

La passion de Jeanne d'Arc essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Passion of Joan of Arc, directed by Carl Th. Dreyer in France in 1927, begins with an explanation of how the film was based on the original trial records. The film states that these documents contain the exact records of the questions of the judges and Joan's responses. The film then begins the opening moments of the trial. Joan walks into the courtroom with chains on her feet. She is brought a bible upon which she places her hand and solemnly swears to tell the truth. The judges then begin asking Joan simple questions about her name, age and if she knows the Lord's Prayer.

The questions change their tone after Joan refuses to recite the prayer. The judges ask Joan if God sent her. Joan replies she was sent by God to save France and that is the reason why she was born. She then tells the judges her vision of all the English getting chased out of France. The judges then challenge Joan's claims of seeing St. Michael by asking questions about his appearance. One of Joan's accusers then asks if it was God who ordered her to wear men's clothing and asks what reward she expects from following God's orders.

She answers, " The salvation of my soul. This angers the judge who then cries out " You blaspheme God! " and spits in her crying face. After seeing this, another judge stands and calls the trial disgraceful. He then approaches Joan where he falls to his knees and calls her a saint. This character is not seen again in the film, and I assume that during the ensuing commotion the guards took him away. Joan is then asked if God has promised to deliver her from prison to which she replies yes, but she doesn't know when. This ends her trial and Joan is taken to her cell. It is now up to Joan's accusers to be clever and conspire against her.

They must, through trickery, obtain a confession from her stating that she was misled by the devil. In their first attempt they try to gain her confidence in one of their priests by forging a letter from her king. This priest enters her room returning a ring that a guard stole from her and claims to have great sympathy for her. He then recites the forged letter. It says that he is a devoted priest sent by her king and that she should trust him. Immediately after reading the letter the judges come into her cell. Here Joan reveals that God's promise of her deliverance from prison shall be by a great victory.

The judges then proceed to ask Joan trick questions. For example, when they ask Joan if God has also promised her that she will go to heaven, she agrees after the priest that she now confides in feeds her the answer. Then they tell her that if she is sure of her salvation then she has no need of the church. Also, they tell her that she can attend mass if she wears women's cloths. When she refuses, they say that she is abominable to God and a creature of Satan for choosing to dress like a man over attending mass. The priest that Joan was supposed to trust then instructs someone to prepare the torture chamber.

After the judges leave Joan's cell there is a short scene where her guards taunt and humiliate her. Joan's one compassionate accuser interrupts them and tells her it's time to go to the torture chamber. Once there Joan's judges tell her to confess that her visions came from Satan. When she doesn't confess they threaten her with a giant spinning wheel with protruding spikes. When faced with the torture wheel Joan says, " Even if you part my soul from my body I will confess nothing, and if I do confess, later I will say it was forced from me! " Joan faints and is brought back to her cell.

Joan awakes in her cell, weak from fever. To combat the fever she is bled. After her bleeding, Joan's accusers again try to get a confession. They offer her the Body of Christ, but just before she can take it, she must sign the confession. When she refuses again, Joan's accusers demonize her further. Joan then claims that it is her accusers were sent by the Devil to make her suffer. After her accusers hear this, they conclude that there is nothing they can do with her and alert the executioner. Joan is then carried to her place of execution on a stretcher.

Once there, her accusers make a final attempt to get the confession. Joan is told that if she doesn't sign, she will be burned alive. Joan looks around to see a skull with maggots falling out of the eye sockets. Then all of Joan's accusers tell her they have great sympathy for her, and begin pleading with her to save her life by confessing. As Joan holds the pen in her hand, the priest who claimed to be sent by her king, signs the confession for her. After signing the confession one of the judges condemns Joan "... to perpetual imprisonment, to eat the bread of sorrow and drink the water of anguish.

In the next scene, Joan is seen getting her hair cut for her imprisonment. As the barber is sweeping up Joan's hair, she sees him sweep up her hand made crown. She then tells the barber to find the judges because she wants to take back her confession. When the judges return to her cell she tells them she has denied God to save her life. She says that she was not misled by the Devil and that everything she said was for fear of the stake. The Judges leave her room, and the one compassionate accuser comes in to prepare her for death.

As they bring the last sacrament, Joan explains to him that God's promise of her great victory shall be her martyrdom that and her deliverance from prison shall be her death. Joan is finally allowed to take the Body of Christ, brought to the stake and tied to it. As the wood beneath Joan ignites, the townspeople can be seen crying. As Joan begins to die, one townsman yells out that they have burned a saint. This sparks a violent riot at the scene of the execution. The film ends with a shot of the top of Joan's stake engulfed in flames and a little, white cross on the left.

There is much that can be said about the camera work in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. Dreyer pans the camera frequently throughout the film to follow various movements. The most notable is a slow, lengthy pan that crosses the courtroom from behind the perspective of Joan's accusers. This is the first shot of the film and has action going on in the background and foreground simultaneously. Dreyer also tracks certain movements from above. This effect looks pretty slick when it follows a fast moving object and lasts for only a second.

For example, when the bible is brought to Joan or when it shows a close up of the chains on Joan's feet at the beginning of the film. Dreyer also uses a number of experimental camera techniques. In the scene where Joan accuses the inquisitors of being sent by the devil the camera quickly spins around the room facing them. Dreyer also uses a swinging camera to zoom in on the faces of Joan's accusers. He uses the same technique in a shot just before the riot where the camera swings in time with a man catching weapons being thrown out a window.

The effect of these techniques can leave the viewer feeling disorientated. The film also revolutionized the importance of close-ups, and the entire film was shot in close-ups and middle shots. The film's unusual number of close-ups was a strategy Dreyer used to bring the viewer into the psyche of the actor. The prison guards and Joan's accusers are often seen from a low angle with sharp architectural angles behind them. Many of the shots (especially those of Joan, who is seen in mostly isolated shots) are of faces that are in a spatial void with no background.

Not being allowed to see the distance between Joan and the other characters gives the viewer a hard time getting a feel for Joan's environment. This is compounded by the fact that we are never allowed to see the film's entire set, and there aren't any easy to read visual links between shots. For example, in the scene where Joan is prepared for death, the one companionate priest appears to look up to Joan and she appears to look down to him although spatially she is sitting on the floor. Dreyer also used experimental new ways to frame the actors.

He frequently would show only a small part of an actor's face, or just show their eyes. There are many shots that have the actors at the bottom or the side of the frame. Other shots have actors entering Joan's room at the bottom of the shot or only show their heads with the arc of the door. Perhaps the reason why Dreyer had certain actors rise from the bottom of a shot may have been to convey a feeling that, compared to Joan, they are lowly and simple creatures. One extremely unusual framing of actors is in the scene where Joan says that her confession was a lie.

The shot is of three priests, lined up from front to back, but shot in a way that their heads look like they are stacked on top of each other with the middle head looking much smaller than the other two! Each of the 1,500 individual shots (which is more than twice the number found in an average feature at the time) begins and ends with a cut. " In his brilliant shot-by-shot analysis of the film, David Bordwell of the University of Wisconsin concludes: ' Of the film's over 1,500 cuts, fewer than 30 carry a figure or object over from one shot to another; and fewer than 15 constitute genuine matches on action. " The entire film was shot in sequence for emotional continuity.

There are numerous instances of parallel editing in the film, usually used to juxtapose Joan's sorrowful stares with the wicked faces of her tormentors. The film often shows Eisenstein's influences in its use of quick shots and use of montage. For example, in the scene that takes place in the torture chamber, there is a montage of instruments of torture that cuts between the swinging or turning objects, extreme close ups of her accusers, the giant spinning wheel, and Joan's terrified reactions.

The film also has a dramatic montage sequence during the scene of Joan's execution. You see Joan's worried face cut back and forth between the wood that is starting to burn, a flock of birds flying away, and the faces of the townspeople. Once Joan utters her last word, Jesus, the montage goes back and forth between quick cuts of the violent peasant uprising, Joan's body engulfed in flame, and upside down camera angles. The faces of Joan's accusers are shot in bright light. This, coupled with their complete lack of make-up, effectively accentuates their facial imperfections.

Joan, however, is shot with softer grays. The film also makes clever use of shadows. The scene that has Joan's accusers make the fraudulent letter cross-cuts to Joan noticing a shadow on the floor that looks like a cross. Later, when the priest returns Joan's stolen ring, he walks by the cross-shaped shadow causing it to vanish under his feet. Another example is during the first outdoor shot (just before Joan is brought out on a stretcher) where you can see the shadow of a guard holding a weapon superimposed over a large white column.

This suggests a sense of hostility outdoors. The actors in the film were typecast mainly on facial appearance. All of Joan's tormentors are either fat or have wrinkly, wart covered faces. These features seem to imply that they have ugly inner souls. Joan and the one companionate priest, by contrast, have youthful, flawless faces. The acting styles of the film were also largely based on facial expressions, which could be both naturalistic and exaggerated. Whenever Joan's accusers yell at her they would usually have exaggerated facial expressions.

Joan's face in the film is always very expressive of whatever emotion she is feeling. The costumes that the actors wear look like authentic Middle Ages attire, which is an important key giving the film an authentic look. The fact that there isn't make-up on any of the actors gives the film a cosmetic authenticity. Dreyer once said that a person's face is a window into their soul. This may partially explain his overemphasis of faces without makeup in the film.

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