# Saint Joan

## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

George Bernard Shaw was born in 1856 in Dublin, the youngest child of George Carr Shaw, a civil servant, and Lucinda Elizabeth (Bessie) Shaw, a singer. Shaw unhappily attended four schools in his youth and developed a deep distaste for formal education. Bessie left for London in 1873 with his two older sisters, and Shaw followed them there in 1876. Shaw took odd jobs while in London, but it wasn't until the 1880s that he began to make a livable income from writing. His first published works were novels, though he is best known for his dramas. Shaw became politically active during this time, attending meetings with the Social Democratic Federation. He joined the Fabian Society, a recently formed British socialist organization, in 1884. Shaw's support of socialism often figures thematically into his writing. He shifted his focus from politics to playwriting in the 1890s and would establish a reputation as a major dramatist by the beginning of the 20th century. His first staged play, *Widowers' Houses*, premiered at the Royalty Theatre in 1892. *Widowers' Houses* is one of three of Shaw's plays known as the as *Plays Unpleasant*. *The Plays Unpleasant* were "unpleasant" because they sacrificed entertainment value in order to force the audience to witness and reflect on relevant social and economic issues and inequalities. Shaw was a prolific playwright, having published over 60 plays, many of which contain the elements of sharp social criticism demonstrated in *The Plays Unpleasant*. Among his more famous plays are *Major Barbara* (1905), *Pygmalion* (1912) and *Saint Joan* (1923). In 1925—shortly after the publication of *Saint Joan*—Shaw received the Nobel Prize for Literature. He died in 1950 at the age of 94.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Two major historical moments relevant to *Saint Joan* are the Hundred Years' War and the Inquisition. One of the most significant military conflicts of the Middle Ages, the Hundred Years' War was comprised of a series of territorial conflicts that occurred between France and English between 1337 and 1453. Historians typically divide the war into three major phases: the Edwardian War (1337-1360), the Caroline War (1369-1389), and the Lancastrian War (1415-1453). The events of *Saint Joan* take place during the Lancastrian War. One major development of the Hundred Years' War was a heightened sense of nationalism in France and England. Shaw explores nationalism's influence in secular characters like Warwick who see Joan's nationalist idea that serfs should pledge allegiance to one king (rather than to non-centralized, local land-owning nobility) as a threat to the existing feudal order. The assessors who condemn Joan are part of the Holy Inquisition, a series of ecclesiastical courts within the Catholic Church formed in the 12th century to address heresy. When suspected heretics tried in the Inquisition refused to repent for their sins against the Church, they were passed from ecclesiastical authorities to secular authorities, as was the case for Joan of Arc. After the historical events of *Saint Joan* took place, the Inquisition expanded its reach to address the growing influence of the Protestantism across Europe during the 16th century. The Inquisition is thematically important to *Saint Joan* because its attack on heretics addresses the threat individuals pose to existing social institutions.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In the preface to *Saint Joan*, Shaw explicitly states that he wrote the play with the goal of improving upon previous literary explorations of Joan's life. As such, *Saint Joan* exists within an extensive canon of adaptations of the Joan of Arc historical narrative. Some notable examples of these are Friedrich Schiller's epic poem *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* (1801), Mark Twain's fictional biography *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896), and Bertolt Brecht's play *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (1930). One of *Saint Joan*'s major themes is the agency of individuals against the power of institutions. Shaw explores this theme through the genre of the historical drama, ultimately drawing larger conclusions about the inevitable corruption of ideals that occurs when institutional power is at stake. In this way, one might compare *Saint Joan* to Arthur Miller's 1953 play *The Crucible*, which presents a fictionalized account of the Salem witch trials as an allegory for McCarthyism and deals with similar themes of the individual versus the institution and moral integrity versus corrupt hypocrisy.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Saint Joan*
- **When Written:** 1923
- **Where Written:** London
- **When Published:** 1923
- **Literary Period:** Victorian
- **Genre:** Drama, Social Criticism, Historical Drama
- **Setting:** France
- **Climax:** Joan refuses to recant and is burned at the stake as a heretic.
- **Antagonist:** Peter Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais; Richard de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick

- **Point of View:** Dramatic

## EXTRA CREDIT

**On Film.** *Saint Joan* was adapted for the screen in 1957. The film was directed by American director Otto Preminger and stars Jean Seberg.

**Atypical Antagonists.** Michael Holroyd, an English biographer who has written four volumes on Shaw, claims that *Saint Joan* is "a tragedy without villains."

## PLOT SUMMARY

*Saint Joan* begins in 1429 at the castle of Vaucouleurs. Captain Robert de Baudricourt sits at a **table** and berates his steward for the fact that there are no eggs. The steward is convinced that the **hens** won't lay eggs until De Baudricourt agrees to see "The Maid" who called on De Baudricourt two days ago and is still outside, speaking with soldiers and praying as she waits to be seen.

Reluctantly, De Baudricourt sends for her: she is Joan of Arc, a simple country girl of 17 or 18 years, dressed in **men's clothing** and with a persuasive confidence about her. She informs De Baudricourt that he must give her a horse, armor, soldiers, and send her to the Dauphin: she is on a mission to raise the siege of Orleans, acting on the word of God as it is conveyed to her through the voices of saints she hears in her head. De Baudricourt balks at being ordered around by a young girl, but Joan won't be refused. She tells him that two soldiers, Bertrand de Poulengey and Monsieur John of Metz, have promised to support and accompany her in her journey. Reluctantly, De Baudricourt yields to Joan's demands. Joan and her soldiers depart for Chinon to meet with the Dauphin. After they leave, the steward rushes in to inform de Baudricourt that the hens have begun to lay eggs again, which de Baudricourt sees as proof that Joan really was sent by God.

Sometime later, Joan reaches the Dauphin at his castle in Chinon, in Touraine. She informs him that she has been sent by God to drive the English out of France and crown him king. The Dauphin is skeptical, having little interest in warfare and knowing that the English are more adept at fighting than the French, but things are so dire that France really has nothing to lose, and Joan eventually convinces him to let her command his army.

Joan and her army reach Orleans on April 29, 1429. On the river Loire, she meets Dunois, the Bastard of Orleans. Joan is impatient to begin fighting, which Dunois regards as overconfident and foolish. Dunois tells her the English are across the river, but he is hesitant to strike before the wind changes directions, as they must travel up the river and attack the English from the rear. Dunois has prayed incessantly for a west wind, but to no avail. Joan joins Dunois in praying. Shortly after this, Dunois's page announces, with awe, that the wind has changed. Dunois sees this as evidence that Joan is sent from God, and they prepare to fight the English.

Sometime later, at a tent at an English camp, John de Stogumber (the Chaplain) and the Earl of Warwick discuss Joan: they believe she must be witch, as there is no other way to explain the French's sudden rush of military victories.

Peter Cauchon (the Bishop of Beauvais) enters. Cauchon and Warwick discuss the problems Joan presents for their respective institutions. Cauchon believes Joan is guilty of heresy and, as a churchman, he believes he has an obligation to make sure she recants and saves her soul from damnation. At the same time, he acknowledges the danger Joan and her ideas pose for the Church: Joan's relationship to God is unmediated by the Church—she believes she can talk to and understand God's word without help from the Church—and this threatens the power the Church holds over its people.

Warwick is less concerned with the problem Joan poses to the Church but fears the threat Joan's political ideologies pose to the existing feudal structure and society: acting on God's orders, Joan wants the common people to be answerable to the king alone which would result in noblemen like Warwick being ripped of their power. Cauchon and Warwick don't see eye to eye—Cauchon's concerns are spiritual, and Warwick's are temporal—but the two men can agree that they share Joan as a common threat to their respective institutions' hold on power. They agree that Joan must be stopped.

Scene V takes place in the cathedral at Rheims. After numerous military victories, Joan has finally crowned Dauphin king: he is finally King Charles VII. Dunois enters the cathedral to find Joan praying. Having fulfilled her promises to God, Joan plans to return home to the country, but she suddenly asks Dunois if they can continue to fight and drive the English out of Paris before she leaves. Dunois has doubts that the French will be able to keep their victory streak going, and the Archbishop accuses Joan of obstinance, overconfidence, and the sin of pride. Charles VII, too, believes Joan is taking things too far. It's also revealed that Joan's actions and confidence have earned her many enemies. The crown, the military, and the Church all tell Joan that if her enemies capture her, she's on her own: none of them will step in to rescue her from whatever gruesome fate is in store for her.

By May 30, 1431, Joan has been captured by the English and is on trial for heresy. Cauchon sincerely tries to give Joan a fair trial. He provides her with ample opportunities to recant and save her soul and body from destruction, but she refuses to reject the validity of her voices and place the authority of the Church before the direct word of God. Joan learns that she will be burned at the stake immediately because she refuses to recant. In a panic, she hurriedly signs a document rejecting her previous statements under the assumption that she will be

allowed to go free.

When Cauchon informs her that she will be sentenced to life in prison, she rips the recantation to pieces and accepts her fate. She is immediately burned, except for her heart, which the Executioner reveals couldn't be destroyed. The Chaplain rushes into the courtroom in a deranged panic: witnessing the cruelty and gruesomeness of Joan's execution has had a profound effect on him, and he now regards his earlier enthusiasm to see her burned for witchcraft with shame and moral reprehension. He informs Warwick and Cauchon that a soldier offered Joan a makeshift cross in her final moments and regrets that he did nothing to prevent her burning.

Ladvenu, a Dominican monk who is sympathetic toward Joan, reveals that he, too, offered Joan a cross. When the flames grew so high that they threatened to enrobe Ladvenu as well as Joan, however, she told him to get down and save himself. Ladvenu believes the selflessness Joan demonstrated in her final hours is proof that she was sent from God, not from the devil, and that her death was not the end for her, but only the beginning of her redemption.

Twenty-five years after Joan's death, Ladvenu comes to King Charles VII to announce that the charges brought against Joan have been reversed: the Church has cleared her name and smeared the reputations of her accusers. Charles VII is pleased to hear this, as it means he wasn't crowned by a witch or heretic, and his title is therefore legitimate.

Joan then appears to Charles VII in a dream. He tells her the good news. One by one, those who condemned or abandoned Joan appear. Finally, a gentleman in 1920s clothing appears and informs the room that the Church has canonized Joan 500 years after her execution. Everybody praises her and apologizes for doubting her. When Joan asks whether she should come back to life and join them, however, they reject her, make excuses, and disappear. Joan cries out in despair: "O God that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive thy saints? How long, O Lord, how long?"

## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Joan ("The Maid")** – Joan, often referred to by others as "the Maid," is *Saint Joan*'s protagonist. She is based on the historical figure Joan of Arc from Lorraine. Shaw portrays Joan as a simple teenage girl who is uneducated and somewhat naïve. However, she is also witty, intelligent, pragmatic, and a highly capable military strategist: until her capture at the end of *Saint Joan*, she celebrates only victories in her martial pursuits. Throughout the play, Joan presumes to communicate directly with God through the voices of Saint Catherine, Saint Margaret, and the archangel Michael, which she hears in her head. Joan's voices inform her military strategizing, her decision to don men's clothing and **armor**, and her decision to crown the Dauphin King of France. Joan gains enemies in both the religious and secular spheres of medieval society because authority figures like Peter Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais and the Earl of Warwick believe that the confidence she places in her voices poses a threat to existing systems of institutional power. For example, Cauchon and the Church see Joan as a threat because, in listening to her voices, she presumes that she, rather than the Church, is the ultimate authority on the word of God. Such a view eliminates the need for the Church to understand God and consequently lessens the power religious authorities like Cauchon hold over the common people. What sets Joan apart from most other characters in the play is her strong sense of moral integrity. Unlike Charles VII, Cauchon, or Warwick, Joan has no interest or obligation to uphold the values and power structures of an institution, choosing instead to act solely on behalf of her own conscience and moral compass. While other characters repeatedly contradict their individual beliefs in order to fuel the strength of their respective institutions, Joan's individuality allows her to maintain a sense of honesty and integrity in everything she says and does.

**Robert de Baudricourt** – A handsome military squire from Joan's hometown of Lorraine. He has "no will of his own" and compensates for this by berating his steward. Baudricourt is the first nobleman to back Joan's plans after she goes to him at the castle of Vaucouleurs to request **armor**, a horse, and soldiers. He originally thinks Joan is crazy but eventually supports her.

**Bertrand de Poulengey** – A 36-year-old French gentleman-at-arms. Poulengey is unfocused, passive, and doesn't offer his opinion unless it's asked of him. He backs Joan from the start, placing faith in her military capabilities and believing her to be a "miracle." Baudricourt thinks Poulengey has ulterior, sexual motivations for supporting Joan, though this is not the case. Joan refers to him by his nickname "Polly," which highlights how she wants to be seen as an equal to the men.

**The Archbishop of Rheims (Regnault de Chartres)** – A French churchman. At first he sees Joan as pious and humble, but he turns on her when he realizes the extent of her self-confidence and obstinance, believing her to be guilty of the sin of pride. He is particularly critical of Joan's position that she can know and communicate with God without the intermediary help of the Church. The Archbishop is also annoyed and intimidated by the fact that Joan is always right, and by the fact that it was she—and not he—who crowned Charles VII king. The Archbishop eventually turns on Joan, promising her that the Church will abandon her if she is captured by enemy forces.

**The Dauphin (King Charles VII)** – The Dauphin is the 26-year-old heir to the French throne. He should be King Charles VII since his father died, but it's not until Scene V that Joan crowns him and he assumes the role of king. The Dauphin's mother has

explicitly suggested he is illegitimate, which undercuts his power and causes members of his court to mock and disrespect him. Shaw describes him as "a poor creature physically." He is slight, unattractive, and badly dressed. Still, he is an adept conversationalist and very intelligent. Charles is initially indifferent to political or military matters, preferring to stay at home and be comfortable and unbothered rather than fight. Joan forces Charles to assume a more authoritative role and, by the end of the play (25 years after Joan's execution), he has a string of military successes under his belt, earning him the nickname Charles the Victorious. The Dauphin is relieved to hear news of the reversal of Joan's conviction 25 years after her execution because it means he was crowned legitimately and not by a heretic.

**Jean, Comte de Dunois, Bastard of Orleans** – A 26-year-old skilled, successful, and popular French military leader. He recognizes Joan's own military prowess and supports her throughout the play. Dunois is skeptical of Joan's voices but accepts them, as her leadership has resulted in many French victories. Dunois rejects Joan's proposal that the French take Paris before she returns home, deeming her overconfidence foolish and impractical. Dunois ultimately does nothing to interfere with Joan's execution, nor does he believe she should be resurrected at the end of the play.

**Richard de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick** – Warwick is a nobleman who is in charge of English forces. He is Joan's primary enemy in the secular world. Warwick wants Joan to be punished because her political philosophies threaten the existing feudal structure. Under Joan's proposed social order, noblemen like Warwick would lose their land and social status when all power is relinquished to one king who, in turn, answers only to God. Warwick conspires with Peter Cauchon to capture and try Joan when both men agree that Joan is a threat to their respective institutions' power. Cauchon agrees to turn Joan over to Warwick and the secular arm should Joan refuse to recant the charges of heresy of which the Church finds her guilty. Although Warwick is largely indifferent toward Joan's heresy, he acknowledges that in Joan, he and Cauchon have a common enemy who threatens to dismantle and destroy the infrastructure of either man's institution. Warwick wants Joan punished so that he can maintain his position of power within the existing feudal system.

**John Bowyer Spenser Neville de Stogumber (Warwick's Chaplain)** – De Stogumber is Warwick's Chaplain. He is not horribly bright, so most of Cauchon and Warwick's nuanced condemnations of Joan go over his head. For much of the play, the Chaplain possesses a deep hatred for Joan. Unlike Cauchon, he has little interest in giving Joan a partial, nuanced trial. To the Chaplain, Joan is merely a witch who must be killed. Ultimately, however, Joan's execution has a profound effect on the Chaplain. In the Epilogue, he reveals that he became "a different man" after Joan's death in an attempt to repent for the cruelty he inflicted upon her.

**Peter (Píerre) Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais** – Cauchon is a French churchman, but he is of the Burgundian faction, which makes him an ally to the English. Cauchon believes Joan is guilty of heresy and does all in his power to assure that she is given a fair trial with ample opportunities to understand and recant. As a religious leader, he sees it as his primary obligation to save Joan's soul from damnation. Cauchon works with Warwick, promising him that the Church will turn over Joan to the English if she is captured. Cauchon's desire to save Joan's soul is complicated by the fact that her direct communication with God threatens the Church's institutional power; in other words, Cauchon has ulterior motives for wanting Joan captured and tried: on the one hand, he sincerely wants to save her soul but, at the same time, he needs Joan to be captured and her spiritual philosophies halted in order for the Church to maintain its institutional power.

**Brother John Lemaître (The Inquisitor)** – The Inquisitor is a Dominican monk who plays a significant role in Joan's trial. He gives a long speech in Scene VI condemning Joan's heresy and attesting to his strong belief in the value of institutions. He strongly opposes the attempt of any individual to subvert existing institutional structures. The Inquisitor believes it is not inherently cruel to try Joan, because it is far crueler to allow heresy to go unpunished, giving it free reign to disrupt and dismantle the institutional status quo that gives the world order. Like Ladvenu, the Inquisitor questions whether Joan understood the charges pressed against her on an intellectual level.

**John d'Estivet, Canon of Bayeux** – The court promoter, or prosecutor. He gets annoyed when Courcelles (who was involved with assembling the 64 charges originally filed against Joan) and others bring up trite matters that detract from the more central issue of heresy at issue in Joan's trial. Unlike Cauchon or Warwick, d'Estivet's investment in Joan's case comes from a purely legal position.

**Thomas de Courcelles, Canon of Paris** – A young, 30-year-old priest who is present at Joan's trial. Courcelles helped assemble 64 charges against Joan, and he becomes annoyed when the Inquisitor dismisses all but 12 of them. He interrupts Joan's trial multiple times to bring up some of these trite, insignificant charges, much to the annoyance of the Inquisitor and Cauchon.

**Brother Martin Ladvenu** – A young Dominican priest. He is sympathetic toward Joan and wants her to be treated mercifully. As Joan burns at the stake, he approaches her to give her a cross. When the fire grows and threatens to harm him, Joan orders him to back away and save himself. This act of selflessness in her final moments of life leads Ladvenu to believe that Joan was inspired not by the devil but by God, and that she was ultimately redeemed in her final moments. After her death, he advocates for her image to be restored, and it is

he who alerts King Charles VII to the reversal of the charges pressed against Joan. Ladvenu is concerned about the role Joan's ignorance of the law plays in her trial—he fears she doesn't understand the charges pressed against her, though he ultimately finds her sentence to be just.

**The Executioner** – The Executioner carries out Joan's execution and informs everyone that Joan's heart wouldn't burn. At the end of the play, when everyone learns that Joan has been canonized, the Executioner praises her, as her sainthood redeems the executioners of the world for the role they play in "the death of the soul." Ultimately, however, he wants Joan to remain dead and makes excuses when she asks if she should resurrect herself.

**English Soldier** – An English soldier who gives Joan a makeshift cross made of two twigs while she burns at the stake. His soul is damned, but this act of generosity toward Joan allows him one day off from hell. He appears again in the Epilogue and comforts Joan after the others have abandoned her, though he, too, must leave when the clock strikes midnight and his break from damnation ends.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Steward** – Robert de Baudricourt's steward. He is a worn, ugly man who may be any age between 18 and 55. The steward sees something special in Joan, despite Baudricourt's skepticism.

**Georges, Duc de la Trémouille, Constable of France** – A French nobleman in the Dauphin's court. He is arrogant and in charge of the French forces. La Trémouille doesn't respect the Dauphin, who owes him money and bullies him. He's enraged when the Dauphin places Joan in charge of the French forces.

**Gilles de Rais ("Bluebeard")** – A 25-year-old French captain in the army. He is smart, confident, and earns the name "Bluebeard" as a result of his "little curled beard dyed blue." He wants to be liked but isn't particularly "pleasant" to be around. Bluebeard is an early supporter of Joan.

**Captain La Hire** – A French soldier with "no court manners," La Hire is an early supporter of Joan.

**The Duchess de la Trémouille** – The Duc de la Trémouille's wife. Besides Joan, she is the only other female character in the play.

**Monsieur John of Metz** A French nobleman. refers to him by his nickname, Jack.

# THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

## INSTITUTIONS AND THE CORRUPTION OF INTEGRITY

In *Saint Joan*, Shaw takes issue with previous adaptations of the Joan of Arc narrative that situate Joan as the undeniable heroine and her accusers as inarguable villains. To Shaw, such interpretations oversimplify Joan's story and don't try to understand the institutional structures that informed Joan's and her accusers' ethical frameworks and, subsequently, influenced their actions. Peter Cauchon, the Bishop of Beauvais and a French ally to the English, for example, condemns Joan and the heresy she commits against the Catholic Church, arguing that he has a religious obligation to save Joan's soul from damnation. While Cauchon's spirituality is a major driving force in his condemnation of Joan—and what allows him to see such a condemnation as ethically just—his ties to the Catholic Church and the desire for it to remain in power give his intentions a political aspect, effectively corrupting the integrity of his spiritual reasons for trying Joan. In general, Shaw suggests, authority figures like Cauchon make decisions based on what will enable their institutions to remain in power rather than on the ethical frameworks their institutions promote. People themselves might not be inherently villainous, but their obligation to uphold institutional power allows for the corruption of their ideals.

Initially, Cauchon says that it is his religious obligation that motivates his desire to bring Joan to justice. As a bishop, he has a responsibility to intercede, as believes that the voices Joan hears come not from God but from the devil. (Joan repeatedly insists that she receives messages from God conveyed to her directly through the voices of saints she hears in her head.) Joan's supposed direct communication with God is problematic for Cauchon because it rejects the idea that one needs the Church's guidance to hear and understand the word of God—in other words, Joan is prioritizing the word of her voices over the word of the Church. In Scene IV, Cauchon states: "When [the devil] strikes, he strikes at the Catholic Church, whose realm is the whole spiritual world. When he damns, he damns the souls of the entire human race. […] And it is as one of the instruments of that design that I see this girl. She is inspired, but diabolically inspired." If the devil's intent is to destroy the Church and "damn[] the souls of the entire human race," it is ethically just of Cauchon to do everything in his power to stop Joan. Cauchon clearly articulates that his intentions for punishing Joan aren't inherently cruel. As a Church leader, he considers it his "first duty to seek this girl's salvation," and he has no desire to torture Joan unjustly.

Despite Cauchon's repeated insistence that his first priority is to save Joan's soul, however, this is not his only motivation for wanting Joan brought to trial—it is most important to Cauchon that the Catholic Church remains strong and in power. In this way, Cauchon's worldly obligations to the institution of the

Church corrupt his spiritual obligations to God. Joan doesn't believe she needs the Church as an intermediary to connect with God—she hears, understands, and acts on her voices and visions without the Church's guidance. Joan's rejection of the clergy threatens the Church's hold on power, and Cauchon knows he must put her campaign to an end, lest her rebellion spread to the masses. Cauchon perceives Joan as a threat because her personal connection to God diminishes the hold the Church has on Catholics and lessens its institutional power. "What will the world be like when The Church's accumulated wisdom and knowledge and experience, its councils of learned, venerable pious men, are thrust into the kennel by every ignorant laborer or dairy-maid whom the devil can puff up with monstrous self-conceit of being directly inspired by heaven?" Cauchon asks of Richard de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick (a nobleman in charge of England's military forces). He answers his own question, exclaiming, "It will be a world of blood, fury, of devastation, of each man striving for his own hand: in the end a world wrecked back into barbarism." From Cauchon's perspective, without the guidance of the Church, the world will revert to chaos and "barbarism" because it lacks the order and structure institutions provide. In the end, it's more important to Cauchon to ensure that the Church maintains its hold over the people than it is to save Joan from eternal damnation.

Although Warwick is only peripherally concerned with the heresy of which Cauchon accuses Joan, he extends sympathy toward Cauchon's condemnation of Joan to advance his own political cause. Warwick's actions highlight how corruption abounds even outside the Church, as he sacrifices his integrity in order to preserve his political institution. Joan's demand for a king that answers to God alone threatens Warwick's position in England's existing feudal system. For this reason, he sees Joan's mission as "a cunning device to supersede the aristocracy." If God (via the King) becomes society's only ruler, feudal lords like Warwick will lose their power. Although Warwick isn't completely convinced of Joan's heresy, he goes along with Cauchon's charges: "These two ideas of hers are the same idea at bottom," he allows, "It goes deep, my lord. It is the protest of the individual soul against the interference of priest or peer between the private man and his God." Cauchon recognizes that if he adjusts his own secular charges to legitimize Cauchon's religious ones, both men can defeat what they perceive as a threat against their respective institutions. When Warwick asserts that Joan's "two ideas [...] are the same idea at bottom" he acknowledges the tension between the individual and the institution at play in Joan's revolutionary "ideas" concerning politics and spirituality. In either case, Joan's philosophies promote the strength of the individual at the expense of larger institutions. Her call for an individual king who answers to God alone threatens the existing feudal system much in the way that her belief in a personal experience with Christianity threatens the power the Catholic Church holds over individuals who have been taught that they need the Church to fully understand God.

Warwick and Cauchon have vastly different reasons for wanting to halt Joan's crusade—Warwick's are more political, and Cauchon's are more spiritual—but they are united in their mutual desire to see that their institutions remain in power. The extent to which either man is willing to compromise his own ethics in order to entertain the conflicting ethics of the other suggests that power and moral integrity are mutually exclusive.

## GENDER

Although Shaw maintains that Joan of Arc's trial was fairer and more partial than previous fictitious interpretations of it would suggest, he also illustrates how significantly Joan's gender influenced the way her accusers and allies alike perceived of her character and actions. Joan's trial might have been fair in the sense that she was given ample opportunity to recant and repent, but Shaw's rhetorical choices throughout *Saint Joan* suggest that the accusations brought against her in the first place were worsened or exaggerated as a result of male characters' gender bias. In a multitude of ways—such as the notable absence of women throughout the play, and through male characters' tendency to portray Joan's self-assuredness as disobedience and shameful pride—Shaw highlights the gender bias and sexist conventions of the Middle Ages. He thus upholds Joan as a rebel unwilling to yield to the life society handed her as a woman, even in the face of death.

Shaw first introduces the notion that gender inequality and sexism are at play in Joan's society through *Saint Joan*'s notable absence of female characters. With the exception of the very brief, unremarkable appearance of the Duchess de la Trémouille in Scene II, Joan is the play's sole female character. And though two of the three saints with whom Joan supposedly communicates are women—Saint Catharine and Saint Margaret—the reality is that these female saints exist only as voices, rendering them invisible to the male characters in the play, as well as to the reader. In addition to being invisible, Saint Catharine and Saint Margaret's "voices" are effectively silenced, as they are only ever conveyed, secondhand, through Joan. Shaw purposely erases women from *Saint Joan* in order to emphasize how male-dominated Joan's society was and, subsequently, to illustrate how extreme and unheard of her decision to rebel against gender norms would have been during this time.

Gender inequality may also be observed in the many characters who recast Joan's self-assurance as disobedience and shameful pride. Regnault de Chartres, the Archbishop of Rheims, adamantly and repeatedly warns Joan that she is likely guilty of the deadly sin of pride. In the aftermath of the French victory at Orleans and King Charles VII's subsequent consecration, Joan tells King Charles that she would like to continue fighting and

take Paris, and that she knows it is God's will that they do so. In response, the Archbishop condemns Joan for feeling so assured that she can know God's will with such unceasingly certainty: "When you first came you respected [God's will], and would not have dared to speak as you are not speaking," he says. "You came clothed with the virtue of humility; and because God blessed your enterprises accordingly, you have stained yourself with the sin of pride. The old Greek tragedy is rising among us. It is the chastisement of hubris" Joan's confidence and military prowess resulted in a military victory for the French, but this matters little to the Archbishop. To him, Joan's self-assuredness is sinful and unladylike. He regards her forwardness as inappropriate, and the problematic nature of this outweighs the military victories Joan's confidence has made possible. The Archbishop's disapproval of Joan is first and foremost religious, of course—it is a sin for an individual to claim they can speak on behalf of God—but it's worth noting that he does not condemn other arrogant characters, such as the Lord Chamberlain, Monseigneur de la Trémouille, for their pride in the way he does Joan.

In response to a society bent on making her invisible and men who refuse to take her seriously, Joan rebels relentlessly, subverting gender norms through her physical appearance and rebellious actions. Joan insists on dressing in **armor**, despite society's position that it is to "rebel[] against Nature by wearing man's clothes, and fighting," according to John de Stogumber, the English Chaplain. Her inner voices instruct her to fight, and to fight she must wear armor. In this way, her decision to don men's gear may be seen as a metaphorical representation of her rebellion against gender norms. The male characters in *Saint Joan* repeatedly deride Joan and refuse to take her seriously. In turn, she responds with an opposite, equal irreverence. Joan declines to respect the formal titles of her male counterparts, referring to them colloquially, as an equal. For example, she calls the French gentleman-at-arms Bertrand de Poulengey by his nickname, "Polly," and to the Dauphin (who will later become King Charles VII) as "Charlie." If Joan asserts herself as an equal by speaking informally with the men she likes, she resists subjugation at the hands of her enemies by belittling and talking back to them. During her trial for heresy, for example, she calls Thomas de Courcelles, Canon of Paris "a rare noodle" when he criticizes Cauchon's intent to thoroughly question Joan rather than "proceed[ing] on forced confessions." In court, Joan rejects the charges brought against her with what Cauchon refers to as "pert answers" despite the very real consequence of death this presents for her. Joan defends herself unceasingly, preferring to respond to her accusers with "pert answers" rather than relinquish her beliefs in order to assume the subservient role the world has given her and secure her mortal safety. Despite the severe accusations brought against her in court, she refuses to abandon her principles or alter her actions to conform with society's expectations of how a young woman should behave.

## SANITY VS. MADNESS

Characters throughout *Saint Joan* call Joan mad and question the legitimacy of her claim that she acts on God's will as it is conveyed to her through the voices of Saint Catherine, Saint Margaret, and the archangel Michael. In the preface to *Saint Joan*, Shaw observes that "The test of sanity is not the normality of the method but the reasonableness of the discovery." But how does one assess normalcy? Throughout *Saint Joan*, Shaw emphasizes that it was not Joan's visions that so enraged and offended her accusers but, rather, the subversive instructions her visions contained. Had Joan's visions upheld the Church's ideals—or, had Joan appealed to her enemies wearing conventionally feminine clothing—it's possible that her accusers would have been more sympathetic toward her. But the instructions her voices pass along to her—to take Orleans, to establish a new kingdom governed not by individual kings and lords but by one, divinely sanctioned King—threaten the current social and political orders. Further, the notion that Joan could be able to hear and understand God on her own contradicts core tenets of the Catholic Church. Joan's accusers deny her voices' validity because the philosophies they propose contradict their own views, threaten their hold on power, and upend the status quo. With this, the play emphasizes that madness isn't an essential state but a reflection of how a society wants its citizens to behave.

Religious, political, and military figures deem Joan mad because she acts in ways that threaten the political, religious, and social institutions around which medieval society is structured; once the reader considers Joan outside of her social and spiritual context, however, it becomes clear that she is an exceptionally rational character. Joan's decision to dress in **men's clothing** is insane because it resists conventional gender roles. In addition to this, her accusers deem the voices she hears as a symptom of madness because the voices suggest that individuals hold the power to hear and understand God without the Church's aid, which threatens the Church's hold on power. In reality, however, Joan's actions are often highly logical. Her military strategies might be bold and her words and actions extreme, but most everything she does is calculated and reflects her soundness of mind. One example of Joan's rationality is the decision she makes at her trial to recant her acts of heresy after she learns that she will be immediately burned at the stake should she refuse. Joan stands behind her convictions, but not to the point of madness—she recognizes her punishment for the gruesome, tortuous thing that it is. In *Saint Joan*'s preface, Shaw states of Joan's decision to recant that "Nothing could be more sane or practical." Joan's subsequent decision to then reject her recantation demonstrates another act of reasoning and rationality: she weighs the costs and benefits of the two unpleasant options available to her and decides that dying is preferable to spending the rest of her days rotting in jail.

Joan's accusers and skeptics only acknowledge her goodness and their own cruel and misguided treatment of her after learning that the Catholic Church has canonized her 500 years after her execution, suggesting that Joan can only be considered sane and virtuous once she is no longer alive and able to disrupt social norms. In the Epilogue, which takes place years after the trial, in 1456, Charles VII lies in bed reading. Ladvenu, a priest who was at Joan's trial and feels sympathetically toward her, enters Charles's bedroom to announce that Joan's conviction has been reversed. Shortly after, Joan's ghost appears before King Charles. As Charles informs Joan that the Church has cleared her name, the spirits of her accusers appear before her. The final apparition to appear is that of a gentleman from the 1920s who informs them all that the Catholic Church "has finally declared [Joan] to have been endowed with heroic virtues and favored with private revelations, and calls the said Venerable and Blessed Joan to the communion of the Church Triumphant as Saint Joan." Five hundred years later, the Church's political and social obligations have changed, and only then can Joan's "private revelations" be deemed saintly instead of insane and heretical. Following the gentleman's announcement, each spirit kneels and praises Saint Joan, as her new sane, saintly status relieves them of having to live with their earlier cruelties. The Archbishop announces: "The princes of the Church praise thee, because thou hast cut the knots in which they have tied their own souls." Each of the other apparitions then take turns lauding Joan. Because society now acknowledges her sanity, they, too, can do so without the risk of upsetting the status quo.

But when Joan suddenly asks whether she should rise from the dead and join them (she's a saint now, so she can perform miracles), each of the apparitions makes sudden excuses and disappears. The apparitions' acceptance of Joan's sanity is limited to the spiritual, symbolic realm; they remain unable to accept her sanity in the temporal world, where it could have real consequences on the social order. Warwick, for example, states that "[they all] sincerely regret [their] little mistake; but political necessities, though occasionally erroneous, are still imperative." Warwick and the others are willing to accept Joan retroactively, but for her to return from the dead would symbolically reverse society's earlier condemnation of her madness and her heresy. To reverse this condemnation would be to question the power of institutions and the sanity of the status quo, itself.

Left alone after all of the apparitions have vanished, Joan cries out: "O God that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive Thy saints? How long, O lord, how long?" and the play ends. Explicitly, Joan's question remains unanswered, but the supposedly repentant apparitions' desertion of Joan suggests that the world will never "be ready to receive [its] saints." Saints like Joan who threaten society's institutions can never be accepted in their lifetime, as these institutions—and the individuals who subscribe to them—will always place more value on maintaining the status quo. Joan can only be deemed sane once she is dead and her rebellious "insanity" is no longer a threat to social norms.

## THE QUEST FOR PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE

The primary reason Joan's accusers perceive her as a threat is because her relationship to religion requires no temporal, institutional intermediaries. In other words, she can understand God and religion on her own, without the Church's supervising guidance. While such a liberated, personal experience of Christianity would later be espoused by Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, the fifteenth-century Catholic Church of Joan's world kept a close hold on its members and maintained that it is only through the guidance and surveillance of religious authorities that individuals may truly know and understand God. Shaw expands Joan's unceasing quest to understand and act on truths that she arrives at on her own to make a larger case for humanity's inherent drive toward knowledge and a personal, subjective experience of the world and religion, in particular.

Throughout the play, Joan reinforces that she doesn't want the Church to determine how she should relate to God. Instead, she desires to establish an unmediated connection to God founded on her own, unique principles. Of Joan's personal piety, Cauchon proclaims: "A faithful daughter of the Church! The Pope himself at his proudest dare not presume as this woman presumes. She acts as if she herself were the Church. She brings the message of God to Charles; and the Church must stand aside." The reason that Joan's stance toward religion is so threatening to the Church is that it invites others to also go against the establishment. Cauchon's fears are well founded: the growing presence of Protestantism shows that Joan isn't the only one who craves religious and intellectual agency: "We have such people here in France too: I know the breed," says Cauchon, adding, "It is cancerous: if it be not cut out, stamped out, burnt out, it will not stop until it has brought the whole body of human society into sin and corruption, into waste and ruin." Cauchon's comparison of Protestantism to cancer is extreme, but it shows that he acknowledges humanity's instinctual hunger for urge toward self-actualization and a direct engagement with the world—the fact that Protestantism must be "cut out, stamped out, burnt out" in order to be quelled shows the intensity of humanity's hunger for personal knowledge.

Symbolically, Joan's voices represent her adamance to possess and act on her own self-realized truths. In the preface to *Saint Joan*, Shaw writes: "There are people in the world whose imagination is so vivid that when they have an idea it comes to them as an audible voice, sometimes uttered by a visual figure."

©2020 LitCharts LLC v.007

While Shaw's statement is more poetically resonant than it is psychologically accurate, it presents a compelling lens through which to interpret Joan's voices. Joan seems to indirectly or unconsciously admit that the voices she hears are the manifestation of her own subjective thoughts. This is evident in her tendency refer to the saints' voices possessively, calling them "my" voices. By calling the voices her own, Joan assumes ownership of them and the ideas that they convey. During her trial, when Cauchon asks Joan whether she considers the Church or herself to be the ultimate judge of reality, she responds decisively: "What other judgment can I judge but my own?" Joan's response blurs the lines between the Saints' voices and her own internal judgment.

Like the institution of the Church, Joan's voices act as a mediating force through which one may arrive at truths and judge the reality of the world around them. The key difference between the Church and Joan's voices, however, is that while the Church is an external force that administers truth to its followers by force, Joan's mediating voices come from within, and allow her to make conscious, voluntary assessments of truth. In this way, Joan's decision to submit to the judgment of her voices over the judgment of the Church—despite the fact that she is ultimately burned at the stake for it—represents the intensity of her desire for personal knowledge and a free, direct engagement with the world.

## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

### NATURE

Shaw evokes elements of the natural world to symbolize freedom from institutional bonds. While most characters in *Saint Joan* subscribe to ideologies espoused by institutions like the Church or the monarchy and justify their actions and worldviews in light of these institutions, Joan exists outside of institutional influence, choosing to operate in accordance with her personal, internal beliefs. As such, Shaw frequently connects Joan to the natural world. One example of this appears in Scene III, when Joan's arrival at Orleans coincides with Dunois and his page observing kingfishers fly over the Loire river. By paralleling Joan's arrival with the presence of kingfishers, Shaw emphasizes Joan's ties to nature and her rejection of institutional power. More explicitly, in Scene VII, when Joan decides she would rather burn at the stake than spend the rest of her days in prison, she explains that while she can give up her military pursuits, **armor**, and renown, it is impossible for her to live without nature and freedom. Joan would rather suffer an excruciating death than spend the rest of her days cut off from nature, personal freedom, imprisoned in a literal institutional structure.

### TABLES

Tables, which Shaw writes very purposely into *Saint Joan*'s stage directions, represent institutional order. Tables appear throughout the play to symbolize the power and influence of the social institutions actively at play in any given scene. People who sit around tables usually have close ties to powerful institutions like the Church or the government, so whenever a table is present in *Saint Joan*, it's Shaw's way of reinforcing to the reader how heavily institutions influence characters' worldviews and actions and how the need to assert institutional power and maintain the status quo can corrupt their otherwise morally sound intentions. A notable example of this is in Scene IV, which features a philosophically rich dialogue between Cauchon and Warwick. During this scene, the men sit at a table at an English camp and discuss the threat Joan poses to their separate institutions (Stogumber is there as well, though he lacks the mental capacity to contribute anything significantly insightful). Although Cauchon and Warwick begin their dialogue opposed to and unimpressed with the other's concerns—Warwick is invested in the problems Joan poses for the feudal structure, and Cauchon is invested in those she presents for the Church—they end their debate by compromising their ideals in order to meet in the middle and increase their chances of overtaking Joan, whom they ultimately come to see as posing a similar threat to the integrity of their respective institutions. Shaw's decision to have this moment of moral compromise unfold at a table emphasizes its significance to *Saint Joan*'s thematic exploration of corruption within institutions of power .

### JOAN'S ARMOR

Shaw uses Joan's armor and male attire to emphasize how boldly and incessantly Joan subverts the misogynist norms embraced by medieval society. Joan's armor—and, more generally, her decision to wear men's clothing—is a frequent point of contention for *Saint Joan*'s male characters. During Joan's trial, for example, the Inquisitor goes so far as to suggest that the act against nature Joan demonstrates in her decision to don male clothing is as grave a sin as heresy. Joan's armor also symbolizes her practicality, as evidenced by the fact that her reasons for wearing it are often as pragmatic as they are rebellious Armor is practical for Joan's military pursuits because it protects her from the violence of warfare. Further, if Joan is to live among other soldiers, it is imperative that they see her as an equal. Wearing armor and men's clothing renders her more visibly equal to her male counterparts. Throughout the play, characters often suggest that Joan is mad and capricious but, in reality, most of her decisions are practical and highly calculated. When Shaw

references Joan's armor or male attire in Saint Joan, he reinforces Joan's practicality and alerts the reader to the falsity of these claims.

## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *Saint Joan* published in 1924.

### Scene 1 Quotes

"We want a few mad people now. See where the sane ones have landed us!"

**Related Characters:** Bertrand de Poulengey (speaker), Jean, Comte de Dunois, Bastard of Orleans, Joan ("The Maid"), Robert de Baudricourt

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 67

**Explanation and Analysis**

Poulengey defends his decision to support Joan to Baudricourt, who is still skeptical of the inexperienced, young country girl's ability to lead the French army into battle. Joan's madness—as exhibited by her insistence that she is acting on God's orders, conveyed to her via the voices of saints she hears in her head—is Baudricourt's main source of skepticism.

To this, Poulengey suggests that "we want a few mad people now. See where the sane ones have landed us!" In his statement, Poulengey establishes a divide between madness and sanity based not on one's psychological functionality, but on the success social and political contributions one can offer society. To Poulengey, the relative failures of the "sane" people in charge of France's military pursuits against the English—the successful, well-regarded, and highly popular Dunois, for example—offer the possibility that the French don't have much to lose if they allow someone as "mad" as Joan to take charge of military operations.

Poulengey's distinction between the sanity and madness establishes sanity as a state of mental functionality that is accepted by the masses (symbolized by Baudricourt) and madness as a unique, outsider state of being or functionality. Joan's uniqueness and resultant status as a social, intellectual outsider render her mad, but Poulengey's remark opens the possibility that these outsider perspectives can elevate and enrich a social structure rather than harm its infrastructure and disrupt the status quo.

ROBERT. How do you mean? voices?

JOAN. I hear voices telling me what to do. They come from God.

ROBERT. They come from your imagination.

JOAN. Of course. That is how the messages of God come to us.

**Related Characters:** Robert de Baudricourt, Joan ("The Maid") (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 68

**Explanation and Analysis**

At the castle of Vaucouleurs, Captain Robert de Baudricourt challenges Joan on the legitimacy of her voices, positing that they don't actually come from saints and God, but that they are merely a figment of Joan's imagination. Joan has come to Baudricourt to request armor, soldiers, and Baudricourt's permission to journey to the Dauphin to gain approval to engage in battle against the English at Orleans, but Baudricourt is hesitant to grant Joan her requests out of fear that her voices are proof that she is insane.

Joan complicates Baudricourt's attempt to challenge the legitimacy of her voices, simultaneously validating their existence while agreeing with his criticism that they "come from [her] imagination." To Joan, that her voices come from her "imagination" does not lessen their legitimacy, as she views her imagination—or, her internal conscience—as her most valuable means of navigating the world and understanding the word of God. Joan's stance on the importance of imagination stands in direct contrast to the teachings of the Church, as it renders the individual more capable of forming their own opinions, effectively lessening their need to rely on institutions like the Church to form their judgments for them.

## Scene 2 Quotes

“A miracle, my friend, is an event which creates faith. That is the purpose and nature of miracles. They may seem very wonderful to the people who witness them, and very simple to those who perform them. That does not matter: if they confirm or create faith they are true miracles.”

**Related Characters:** The Archbishop of Rheims (Regnault de Chartres) (speaker), Georges, Duc de la Trémouille, Constable of France, Gilles de Rais (“Bluebeard”), Joan (“The Maid”), The Dauphin (King Charles VII)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 79

**Explanation and Analysis**

Here, the Dauphin and Bluebeard leave the throne room to disguise themselves as one another in order to test Joan—if she can distinguish royalty from a commoner, they will see it as evidence that she can perform miracles and know she is not pretending to be holy—and the Archbishop and La Trémouille stay behind at discuss that nature and existence of miracles.

To the Archbishop, miracles don’t have to be legitimate signs of God’s will, so long as they result in “faith” and work to reinforce the Church’s values and maintain the loyalty of its followers. Miracles “seem very wonderful to the people who witness them” because they confirm what people most want to be true, allowing them to seek solace in the comforts of faith—in God, in their governments, in their countries. On the other hand, miracles are “very simple to those who perform them” because it is easy to tell people what they want to hear—regardless of if what they want to hear is true.

“You are not a churchman; but you are a diplomatist and a soldier. Could you make our citizens pay war taxes, or our soldiers sacrifice their lives, if they knew what is really happening instead of what seems to them to be happening?”

**Related Characters:** The Archbishop of Rheims (Regnault de Chartres) (speaker), Georges, Duc de la Trémouille, Constable of France, Joan (“The Maid”), Gilles de Rais (“Bluebeard”), The Dauphin (King Charles VII)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 79

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, the Archbishop and La Trémouille discuss the nature and social function of miracles while they wait in the throne room for the Dauphin and Bluebeard to return in disguise to test Joan’s holiness. The Archbishop recasts his original definition of miracles as events that create faith in the people to suit La Trémouille’s secular, political background. He argues that just as religious figures perform spiritual miracles to create faith in their religious followers, political figures like La Trémouille convey certain elaborations or alterations of the truth to their citizens so that they can instill within them enough faith to continue to “pay war taxes” and maintain a body of citizens willing to “sacrifice their lives” for the greater good of society.

In the Archbishop’s formation, should citizens know the extent of France’s dire political position in the Hundred Years’ War, “if they knew what was really happening,” they would be less willing to have faith in the governance of their military and political leaders. For this reason, it’s necessary for authority figures like La Trémouille to provide citizens with a miraculous, alternate version “of what seems to be happening” to instill within their citizens a strong, unyielding faith. By paralleling the purpose of miracles in politics and in the institution of the Church, the Archbishop shows how significantly the need to maintain the status quo factors into the values and realities that institutions encourage their followers to believe.

“Do not think that I am a lover of crooked ways. There is a new spirit rising in men: we are at the dawning of a wider epoch. If I were a simple monk, and had not to rule men, I should seek peace for my spirit with Aristotle and Pythagoras rather than with the saints and their miracles.”

**Related Characters:** The Archbishop of Rheims (Regnault de Chartres) (speaker), Georges, Duc de la Trémouille, Constable of France, Joan (“The Maid”), Gilles de Rais (“Bluebeard”), The Dauphin (King Charles VII)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 80

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quote occurs in a discussion between the Archbishop and La Trémouille as they wait for Bluebeard and the Dauphin to return, both disguised, to test Joan’s ability to perform miracles. The Archbishop has just spoken cynically

of miracles, construing them as events that produce faith but that are not themselves inherently holy. To the Archbishop, miracles merely reaffirm what witnesses to miracles want to believe and what the performers of miracles want their followers to believe.

The Archbishop elaborates on his cynicism, insisting that he is not "a lover of crooked ways." He defends his support of miracles—despite their often fraudulent nature—on the basis that "there is a new spirit rising in men." During the 15th century (and especially in the 16th century with the advent of the Protestant Revolution) the Catholic Church was met with revolutionary figures whose criticisms of the clergy and notions about the individual's capability to have a more direct connection with God threatened the absolute power the Church held over its followers. The Archbishop justifies his support of "crooked" miracles because he knows that, as an authority figure who must "rule men," he must possess some means of maintaining his institution's power.

In an ideal world, the Archbishop insists, he would "seek peace for [his] spirit with Aristotle and Pythagoras rather than with the saints and their miracles." In other words, the Archbishop maintains that he could behave more ethically were his morality not inhibited by his obligation to answer to and uphold the ideologies of the Catholic Church. Still, he ultimately does nothing to correct his corrupted morality.

"Minding your own business is like minding your own body: it's the shortest way to make yourself sick."

**Related Characters:** Joan ("The Maid") (speaker), Gilles de Rais ("Bluebeard"), The Dauphin (King Charles VII)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 86

**Explanation and Analysis**

After Joan successfully proves herself to the Dauphin's court by correctly identifying the Dauphin, who had disguised himself as Bluebeard to determine whether Joan is sent from God or simply pretending to be holy, everyone leaves the antechamber to let Joan and the Dauphin speak privately.

The Dauphin admits to Joan that he would prefer to remain uninvolved in France's military efforts against England. When Joan criticizes the Dauphin's passivity, he responds angrily, insisting that she mind her own business. Joan resents the Dauphin's refusal to attend to his responsibilities as the anticipated King of France. To Joan, it is morally reprehensible for the Dauphin to bask in the comforts his position of authority affords him at the expense of France, as she believes it is God's will that the Dauphin assume his role as king and reign over God's divinely sanctioned kingdom.

Joan sees "minding your own business" as knowing the right thing to do but refusing to act on it. This level of moral hypocrisy is so unimaginable to Joan that she compares it to "minding your own body," suggesting that to disregard one's morals is as painful to her as bodily illness. Joan's remark to the Dauphin demonstrates the superiority of her moral integrity compared to those for whom institutional power has resulted in moral corruption and complacency.

## Scene 3 Quotes

"I will not look back to see whether anyone is following me."

**Related Characters:** Joan ("The Maid") (speaker), Jean, Comte de Dunois, Bastard of Orleans

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 91

**Explanation and Analysis**

Joan has just met up with Dunois, where he is stationed on the south bank of the river Loire, across from the English. Joan is enraged that her troops have led her to wrong side of the river, as she would prefer to engage in battle against the English immediately, but Dunois insists that it is more practical to wait until the west wind comes, as the French will need to attack the English upstream, from the rear.

Dunois warns Joan that nobody will follow her if she decides to take on the English before the French troops are confidently prepared, to which Joan responds, confidently: "I will not look back to see whether anyone is following me." Joan is unconcerned with what she considers to be Dunois's needlessly cautious strategizing: she believes the French have God on their side, and that he will protect them at battle. Joan's martial confidence might be the result of her steadfast faith in God, but she frequently expresses her faith using the first person "I," underscoring the self-assurance that fuels her faith.

DUNOIS. I, God forgive me, am a little in love with war myself, the ugly devil! I am like a man with two wives. Do you want to be like a woman with two husbands?

JOAN. [*matter-of-fact*] I will never take a husband. A man in Toul took action against me for breach of promise; but I never promised him. I am a soldier: I do not want to be thought of as a woman. I will not dress as a woman. I do not care for the things women care for. They dream of lovers, and money. I dream of leading a charge, and of placing the big guns.

**Related Characters:** Joan ("The Maid") (speaker), Jean, Comte de Dunois, Bastard of Orleans

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 92

**Explanation and Analysis**

Joan and Dunois confide in one another their mutual love of war, and Joan straightforwardly explains the role war plays in her life. Dunois makes the analogy that his love affair with war is comparable to having "two wives." When he asks Joan if it's the same with her—if her martial love affair is akin to her love for a husband—Joan points out the asymmetry inherent in her and Dunois's relationship to war that emerges as a result of their different genders.

As a man, Dunois's gender identity allows for him to love war, as the life of a solider is conducive to the stereotypes of masculinity his medieval society upholds. In this way, he can think of war as a second wife, as his identity as a man allows for him to love war and violence in the same way he loves women.

For Joan, things are not so simple, as society sees femininity and a love of war or violence as mutually exclusive character traits. For Joan to fully embrace her love of war, thus, she must reject her ties to femininity, identifying only as "a solider" in order to forge a relationship to war that society will more readily accept. As such, it becomes necessary for her to "not want to be thought of as a woman," not to "dress as a woman," and to reject what her society has deemed "the things women care for." Joan's response to Dunois illustrates the double standards she's forced to grapple with as a young woman. It also shows the extent of her individuality. By choosing to see herself as a solider, she rejects both masculine and feminine gender expectations, identifying not with the norms forced upon people in society, but with the martial pursuits and interests that define her personality.

## Scene 4 Quotes

"Men cannot serve two masters. If this cant of serving their country once takes hold of them, goodbye to the authority of their feudal lords, and goodbye to the authority of the Church. That is, goodbye to you and me."

**Related Characters:** Richard de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick (speaker), Peter (Píerre) Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais, Joan ("The Maid"), John Bowyer Spenser Neville de Stogumber (Warwick's Chaplain)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 96

**Explanation and Analysis**

Warwick and Chaplain de Stogumber sit at an English camp waiting for Cauchon to arrive so that they can discuss the compromised position the English find themselves in now that Joan has joined forces with the French. Stogumber insists that the English needn't be too worried, as it's only Frenchmen they're up against. Warwick responds critically to Stogumber's remark, as it reinforces the nationalist rhetoric that has emerged as a result of the Hundred Years' War.

To Warwick, who is an earl, such rhetoric poses a threat to the power he holds over the commoners who live in his allotted territory. When Warwick states that "men cannot serve two masters," he refers to consequences that will arise if commoners pledge allegiance to their nation's king, rather than to their regional "feudal lords." If these new nationalist ideals were to become the law of the land, it would mean that noblemen like Warwick—as well as churchmen like Stogumber—would surrender their power to a single king, who answers only to God. When Warwick concludes that this means "goodbye to me and you," he asserts that nationalism and individuals like Joan who promote it are a threat to society's current power structures.

"When he strikes, he strikes at the Catholic Church, whose realm is the whole spiritual world. When he damns, he damns the souls of the entire human race. Against that dreadful design The Church stands ever on guard. And it is as one of the instruments of that design that I see this girl. She is inspired, but diabolically inspired."

**Related Characters:** Peter (Píerre) Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais (speaker), Richard de Beauchamp, Earl of

Warwick, John Bowyer Spenser Neville de Stogumber (Warwick's Chaplain), Joan ("The Maid")

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 100

**Explanation and Analysis**

Cauchon tells Warwick that Joan is guilty not of witchcraft but of heresy, and he then explains how heresy operates to destroy the foundation of the Catholic Church. According to Cauchon, the devil works through heretics to "strike[] at the Catholic Church, whose realm is the whole spiritual world." In other words, the devil works through individuals to destroy the status quo established and upheld by society's larger institutions.

Cauchon's initial remark positions individuals and individual thought as a direct threat to the stability of the collective, emphasizing the severity of the damage an individual can do by insisting it can "damn[] the souls of the entire human race." Unlike Joan, who sees her self-assurance and unique imagination as positive aspects that can help her forge a more fruitful connection with God and the world, Cauchon views Joan's "inspired" individuality as "diabolical[]" because it has the ability to diminish the Catholic Church's hold on power. Cauchon condemns Joan's heresy because the qualities of individual inquiry it rests upon stand in direct opposition to the subservience the Church needs in order to maintain control over its followers.

"You great lords are too prone to treat The Church as a mere political convenience."

**Related Characters:** Peter (Píerre) Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais (speaker), Richard de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, John Bowyer Spenser Neville de Stogumber (Warwick's Chaplain), Joan ("The Maid")

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 101

**Explanation and Analysis**

Here, Cauchon, Warwick, and Stogumber are in an English camp discussing Joan and the problems she presents for their respective institutions. Cauchon has just promised Warwick that, should Joan refuse to repent for her acts of heresy in an ecclesiastic court, he will hand her over to Warwick and the secular arm for further punishment.

Warwick expresses flippant glee at the prospect of burning Joan at the stake, to which Cauchon responds critically, as his role as a churchman obligates him to consider Joan and crimes against the Church gravely, positioning the wellbeing of Joan's soul at the forefront of his concerns.

When Cauchon accuses Warwick and other noblemen as being "too prone to treat The Church as a mere political convenience," he insinuates that Warwick could care less about Joan, the state of our soul, or the legitimacy of the crimes of which the Church accuses her. The only reason Warwick bothers to negotiate with the Catholic Church in the first place is to halt what he sees as Joan's crusade against the existing feudal system—in other words, his cooperation with Cauchon is entirely political.

The reader may take Cauchon's statement ironically, however, as even he—a churchman—"treat[s] The Church as a mere political convenience" when assessing the consequences Joan's capture will have on the Church's ability to maintain control of the common people. The main reason Joan's heresy is dangerous to the Church is that her direct connection with God opens the door for other common people to establish personal connections and experiences with God and religion outside of the guidance of the Church, effectively deceasing the Church's power.

"She acts as if she herself were The Church. She brings the message of God to Charles; and The Church must stand aside. She will crown him in the cathedral of Rheims: she, not The Church! She sends letters to the king of England giving him God's command through her to return to his island on pain of God's vengeance, which she will execute. [...] Has she ever in all her utterances said one word of The Church? Never. It is always God and herself."

**Related Characters:** Peter (Píerre) Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais (speaker), Richard de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, John Bowyer Spenser Neville de Stogumber (Warwick's Chaplain), Joan ("The Maid")

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 103

**Explanation and Analysis**

Chaplain de Stogumber has just asked Cauchon how Joan can be a heretic when she appears so pious in so many aspects of her life, citing her incessant prayer and confession as evidence of her holiness. Cauchon responds

to Stogumber outlining the nuances of Joan's relationship to God that make her grasp on religion go beyond mere piousness and verge on heretical.

Cauchon's main gripe with Joan's personal connection to God is that it leaves no room for the Church as an intermediary figure. When Cauchon states that Joan "acts as if she herself were The Church," he means that, when she presumes to "bring[] the message of God to Charles" on her own behalf, she takes over the Church's role of hearing and understanding the word of God. In the established system, the Church—via churchmen like Cauchon, for example—serves as the go-between between God and insignificant, uneducated commoners. Because churchmen are spiritually better equipped to understand God's intention, it falls to them to decide what God wants and expects of his followers. Joan's self-assurance allows her to disregard the Church; in other words, "it is always God and herself" as she repeatedly criticizes and calls into question the Church's accuracy and legitimacy.

"My lord: we shall not defeat The Maid if we strive against one another. [...] The devil divides us and governs. I see you are no friend to The Church: you are an earl first and last, as I am a churchman first and last. But can we not sink our differences in the face of a common enemy?"

**Related Characters:** Peter (Píerre) Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais (speaker), Richard de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, John Bowyer Spenser Neville de Stogumber (Warwick's Chaplain), Joan ("The Maid")

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 106-107

**Explanation and Analysis**

Cauchon and Warwick have just debated their different philosophical reasonings for condemning Joan while also acknowledging that neither man particularly cares about the other's philosophical priorities. While Warwick wants Joan stopped because she threatens the existing feudal order and the authority he holds within that system, Cauchon is more threatened by Joan's personal connection to God and the way it diminishes the need for churchmen like himself to interpret the word of God for the common people.

When Cauchon states that Warwick is "no friend to The Church," he explicitly acknowledges that Warwick's concerns do not align with his own concerns for the Church: "you are an earl first and last, as I am a churchman first and last." With this statement, Cauchon not only acknowledges the men's alliances as different, but even as opposite. Still, he sets these opposing alliances aside to come together to defeat Joan, whom he regards as "a common enemy" of both the Church and state. Despite having earlier professed that his first priority is to honor God and save Joan's soul from damnation, Cauchon's willingness to set aside his spiritual integrity to compromise with Warwick to "defeat The Maid" shows the extent to which his political ulterior motives corrupt his spirituality.

What Cauchon implies when he construes himself as "a churchman first and last" is that it is his duty to serve the *institution* of the Church, not necessarily the ideals of God that that institution purports to uphold. Cauchon and Warwick's compromise emphasizes Shaw's position that an institution's need to maintain power corrupts its authorities' values.

## Scene 5 Quotes

"Well, I have to find reasons for you, because you do not believe in my voices. But the voices come first; and I find the reasons after: whatever you may choose to believe."

**Related Characters:** Joan ("The Maid") (speaker), Jean, Comte de Dunois, Bastard of Orleans, The Dauphin (King Charles VII)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 111

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quote occurs at the Cathedral at Rheims in a discussion between Joan and Dunois. After leading the French army in a series of military victories, Joan has followed through on her promise to crown the Dauphin King of France. Despite Joan's many victories, however, Dunois cautions her that she has made many enemies, as her military successes and excessive confidence have revealed the inferiority of other important authority figures. Dejected, Joan laments that she can only rely on her voices to support her, which makes Dunois uncomfortable, as he is always uncomfortable when Joan talks about her voices.

In this passage, Joan criticizes Dunois's discomfort and, more generally, her constant need to justify and legitimize her voices in way that society will deem sane and acceptable. Authority figures in *Saint Joan* repeatedly

©2020 LitCharts LLC

demonstrate an unwillingness to accept Joan's visionary ideas at face value, despite their logical nature, their accuracy, and the military successes they bring about. In stating that her voices "come first" and that she "find[s] the reasons after," she suggests that she will stand by her personal convictions even if she must reframe them to suit the narrative of whatever Dunois—and, more generally, society—"may choose to believe."

"You came clothed with the virtue of humility; and because God blessed your enterprises accordingly, you have stained yourself with the sin of pride. The old Greek tragedy is rising among us. It is the chastisement of hubris."

**Related Characters:** The Archbishop of Rheims (Regnault de Chartres) (speaker), The Dauphin (King Charles VII), Joan ("The Maid")

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 113

**Explanation and Analysis**

At the Cathedral at Rheims, the Archbishop condemns Joan for surrendering to "the sin of pride." The Archbishop is particularly annoyed with Joan because she has just crowned the Dauphin king, which, as a Church leader, should have been his rightful task to perform, and he regards the confidence with which Joan assumes his responsibilities as a threat to the Church's power.

When the Archbishop states that Joan "ha[s] stained [her]self with the sin of pride," he accuses her of interpreting the success of her "enterprises" as absolute, undeniable proof that she is acting on God's behalf and that he will continue to protect her in future pursuits. This is a heavy accusation for the Archbishop to make, as it is a sin for Joan to presume to know the will of God on her own—in the hierarchal structure of the Church, such knowledge is reserved only for churchmen in positions of authority, not for lowly peasant girls like Joan.

The Archbishops' warning that "the old Greek tragedy is rising among us" aligns Joan with figures from Greek tragedies, casting her as a hubristic individual up against an unforgiving and indifferent universe.

## Scene 6 Quotes

"You must not fall into the common error of mistaking these simpletons for liars and hypocrites. They believe honestly and sincerely that their diabolical inspiration is divine. Therefore you must be on guard against your natural compassion. [...] You are going to see before you a young girl, pious and chaste; for I must tell you, gentlemen, that the things said of her by our English friends are supported by no evidence, whilst there is abundant testimony that her excesses have been excesses of religion and charity and not of worldliness and wantonness. This girl is not one of those whose hard features are the sign of hard hearts, and whose brazen looks and lewd demeanor condemn them before they are accused. The devilish pride that has led her into her present peril had left no mark on her countenance. Strange as it may seem to you, it has even left no mark on her character outside those special matters in which she is proud; so that you will see a diabolical pride and a natural humility seated side by side in the selfsame soul."

**Related Characters:** Brother John Lemaître (The Inquisitor) (speaker), Peter (Píerre) Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais, Robert de Baudricourt, The Archbishop of Rheims (Regnault de Chartres), Joan ("The Maid")

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 129

**Explanation and Analysis**

This passage occurs during a lengthy speech the Inquisitor delivers to Joan's assessors at the start of her trial. In it, he cautions the assessors to be wary of the ways Joan's piousness and "natural humility" might cause them to feel unduly sympathetic toward her and impact their ability to sentence her objectively. Joan's—and other heretics'—biggest threat isn't that they are "liars and hypocrites" that knowingly threaten the Church's power. On the contrary, heretics are so dangerous to the Church because "they believe honestly and sincerely that their diabolical inspiration is divine." As other characters such as the Archbishop and Cauchon have done throughout *Saint Joan*, the Inquisitor attacks Joan's confidence as one of her major sins and among the most significant ways she can damage the structural workings of the Church.

What is most dangerous about Joan isn't her ideas, but the self-assurance with which she asserts these ideas. Even in the beginning moments of *Saint Joan*, Captain Baudricourt's page cited Joan's "positive" demeanor as unlike that of any other and wholly convincing. In his speech, the Inquisitor cites this as exactly why Joan and others like her are so

dangerous: the confidence they have in their own convictions renders them highly convincing to others, such to the extent that they pose a grave threat to the establishment.

Interestingly, the Inquisitor's condemnation of Joan presents her as both mad and sane: on the one hand, she is able to maintain confidence in her convictions because they are calculating, thoughtful, and decidedly logical. On the other hand, the Inquisitor maintains, this confidence prevents Joan from seeing that her ideas are diabolically and not divinely inspired—therefore, she is "mad" because her confidence imbues within her blind spots that prevent her from seeing the true origins of her ideas.

"What other judgment can I judge by but my own?"

**Related Characters:** Joan ("The Maid") (speaker), Peter (Píerre) Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 136

**Explanation and Analysis**

During her trial, Joan utters this statement in response to Cauchon, who has just asked her whether she will answer to herself or to the Church. After Joan responds, Cauchon informs her that she has effectively damned herself by admitting, explicitly, to heresy.

Throughout *Saint Joan*, Joan repeatedly legitimizes her military strategies and spiritual ideologies on the grounds that she is acting on instructions conveyed to her by saints via voices she hears in her head. Joan's internal voices are so threatening to the Church because the offer the opportunity for individuals to have a direct connection or experience with God without the guidance of the Church to censor and decide which types of experiences are permissible and which are not. For this reason, Joan's decision to stand behind her judgments is a grave one: prioritizing one's own judgment before that of the Church rips the Church of the power it holds over its people, therefore it is essential that they punish anyone who promotes such an idea.

In this statement, Joan doesn't bother to frame her ideologies as divinely inspired, explicitly claiming ownership of her thoughts and convictions as she refers to them as "[her] own." The court effectively damns Joan for refusing to compromise her own "judgment" to conform to the ideals of the Church, which imbues Joan's martyrdom with an additional layer of complexity. Shaw seems to suggest that Joan sacrificed herself not only for God, but to uphold the value of personal inquiry. Joan would rather maintain her convictions than compromise her morals to adhere to social norms, and it follows that her death invokes the larger struggle of individual thought against authoritative power.

"There is great wisdom in the simplicity of a beast, let me tell you; and sometimes great foolishness in the wisdom of scholars."

**Related Characters:** Joan ("The Maid") (speaker), Brother John Lemaître (The Inquisitor)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 139

**Explanation and Analysis**

Joan offers this statement during her trial in response to the Inquisitor, who has just likened Joan's simplicity to that of a "beast" and told her that her ignorance of the court system's intricacies and the charges pressed against her do not relieve her of responsibility for her sins: even if she doesn't understand the consequences of her words, her words may still damn her.

Joan refuses to see her ignorance as an impediment, however. When she remarks on the "great wisdom in the simplicity of a beast," especially as compared to the "sometimes great foolishness in the wisdom of scholars," she insinuates that her simple, uneducated wisdom surpasses that of every "scholar" present in her trial. Joan's comparison attacks the institutions the Inquisitor and the rest of her accusers turn to in order to justify their condemnation of her and delegitimize her piousness, insinuating that it is foolish of them to believe that their beliefs are more just than hers simply because they are condoned by the dominant culture.

Joan's "simplicity" might ultimately seal her fate when she fails to grasp the grave consequences of her words and actions, but it also grants her the freedom to seek higher truths based in individual inquiry and a direct engagement with the world, which her accusers, so tied are they to the intellectual confines of the Church, state, and legal system, are unable to pursue, as evidenced by the moral shortcomings they exhibit when they fail to acknowledge her innocence and prevent her gruesome death.

"But to shut me from the light of the sky and the sight of the fields and flowers; to chain my feet so that I can never again ride with the soldiers nor climb the hills; to make me breathe foul damp darkness, and keep me from everything that brings me back to the love of God when your wickedness and foolishness tempt me to hate Him: all this is worse than the furnace in the Bible that was heated seven times. I could do without my warhorse; I could drag about in a skirt; I could let the banners and the trumpets and the knights and soldiers pass me and leave me behind as they leave the other women, if only I could still hear the wind in the trees, the larks in the sunshine, the young lambs crying through the healthy frost, and the blessed blessed church bells that send my angel voices floating to me on the wind."

**Related Characters:** Joan ("The Maid") (speaker), Brother John Lemaître (The Inquisitor)

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 143

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quote is taken from the speech Joan delivers in her trial after tearing up her recantation and resigning herself to being burned at the stake for heresy. Joan initially agreed to recant because she believed that that, if she were to do so, the Church would let her go free. However, upon signing the document that attests to her sins and denies the holiness of her voices, the Inquisitor announces that she will be sentenced to life in prison.

Horrified, Joan rejects this alternate horrifying sentence. She explains her reasoning by citing the valorous aspects of her military exploits that she would be willing to give up: "I could do without my warhorse; I could drag about in a skirt; I could let the banners and the trumpets and the knights and soldiers pass me and leave me behind as they leave the other women," she insists. Despite everyone's attempts to portray Joan as arrogant and unreasonable, Joan rejects this sequence of objects that symbolize reputation and public image, revealing the purity and integrity of her motivations for engaging in battle and subverting her society's gender norms.

Unlike most other characters, Joan was never (primarily) motivated by external recognition or the desire for power but, rather, by the conviction that she must live honestly and according to the instructions her internal voices provided her. When she states that "to shut me from the light of the sky and the sight of the fields and flowers; to chain my feet so that I can never ride again […]; to make me breathe foul damp darkness, and keep me from everything that brings me back to the love of God […]: all this is worse than the furnace in the Bible that was heated seven times," she means that to be imprisoned within the ideological (and literal) constraints of an institution at the cost of betraying her personal convictions is more reprehensible to her than the damnation of her soul or the burning of her body. Joan would rather die morally self-assured than live morally dubiously. She further emphasizes this point by evoking nature imagery, which Shaw frequently frames as an opposing force to the artificiality and corruption of institutions.

"One gets used to it. Habit is everything. I am accustomed to the fire; it is soon over."

**Related Characters:** Brother John Lemaître (The Inquisitor) (speaker), Peter (Píerre) Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais, Joan ("The Maid")

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 145

**Explanation and Analysis**

The court has found Joan guilty of heresy and she is handed over to the English to be burned at the stake. The Inquisitor acknowledges Joan's innocence before lamenting to Cauchon that while it is wrong of the English to burn Joan in order to advance their own politics interests, he can justify his inability to oppose the gruesome murder of an innocent girl on the basis that he and the court followed the proper legal proceedings.

As the Inquisitor and Cauchon wait for Joan's burning to commence, the Inquisitor comments on the cynical indifference he feels toward such gruesome acts of violence, admitting that "habit is everything. I am accustomed to the fire." The Inquisitor's job desensitizes him to the atrocities of death and suffering. In other words, when violence becomes integrated into society, it is easier for members of that society to ignore acts of violence and cruelty and accept them with minimal moral qualms.

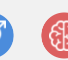
Shaw wrote *Saint Joan* to challenge earlier, melodramatic renditions of the Joan of Arc narrative that situated Joan as heroine and her accusers as villains, opting instead to present a story that featured a more complex, nuanced picture of morality. The indifference with which the Inquisitor reflects on his role in Joan's gruesome death is an

apt example of this sort of moral ambiguity: the Inquisitor isn't a tyrannical villain who wants only to see Joan suffer, but he also refrains from reflecting on the unjustness of her death, as his obligations to the Church separate him from moral implications of his actions.

## Epilogue Quotes

"I was always a rough one: a regular soldier. I might almost as well have been a man. Pity I wasn't: I should not have bothered you all so much then."

**Related Characters:** Joan ("The Maid") (speaker), Jean, Comte de Dunois, Bastard of Orleans, The Dauphin (King Charles VII)

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 153

**Explanation and Analysis**

Twenty-five years after her execution, Joan appears to the Dauphin in a dream. In this statement, she reflects on how significantly her gender impacted everyone's perception of her. Joan implies that it's disappointing to her that she wasn't born a man, as her revolutionary martial and ideological contributions might have been received more objectively by the Church and the court had they been the product of a man's ingenuity rather than those of a simple, inexperienced country girl.

Shaw repeatedly demonstrates how Joan's supporters grow skeptical of her once her ideas expose their own hypocrisies, shortcomings, and failures. For example, even Dunois—who was a friend to Joan, as well as one of her strongest allies—dismisses her once it becomes clear that her own martial instincts surpass his own. It is a recurring theme throughout *Saint Joan* for male characters to be especially threatened by Joan because social institutions like the Church expect women to adhere more extreme levels of humility and submissiveness. For as adamantly as characters would like to portray Joan's biggest sins as pride and heresy, they are just as resentful of the fact that she is a woman who chooses to act of her own accord.

"It is the memory and the salvation that sanctify the cross, not the cross that sanctifies the memory and the salvation."

**Related Characters:** Joan ("The Maid") (speaker), The Dauphin (King Charles VII)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 154

**Explanation and Analysis**

Joan offers this critical remark in response to the Dauphin's cheerful announcement that, after her death, the Church reversed her guilty conviction and called for a memorial cross to be built at the location of her burning.

Joan's remark points to the emptiness of the Church's symbolic attempt to repent for Joan's martyrdom. The Church wants to believe that it can reverse the cruelties and injustices it wrought on Joan by building objects that memorialize her but, in reality, these memorials are incapable of bringing about true "memory and salvation." Joan's critique of her memorial cross illustrates the uncorrupted integrity with which she approaches her spiritual life while simultaneously calling out the Church's lack thereof. Joan knows that it is the strength of one's faith and internalized conviction that "sanctifies the memory and the salvation" and not an uninformed, subservient adherence to religious ideas that make sacred objects like the cross truly sacred.

"Yes: it is always you good men that do the big mischiefs."

**Related Characters:** The Dauphin (King Charles VII) (speaker), Peter (Píerre) Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais, Joan ("The Maid")

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 155

**Explanation and Analysis**

The Dauphin offers this critical statement in response to Cauchon, who has just revealed that, after Joan's guilty verdict was reversed, he was posthumously excommunicated from the Church, his reputation destroyed, and his corpse thrown, unjustly, into the sewer. Cauchon believes that society's rejection of him is unwarranted because, at the time, his treatment of Joan was merciful and just: he was only doing what he had to do protect the integrity of the Church.

The Dauphin calls Cauchon "good" ironically: Cauchon's insistence that he was not in the wrong to condemn Joan is

based on the fact that he was acting on his obligations to the Church, not on the moral obligation he had to recognize Joan's innocence. When he states that "it is always you good men that do the big mischiefs," the Dauphin shows that "good men" are able to justify their cruel, "big mischiefs" on the basis that they were only doing what society's institutions deemed permissible and preferred. In short, institutional power allows "big mischiefs" to be construed as just acts, so long as such mischiefs maintain the status quo.

"The heretic is always better dead. And mortal eyes cannot distinguish the saint from the heretic. Spare them."

**Related Characters:** Peter (Píerre) Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais (speaker), Joan ("The Maid")

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 163

**Explanation and Analysis**

Cauchon is the first of Joan's accusers to reject her request to resurrect herself before abandoning her after everyone learns that, 500 years after her death, the Catholic Church will canonize her as a saint. Cauchon's rejection hits Joan especially hard, as everybody has just finished praising Joan's holiness and repenting for their prior mistreatment of her in her final hours. When Cauchon states that "the heretic is always better dead," he suggests that heretics and other figures who rebel against a society's established norms will never be accepted when they are alive because society so vehemently rejects any person or force who threatens its established values. That "mortal eyes cannot distinguish the saint from the heretic" reinforces this point: ultimately, the world's establishments are not interested in determining whether individuals who try to enact social or ideological change like Joan are beneficial or harmful to society.

When heretics—or, more generally, rebels—are alive, they are rejected by the culture on the basis that they will dismantle the status quo; when they are dead, society may recast and remold their image in whichever light it deems most useful in the context of the contemporary social order. Cauchon's remark illustrates how little room there is for visionaries Joan to exist in a morally corrupt world.

"O God that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive Thy saints? How long, O Lord, how long?"

**Related Characters:** Joan ("The Maid") (speaker)

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 164

**Explanation and Analysis**

After learning that she will be canonized 500 years after her execution, Joan asks her accusers, who appear before in the form of dream-like apparitions, whether they would like her to use her sainthood to perform a miracle and resurrect herself, figuring that, since everyone has just made a point of lauding her and begging forgiveness for wronging or abandoning her at the end of her life, they will be enthusiastic for her to rejoin them. To Joan's surprise, however, everybody becomes flustered and insists it's best that she remains dead before abandoning her altogether.

When Joan asks God "when will [this beautiful earth] be ready to receive Thy saints?" she establishes a divide between the spiritual realm of God and the temporal realm of the earth. Joan acknowledges that while God might be "ready to receive" saints who work on his behalf, the earthly realm lags behind in its acceptance, as it is too concerned with upholding the values and power structures that saints like Joan disrupt.

Ultimately, the silence and lack of closure with which Joan's final plea is met suggests that the earth will never accept saints and others who position themselves outside societal norms. The only way institutions like the Catholic Church are willing to accept social outsiders and rebels is posthumously, through symbolic gesture. Joan's canonization is convenient for the Church because it sends a nice message while ultimately lacking the ability to disrupt institutional order.

# SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## SCENE 1

It's a spring morning in 1429 at the castle of Vaucouleurs. Captain Robert de Baudricourt, an irritable, apathetic military squire, sits at an oak **table** in one of the castle's chambers and berates his steward for the **hens**' refusal to lay eggs. The steward replies that the hens won't lay eggs and the cows won't produce milk because "there is a spell on [them] since the arrival of "The Maid" at Vaucouleurs. For the past two days, a girl from Lorraine has been sitting outside the castle waiting to speak with Baudricourt, and she refuses to leave until he sees her. Baudricourt condemns her "impudence."

*By seating Baudricourt at the table, Shaw reinforces both his position as a nobleman and his ties to French political institutions. In contrast, the hens symbolize the natural world. When the steward suggests that the hens won't lay eggs until Baudricourt agrees to see Joan, he aligns Joan with nature, thereby setting the groundwork for her anti-institutional positions toward matters of religion and politics.*

Baudricourt has instructed his steward to throw the Maid out, but the steward insists that her "positive" demeanor prevents him from doing so. The steward tells Baudricourt that the Maid is in the courtyard talking to soldiers, something she does frequently when she isn't praying. Baudricourt scoffs at this, insinuating that she is talking to the soldiers in order to proposition them.

*Joan's "positive" demeanor sets her apart from many of the other characters of* Saint Joan. *Because Joan answers to no one but herself—she honors no obligation to answer to the Church or the nobility—she projects this air of positivity, self-assurance, and integrity that many other characters lack. Joan's integrity is inconceivable to characters like Baudricourt who assume that Joan must have ulterior motives. Baudricourt's demonstrates his skepticism when he assumes Joan's motives for engaging with the soldiers are immoral rather than practical or earnest.*

Baudricourt calls out the window to the Maid and summons her inside. The Maid—Joan of Arc—appears in the doorway. She is 17 or 18 years old, sturdily built, and has "an uncommon face" with wideset, large eyes. When she addresses Baudricourt, she speaks confidently, demanding that he give her a horse, **armor**, soldiers, and that he send her to the Dauphin. The Lord has given her these orders, she claims. This angers Baudricourt, who insists that Joan return to her "Lord," for Baudricourt takes orders only from the king. Joan clarifies: "my Lord is the King of Heaven."

*Many earlier adaptations of the Joan of Arc narrative depict Joan as striking or beautiful, despite little historical evidence to suggest this was so. Shaw believes that this idealized portrayal of Joan romanticizes her, and his goal in writing* Saint Joan *was to present a more flawed, nuanced depiction of her. Baudricourt's assumption that Joan is talking about a feudal "lord" further reinforces his ties to the temporal institutions at play in* Saint Joan.

Although Baudricourt calls Joan mad, she refuses to back down. She needs Baudricourt to give her supplies and send her to the Dauphin so that she can drive the English out of Orleans and restore French control of the territory. Baudricourt balks at this ambitious project, but Joan insists that she is merely acting on God's instruction. She doesn't need many soldiers, anyway, and "Polly" and "Jack" have already agreed to go with her. Baudricourt is scandalized that Joan would refer to Squire Betrand de Poulengey and Monsieur John of Metz so informally. Joan doesn't see a problem with the familiarity, though, because that's what their friends call them.

*The Dauphin is the anticipated King Charles VII of France—he has yet to be crowned, so he maintains the title of "dauphin." Joan's lofty military goal—to raise the siege of Orleans—refers to taking back French land seized by English forces during the Hundred Years' War. By calling noblemen like Poulengey and Metz by their nicknames, Joan actively establishes herself as their equal, despite her comparatively lowly social and economic position.*

Joan explains that she's organized everything—Baudricourt need only grant her permission to be off; what's more, if he signs off on her journey, Saint Catherine and Saint Margaret, with whom Joan speaks regularly, will assure Baudricourt a place in heaven.

*Joan's assurance that Baudricourt will have a place in heaven speaks to her self-confidence: she believes she can know the saints' intentions without needing the Church's guidance to interpret God's will.*

Baudricourt dismisses Joan and sends for Monsieur de Poulengey. Poulengey enters and Baudricourt warns Poulengey about Joan's background: she's a bourgeoise. Her father isn't a gentleman, but he's not a laborer, either. Though he doesn't have any direct power, his connections could "give a lot of bother to the authorities," therefore it's important to Baudricourt that Polly not get Joan "into trouble." Poulengey insists that he has no dishonorable intentions for Joan. Baudricourt is aghast and can't imagine why else the soldiers would have offered to accompany Joan to the Dauphin. Poulengey insists that there's just "something about her."

*Baudricourt's skepticism toward helping Joan isn't exclusively rooted in his own ideological or moral values but, rather, in the more logistical concern of having to answer to the social structures to which he is held accountable. Should Joan get "into trouble," her status as a bourgeoise means that there are more consequences than if she came from a family of poor laborers. Baudricourt's assumption that Poulengey's intentions for helping Joan are dishonorable shows how cynical he is toward other people's ability to act virtuously and uncompromised by institutional or personal corruption. When Poulengey repeats the steward's earlier claim that there is "something about" Joan, he reinforces the unique, anti-institutional position she holds that sets her apart from other characters in the play.*

Baudricourt tells Poulengey to be practical, but Poulengey replies that it would be most practical for the French to align themselves with "the Duke of Burgundy and the English king." The English control over half the country, including Paris and this castle, which Baudricourt is "only holding […] on parole." The Dauphin refuses to fight back, however, and his command over the French is weak at best: nobody respects him, as his own mother has insinuated that he's illegitimate. France's situation is so dire, Poulengey argues, that only thing that can save it is a miracle, and he believes that Joan can work miracles. On these grounds, Poulengey insists that Baudricourt pledge allegiance to the girl.

*Most people who reject Joan do so on the grounds that she is capricious, impractical, and inexperienced. Poulengey presents an opposing viewpoint when he argues that France's political situation is so dire that it needs the input of someone like Joan, who thinks outside the box of the old, accepted approaches to military and political pursuits. Poulengey's belief that Joan can work miracles may be perceived literally or figuratively: Poulengey might well believe Joan has supernatural powers, but the "miracles" of which she is capable of are also symbolically miraculous in their ability to disrupt the status quo.*

The men call for Joan to return and they interrogate her about the voices of saints she claims to hear in her head, and which provide her with instructions for how to act and in what to believe. She tells them that she doesn't talk to them in the way she does other people. Baudricourt suggests that they're only her imagination, which she agrees with, but only because "that is how the messages of God come to us." She reiterates the messages God has sent to her: to stop the siege of Orleans, to crown the Dauphin, and to drive the English out of France. She knows fighting won't be easy, but she is confident that God is on her side. The English are only men, and because God "gave them their own country and their own language," they must be expelled from France.

*Joan's statement that "the messages of God come to us" through her own "imagination" enforces her belief in the individual's power to know and assess the world around them without the guidance of outside powers like the Church or the government. Baudricourt's observation that Joan's voices are merely her "imagination" is meant to discredit her voices, but Joan's agreement legitimizes them, as she believes that one may obtain the highest degree of truth through personal introspection. Joan's belief that the English should stay in their own land where they speak "their own language" evokes the growing sense of nationalism that developed during the Hundred Years' War, when national loyalties began to supersede religious and regional loyalties.*

Baudricourt finds Joan's confidence ludicrous, emphasizing the strength and determination of the English soldiers. Joan counters this, reasoning that because she has God on her side, the French will be successful in battle. Although he remains skeptical, Baudricourt agrees to send Joan and her three soldiers to Chinon to see the Dauphin. Immediately after they leave, the steward runs into Baudricourt's chamber to announce that the **hens** are laying eggs again. Baudricourt sees this as evidence that Joan was truly sent from God.

*Given the strength of England's military forces, Joan's overconfidence is certainly unfounded, though it's reasonable to suspect that Baudricourt's initial dismissal of her is amplified by the sexist norms of his society. This is reinforced by the fact that Baudricourt is quick to believe in Joan once he sees evidence of a miracle (the hens laying eggs), but remains unconvinced by her attempts to persuade him using logic and reasoning—in other words, Baudricourt is quicker to believe in a miracle than a woman's use of rhetoric.*

## SCENE 2

It's March 8, 1429. At Chinon, the Archbishop of Rheims, whom Shaw's stage directions paint as an imposing but not altogether pious-looking figure, and the Lord Chamberlain, Monseigneur de la Trémouille wait for the Dauphin in the anteroom of the throne room in the castle. La Trémouille grows impatient and insults the Dauphin, who owes him money. A court page appears in the doorway and tells them that Monsieur de Rais is on his way, accompanied by Captain La Hire.

*Shaw's description of the Archbishop emphasizes his power and downplays his piousness, suggesting that figures of authority don't always subscribe to the values their institutions espouse—in other words, the Archbishop is powerful first and pious second. Likewise, the Dauphin might be the assumed heir to the French throne, but his position renders him neither powerful nor respected.*

Gilles de Rais enters. He is a smart and confident young man whose blue-dyed beard earns him the nickname "Bluebeard." Bluebeard tells the Archbishop and La Trémouille that earlier that day a man called Foul Mouthed Frank had fallen into a well and begun to swear profusely. A soldier addressed Frank, advising him not to swear when he was on the verge of death and, miraculously, Frank died moments later: the soldier had predicted Frank's drowning. La Hire, a soldier, enters to announce that it wasn't a soldier who predicted Frank's fate, but "an angel dressed as a soldier." La Hire explains that the angel has come from Champagne, accompanied by a pack of loyal followers.

*La Hire's insistence that Joan is "an angel dressed as a soldier" reinforces her role as an individual who outside of the temporal, institutional realms of the Church or state—it imbues her with a unique, otherworldly sort of power. La Hire's willingness to see Joan's prediction about Frank's death as a miracle—despite the fact that it could have been a mere coincidence—shows that people accept miracles only when they are convenient and useful to them. As a soldier, La Hire recognizes France's dire military situation, so he's more willing to believe in Joan's miraculous qualities if they will help France achieve victory in battle.*

The Dauphin, carrying a letter from Robert de Baudricourt, enters the room excitedly: an "angel" has come to see *him*. The Archbishop condemns the Dauphin's excitement to see the "crazy wench," and La Trémouille shares this sentiment. The Dauphin refuses to let them bring him down: his own grandfather spoke to saints, and so he will, too. The Archbishop scoffs at this. The girl is hardly a saint—she doesn't even wear women's clothing.

*The Dauphin lauds Joan as an "angel" for selfish reasons: he is smug about the fact that she's coming to see him. In contrast, the Archbishop, for whom Joan represents a threat to the Church's power, derides her as a "crazy wench." La Trémouille agrees with the Archbishop because Joan threatens his own military power. The Archbishop's harsh reaction to Joan's refusal to wear women's clothing speaks to how engrained sexism is in his worldview and the ideals espoused by the Church.*

The men arrange to put the girl's sainthood to the test: Bluebeard will disguise himself as the Dauphin. If the girl can differentiate the royal Dauphin from Bluebeard, a commoner, they will accept her holiness. If she cannot, they will know she is only pretending to be God's messenger. The Archbishop insists that the girl not be admitted, but the Dauphin is still determined to see her, as De Baudricourt says she will stop the siege of Orleans and conquer the English. Seeing as how the highly regarded Dunois, the Bastard of Orleans, hasn't been able to drive out the English, the Dauphin sees the girl as their only hope. The men eventually agree that France needs a miracle to defeat the English, so they send for Joan. The Dauphin and Bluebeard leave to assume their disguises.

*Because the Dauphin and Bluebeard are more enthusiastic about Joan's arrival, they are more willing to believe in her ability to perform miracles and confirm her holiness. For the Dauphin—who hates and shirks his military responsibilities—Joan offers the possibility for French victory without him having to lift a finger. In this way, his readiness to accept Joan's holiness rests not on Joan, her intelligence, or her capabilities as a soldier, but on what she can do for him and the institution he represents.*

Alone, the Archbishop and La Trémouille muse over miracles. The Archbishop laments that the test is useless: Joan will easily be able to identify the true Dauphin through context clues, therefore passing the test won't be proof of a miracle. To the Archbishop, a miracle is only "an event which creates faith." Miracles merely confirm what people want to believe, thus even fraudulent events—if they result in faith—may be deemed miracles. The Archbishop compares spiritual miracles to La Trémouille's experience as a soldier: like churchmen, La Trémouille also encourages his citizens to believe in falsehoods and exaggerations in order to maintain their loyalty to the government.

*The Archbishop's view of miracles places less weight on what miracles do and more weight on the larger effect they have on people. Regardless of the legitimacy of a miracle, if it has a positive effect on the people and "creates faith," he—and the Church—is willing to view the act as miraculous. Miracles confirm what people want to believe and reinforce the values of dominant social institutions. The Dauphin is ready to believe Joan can work miracles because it will relieve him of his military responsibilities and hopefully result in a much-needed French victory. Likewise, La Trémouille can justify disclosing the reality of France's weak military position to the French because it ensures that they will continue to pay taxes and blindly serve their country.*

The Archbishop and La Trémouille go to the throne room to join the others. Bluebeard, dressed as the Dauphin, sits on the throne. Joan enters and accurately identifies the Dauphin. She then announces that she has come to Chinon to drive away the English and crown the Dauphin king. The Dauphin is elated but tells Joan she must first gain the Archbishop's approval. Joan approaches the Archbishop and asks humbly for his blessing. Her humility wins the Archbishop over, and he decides she is pious, after all. Joan requests to talk with the Dauphin alone and everyone else leaves the throne room.

*Joan's correct identification of the Dauphin is more likely based on her assessment of context clues than on divine revelation, but the Dauphin is willing to accept it as a miracle because he's excited that an angel is visiting him. The Archbishop softens to Joan when she behaves humbly. He views Joan's humility as a sign of piousness, but his approval could also be in response to Joan behaving submissively before powerful men, which, in society's eyes, her status as a woman requires her to do.*

Joan addresses the Dauphin—whose name is Charles—colloquially as "Charlie" and comforts him as he admits that he isn't much of a fighter: he'd rather be comfortable, safe, and not have to kill people. Joan still wants Charles to fight, however, and she says she can inspire him to be courageous. She insists that they pray for victory. Annoyed, Charles tells Joan to mind her own business. Joan counters this, asserting that they are both here to do "God's business." Charles ultimately decides to join forces with Joan and gives her command of his army. The others return to the room. "Who is for God and His Maid?" asks Joan, victoriously. "To Orleans!" the knights exclaim. The Archbishop offers his reluctant support, and La Trémouille, who had previously commanded the army, curses.

*Joan refers to the Dauphin by a nickname just as she did in Scene I with Poulengey and John of Metz, demonstrating again how she addresses powerful men informally to establish herself as their equal. In this moment of the play, Shaw illustrates how everyone but Joan acts on their own self-interest. The Dauphin accepts her request only after she flatters him; the Archbishop responds with skepticism because Joan's heightened sense of power renders her less humble, less pious and, therefore, less subservient to the Church; La Trémouille curses because Joan—a simple farm girl—has assumed his former authoritative role. In contrast, Joan acts only on behalf of God, whom she "knows" by virtue of her own judgment.*

## SCENE 3

It's April 29, 1429, and Dunois, 26 years old, walks along the south bank of the Loire river at Orleans. Dunois is a capable, practical, broadly built man. His page sits beside him, watching the water. Dunois calls on the west, "womanish" wind to blow in his direction. The page pays little attention to Dunois's frustrations: he is too busy watching the **kingfishers** fly across the river. Although Dunois is annoyed by his page's divided attention, he can't help but find the birds lovely.

*Here, Dunois insults the wind when he calls it "womanish," emphasizing the misogyny present throughout* Saint Joan.

Suddenly, Joan approaches. She identifies Dunois as the Bastard of Orleans and introduces herself to Dunois before complaining that her troops have sent her to the wrong side of the river: the English are on the other side, and she wants to attack immediately. Dunois explains that it's too risky to launch an attack before his troops are sufficiently ready. He accuses Joan of being impatient, but she is convinced they can fight the English immediately, as they have God on their side. Joan and Dunois discuss their mutual love affair with war.

*Joan emerges as Dunois and his page observe the kingfishers, which symbolically connects Joan to nature and her anti-institutional tendencies. While Dunois's military decisions are based on previously tested, institutionally condoned strategies, Joan's are rooted in the self-knowledge, intuition, and self-assurance she derives from her strong faith in God.*

Joan tells Dunois that, when they reach the forts across the river, she will be the first up the ladder. Dunois calls her a daredevil, but she insists that this isn't so: she is merely "a servant of God." Joan and Dunois argue over when to attack the English. Since the French need to sail up the river to attack the English from the rear, they must wait for God to "change[] the wind," for which Dunois has prayed incessantly. Joan concurs and tells Dunois she'll pass along their prayers to Saint Catherine, who will make God give them the wind. Suddenly, the page informs Dunois that the wind has come. In awe at the miracle he's just witnessed, Dunois pledges allegiance to Joan and gives her command of his army. Joan cries and embraces Dunois. Shrilly, the page praises Joan.

*Joan repeatedly attributes her actions as the manifestation not of personal beliefs, but of her obligation to serve God. This is somewhat ironic, given the fact that characters frequently cite arrogance as one of Joan's biggest sins, and her insistence that she is merely acting as "a servant of God" would seem to contradict these critiques of arrogance. The sudden appearance of wind is another instance in which characters misconstrue coincidence as miracle. Because Dunois has been unable to defeat the English on his own, he's willing to believe in Joan and her holiness as a last resort.*

## SCENE 4

An English Chaplain and a nobleman sit at a **table** in a tent at an English camp. The nobleman is an imposing man in his mid-forties. While the nobleman reads the Book of Hours contentedly, the Chaplain seethes silently. The nobleman praises the "workmanship" of the Book of Hours, though he laments how unfortunate it is that, nowadays, "instead of looking at books, people read them." The English-born Chaplain doesn't share the nobleman's flippant mood, however: the English have been defeated and he's bitter about it. Angrily, he imagines strangling the "witch" who has brought about England's many recent defeats.

*Sitting at a table aligns the Chaplain and the nobleman (Warwick) with their respective institutions—Chaplain Stogumber with the Church and England, and Warwick with English nobility and the feudal system. Warwick's criticism of "people read[ing]" the Book of Hours (an illustrated Christian devotional book from the Middle Ages) "instead of looking at [it]" is a criticism of individual knowledge and inquiry: Warwick would prefer that the common people remain dependent on authorities' interpretations of the Book of Hour rather than arrive at their own understanding.*

The nobleman is more concerned with the Bastard of Orleans (Dunois), as he is a renowned commander. The Chaplain counters that Dunois is "only a Frenchman," which upsets the nobleman, who believes this nationalist rhetoric to be destructive, as "men cannot serve two masters." If serfs pledge allegiance to their country, it's "goodbye to the authority of their feudal lords, and goodbye to the authority of the Church." The nobleman asserts that they must burn the witch, and that he's waiting for the Bishop of Beauvais to set these plans into action.

*The nobleman (Warwick) is upset by the Chaplain's insult that Dunois is "only a Frenchman" because nationalist rhetoric like this threatens his own hold on power: if national identity supersedes regional identity, his position of power as an earl (a nobleman who rules over a region of a king's court) will be compromised. The nobleman wants to burn the witch (Joan) because she explicitly promotes such nationalist rhetoric.*

The nobleman's page enters to announce the presence of Peter Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais. The nobleman introduces himself to Cauchon as Richard de Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, and his Chaplain as Master John de Stogumber. The men sit around the **table** and discuss their shared problem: "the young woman from Lorraine." Stogumber believes that Joan is a sorceress and Warwick thinks she should be burned at the stake.

*Shaw's stage directions specify that the men sit around the table to discuss Joan, which alerts the reader that their discussion will be oriented around the interests of their respective institutions. Warwick and Stogumber's overzealousness to see that Joan is killed shows how readily they are willing to disregard Joan's rights in order to maintain their positions of power.*

Cauchon approaches the problem of Joan more cautiously: they must not only act on their own opinions, he cautions, but also on those of the French court. "A Catholic court," corrects Warwick. Cauchon insists that, though sacred in their goals, Catholic courts ultimately consist of mortal men, like all other courts. And because the court consists of mortal Frenchmen, it will be difficult to convince them that Joan is a witch merely because the French army defeated the English army.

*Warwick's side comment about the French court being a "Catholic court" reflects his skepticism that the court's interests aren't in line with his own—he fears that the court's treatment of Joan will be more spiritually than politically motivated. Cauchon's response touches on the French court's nationalist bias, which isn't in line with Cauchon's spiritual interests: because Joan is French and has brought the French military victories, the court may well feel loyal toward her and therefore less willing to convict her of heresy or witchcraft without substantial, convincing evidence.*

Cauchon feels that the men should attribute the French victory more to Dunois's military prowess than to Joan's supposed sorcery. Stogumber is convinced of Joan's sorcery, however; he recounts hearing that Joan was pierced through the throat by an English arrow yet continued to fight for the rest of the day. Warwick is less superstitious than the Chaplain, but he still wonders why it was only upon Joan's arrival that the French became successful in battle.

*Cauchon's willingness to attribute the French victory to Dunois's military skills shows that he is a logical, thoughtful character. In the Prologue, Shaw takes issue with previous adaptations of the Joan of Arc narrative portraying Cauchon as a ruthless villain, so he puts forth considerable effort to portray Cauchon as partial and reasonable. Cauchon stands in contrast to Stogumber, who relies on hearsay and the supernatural to justify his preformed opinion that Joan is a witch.*

Cauchon suggests that the devil is working through Joan in order to destroy the Catholic Church and "damn[] the souls of the entire human race." Because most of the "miracles" Joan has performed have natural explanations, Cauchon reasons that she is guilty of heresy, not witchcraft. Warwick insists they burn Joan, but Cauchon maintains that the Church's first obligation is not to execute her, but to save her soul. Only the secular court can condemn Joan to death. If Joan continues with her heresy, however, Cauchon will gladly hand her over to be burned.

*To Cauchon, the core of Joan's sinfulness lies not in her actions but in her ideas. He's not concerned about her so-called "miracles," because they can be attributed to natural causes–Joan's miraculous victories can be explained by the fact that she is simply a more adept soldier than her English opponents, for example. Cauchon is more concerned with what he regards as the devil working through Joan to "damn[] the souls of the entire human race." Because Cauchon is a churchman, he sees it as his primary obligation to save these souls—including Joan's. Because Cauchon is spiritually motivated, thus, he will only hand Joan over to the secular arm should she refuse to repent and be saved.*

Warwick is enthusiastic about working with Cauchon to burn Joan, and Cauchon accuses him of "treat[ing] the Church as a mere political convenience." Cauchon insists that *he* is no political bishop: his priority is Joan's soul. Stogumber accuses Cauchon of being a traitor and valuing the interests of the Church over those of England, which offends Cauchon. Warwick defends his and Stogumber's eagerness, explaining to Cauchon his fear that the English will be defeated unless somebody stops Joan.

*Shaw uses Warwick to represent Medieval society's political forces. When Cauchon accuses Warwick of "treat[ing] the Church as a mere political convenience," he means that Warwick's primary motivation for wanting to stop Joan is the threat she poses to the existing feudal society—not the spiritual wellbeing of Joan's soul. By calling Cauchon a traitor, Stogumber emphasizes the existing tension between his and Warwick's political loyalties to England and Cauchon's spiritual loyalties to the Church.*

Stogumber interrupts to question how Joan can be accused of heresy when she prays nonstop. With gusto, Cauchon explains his condemnation of Joan. "She acts as if she herself were The Church," insists Cauchon. Joan wants it to be *she* and not the Church who crowns Charles king. Further, she claims to receive messages directly from God—without the aid of the Church. In short, Joan rejects the Church's authority.

*Cauchon's main problem with Joan is that she believes she can understand the word of God without the Church's help. Joan presumes to have a direct connection with God, and Cauchon fears that this belief will spread and threaten the Church's authority over common people.*

Cauchon believes the devil is using Joan to spread a "cancerous" form of heresy in order to destroy the Church's power. He lists heretics from history who have acted as Joan acts now, such as "the man Hus" who "infected all Bohemia," and "a man named WcLeef" who "spread pestilence in England. Joan, Cauchon insists, is not so different than "Mahomet." All these heretics share the destructive mindset that the individual's voice takes precedent over "the Church's accumulated wisdom and knowledge," and Cauchon believes such thinking needs to be stopped before it spreads to the masses.

*"The man Hus" refers to Jan Hus, a 14th-century Czech theologian and reformer whose ideas would influence other reformers down the line, notably Martin Luther, a major figure in the 16th-century Protestant Reformation. "A man named WcLeef" refers to John Wycliff, another important predecessor to the Protestant Reformation. Wycliff was notably critical of the privileged status of the clergy. Cauchon initially presents his case against Joan as an exclusively spiritual crusade, but by citing dissenters of the clergy like Hus and Wycliff, he shows that his condemnation of Joan is also political: like Warwick, he sees Joan as a threat to his current position of power.*

Warwick isn't a churchman, so he's unimpressed with Cauchon's heresy lecture. He encourages Cauchon to consider the "temporal institutions of the world, as well as the spiritual ones." Warwick believes that Joan's views threaten to destroy the existing feudal system. Under Joan's system, nobility would be required to surrender their land to one king, who would then present the seized land to God. Under this new system, feudal lords (mid-level nobility) would lose their land and power, and serfs would only be required to pledge allegiance to the king. In this way, Joan presents a similar threat to the Church as she does to the feudal system: in either case, she eliminates the need for intermediary authority figures, leaving individual, common people answerable only to one king or God. Warwick calls Joan's philosophy "Protestantism."

*It's ironic that Warwick and Cauchon remain unimpressed with one another's cases against Joan, as they demonize her for strikingly similar reasons. Warwick is concerned with the "temporal institutions of the world" while Cauchon is more concerned with "the spiritual ones," but both men's main problem with Joan is rooted in the threat she poses to institutional power. Protestantism didn't officially take shape until the Protestant Reformation in Europe in the 16th century, so Shaw is taking some liberties with historical accuracy when Warwick refers explicitly to Joan's philosophy as such. The effect seems to be Shaw's attempt to draw on the larger theme of dissent and rebellion against dominant social institutions in a way that extends beyond Saint Joan's specific, historical moment.*

Cauchon agrees that Joan's political position is problematic. He ties it to a component of Joan's heresy that he calls "nationalism," wherein individuals pledge allegiance to their regions over allegiance to the Church. Cauchon deems nationalism "anti-Church." The Chaplain, whose simplicity renders him unable to follow Warwick and Cauchon's dialogue, nevertheless cries out for Joan's burning. Cauchon and Warwick reach a point of agreement as they realize the more nuanced ways in which Joan's philosophies make her their common enemy. Cauchon and Warwick's debate has left the simple-minded Stogumber confused, but he's still on board with putting Joan to death on the basis that she "rebels against Nature" by wearing **men's clothing**. In the end, the three men agree that Joan must be stopped.

*Cauchon sees nationalism as "anti-Church" because it compromises the common people's allegiance to the clergy, much in the same way Warwick sees nationalism as anti-feudal because it compromises the common people's allegiance to their regional noblemen in favor of allegiance to the king. The fact that all Stogumber—the simpleton—can rally behind is how Joan "rebels against Nature" by wearing men's clothing underscores how ridiculous it is for society to condemn Joan so harshly for something as trite and harmless as subverting gender norms.*

## SCENE 5

An organ plays in the cathedral of Rheims after Charles's coronation. Joan, dressed in **men's clothing**, kneels before the stations of the cross displayed on a pillar. Dunois enters and tells Joan that there are people outside who want to see her, but she declines to leave, wanting the newly crowned King Charles VII to "have all the glory." Joan expresses gratitude for Dunois's friendship, and he admits that she needs it: despite the knights' acceptance and respect for Joan, the court has begun to see her as an enemy. In her confidence and ambition, she is perpetually "shewing them up," and they are resentful of her. It was Joan and not the Archbishop who crowned Charles VII King, for example.

*By crowning the Dauphin king herself, Joan again challenges the Church's authority. Throughout the play, Joan is repeatedly blinded by her confidence, unaware of how her self-assurance plays on the insecurities of the powerful men with whom she interacts. Shaw's use of the phrase "shewing them up" demonstrates one of his idiosyncrasies as a writer: throughout his career, he persistently resisted conforming to standard English usage, in this case demonstrated by replacing "show" with the archaic spelling "shew."*

Joan tells Dunois that she wants to "take Paris" next, but Dunois cautions her that many would rather see Joan defeated than see Joan victorious at Paris. Joan calls the world "wicked." She laments that the only thing she can rely on are her voices. Dunois responds uncomfortably to this: were it not for Joan's successful military endeavors, her incessant talk of "voices" would make him think that she's mad. Offended by Dunois's skepticism, Joan insists that "the voices come first; and I find the reasons after."

*Joan feels alienated because she seems to be the only character driven solely by her own conviction (symbolized by her voices) as opposed to the interests of a larger, external institution. Dunois accepts Joan's voices because they have resulted in French victory, but he would be less willing to do so if the voices weren't benefiting him in an obvious way. Joan is aware of this: when she states that "the voices come first; and I find the reasons after," she means that she consciously adjusts the framing of her voices' instructions to suit the interests of those with whom she must cooperate. Joan's confidence insures that she doesn't need to "find the reasons" to justify the voices to herself, but she recognizes that she must present logical "reasons" for her voices, lest others accuse her of madness.*

King Charles, Bluebeard, and La Hire enter the cathedral. Charles complains about how heavy his robes are and how horrible holy oil smells. Joan approaches Charles and tells him of her plans to return home. Reluctant to return to a life of boring normalcy, she suggests to Dunois that they should take Paris before she leaves. This alarms Charles, who would rather establish a treaty with the Duke of Burgundy than continue fighting and risk defeat. The Archbishop enters the cathedral and condemns Joan for her lack of humility. She responds to this defensively and disrespectfully, causing the Archbishop to accuse her of "the sin of pride." Charles seconds this, complaining that Joan thinks she's better and smarter than everyone else.

*Joan's defensive, disrespectful response to the Archbishop shows that she's ignorant of how off-putting her confidence is to others. Joan's sole quest throughout the play is to act on the truth, and she refuses to yield to anyone whose ignorance or hesitation contradicts her convictions. Shaw emphasizes Joan's ignorance here to set up how unequipped and unprepared she will be to defend herself during her trial in Scene VI.*

Joan asserts that she knows she's right because her voices tell her so. Additionally, her decision to act on her voices' orders has given the French numerous military victories. Dunois cautions Joan to be pragmatic: God might have been on their side when he brought them wind at Orleans, but it's foolish to presume he will always be on their side. Still, Joan remains confident in God: he's protected her before, and he will protect her now.

*Joan offers logical explanations to legitimize her voices: she is right to be confident in them, because acting on their orders has resulted in numerous French victories. Dunois more readily accepts the victories Joan as brought France than Joan's willingness to claim responsibility for these victories. Dunois's unwillingness to accept Joan's role in France's recent victories betrays his own insecurity at being upstaged by Joan, which highlights how gender bias prevents others from regarding her objectively.*

The Archbishop warns Joan that "pride will have a fall," and that the Church will "burn [her] as a witch" for her heresy. Joan can't believe that anybody could punish her for telling the truth. She enlists the Archbishop to defend her, but he refuses to do so if she continues to be "proud and disobedient." Joan resists the Archbishop's criticisms She's not being undeservingly proud, because she has always been right, and "your earthly counsels always wrong."

*Joan is correct when she states that she has always been right and the "earthly counsels always wrong," but the Archbishop refuses to acknowledge the validity that lies at the core in Joan's statement, focusing instead on the "proud and disobedient" manner in which Joan delivers the truth.*

Ultimately, everyone decides that Joan's confidence is unfounded and foolish. The Archbishop assures her that the Church, the army, and the crown will disown her if she continues to value her own "private judgement" above the judgement of the Church.

*Everybody besides Joan professes loyalty to their respective institutions: the Archbishop to the Church, Dunois to the military, and the Dauphin to the monarchy. Joan alone remains loyal to her own "private judgement."*

Frustrated, Joan cries out that she has "always been alone." She'd thought that she would find people sympathetic to her cause in the French court, as she fights in the name of God and "God ha[s] friends everywhere," but she was wrong: Joan—like France and like God—is all alone. Still, Joan refuses to give up: if God's strength is in his loneliness, so, too, will be hers. She resolves to turn away from the authority figures who hate and abandon her and turn toward "the common people," whose love and acceptance will comfort her. Even if she is burned at the stake, she will be remembered in the hearts of these common people.

*Joan's alienation reflects how rare it is to maintain personal integrity in the face of institutional pressures in a corrupt, morally imperfect world. By aligning herself with God and France, Joan proposes an opposition between the purity and goodness of a "common people" and the corruption of people in positions of power.*

Joan leaves. Bluebeard and Dunois admit that, although she is foolish, her passion inspires them. La Hire says he'd very well "follow her to hell when the spirit rises in her like that." The Archbishop admits that "there is a dangerous power in her outburst" which complicates his own spiritual judgment. Charles wishes Joan would just be quiet and stop digging herself into a hole.

*The fact that nobody dismisses Joan outright suggests that, although they are morally conflicted to abandon her, they know that it is in their best interest to maintain the status quo. Joan's refusal to see this illustrates both her moral superiority and ignorance of the corrupt forces that control her world.*

## SCENE 6

It is now May 30, 1431. The scene opens in a castle in Rouen in a stone hall arranged for Joan's trial. Two chairs sit side by side, raised above the rest of the court, with rows of chairs extending around them. A **table** is placed in the center of these chairs for the scribes. There is a wooden stool for Joan. The court is cut off from the outdoors, "shielded from the weather by screens and curtains."

*The hall is intricately and consciously arranged, which symbolizes the complex, rigorously structured court system to which Joan will be subjected during her trial. That the room is "shielded from the weather by screens and curtains" further signifies that the trial is wholly tied up in institutional power and therefore cut off from the natural, uncorrupted world. The placement of a single wooden stool for Joan in the center of her prosecutors' chairs emphasizes how alone she is: visually and literally, it's her against everyone else.*

Warwick and his page enter the courtroom. Cauchon enters, along with a monk and a canon. The page leaves the three men alone. Cauchon introduces the monk as Brother John Lemaître, who will be deputy to the Chief Inquisitor, and the canon as Canon John D'Estivet, who will be the Promoter, or Prosecutor. It's been nine months since Joan was captured by the Burgundians. Warwick asks Cauchon when the trial will be over, to which Cauchon responds that it hasn't even begun, as the court has been busy holding 15 "examinations" of Joan. The Inquisitor explains to Warwick that, although he initially saw Joan's case as political, he now has enough evidence to regard it as heresy. The trial will thus begin that morning.

*The court's thorough "examinations" of Joan reflect Cauchon's adamance that Joan be given a fair trial. In the face of English political authorities like Warwick who are eager to see that Joan is executed, it's crucial to Cauchon that Joan is tried for heresy so that she is interrogated by an ecclesiastical court first and, thus, be given the opportunity to repent, save her soul from damnation, and save herself from being burned at the stake. By giving Joan a fair trial, Cauchon resists Warwick's and the English force's political corruption.*

Warwick is pleased—he'd been growing impatient. Cauchon denounces the English soldiers who threaten to drown anyone who sides with Joan. He reiterates his determination to give Joan a fair trial. D'Estivet describes how psychologically difficult it has been for him to try Joan, as he finds her punishment unjust and wants desperately to save her soul. All the same, he recognizes that authorities have gone out of their way to explain to Joan the danger she is in. In this way, he can justify trying Joan. Warwick, in contrast, doesn't care about saving Joan's soul and regards her punishment as a "political necessity." With pride, Cauchon affirms that "the Church is not subject to political necessity."

*Shaw further establishes a divide between the spiritual leaders (Cauchon and D'Estivet) for whom Joan's soul is the top priority and the political figures (Warwick and the English soldiers) who want Joan burned as a "political necessity." Still, it's ironic that Cauchon insists that "the Church is not subject to political necessity," as the Church's fear of heresy is partially motivated by their desire to maintain control over their subjects.*

©2020 LitCharts LLC

The Inquisitor interrupts to assure both men that neither must worry about Joan being punished, as her own stubbornness will seal her fate: everything she says further convinces her interrogators of her heresy. Warwick leaves. Chaplain de Stogumber and Canon de Courcelles enter the courtroom. They are both agitated, having just learned that the 64 counts on which they've indicted Joan have been reduced to 12 without their consultation. The Inquisitor claims responsibility for the reduced charges, reasoning that too many issues will only confuse the rest of the court; further, focusing on the "trumpery" issues of magic and witchcraft of which they've accused Joan might allow her to get away with "the great main issue of heresy." Cauchon agrees with the Inquisitor's judgement.

*The Inquisitor reveals that Joan remains ignorant of the consequences of her confidence—namely, how this affects others' perceptions of her and the outcome of her trial. Even with her life on the line, she remains stubborn, refusing to compromise her values. The Inquisitor and Cauchon are adamant that the court remain focused on "the great main issue of heresy" because heresy—not the minor, "trumpery" issues of which Stogumber and Courcelles have accused Joan—is what poses the most significant threat to the Church.*

Ladvenu, a young Dominican monk, enters the courtroom, suggesting that Joan's heresy could be the result of her "simplicity." In a long speech, the Inquisitor cautions him against this position: heresy, a very serious threat, often originates as an "apparently harmless" idea espoused by simple, pious individuals. He cites women who refuse to wear women's clothes and end up running around naked, as well as people who refuse to marry and "begin with polygamy, and end by incest," to illustrate that even the most innocent transgressions can morph into wicked, destructive forces. The Church knows that "diabolical madnesses" begin with people like Joan who "set[] up their own judgment against the Church."

*The Inquisitor disregards Ladvenu's suggestion that the court should view Joan's "simplicity" as a sign of her innocence. He places more weight on the consequences of Joan's actions—like the possibility that commoners will learn to "set[] up their own judgment against the Church"—than on Joan's motivations for committing these actions in the first place. It doesn't matter to the Inquisitor that Joan isn't* consciously *plotting a calculated attack against the Church—it only matters that her actions pose this threat.*

What is so dangerous about Joan's heresy, states the Inquisitor, is that it is not just an act: she sincerely believes that her "diabolical" ideas are "divine." Those who judge Joan must be on guard not to feel compassion for her, as her diabolically inspired pride has not hardened the other aspects of her soul in a visibly discernable way. Joan's natural humility might make her judges feel cruel to condemn her, but the Inquisitor reminds the court "that nothing is so cruel in its consequences as the toleration of heresy."

*Like other characters in* Saint Joan *have done before him, the Inquisitor attacks the confidence Joan places in her own conviction. If other individuals were to follow in Joan's footsteps, it would destroy the Church's ability to exercise control over the masses, as they—like Joan—would be more inclined to answer to themselves before the Church. When the Inquisitor insists "that nothing is so cruel in its consequence as the toleration of heresy," he shows that the court is willing to be "cruel" to Joan if it means the Church's power will be upheld. In this way, Joan's condemnation becomes a political necessity to the Church as well as the secular realm.*

The Inquisitor insists that everyone should be grateful to the Holy Inquisition: before it existed, someone like Joan would have been violently executed without a trial. Ultimately, Joan's judges need to value justice over anger or pity. Cauchon agrees with the Inquisitor and further admonishes Joan's "Protestant" type of heresy, arguing that it is particularly dangerous because it spreads not amongst the simple, but amongst those with a "stronger" mind. The greater one values the truth of their "private judgment," the greater the threat they pose to the Church.

*Cauchon finds Joan's "Protestant" heresy particularly dangerous because it gathers its strength from an individual's "stronger" assurance in their ability to have a relationship to God without the Church's help and, more generally, to have confidence in their own convictions without having to answer to authority figures. Individuals who possess a stronger sense of self will be more reluctant to submit to the orders of social institutions.*

Two English soldiers bring Joan to the courtroom and lead her to her wooden stool. She is in chains and wears a **page's suit**. A long imprisonment has taken a toll on her, but she still appears vibrant and determined—albeit a bit pale. Before the trial can begin, Joan questions why she must be in chains, prompting Courcelles to remind her that she tried escape multiple times. In response to this, D'Estivet accuses of her of heresy, as her attempted escapes prove she wanted to remove herself from the Church's control. Cauchon tells Joan to be quiet, as her obstinance is not helping her case.

*Joan displays her stubbornness verbally as she continues to question the court's actions, as well as visually through the men's clothing she wears during her trial.*

The Inquisitor reminds D'Estivet that the trial hasn't officially begun because Joan has yet to take the oath to tell the whole truth. Joan continues to be obstinate, telling the Inquisitor she cannot tell "the whole truth" in court because only God can know all. Courcelles recommends that Joan be tortured if she doesn't take the oath to tell the whole truth, arguing that it's not cruel to torture Joan—it's the law. Cauchon is adamant to not torture Joan unless it is absolutely necessary: it's most important to save Joan's "soul and body," and it would be counterintuitive to destroy them both. Courcelles says this is not usually what is done, and Joan mocks this simplistic logic.

*Even as characters like Courcelles and D'Estivet show Joan that her legal assessors are willing to pounce on the smallest transgressions if they will result in her conviction, she refuses to back down. Shaw underscores here how Joan's confidence and integrity is transformed into foolishness and obstinance in the face of corrupt officials who will stop at nothing to uphold their institutional values; Joan's integrity matters little in the face of corrupt power.*

Cauchon returns the court to its central concern, asking Joan if she will "accept the judgment of God's Church on earth." Joan responds that she will not accept the Church's judgment if it forces her to recant her visions. Horrified, the assessors call this answer "flat heresy." The Inquisitor asks Joan if she will recant if the Church Militant tells her that her visions came from the devil instead of God, but Joan maintains that her visions came from God. Ladvenu pleads with Joan to yield to the Church, but to no avail. She responds simply: "what other judgment can I judge by but my own?"

*Joan refuses to adapt her understanding of her visions to fit the version the court finds palatable—that they came from the devil instead of God—which sets her apart from other characters in the play who repeatedly demonstrate that they are willing to compromise their values to seek a political end. When Joan asks "what other judgment can I judge by but my own?" she positions her personal, subjective knowledge of the world as superior to religious or political dogma.*

Cauchon tells Joan that—despite the numerous opportunities the court has given her to save herself— she has condemned herself with this statement. D'Estivet affirms that Joan's two biggest crimes are acting on behalf of "evil spirits" and dressing in **men's clothing**, which is "indecent, unnatural, and abominable."

*D'Estivet places Joan's decision to wear men's clothing on par with something so supposedly wicked as acting on behalf of "evil spirits," which speaks to the sexism that colors the court's perception of Joan.*

The Inquisitor tells Joan the Church has decided with certainty that her voices come from the devil and asks her if she accepts this position. Once more, she refuses to deny the holiness of her voices. Cauchon grows frustrated and asks Joan if she knows what she's saying, and she insists that she does. The Inquisitor asks Joan if she will remove her **men's clothing**, but she refuses, as her voices tell her to dress like a soldier. Ladvenu asks if she can justify this request. She replies simply: she lived, slept, and fought with soldiers, so it made sense for them to think of her as one of them. Ladvenu concedes that Joan's appearance might be shocking, but her logic is sound. Joan insults the court some more.

*Even though Joan insists that she knows what she's saying, it's clear she's not fully aware of the consequences of her actions. She still has yet to wrap her head around the fact that the complex legal, political, and ecclesiastical systems to which she is now subjected will execute her for her obstinance. It illustrates the court's hypocrisy that they will accept Joan's word (that she knows what she is saying) now when it allows them to condemn her, but that they misconstrue her words as heresy and obstinance when they doesn't benefit their political agendas.*

The Inquisitor tells Joan that the stake is ready for her burning. Joan is shocked: her voices had promised to protect her from harm. She can't believe they would lead her astray, though she finally accepts that it must be true. Ladvenu tells her that the Church will welcome her back, and Cauchon gives her a recantation to sign. In despair, Joan agrees to recant. Joan is illiterate, so Ladvenu reads the document to her, confirms that she understands, and then shows her how to sign her name. Once Joan signs the paper, the Inquisitor sentences her to life imprisonment. Joan is horrified at the prospect of life in prison—she thought she'd be allowed to go free—and she hurriedly tears the paper into pieces, reversing her recantation.

*Joan's decision to recant signifies that she finally understands the legal consequences of her obstinance and clarifies that she hadn't understood before, as her unfailing confidence in her voices and herself blinded her to the reality of her situation. Her ability to modify her actions in light of the new, critical information that she will suffer a gruesome fate if she continues to rebel is further evidence of the sanity and intelligence she has demonstrated throughout the play, as is her revised decision to reject her recantation when she learns that her alternative to being burned at the stake is the equally horrifying prospect of a life in prison.*

Joan accuses the court of lying to her: they said they wanted to save her life, but imprisonment wouldn't be life to her. She could give up **men's clothing** and warfare, but she can't bear being separated from "the wind in the trees, the larks in the sunshine," and the rest of the **natural world**. She reaffirms her previous stance: she knows the court "is of the devil," and that she is "of God." The soldiers grab Joan to lead her to the stake. Cauchon reads Joan's sentence, excommunicates her, and passes her over to the secular arm. Chaplain de Stogumber gleefully helps the soldiers bring Joan to the stake.

*Joan's reason for rejecting the court's offer to reduce her sentence to life in prison underscores her loyalties to the natural, uncorrupted world of "the wind in the trees, [and] the larks in the sunshine" that lies beyond the influence of institutions of power. Joan cannot bear to part with the natural, uncorrupted world, which symbolizes her unwillingness to sacrifice her integrity to meet the conditions of the Church.*

Cauchon laments the English's excitement to destroy Joan while acknowledging its necessity. The Inquisitor admits that, although he is used to such cruel practices, seeing someone as young and innocent as Joan die is hard to accept. He feels Joan is innocent because she didn't sufficiently understand the accusations against her. Warwick enters, followed shortly thereafter by Chaplain de Stogumber, who is sobbing. The Chaplain explains that he watched an English soldier give Joan a cross made of two sticks tied together after she requested one. He made no efforts to comfort Joan, but wishes he had: Joan's burning profoundly affects Stogumber, who hadn't realized how traumatic and cruel it would be. He is beside himself in grief and shame at how callously he has treated Joan.

*Although the religious authorities express remorse for Joan's fate, they don't deny the necessity of her death. Here, Shaw underscores Cauchon and the Inquisitor's hypocrisy: even though they know it is cruel and morally dubious to hand over the innocent Joan to the English, they are still able to justify doing so on the grounds that it is best for the Church. They have both become desensitized to the extent that they accept violence and cruelty as necessary evils. In an unlikely twist, it is Stogumber—who, for the entirety of the play, has eagerly and unquestioningly anticipated Joan's ruthless execution—who is most profoundly affected by her death.*

Ladvenu enters and reports on the burning: Joan had only the improvised cross pressed to her chest, so he brought one from the church for her to hold. He tried to bring it to her hands, but the fire began to enrobe them both, so she told him to back down and save himself. Ladvenu can't believe that such selflessness could have been "inspired by the devil." He believes that God redeemed Joan in her last moments of life. He reports hearing laughter, and he admits, wryly, that he hopes it was English laughter. His shame reignited, the Chaplain runs away in disgrace.

*Like Cauchon and the Inquisitor, Ladvenu also affirms Joan's innocence. Ladvenu's belief in Joan's innocence is less hypocritical than Cauchon's or the Inquisitor's (he maintains a more consistent skepticism toward her guilt), but it's still significant that none of the men may positively affirm Joan's innocence until after she is dead, which speaks to Shaw's position that saints and dissenters like Joan will not be accepted while they are alive and, therefore, capable of upsetting social norms.*

The Executioner enters and tells Warwick that the deed is done: Joan is dead. Her remains were thrown in the river. Reflecting on Ladvenu's earlier claim that Joan was redeemed in her final moments of life, Warwick wonders whether he's truly seen the last of Joan.

*Warwick's musings on whether he's seen the last of Joan foreshadows the eventual reversal of her heresy conviction and future canonization. It also emphasizes the unnecessary cruelty and tragedy of Joan's death: Warwick and her other accusers wanted her dead to extinguish her and her dangerous ideas, yet they seem to know that death was insufficient to put an end to Joan and the ideas she put forward.*

## EPILOGUE

It's a June night in 1456, 25 years after Joan's execution. Charles VII—now 51 years old and known as Charles the Victorious on account of his military successes—lies reading in bed. Beside him is a **table**, upon which rests a picture of the Virgin Mary. Ladvenu enters Charles's room and tells him that Joan has finally received justice. He's come from an inquiry that exposed the court's perjury. The Church now sees Joan as innocent and her accusers as corrupt. Charles doesn't care about Joan's reputation; he is only relieved to know that he wasn't crowned by a heretic so many years before. Now, nobody can question his legitimacy as king. Wryly, he speculates that, if Joan could be magically resurrected, "they would burn her again within six months." Ladvenu exits the room.

*The table beside Charles's bed reinforces his institutional ties to the monarchy, and the picture of the Virgin Mary that rests upon it shows that he also answers to the Church. Charles's selfish response to Ladvenu's news about Joan further reinforces his institutional obligations. Charles doesn't care that Joan's reputation has been rightfully restored—he only cares that her restored reputation affirms the legitimacy of his own claim to power. Still, his speculation that "they would burn her again within six months" betrays a cynicism toward institutions and their desire to maintain the status quo.*

Suddenly, the candles go out. Charles hears Joan's voice. She appears as an apparition, revealing herself to be a dream. Joan tells Charles she doesn't remember much about being burned, and Charles tells her about the successful military pursuits he forged after her death. More importantly, he informs Joan that the court's conduct has been ruled corrupt, her sentence has been reversed, and the Church will place a cross where they burned Joan to memorialize her. Joan replies simply: "it is the memory and the salvation that sanctify the cross, not the cross that sanctifies the memory and the salvation." She believes her memory will "outlast that cross." Charles scoffs at her characteristic "self-conceit."

*Joan's observation that "it is the memory and the salvation that sanctify the cross, not the cross that sanctifies the memory and the salvation" is a criticism of empty, symbolic gestures. The Church would like to believe that its memorial to Joan will "sanctify" her memory and reverse the wrongs done unto her by the Church. In contrast, Joan sees the cross as meaningless: because she doesn't see the Church's apology as sincere, the cross does little to "sanctif[y] the memory and the salvation" it purports to convey. To Joan, "memory and salvation" can only be reached from within: they cannot be obtained from symbolic, external means.*

Suddenly, the apparition of Cauchon appears. After the Church declared Joan's innocence, Cauchon—who was already dead—was excommunicated, his corpse tossed into the sewer. Embittered, he complains that his dishonoring "saps the foundation of the Church." Cauchon maintains that he showed great mercy in his treatment of Joan—he was neither corrupt nor cruel. To Cauchon's complaint, the Dauphin replies: "yes: it is always you good men that do the big mischiefs," yet he defends his own inaction in saving Joan by claiming that he was acting on behalf of France's national interest. Joan asks Charles if the English are gone, and the apparition of Dunois appears. Dunois—who is still alive—tells Joan he drove the English out using her successful military tactics. Dunois expresses remorse for letting the English burn Joan, making the excuse that he was busy fighting and couldn't help her.

*Cauchon frames his embitterment about being excommunicated in terms of the destructive impact it has on "the foundation of the Church," underscoring his ties to the institution of the Church. Charles's critical remark toward Cauchon is hypocritical, as Charles, too, cites his obligation to an outside institution—in his case, the nation of France—to defend his own failure to help Joan. In this way, both Cauchon and the Dauphin were "good men" to their institution who indirectly inflicted "big mischiefs" on Joan as a result of these outside obligations. Dunois makes a similar excuse, citing his martial obligations as the primary reason he couldn't assist Joan.*

The clock strikes and the apparition of an English soldier appears, singing a rough, "improvised tune." The soldier, a "saint," has come "straight from hell." He is granted one day free from damnation each year for his "one good action." Joan recognizes the soldier and explains that he was the man who gave her the improvised cross in the final moments before her death. The soldier says that hell isn't so bad; in fact, there are plenty of "emperors and popes and kings" there to keep him company.

*The improvisatory nature of the soldier's tune evokes the sensibilities of the common people and stands in contrast to the institutional sensibilities of churchmen and noblemen that have entered the room before the soldier. The soldier's admission that hell is filled with "emperors and popes and kings" is humorous and suggests how little glorified titles say about the truth of one's character: even (and perhaps, especially) the most lauded and worshipped individuals are capable of acts of evil and corruption.*

The door opens and an old man enters: he reveals that he is Chaplain de Stogumber. Stogumber expresses remorse for the cruelty he inflicted upon Joan, though in his old age he does not recognize her before him. Joan's execution might have been horrific, but Stogumber says it "saved" him, forcing him to become "a different man ever since." Cauchon scoffs at this: "must then a Christ perish in torment in every age to save those that have no imagination?" he asks.

*Stogumber appears to be the only character for whom Joan's death had a real, lasting impact: the horror of her execution "saved" his soul, and he responded by taking direct, charitable action to become "a different man." Cauchon is too cynical to accept Stogumber's transformation without critique. When he speculates that "a Christ [must] perish in torment in every age to save those that have no imagination," he suggests that simple people like Stogumber lack the intellectual capacity to change on their own behalf and need "Christ" figures like Joan to sacrifice themselves to gain enlightenment.*

©2020 LitCharts LLC

The Executioner appears, announcing that Joan's strength of spirit makes her "more alive" than Stogumber. Warwick enters next and congratulates Joan on her cleared name. He apologizes, maintaining that her execution was not personal—it was "purely political," and a mistake, at that. A "clerical looking gentleman" appears dressed in 1920s clothing, which the medieval characters find hilarious. The gentleman disregards their laughter, for he comes to them with serious business: he's been sent to tell them that, 500 years after her death, the Catholic Church has canonized Joan as a saint, and she will be celebrated every year on May 30, the anniversary of her death. Joan is elated. One by one, each of the characters in the room kneel and praise Joan, offering the good she brings to the different sectors of society they represent.

*Joan's strength of spirit alludes to the heightened sense of confidence and self-assurance she has demonstrated throughout the play. The Executioner's decision to pass off Joan's execution as "purely political" is in line with the previous excuses characters have offered Joan. Nobody had a personal vendetta against Joan: they were merely acting on behalf of the institutions to which they were answerable. The appearance of the "clerical man" from the future makes clear that once the institution of the Catholic Church validates Joan by canonizing her, each of her accusers are allowed and obligated to praise her. Nothing about their relationship to Joan has changed—only an institution of great power's reception of her.*

In response to everyone's praise, Joan proposes that she rise from the dead and join them—she's a saint now, after all, and can perform miracles. Darkness falls upon the room as everyone rises rapidly to their feet, making nervous and hasty excuses for why Joan cannot be resurrected: unanimously, they agree it would be best for Joan to remain dead. One by one, everyone leaves the room.

*Joan's accusers don't actually care about her on a personal level—they're only concerned with how the Church's canonization of Joan enables them to repent for the cruelties they committed against her and gives them a path toward redemption and ideological validation. They need Joan to exist solely as a dead symbol, but they remain unable to accept her as a living being who can threaten the status quo.*

The soldier is the last character to go. He tries to comfort Joan, asserting that all those who left her to die are not worth her time. He insists that Joan has the same right to her own convictions as they do to theirs, if not more so. Suddenly, the clock strikes midnight and it is time for the soldiers to go: his day off from damnation is over, and he must return to hell. Alone, Joan cries out: "O God that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive Thy saints? How long, O Lord, how long?"

*In stating that Joan has more of a right to her convictions than the others do, the soldier suggests that Joan's convictions are more virtuous because she has arrived at them via individual, intellectual exploration—not via the dogmatic instruction of institutions. Joan's final plea to God reinforces the idea that the world is never "ready" for saints, or people who operate outside institutions and disrupt the status quo. Ultimately, the world will always reject individuals like Joan, passing them off as insane or a nuisance to society.*

©2020 LitCharts LLC

## HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

### MLA

Charles, Carly. "*Saint Joan*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 12 Feb 2020. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Charles, Carly. "*Saint Joan*." LitCharts LLC, February 12, 2020. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/saint-joan.

To cite any of the quotes from *Saint Joan* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

### MLA

Shaw, George Bernard. Saint Joan. Penguin. 1924.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Shaw, George Bernard. Saint Joan. London: Penguin. 1924.