, the gateway to domination of southern France.

But with Joan's inspiration, this version relates, Charles was transformed, his troops rallied and their cause began to prosper. In the major battle for the relief of Orléans in May 1429, the English were turned back. With their hegemony over half of France having been fatally weakened, the ground was clear for Charles's triumphant coronation in July and for the eventual destruction of English hopes to establish a Lancastrian monarchy in France. Joan of Arc's charismatic presence at the battle of Orléans effected this astonishing victory; her encouragement brought Charles to his anointing; she was the saviour – appointed and guided by divine messengers, her voices – who created the modern nation-state of France.

After glory, the tragic fall: the familiar story leaves the panoply of the medieval battlefield and cathedral and palace for the mean dimensions of the prison cell. Captured by her enemies during a skirmish at Compiègne in May 1430, only nine months after her apotheosis at Charles's side in the cathedral at Rheims during his coronation, she is sold to the English by her Burgundian captors, turned over to the Inquisition, treacherously tried at Rouen and burned as a heretic in May 1431.

This is the triumphant tale. Substantial though it appears to be, it leaves entirely vague some crucial questions: Why was Joan accepted by Charles and the Valois party? What was her contribution to the military campaign? Why, after achievements so signal, was she allowed to be sold and executed

when ransoms were the custom? Yet these three points are only the bare beginning of the mysteries.

The prime source, of remarkable and intense interest, is the record of Joan's trial, conducted between 9 January and 30 May 1431, when she was burnt. Joan was tried before a large tribunal, composed principally of ecclesiastics and lawyers – sometimes numbering more than seventy men – on suspicion of heresy allied with witchcraft. As was the custom in inquisitorial trials, she was not formally charged until after the cross-examinations had taken place, and by then it had emerged incontrovertibly that she was adamant on two counts: the truthfulness and heavenly origin of the voices who counselled her and her loyalty to her male costume. On these two matters, she would not submit to the authority of the court. As it represented the Church Militant, Christ on earth, she was found guilty of insubordination and heterodoxy and was condemned to the stake.

The trial survives in different manuscript versions (1): one copy is most probably the actual transcript established at the time for the presiding judge, Pierre Cauchon, bishop of Beauvais. In this document, Joan's turn of phrase brings her voice leaping from the page with dramatic, painful authenticity. Half a millennium later, her sincerity is unadulterated; her conviction rings like a bell. It is this quite extraordinary quality of directness in the trial document itself that has, since the 1840s and its first publication, made Joan of Arc an unforgettable source of inspiration. As the trial sought to prove her falsehood and, indeed, succeeded in doing so to the satisfaction of some of the most learned men of the time, this is highly paradoxical.

By contrast, the second major source of knowledge about Joan, composed in her defence by her partisans, does not have the brilliancy of her self-portrait in the trial. In the trial, she stands for unflinching loyalty to a heroic inner conviction; in the documents of the rehabilitation hearings, held at different times between 1450 and 1456, there is often a leaden tone of self-servingness and prudence among witnesses who were anyway recalling events of twenty-five years before.

Nevertheless, few medieval figures are as well documented as Joan of Arc. Yet until the dissemination of these extraordinary records of her career, her chroniclers and panegyrists did not for the most part consult these manuscript sources, but drew on different material and in particular on existing narrative conventions to bring Joan of Arc before their audiences. It is this unfolding of the character of Joan in history that I wanted to trace. It is in some ways terrible to look upon such epic events with a cold

eye; it is pitiless to appraise other men's tears without feeling sympathetic tears oneself. But it is also part of the sincerity admired in someone like Joan to own that heroes and heroines are often the vessels of our most self-flattering illusions, that sometimes the ideals they embody are questionable, however brave and loyal and true they themselves were in pursuit of their aims.

I wanted to learn about Joan not just because her story is so grand, so odd, so stirring. I wanted to learn about her because she has an almost unique standing: she is a universal figure who is female, but is neither a queen, nor a courtesan, nor a beauty, nor a mother, nor an artist of one kind or another, nor – until the extremely recent date of 1920 when she was canonized – a saint. She eludes the categories in which women have normally achieved a higher status that gives them immortality, and yet she gained it. She is one of the few historical personalities who, like Henry VIII, Florence Nightingale, Robin Hood, and Davy Crockett, is immediately known to every child. In England, she is one of the very few foreigners who is a household familiar – with the exception of another great enemy, Napoleon. She is *literally* a cypher. Just as a feather in the cap, green doublet and hose and a merry gallantry signify the figure of Robin Hood, so Joan is instantly present in the mind's eye: a boyish stance, cropped hair, medievalized clothes, armour, an air of spiritual exaltation mixed with physical courage.

But such rapid strokes of the pen that now bring her breathing and alive into the schoolroom were made differently by the historians of her own time and differently again by the men and women of the Renaissance and differently again by the painters and writers of the nineteenth century. In the transformation of her body, and in the different emphases of different times, we have a diviner's cup, which reflects on the surface of the water the image that the petitioner wishes to see, its limits and extensions drawn, as in all magic operations of this kind, according to the known quantities shared between diviner and petitioner. Thus, basic themes, suggested by the recorded historical events of her life, must recur: her departure from her native village of Domremy in Lorraine; her arrival at the court of the uncrowned king of France, Charles VII; her extraordinary successes in battle, first at the relief of Orléans in May and then at Patay in July; the march in triumph with Charles towards Rheims; his anointing and crowning in the cathedral there as the legitimate king of France; her capture and long imprisonment, first by the Burgundians and then by the English, with

whom they were allied; her cruel and prolonged interrogation by the Inquisition; her death at the stake in May 1431. Just over a year of freedom, with a few months' glory, after her emergence into public life; a year of lingering in different gaolers' different gaols; five centuries of questions, interpretations, ideas and conflicting passions. Although her story contains these same elements in almost all its tellers' versions, the variations in emphasis and in interpretation are multiple and rich; and even in negative, through what is omitted, what is not discussed, they reveal the preoccupations of a shared culture. Joan of Arc was an individual in history and real time, but she is also the protagonist of a famous story in the timeless dimension of myth, and the way that story has come to be told tells yet another story, one about our concept of the heroic, the good and the pure.

To find out the reasons why she lodged in the minds of people who heard her story, so that it came to be told again and again until it passed into the collectivity of our culture, is a wonderful and gripping problem. By decoding the context in which she flourished – both of her own lifetime, when she was accepted by her own people, and of her posthumous fame, when she was described and reinvented by wave upon wave of new generations who adopted her – I want to make her real again.

It appears to devalue Joan of Arc to write that it was not blind political enmity of the English that caused her death, but the fears of her own countrymen about heresy and its subversiveness. It appears to belittle her to claim that she alone was not responsible for her luminousness, but those who saw it were equally responsible; that it was not her character, but the combination of her character and a thousand other circumstances, that has created the brave, noble, poignant, bracing figurehead of freedom and truth we think of as Joan of Arc. It is demythologizing, perhaps. We want our heroism cut from the air, pristine and timeless, free from all contingencies, rather than shifting in the soil of circumstance. Idealism that informs faith in a heroine like Joan of Arc finds it hard to tolerate any reservations about her absolute goodness and her complete responsibility for that goodness. But by serving this yearning for unqualified nobility, we run the risk of thinning history's rich diversity, of attenuating the model that the past presents to us for our future learning, of turning to simple formulae that will fail us, since they apply to the organized 'real' of fables and not to the inchoate flux of reality. To restore Joan to her background moves heroism back on to the plane of daily life. But no iconoclasm, however severe, could quite make

Joan and her story mundane. If an archaeologist discovers the provenance of an exquisite fragment of carved stone and replaces it on the temple from which it was long lost, the splendour of the stone is not diminished, only changed.

In Part One of this book, 'The Life and Death of Jeanne la Pucelle', I have tried to restore her to her own context, to create a foreground of the religious beliefs and political struggles that made her activities acceptable and intelligible. So the starting points of this narrative are not her birthday and her birthplace, but instead the physical nature of her virginal body, because that is the starting point of her impact on her contemporaries. Then, like the cutout figure of Joan of Arc in a children's game of the early 1900s, she appears again, dressed in the various costumes that she herself chose to wear – the dress of a man, the splendour of a knight – and in the guises that her contemporaries thought she had assumed – the role of female prophet, of insubordinate heretic, of dangerous witch.

The second part, 'The Afterlife of Joan of Arc', follows the thread of posthumous tributes to the heroine, both visual and verbal, and the successive transformations her figure undergoes as different pressure groups make her their own, like the unsettled aristocracy of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France or the ardent xenophobic and anti-Semitic activists at the end of the nineteenth century. Throughout this section I hope to have developed the underlying theme that when a story is told, it is told according to the perceptions of its hearers or its readers: the teller unconsciously provides points of reference to make the material intelligible. In the case of Joan of Arc, this shared information altered her story considerably, and circumstances of her life that I have outlined in Part One vanish almost completely. The narrators of the seventeenth century, for instance, did not elaborate on the numbers of female visionaries and prophets of Joan's day. Such a calling no longer played a part in the collective sympathies of the groups to whom the story of Joan's life was addressed. Instead other common points of reference were marshalled: the lore of Amazons, for instance, had become a motif of dazzling and compulsive popularity in Renaissance Europe, and so Joan was assimilated to it, to give her a context in which she appeared natural and explicable, though still unusual.

By showing that a historical figure like Joan merges and to a certain extent disappears under the influence of other more prevalent and more charming images at different times, this book is intended as a plea. Joan was presented as an Amazon, or a knight of old, or a personification of virtue,

because the history of individual women and of women's roles has been so thin. In the writing of female biography, it is easy to revert unconsciously to known stereotypes. Joan of Arc is a pre-eminent heroine because she belongs to the sphere of action, while so many feminine figures or models are assigned and confined to the sphere of contemplation. She is anomalous in our culture, a woman renowned for doing something on her own, not by birthright. She has extended the taxonomy of female types; she makes evident the dimension of women's dynamism. It is urgent that this taxonomy be expanded further and that the multifarious duties that women have historically undertaken be recognized, researched and named. Like Eskimos, who enjoy a lexicon of many different words for snow, we must develop a richer vocabulary for female activity than we use at present, with our restrictions of wife, mother, mistress, muse. Joan of Arc, in all her brightness, illuminates the operation of our present classification system, its rigidity on the one hand, its potential on the other.

Although the forms in which a story is conveyed change, the questions remain eternally. The human face is no longer painted in the finely invisible brush strokes of the Renaissance portrait, nor is the human adventure recounted in the form of the classical epic. But the same questions are being asked: What did so-and-so look like? What happened then, and how? In the case of Joan of Arc, I am not trying to tell her story as Anatole France or Vita Sackville-West did in their enduringly readable biographies. I am trying to see how Joan fitted into an intellectual and emotional tradition of thought concerning women. So the reader alert for the flourish of medieval trumpets on the bloody battlefield will be disappointed. I have tried to tell the story of how the story came to be told, to find out why Joan of Arc was believed, how that belief was expressed, what its expression affirmed and what causes it has served.

Joan is the dancer; we have watched her down the centuries. Her body has swayed to the music of different players, we have seen her brightening glance. Now is the time to turn from her face and her footwork, hear the music which commands the steps, analyse its measure. For, as Yeats has written, 'How can we know the dancer from the dance?'

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