From: *Makers of the Western Tradition*, ed. J. Kelley Sowards, 6th ed., vol. 1 (New York: St. Martin's, 1994), pp. 200–219.

Giraudon/Art Resource, NY

JOAN OF ARC: MAID AND MARTYR

c. 1412	Born
1429	Raised the siege of Orléans
1430	Captured by the Burgundians
1431	Trial and execution

When Joan of Arc was born, probably about 1412, in the village of Domrémy in the duchy of Lorraine in eastern France, the Hundred Years' War had already been going on for more than seventy years. France had been devastated by foreign invasion and civil war. Even the remote province of Lorraine had not been spared the marauding bands of soldiers burning and looting towns, ravaging the countryside, robbing and killing the helpless peasantry. The French royal cause was in ruins, what leadership it had in the hands of the Dauphin Charles, the still uncrowned heir presumptive to the vacant throne.

In 1428, when Joan was about sixteen, she came to believe that the patron saints of her village were speaking to her, telling her to go to the Dauphin and secure his coronation. She made her way to the nearby castle of Vaucouleurs, which was held by Robert de Baudricourt, a royal partisan. She won him over, and he provided her with an escort of six men-at-arms. After traveling through enemy-held territory for eleven days, she reached Chinon and the Dauphin. She found him living like a servant in his own court, robbed and bullied by the nobles who surrounded him. Joan told him that she wanted to go to battle against the English and that she would have him crowned at Rheims. The superstitiously religious Charles believed her and provided her with a modest military staff, sword and armor, a muster

of a few hundred soldiers, and a banner blazoned with the name of Jesus.

Thus equipped, Joan and her small force joined the royal army raggedly attacking the stronghold of Orléans, a key city besieged by the English and their Burgundian allies. Her presence infused new spirit into the discouraged French army. Orléans was relieved. Other military successes followed, and the course of the war began to turn. On July 17, 1429, Joan secured the coronation of the Dauphin as Charles VII in the liberated city of Rheims, the traditional site of French royal investiture.

Less than a year later Joan was captured by the Burgundians and sold to the English. For a year she was held in prison and subjected to repeated and persistent questioning. Neither her faith nor her simplicity could save her: she was found guilty of witchcraft and executed in the Old Marketplace of the English-held town of Rouen. An English witness standing near the stake said in awe, "We have burned a saint."

The Documentary Sources

The records of the life and martyrdom of Joan of Arc are more complete and extensive than for any other medieval saint. They were collected by the French scholar Jules Quicherat in the mid–nineteenth century and published in five heavy volumes as *Procès de condamnation et de réhabilitation de Jeanne d'Arc, dite la Pucelle.*[1] This work contains not only the complete texts of her trial and of the review of that trial—the *Réhabilitation,* some twenty years later—but virtually every other document pertaining to her: excerpts from chronicles, literary works, letters, state papers, and eyewitness testimony.

The following excerpt from the *Réhabilitation* is the account of Joan's final hearing and execution given by the two friars who assisted her on the scaffold, Martin Ladvenu and Isambart de la Pierre.

MARTIN LADVENU

. . . Many appeared at the trial rather for their love of the English and their partiality toward them than out of zeal for justice and the Catholic faith. This I would particularly say of the zeal and excessive partisanship shown by Messire Pierre Cauchon, then Bishop of Beauvais. I would accuse him of two signs of partiality. Firstly, when the Bishop appointed himself judge he ordered that Joan should be kept in a secular prison and in the hands of her mortal enemies, although he could easily have had her kept and guarded in an ecclesiastical prison. Nevertheless, from the beginning of the trial to its conclusion he permitted her to be tormented and ill-treated in a secular prison. Moreover, at the first hearing or instance, the said Bishop asked for and demanded the opinions of everyone present as to which was the more suitable, to keep her in a secular prison or to hold her in the prisons of the Church. On this point it was decided that it was more proper to keep her in the Church prison than in any other. But the Bishop answered that he would not do that for fear of displeasing the English. The second sign is that on the day when the Bishop and some others declared her a heretic, lapsed and returned to her sin because she had

[1]The Report of the Condemnation and Rehabilitation of Joan of Arc, Called the Maid.—Ed.

resumed male clothing in prison, as he left the prison he said to the Earl of Warwick and a great crowd of Englishmen around him: "Farewell, farewell, it is done. Be of good cheer!" This, or something like it, he said in loud and intelligible tones, and laughed as he did so.

They put questions to her which were too difficult in order to catch her out by her own words and opinions. For she was a poor, rather simple woman who scarcely knew her Pater Noster and Ave Maria.

This simple Maid revealed to me that after her abjuration and renunciation she was violently tormented, worried, beaten, and ill-treated in her prison, and that an English lord had done her violence. She openly said that this was the reason why she had resumed male clothing; and toward her end she said to the Bishop of Beauvais: "Alas, it is through your fault that I am to die. For if you had had me kept in a Church prison, I should not be in this plight."

When her last sermon was preached to her in the Vieux Marché[2] and she was handed over to the secular arm, although the secular judges were seated on the platform she was not sentenced by any of those judges. Without sentence, she was compelled by two sergeants to come down from her scaffold, and she was led by these sergeants to the place where she was to be burnt, and there handed over by them to the executioner. . . . After the burning, at about four hours after nones, the executioner said that he had never been so much afraid in officiating at the death of any criminal as he had been at Joan's, and this for several reasons:

Firstly because of her great name and reputation.

Secondly, because of the cruel way in which she was tied and made a show of. For the English had a tall scaffold of stone built, so that, as the executioner reported, he could not easily reach her or hasten her end. This grieved him greatly, for he was much upset by the cruel form and manner in which she was brought to her death.

As for her great and wonderful contrition, repentance, and repeated confessions, she called continuously on the name of Jesus, and devotedly invoked the aid of the Saints, male and female, in Paradise, as Friar Isambart, who accompanied her to her death and spoke to her of her salvation on the way, has testified above.

ISAMBART DE LA PIERRE

. . . On one occasion I and several others were admonishing and begging Joan to submit to the Church. She replied that she would willingly submit to the Holy Father, to whom she asked to be led, but that she would not submit to the judgment of her enemies. And at that

[2]The Old Market in Rouen.—ED.

time I advised her to submit to the Council of Basle, and Joan asked me what a general council was. I replied that it was an assembly of the whole universal Church and of Christendom, and that in this council there were as many of her party as of the English. When she heard and understood this she began to cry out: "Oh, if there are some of our party there, I will willingly surrender and submit to the Council of Basle." Then suddenly, in a great fury and indignation, the Bishop of Beauvais began to shout: "Be quiet, in the devil's name!" And he told the notary to be sure not to record the submission she had made to the Council of Basle. On this account and for several other reasons, the English and their officers threatened me horribly that if I did not keep quiet they would throw me in the Seine.

After her renunciation and abjuration, when she had put on male clothes again, she excused herself for having done so in the presence of myself and several others. She said and publicly affirmed that when she put on women's clothes the English had done her great wrongs and violence in her prison. And indeed I saw her weeping, with her face running with tears, and so outraged and disfigured that I felt pity and compassion for her.

When she was labeled an obstinate and relapsed heretic, she publicly answered before the whole court: "If you, lords of the Church, had taken me and kept me in your own prisons, perhaps things would not be like this with me."

After the final conclusion of that session and of the suit, the lord Bishop of Beauvais said to the English: "Farewell, be of good cheer. It is done."

They put such difficult questions to poor Joan, and framed such subtle and tricky interrogatories that the great clerks and men of learning there present would have found it very hard to know how to answer. Several of those present grumbled about this.

As for myself, I was summoned in person before the Bishop of Avranches, a good cleric but very old, who had been asked and entreated to give an opinion on the case. The Bishop asked me, therefore, what the worthy Saint Thomas said on the subject of the proper form of submission to the Church. I gave the Bishop Saint Thomas's ruling in writing. It says: "In all doubts as to faith, one should always resort to the Pope and the General Council." The Bishop subscribed to this opinion, and seemed most unhappy at the decision which had been reached in defiance of it. This opinion of his was not recorded, but omitted out of malice.

After her confession and her taking of the sacrament of the Host, sentence was pronounced on her, and she was declared an excommunicated heretic.

I well saw and clearly perceived—for I was present throughout and watched the whole summing up and conclusion of the case—that the

secular judge did not condemn her to death or to be consumed by the fire. And although the lay and secular judge appeared and was present at the very place of her last sermon and her transfer to the secular arm, nevertheless she was handed over to the executioner and burnt without any judgment or conclusion by that judge. The executioner was told: "Do your duty." She received no other sentence.

Joan showed such great contrition and such a fine repentance in her death as was a wonder to see. The words she uttered were so devout, pious, and Christian that all who watched her—and they were a great multitude—wept warm tears. Even the Cardinal of England (the Bishop of Winchester) and several other Englishmen were constrained to weep and were moved to compassion.

The pious woman asked, commanded, and begged me, since I was near her at the end, to go into the nearby church and bring her the Crucifix. This she made me hold up, right before her eyes, until the moment of her death, so that the Cross upon which God hung should be continually before her eyes so long as her life lasted. Moreover, when she was surrounded by flames she continued to cry aloud and acknowledge the sacred name of Jesus, and ceaselessly to implore and invoke the aid of the Saints in Paradise. And, what is more, as she gave up the ghost and bowed her head, she pronounced the name of Jesus. This was a sure sign that she fervently believed in God, as we read in the case of Saint Ignatius and many other martyrs.

Immediately after the execution, the executioner came up to me and my companion, Friar Martin Ladvenu. He was struck and moved by a marvelous repentance and terrible contrition; and he was desperate with fear that he would never be able to obtain God's pardon and indulgence for what he had done to that saintly woman. He said and affirmed that, notwithstanding the oil, sulphur, and charcoal that he had applied to Joan's entrails and heart, he had not found it possible to burn them or reduce them to ashes. He was astonished at this as at a patent miracle.

A Nationalist View of Joan

JULES MICHELET

The story of Joan of Arc was largely the subject of poems and legends until the 1840s and the appearance of Jules Michelet's monumental *History of France.* The fifth volume of this work, devoted to the reign of Charles VII, contains three chapters on Joan of Arc. They were later republished as a separate volume and are generally regarded as Michelet's masterpiece. Like most of his fellow French intellectuals of the time, Michelet was an ardent nationalist and a critic of the traditional French Catholic church. He tended to see religion as properly the service of man through the service of God—a thoroughly liberal, humanitarian, and democratic interpretation. Thus, he depicted Joan of Arc as a champion of French nationalism brought down by the functionaries of the church, as corrupt in her century as in his own. One critic has called Michelet's Joan of Arc "a hymn to patriotism."[3]

On Friday and Saturday the wretched prisoner, deprived of her male garments, had much to fear. Brutal nature, furious hatred, vengeance, everything would urge the cowards to degrade her before she perished, to sully the victim they were going to burn. . . . They might be tempted to cover their infamy with a *raison d'état,* according to the ideas of the time; by ravishing her virginity, they would destroy the occult power of which they were so horribly afraid; it might restore their courage to realize that after all she was but a woman. According to her confessor, to whom she had revealed the fact, an Englishman, not a common soldier, but a gentleman, a lord, had patriotically assumed the task; he had bravely attempted to rape a girl in chains; and when he did not succeed, he had showered her with blows.

When Sunday morning came, Trinity Sunday, and she had to rise, as she reported to a witness, she told her English guards, "Take off my shackles, so that I may get up." One of them took off the woman's garments she wore, emptied a bag containing man's clothing, and said to her, "Arise."—"Gentlemen," she said, "you know I am forbidden to wear this; excuse me, but I will not put it on." The discussion went on until noon; finally, a bodily necessity compelled her to go out, and to take the clothes given her. When she came back, they would not give her any other, in spite of all her entreaties.

It was not actually to the advantage of the English that she should resume the wearing of man's clothing, thus canceling the recantation that had been so hard to obtain. But at that moment their rage knew no bounds. Saintrailles had boldly attempted a raid on Rouen. It would have been a splendid stroke to snatch the judges right from their tribunal, to take Winchester and Bedford to Poitiers; Bedford had another narrow escape on his way back from Rouen to Paris. The

[3]Frances Gies, *Joan of Arc: The Legend and the Reality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 253.

English felt insecure so long as the accursed woman was alive; undoubtedly, she kept weaving her evil spells in her prison. She must perish.

The assessors, summoned at once to the castle to certify that she had changed to man's clothes again, found in the courtyard some hundred Englishmen who barred their way; they thought that these doctors, if allowed to enter, would spoil the game; they raised their battle-axes and their swords against them and chased them away, calling them *Armagnac traitors*. Cauchon managed with great difficulty to be admitted; he affected gaiety in order to please Warwick, and said with a laugh, "She is caught."

On Monday he returned with the inquisitor and eight assessors to question the Maid and asked her why she had resumed those garments. She offered no excuse, but, bravely facing her peril, she said that this garb was more suitable, so long as she had men as her keepers, and that besides the judges had failed to keep their word to her. Her saints had told her that "it was a great pity she had abjured in order to save her life." However, she was not refusing to wear woman's clothes. "Give me a safe and mild prison," she said, "and I shall be good, and obey the Church in everything."

The bishop, as he left, met Warwick, and to show his loyalty to the English cause he said in English, "Farewell, farewell." This cheerful good-bye meant something like "it is all over."

On Tuesday the judges summoned to the archbishop's palace a hotchpotch assembly, some assessors who had been present only at the first meetings, some who had never attended at all; men of all sorts, clerics, jurists, and even three medical men. The judges reported to the assembly what had taken place and requested its opinion. The opinion, very different from what had been expected, was that the prisoner should be summoned once more, and that her act of abjuration should be read over to her. It is doubtful whether the judges had any authority to do this. In reality, in the tumult of the raging soldiery and the clanking of swords there were no judges any more, and no judicial process was possible. The mob was howling for blood; perhaps the judges would have been the first victims. They drew up in haste a summons to be delivered on the morrow at eight o'clock; she was not to appear again, save to be burnt.

In the morning, Cauchon sent her a confessor, Brother Martin l'Advenu, "to apprise her of her coming death and induce her to penitence. . . ." When he told the poor woman what manner of death was awaiting her, she cried out most piteously, flung her arms about and tore her hair, "Alas! Am I to be treated with such horrible cruelty, that my body, wholly pure and never sullied, should be consumed today and turned into ashes! Ah! I should prefer to be beheaded

seven times over than to be burnt in this wise! . . . Oh! I appeal to God, the great judge, to right the wrongs and grievances done to me!"

After this outburst of grief, she recovered herself, made confession, and asked to receive communion. The friar was in a predicament; but the bishop, whom he consulted, answered that she might be given communion, "and anything she might desire." Thus, at the very moment he had pronounced her a heretic and a backslider, and as such cut off from the Church, he was granting her that which the Church gives to the faithful. Perhaps a last sentiment of humanity rose in the heart of the wicked judge; he may have thought he had done enough in having the poor creature burnt, without casting her into despair and damnation. Perhaps the bad priest, with the indifferent levity of a skeptic, was allowing her the sacraments as something of little consequence, which might simply soothe the victim, and induce her to hold her peace. At first they attempted to go through with the ceremony surreptitiously, the host was brought without stole and without tapers. But the monk complained, and the churchmen of Rouen, duly informed, took advantage of this to express their opinion of Cauchon's judgment; they sent the body of Christ by the light of many torches, escorted by numerous priests who chanted litanies and told the people kneeling along the streets, "Pray for her."

After receiving communion with abundant tears, she caught sight of the bishop and said to him, "Bishop, my death is your doing. . . ." And again, "If you had placed me in a Church prison and in the keeping of ecclesiastics, this would not have happened. . . . That is why I appeal against you before God!"

Then, noticing among those in attendance Peter Morice, one of those who had preached to her, she said to him, "Ah! Master Peter, where shall I be tonight?"—"Do you not have a firm hope in the Lord?"—"Oh! yes, with God's help, I shall be in Paradise."

It was nine. They had clothed her in woman's garb and put her on a cart. By her side stood her confessor, Brother Martin l'Advenu; Massieu, the usher, was on her other side. The Augustinian monk, Brother Isambart, who had already shown such charity and such courage, would not relinquish her. It was asserted that the wretched Loyseleur[4] also climbed onto the cart, to beg her forgiveness; the English would have killed him but for the Earl of Warwick's intervention.

Up to that moment the Maid had never despaired, except perhaps in her hour of temptation during Holy Week. While saying as she sometimes did, "These English people will put me to death," at bot-

[4]Loyseleur was a church canon on the trial commission who had volunteered to serve as Joan's confessor and then revealed her spiritual confidences to the commission.—ED.

tom she did not believe it. She did not imagine that she would be abandoned. She had faith in her king, in the good people of France. She had said it expressly, "There will be in the prison, or at the time of the judgment, a great commotion whereby I shall be freed . . . delivered through a great victory! . . ." But even if king and people failed her, she had another support, infinitely more powerful and more assured, that of her friends from on high, her kind and beloved saints. . . . When she was besieging St. Peter,[5] and her soldiers abandoned her at the moment of the assault, the saints sent an invisible army to her aid. How could they now forsake their obedient daughter, they who so often had promised her rescue and deliverance!

What must have been her thoughts then, when she saw that of a certainty she was going to die, when she was carried in the cart through a quivering multitude, under the guard of eight hundred Englishmen armed with spears and swords? She wept and mourned; yet she accused neither her king nor her saints. . . . Only these words escaped her lips: "O Rouen, Rouen! Is it here that I must die?"

The end of this sorrowful journey was the Old Market Place, the fish market. Three platforms had been erected. On the first was the episcopal and royal chair, the throne of the English cardinal, and beside it the seats of his prelates. On the second were to figure the characters in the somber drama, the preacher, the judge, the bailiff, and the condemned. Apart from these, there rose a huge mass of plaster heaped high with wood; they had not been niggardly with the pyre: its height filled the spectators with awe. This was not done merely to give the execution a more solemn character: there was another motive. The pyre had been made so high, so that the executioner could only reach its base; he would not be able to shorten the torture, and mercifully to dispatch the victim, as he usually did, and so to spare her the flames. In this case, they wanted to make sure that justice would not be cheated, that the fire would not simply devour a corpse; they wanted her to be literally burnt alive; they wanted her, hoisted atop this mountain of fuel, above the encircling spears and swords, to be in plain sight for everyone in the market place. The slow, protracted burning under the eyes of the watchful crowd would probably expose at last some flaw, would wrench from her some cries that might be given out as a recantation, at the very least some confused, barely articulate words that could be so twisted; perhaps some craven prayer, some humiliating appeal to mercy, such as one would expect from a woman demented with terror.

A chronicler, a friend of the English, here lays a heavy charge against them. If we are to believe him, they wanted her dress to be

[5]The site of an action in one of the battles in which Joan took part.—ED.

consumed first, revealing her nakedness, "so as to remove all doubts from the minds of the people"; the fire being brushed aside for a moment, everyone could draw nigh and stare at her, "and all the secrets which may or should be in a woman's body"; after this immoral and ferocious exhibition, the executioner was to make the flames blaze anew on her poor carcass.

The horrible ceremony began with a sermon. Master Nicholas Midy, one of the lights of the University of Paris, preached on the edifying text: "When one limb of the Church is sick, the whole Church is sick." The poor Church could be healed only by cutting off the limb. He concluded with the formula: "Joan, go *you* in peace, the Church can no longer defend *thee*."

Then the ecclesiastical judge, the bishop of Beauvais, exhorted her with benignity to care for her soul and to remember all her transgressions, so as to rouse herself to contrition. The assessors had ruled that according to the law her abjuration should be read over to her; the bishop omitted this. He was afraid she would give him the lie, raise a protest. But the poor girl had little thought of thus haggling for her life; her mind was fixed on very different things. Even before she had been exhorted to contrition, she had fallen on her knees, invoking God, the Virgin, St. Michael and St. Catherine, forgiving everyone and asking forgiveness; begging of the crowd that they pray for her. Above all, she entreated every one of the priests present to say a mass for her soul. All this in such a devout, humble and touching fashion that all were moved and could not repress their feelings; the bishop of Beauvais began weeping, the bishop of Boulogne was sobbing, and now even the English were in tears, Winchester like the rest.

Might it be that in that moment of universal tenderness, of tears, of contagious weakness, the hapless girl, softened, relapsing into mere womanhood, did confess that now she could see clearly she had been wrong, that they had deceived her who had promised deliverance? On this point, we cannot accept with implicit faith the biased testimony of the English. But it would betray scant knowledge of human nature to doubt that, frustrated as she was in her hope, her faith may have wavered. Did she actually utter the words? The thing is not certain; but I dare to affirm that the thought was there.

Meanwhile, the judges, dismayed for a moment, had rallied and were their stern selves again; the bishop of Beauvais, wiping his eyes, began reading the sentence. He rehearsed for the culprit all her crimes—schism, idolatry, invoking demons; how, after being admitted to penitence, she was "seduced by the Prince of lies and had relapsed, O grief! *like the dog returning to his vomit!* . . . Therefore, we pronounce you a rotten limb, and as such cut off from the Church; we deliver

you over to the secular power, *begging it however to be mild in dealing with you, and to spare you death and bodily mutilation.*"

Thus rejected by the Church, she committed herself in full confidence to God. She asked for a cross. An Englishman made a wooden one out of a stick, and handed it to her; she received it devoutly, crude as it was, and placed it under her garments, next to her skin. . . . But she desired a regular Church crucifix to keep before her eyes until the moment of death. The kindly usher, Massieu, and Brother Isambart pleaded so earnestly that a cross was brought to her from the parish church of St. Saviour. As she was clasping the cross, and as Isambart was comforting her, the English began to grow weary of the delay; it must have been past noon; the soldiers were grumbling; the captains growled, "What's all this, you priests? Do you mean us to stay here till dinner time? . . ." Then, losing patience, and without waiting for the order of the bailiff, who alone had the authority to send her to death, they had two sergeants climb the platform and snatch her from the hands of the priests. At the foot of the tribunal, she was seized by men-at-arms, who dragged her to the executioner, and told him, "Do your office. . . ." The fury of the soldiers roused a feeling of horror; many in the crowd, and even some of the judges, ran away, unable to bear the sight any more.

When she was brought down from the platform to the market place, roughly handled by the English soldiers, nature broke down, and the flesh in her was perturbed; she cried anew, "O Rouen, so thou art to be my last abode! . . ." She said no more, and *did not sin with her lips,* in this hour of terror and agony.

She accused neither her king, nor her saints. But when she had reached the top of the pyre, and saw the vast city, the motionless and silent crowd, she could not help saying, "Ah! Rouen, Rouen, I sadly fear thou wilt suffer because of my death!" She who had saved the people, and whom the people were forsaking, in the admirable sweetness of her soul, had only words of compassion for the people, as she was about to die.

She was tied under the placard of infamy; a miter placed on her head with the words: "Heretic, backslider, apostate, idolater. . . ." The executioner lit the fire. She saw it from her high station and uttered a cry. Then, as the friar who was exhorting her was paying no heed to the flames, she, forgetting herself, was afraid for him and bade him descend.

The proof that up to that moment she had made no formal recantation is that the wretched Cauchon felt obliged (impelled no doubt by the supreme satanic will which presided over the whole) to come to the foot of the pyre, forced to confront his victim once more, in a last effort to wrest from her some damning admission. He drew but these

words, fit to rack his soul—words that she had told him before, and which she repeated with gentleness, "Bishop, my death is your doing. . . . If you had placed me in a prison of the Church, this would not have come to pass." They may have hoped that, believing herself abandoned by her king, she would accuse him at last, and speak against him. But even then, she was defending him still: "Whether I have done well or ill, my king is not at fault; it was not he who counseled me."

Meanwhile the flames were rising. At the moment they reached her she shivered and in her agony cried for holy *water; water,* it was probably a cry wrenched by terror. But soon conquering herself, she had only the names of God, her angels and her saints on her lips, "Yes, my voices came from God, my voices did not deceive me! . . ." All doubt vanished in the flames; this leads us to believe that she had accepted death as the promised *deliverance,* that she no longer understood *salvation* in the Judaic, literal, material sense, as she had done hitherto, that she saw the light at last, and that, as she emerged from the dark shadows, her gifts of illumination and sanctity were fully purified and attained their supreme perfection.

These great words of hers are vouched for by the one who was the official and sworn witness of her death—the Dominican who went with her up the pile, whom she requested to go down, and who, from below, spoke to her, listened to her, held the cross before her eyes.

We have another testimony on her holy death, a witness of the most unimpeachable authority. This man, whose name history must preserve and honor, was the Augustinian monk we have mentioned before, Brother Isambart de la Pierre; during the trial, he came near being put to death because he had advised the Maid; yet, although so clearly exposed to the hatred of the English, he insisted on climbing into the cart with her; he had the parish crucifix brought to her; he comforted her in the midst of the raging multitude, both on the platform and at the stake.

Twenty years later, the two religious, plain monks, who had espoused poverty, without anything to gain or to fear in this world, testified to the scene we have just described, "We could hear her," they said, "in the fire, invoking her saints, her archangel; she kept repeating the name of our Saviour. . . . Finally, her head dropped, and she uttered a great cry: 'Jesus!' "

"Ten thousand men were weeping. . . ." Only a few Englishmen laughed, or were trying to laugh. One of them, among the most furious, had sworn he would lay a faggot on the pyre; she was expiring at the time he put it, and he swooned; his comrades took him to a tavern, to make him drink and revive his spirits; but he could not recover. "I saw," he said, beside himself, "I saw with her last breath a

dove fly out of her mouth." Others had read in the flames the name she was repeating: "Jesus!" The executioner that evening sought Brother Isambart; he was terror-stricken; he made confession, but he could not believe that God would ever forgive him. A secretary of the king of England, as he returned, said aloud, "We are lost, we have burnt a saint."

Joan of Arc in Context

MALCOLM G. A. VALE

For the following selection, we have turned not to one of the hundreds of works on Joan of Arc but to a modern biography of the king she served so faithfully, Charles VII, by the English historian Malcolm G. A. Vale. Vale deals with his subject through "a series of episodes" (p. ix), one of which is the episode of Joan of Arc. His version of Joan is rather more complex than that of Michelet—indeed of many other more recent biographers—in that he sees her neither as an innocent nor as a committed champion of French nationalism, but as the archetype of the medieval visionary, committed not to human causes but to the voices of her saints. Further, he sets Joan in the context of both fifteenth-century historical events and twentieth-century historical scholarship.

Joan of Arc was born about 1412, at the village of Domrémy, on the borders of the duchies of Bar and Lorraine. She was the daughter, not of a peasant, but of a fairly substantial tenant farmer. There is no subsequent surviving record of her existence from the time of her childhood until May 1428, when she arrived at the castle of Vaucouleurs, where Robert de Baudricourt was captain. He held the castle in the name of the uncrowned Charles VII. Baudricourt, initially sceptical, was eventually won over and dispatched Joan with an escort to see Charles at Chinon. She claimed that she would raise the siege of Orléans which the English, under the earl of Salisbury, had begun on 12 October 1428. She arrived at Chinon probably on 23 February 1429, saw Charles two days later, and evidently impressed him deeply. A month later, after an examination at Poitiers, she began her campaign against the English and their Burgundian allies by

sending them a letter, calling upon them to surrender outside Orléans in God's name. On 29 April she arrived with an army to raise the siege, and on 8 May she entered the town in triumph. The following two months saw a series of French military successes, ending with a thrust to Rheims—then in Anglo-Burgundian hands—where, on 17 July 1429, Charles was crowned and anointed.

There Joan's successes ended. On 23 May 1430 she was captured by Burgundian troops at the siege of Compiègne, and two days later the University of Paris, acting in Henry VI of England's name, demanded that she be tried as a heretic. She was sold by her Burgundian captors to the English administration, and was delivered into the hands of the Inquisition. As she had been captured within the diocese of Beauvais, a common Inquisitorial practice was followed and Pierre Cauchon, bishop of Beauvais—although exiled from his see because it was in territory then occupied by Charles—was appointed to judge the case by Jean Graverent, Inquisitor of France. With Cauchon sat Jean Lemaître, a preaching friar, vicar of the Inquisition in the diocese of Rouen, where the trial was held. It began with preliminary investigations and interrogation of witnesses lasting from 9 January until 26 March 1431. This was followed by the trial itself, which ended with Joan's abjuration on 24 May. On Sunday 27 May she relapsed into heresy, and the swift series of interrogations which followed this relapse ended with her being delivered to the secular power for execution. Three days later she was burnt at the stake in the Old Market Place of Rouen.

Joan of Arc has received more attention than any other female visionary of the later Middle Ages. Despite (or perhaps because of) this, the Saint has tended to oust the girl from Domrémy from serious historical investigation. It is appropriate that her canonisation in 1920 should have been in part a result of pressure from France upon the Holy See. She was one of the most valuable of Saints politically. Her arrival at Chinon in February 1429 was, arguably, a political act. Her execution as a heretic at Rouen in May 1431 was also, allegedly, a political act. John, duke of Bedford, could announce that she was "a disciple and lyme of the feende called the Pucelle, that used fals enchauntments and sorcerie." Her beliefs were not strictly orthodox, at least in fifteenth-century terms. She was no friend of the earthly Church Militant. Like other mystics and visionaries, she posed a threat to the hierarchy of the Church. If men were able to communicate so directly with God—through visions or "voices"—what need was there for the clergy? Mediation between God and Man, except through the Saints, was therefore redundant. Shaw could point to this aspect of her "voices" when he made Pierre Cauchon, bishop of Beauvais, exclaim:

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.

The fictitious Cauchon was merely being made to voice an objection which had already been made in fact—but by the other side. After her capture, Charles's adviser, Regnault de Chartres, archbishop of Rheims, told the inhabitants of the town that "she raised herself in pride." Her pride and presumption—that *superbia* which was noted by her interrogators—was her downfall. Her answers to the tribunal which tried her at Rouen served to indict her. Similarly, her avowed ability to predict and prognosticate the future course of events placed her in a very dangerous position. The line dividing permissible astrology from sorcery was thin and was becoming thinner. Her trial may have been in some respects irregular, but there were many fifteenth-century men—even among those who were on the side of Charles VII—who were not unduly disturbed by her fate. It was dangerous to have so unorthodox a *fille du régiment* in your camp. Her interrogator, Guillaume Erard, could voice the views of many when he said to her on 24 May 1431: "I'm talking to you, Joan, and I tell you that your king is a heretic and schismatic." The trial at Rouen was in part a device to discredit Charles VII as a heretic by association. It was conducted largely by Frenchmen, born in France. Of the 131 judges, assessors and other clergy concerned with her trial and condemnation, only eight were Englishmen. Of those eight, only two attended more than three sessions of the trial. One of France's patron Saints was thus condemned by Frenchmen. She was a victim as much of a civil war within France as of a war with the English. . . .

Joan's career still poses many unanswered (and perhaps unanswerable) questions. What was the "sign" given by her to Charles which, it was alleged, so effectively convinced him of his legitimacy? How was Joan able to win his confidence so quickly, and so easily? What was the king's "secret"? Why was the trial of rehabilitation so long delayed? Many answers have been given to these questions. Some are ludicrous and many are unconvincing. Among the latter stands a recent contribution to the literature on Joan of Arc, entitled *Histoire Véridique et Merveilleuse de la Pucelle d'Orléans.*[6] Its author, M. David-Darnac, attempts to argue that she was not the daughter of a substantial tenant farmer at Domrémy, but the illegitimate child of Louis, duke of Orléans, and Isabella of Bavaria. She was born, not at Domrémy in

[6]The True and Marvelous History of the Maid of Orleans.—ED.

about 1412, but in Paris on the eve of Orléans's murder in 1407. She was then (for reasons which are by no means clear) transported to Lorraine and left there in the care of the d'Arc family. David-Darnac's account of the story is fairly orthodox from this stage until her capture and trial in 1430–1. But he sees Cauchon as being concerned throughout the trial to have her released. At the very last moment, Cauchon, it is asserted, allowed her to escape by way of a secret tunnel under the walls of the castle at Rouen. To introduce such Gothic novelist's nonsense into a work which purports to be history, albeit popular history, seems inexcusable. Joan is then said to have gone into hiding and reappears (for reasons which are again unclear) as the wife of one Robert des Armoises, a minor noble of Lorraine. A substitute has therefore to be conjured up and burned at Rouen in her stead. Undeterred by the sheer improbability of all this, David-Darnac concludes his book with an account of the activities of Joan, identified as "la Pucelle de France," between 1436 and her supposed death in 1449.

The grounds for objection to this version of events are basically twofold. First, Joan's date of birth has to be put back by at least four years if David-Darnac's assertions are to be entertained. A child was born to Isabella of Bavaria in 1407, but it was male and died soon after birth. Joan herself said in 1431 that she was about eighteen or nineteen years old. This would put her date of birth at about 1412 or 1413, at least five years after the death of her pretended father Louis of Orléans. David-Darnac also demands that the evidence of the rehabilitation process of 1455–6 is ignored. On this argument, about 150 witnesses must have perjured themselves to a man in giving evidence on Joan's early life and subsequent career. Secondly, both the thesis of Joan's bastardy and her escape from burning have been long discredited. In 1805 the thesis of bastardy was first put forward. David-Darnac adduces no new documentary evidence to support that contention. Nor has the "survival" of Joan received further documentation. A woman calling herself "la Pucelle de France" certainly appeared in Lorraine, at Orléans and in the South-West between 1436 and 1449. A document referring to her was published by Dom Calmet, in his *History of Lorraine,* in the early eighteenth century. The "false" Joan of Arc, moreover, confessed before Charles VII and the Paris *Parlement* to being an impostor, a piece of evidence which David-Darnac chooses to ignore. There seems no reason to suppose either that Joan was not burnt by the English administration at Rouen in 1431 (as every witness at the inquiries of 1450, 1452 and 1455–6 deposed), or that she was not a girl from the borders of the duchies of Bar and Lorraine.

Review and Study Questions

1. What did Joan actually accomplish in her brief public career?
2. What were the real reasons why Joan was tried and executed?
3. Describe the execution of Joan of Arc.
4. What was the basis on which Joan was canonized as a saint, according to the readings in this chapter?
5. In your opinion, what were the motives of Joan of Arc?

Suggestions for Further Reading

Although Quicherat's monumental five-volume collection of the documentary sources for Joan of Arc remains untranslated, several selections from that collection are available. One of them, Régine Pernoud, *The Retrial of Joan of Arc: The Evidence at the Trial for Her Rehabilitation, 1450–1456,* tr. J. M. Cohen (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955), is excerpted for this chapter. Much of the rest of Joan's earlier trial is presented in another book by Pernoud, *Joan of Arc by Herself and Her Witnesses* (New York: Stein and Day, 1966). Another such selection is *Joan of Arc: Self-Portrait, Compiled and Translated from the Original Latin and French Sources,* ed. Willard Trask (New York: Stackpole Sons, 1936). Yet others are Wilfred T. Jewkes and Jerome B. Landfield, *Joan of Arc: Fact, Legend, and Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1964), which also includes some selections from modern writers about Joan, and *The First Biography of Joan of Arc with the Chronicle Record of a Contemporary Account,* ed. and tr. Daniel S. Rankin and Claire Quintal (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964).

From the mid–nineteenth century on, there has been a steady stream of biographies and special studies of Joan of Arc. Of the more recent works, Frances Gies, *Joan of Arc: The Legend and the Reality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981) is not only a biography but an extensive review of the scholarly material on the subject. Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (New York: Knopf, 1981) is a complex and difficult work of psychohistory that relates Joan to a number of themes of feminist criticism.

Many literary figures, including George Bernard Shaw and Anatole France, have been attracted by the Joan of Arc story. Among the best of these is Victoria Sackville-West, *Saint Joan of Arc* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Doran, 1936), a vivid and sensitive biography by a distinguished British novelist. Edward Lucie-Smith, *Joan of Arc* (New York: Norton, 1976) is again a general account by a literary writer, much in the same vein as Sackville-West's, but less well done. Lucien Fabre, *Joan of Arc,* tr. Gerard Hopkins (London: Odhams Press, 1954), is a sensitive and moving account by a great French man of letters.

Of the many straightforward historical biographies, two can be especially recommended: John Holland Smith, *Joan of Arc* (New York: Scribner's, 1973) and Pierre de Sermoise, *Joan of Arc and Her Secret Missions,* tr. Jennifer Taylor (London: Robert Hale, 1973).