

SAINT JOAN

A CHRONICLE PLAY IN SIX SCENES

AND AN EPILOGUE

Saint Joan

*A Chronicle Play in Six Scenes
and an Epilogue*

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

with an introduction by

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RENARD PRESS

RENARD PRESS LTD

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www.renardpress.com

Saint Joan first published in 1924

This edition first published by Renard Press Ltd in 2022

Edited text and Notes © Renard Press Ltd, 2022

Introduction © Simon Mundy, 2022

Cover design by Will Dady

Printed in the United Kingdom by Severn



ISBN: 978-1-913724-65-8

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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SAINT JOAN

INTRODUCTION

Fair But Not Kind

Shaw was 67 – the same age that I am now – when *Saint Joan* was first produced, on the 28th of December 1923. Worried about how it might be received in London, he arranged for it to open in Broadway's Garrick Theatre first. The Theatre Guild which managed the Garrick was specifically interested in plays that might not entice commercial producers, and presented several of Shaw's, as well as Eugene O'Neill's. Joan was played by the twenty-five-year-old Winifred Lenihan, and it came to be the role that defined her reputation. Established in New York, *Saint Joan* crossed back to London three months later, where Sybil Thorndike, at thirty-one, who Shaw had in mind from the start, played Joan at the New Theatre (at present the Noël Coward Theatre, but known for many years as the Albery) on St Martin's Lane. The play was directed by Thorndike's husband, Lewis Casson.

Each of the scenes had music by John Foulds, a thoroughly respected composer and an interesting choice, since his vast *World Requiem* had just been performed at the Royal Albert Hall for Armistice Day. Foulds made a

suite out of his *Saint Joan* music, which he conducted at the Proms, then in the Queen's Hall, next to the present-day BBC Broadcasting House, in 1925. A few years later Foulds went to India and became one of the first composers to try to bridge Indian and Western classical music. The complete score for *Saint Joan* was destroyed in a WWII fire.

It is surprising, perhaps, that Shaw did not turn to his contemporary and great friend, Edward Elgar, who was at a bit of a loose end in 1923, but who was writing theatre music, having composed a splendid score for a similarly mediaeval but less serious production, Lawrence Binyon's *King Arthur*, at the Old Vic the previous March. Elgar and Shaw admired each other and got on famously, possibly because of their contradictions. Shaw was Protestant Anglo-Irish and would have been perfectly at home two hundred years earlier in the Dublin of Swift and Congreve; Elgar was English Midlands Catholic. Shaw was Fabian socialist; Elgar was firmly Tory. Shaw was in favour of Home Rule for Ireland; Elgar was against it. Both, though, came from lower-middle-class backgrounds, and were firmly entrenched in the upper echelons of London society, though never quite comfortable in it.

The debate about Irish independence had descended into vicious conflict by 1923. Shaw was appalled by the actions of the British, but not amazed. He had a suitably low opinion of both Lloyd George and Baldwin, realising that neither of them understood Ireland, or particularly cared. A decade earlier he had set out his own unconventional views on the issue, and they explain a great deal about why he wrote *Saint Joan* after the violence had erupted, Ulster

had separated from the other three provinces and the Irish Free State had just been formed (at the end of 1922).

Back in 1912 he had given a speech saying, '[the] fact that I am an Irishman has always filled me with a wild and inextinguishable pride. I am also proud of being a Protestant, though Protestantism is to me a great historic movement of Reformation, Aspiration and Self-Assertion against spiritual tyrannies rather than that organisation of false gentility which so often takes its name in vain in Ireland. Already at this meeting pride in Protestantism as something essentially Irish has broken out again and again. I cannot describe what I feel when English Unionists are kind enough to say, "Oh, you are in danger of being persecuted by your Roman Catholic fellow countrymen. England will protect you." I would rather be burnt at the stake by Irish Catholics than protected by Englishmen. We Protestants know perfectly well that we are quite able to take care of ourselves, thank you. I do not want to banish religion from politics, though I do want to abolish the thing miscalled religion in this controversy from the world altogether. I want to bring religion back into politics. There is nothing that revolts me in the present state of things more than the unnatural religious calm in Ireland. I do not want a peaceful Ireland in that sense. I want a turbulent Ireland. All free and healthy nations are full of the turbulence of controversy, political, religious, social: all sorts of controversy. Without it you can have no progress, no life. In Ireland we Protestant Nationalists dare not utter a controversial word lest we should be misunderstood on the great question of national rights. I have much to say in criticism of Catholicism in Ireland; but I dare not

PREFACE

Joan the Original and Presumptuous

Joan of Arc, a village girl from the Vosges, * was born about 1412; burnt for heresy, witchcraft and sorcery in 1431; rehabilitated* after a fashion in 1456; designated Venerable in 1904; declared Blessed in 1908; and finally canonized in 1920. She is the most notable Warrior Saint in the Christian calendar, and the queerest fish among the eccentric worthies of the Middle Ages. Though a professed and most pious Catholic, and the projector of a Crusade against the Hus-ites,* she was in fact one of the first Protestant martyrs. She was also one of the first apostles of Nationalism, and the first French practitioner of Napoleonic realism in warfare as distinguished from the sporting ransom-gambling chivalry of her time. She was the pioneer of rational dressing for women, and, like Queen Christina of Sweden two centuries later, to say nothing of Catalina de Eraúso and innumerable obscure heroines who have disguised themselves as men to serve as soldiers and sailors, she refused to accept the specific woman's lot, and dressed and fought and lived as men did.*

As she contrived to assert herself in all these ways with such force that she was famous throughout western Europe before

she was out of her teens (indeed she never got out of them), it is hardly surprising that she was judicially burnt, ostensibly for a number of capital crimes which we no longer punish as such, but essentially for what we call unwomanly and insufferable presumption. At eighteen Joan's pretensions were beyond those of the proudest pope or the haughtiest emperor. She claimed to be the ambassador and plenipotentiary of God, and to be, in effect, a member of the Church Triumphant* whilst still in the flesh on earth. She patronized her own king, and summoned the English king to repentance and obedience to her commands. She lectured, talked down and overruled statesmen and prelates. She pooh-poohed the plans of generals, leading their troops to victory on plans of her own. She had an unbounded and quite unconcealed contempt for official opinion, judgment and authority, and for War Office tactics and strategy. Had she been a sage and monarch in whom the most venerable hierarchy and the most illustrious dynasty converged, her pretensions and proceedings would have been as trying to the official mind as the pretensions of Caesar were to Cassius.* As her actual condition was pure upstart, there were only two opinions about her. One was that she was miraculous: the other that she was unbearable.

Joan and Socrates

If Joan had been malicious, selfish, cowardly or stupid, she would have been one of the most odious persons known to history, instead of one of the most attractive. If she had been old enough to know the effect she was producing on the men whom she humiliated by being right when they were wrong, and had learnt to flatter and manage them, she might have

lived as long as Queen Elizabeth.* But she was too young and rustical and inexperienced to have any such arts. When she was thwarted by men whom she thought fools, she made no secret of her opinion of them or her impatience with their folly; and she was naïve enough to expect them to be obliged to her for setting them right and keeping them out of mischief. Now it is always hard for superior wits to understand the fury roused by their exposures of the stupidities of comparative dullards. Even Socrates, for all his age and experience, did not defend himself at his trial like a man who understood the long-accumulated fury that had burst on him, and was clamoring for his death.* His accuser, if born 2300 years later, might have been picked out of any first-class carriage on a suburban railway during the evening or morning rush from or to the City; for he had really nothing to say except that he and his like could not endure being shewn up as idiots every time Socrates opened his mouth. Socrates, unconscious of this, was paralyzed by his sense that somehow he was missing the point of the attack. He petered out after he had established the fact that he was an old soldier and a man of honorable life, and that his accuser was a silly snob. He had no suspicion of the extent to which his mental superiority had roused fear and hatred against him in the hearts of men towards whom he was conscious of nothing but good will and good service.

Contrast with Napoleon

If Socrates was as innocent as this at the age of seventy, it may be imagined how innocent Joan was at the age of seventeen. Now Socrates was a man of argument, operating

SCENE III

Orléans, 29th of April 1429. DUNOIS, aged 26, is pacing up and down a patch of ground on the south bank of the silver Loire, commanding a long view of the river in both directions. He has had his lance stuck up with a pennon, which streams in a strong east wind. His shield with its bend sinister lies beside it. He has his commander's baton in his hand. He is well built, carrying his armor easily. His broad brow and pointed chin give him an equilaterally triangular face, already marked by active service and responsibility, with the expression of a good-natured and capable man who has no affectations and no foolish illusions. His PAGE is sitting on the ground, elbows on knees, cheeks on fists, idly watching the water. It is evening; and both man and boy are affected by the loveliness of the Loire.*

DUNOIS (*halting for a moment to glance up at the streaming pennon and shake his head wearily before he resumes his pacing*):
West wind, west wind, west wind. Strumpet: steadfast when you should be wanton, wanton when you should be steadfast. West wind on the silver Loire: what rhymes to Loire? (*He looks again at the pennon, and shakes his fist at it.*) Change, curse you, change, English harlot of a wind,

change. West, west, I tell you. (*With a growl he resumes his march in silence, but soon begins again.*) West wind, wanton wind, wilful wind, womanish wind, false wind from over the water, will you never blow again?

THE PAGE (*bounding to his feet*): See! There! There she goes!

DUNOIS (*startled from his reverie: eagerly*): Where? Who? The Maid?

THE PAGE: No: the kingfisher. Like blue lightning. She went into that bush.

DUNOIS (*furiously disappointed*): Is that all? You infernal young idiot: I have a mind to pitch you into the river.

THE PAGE (*not afraid, knowing his man*): It looked frightfully jolly, that flash of blue. Look! There goes the other!

DUNOIS (*running eagerly to the river brim*): Where? Where?

THE PAGE (*pointing*): Passing the reeds.

DUNOIS (*delighted*): I see.

(*They follow the flight till the bird takes cover.*)

THE PAGE: You blew me up because you were not in time to see them yesterday.

DUNOIS: You knew I was expecting the Maid when you set up your yelping. I will give you something to yelp for next time.

THE PAGE: Arent they lovely? I wish I could catch them.

DUNOIS: Let me catch you trying to trap them, and I will put you in the iron cage for a month to teach you what a cage feels like. You are an abominable boy.

(*The PAGE laughs, and squats down as before.*)

(*Pacing*): Blue bird, blue bird, since I am friend to thee, change thou the wind for me. No: it does not rhyme. He who has sinned for thee: thats better. No sense in it, though. (*He finds himself close to the PAGE.*) You abominable boy! (*He turns away from him.*) Mary in the blue snood, kingfisher color: will you grudge me a west wind?

A SENTRY'S VOICE WESTWARD: Halt! Who goes there?

JOAN'S VOICE: The Maid.

DUNOIS: Let her pass. Hither, Maid! To me!

(*JOAN, in splendid armor, rushes in in a blazing rage. The wind drops; and the pennon flaps idly down the lance; but DUNOIS is too much occupied with JOAN to notice it.*)

JOAN (*bluntly*): Be you Bastard of Orléans?

DUNOIS (*cool and stern, pointing to his shield*): You see the bend sinister. Are you Joan the Maid?

JOAN: Sure.

DUNOIS: Where are your troops?

JOAN: Miles behind. They have cheated me. They have brought me to the wrong side of the river.

DUNOIS: I told them to.

JOAN: Why did you? The English are on the other side!

DUNOIS: The English are on both sides.

JOAN: But Orléans is on the other side. We must fight the English there. How can we cross the river?

DUNOIS (*grimly*): There is a bridge.

JOAN: In God's name, then, let us cross the bridge, and fall on them.

DUNOIS: It seems simple; but it cannot be done.

JOAN: Who says so?

DUNOIS: I say so; and older and wiser heads than mine are of the same opinion.

JOAN (*roundly*): Then your older and wiser heads are fatheads: they have made a fool of you; and now they want to make a fool of me too, bringing me to the wrong side of the river. Do you not know that I bring you better help than ever came to any general or any town?

DUNOIS (*smiling patiently*): Your own?

JOAN: No: the help and counsel of the King of Heaven. Which is the way to the bridge?

DUNOIS: You are impatient, Maid.

JOAN: Is this a time for patience? Our enemy is at our gates; and here we stand doing nothing. Oh, why are you not fighting? Listen to me: I will deliver you from fear. I—

DUNOIS (*laughing heartily, and waving her off*): No, no, my girl: if you delivered me from fear I should be a good knight for a storybook, but a very bad commander of the army. Come! Let me begin to make a soldier of you. (*He takes her to the water's edge.*) Do you see those two forts at this end of the bridge? The big ones?

JOAN: Yes. Are they ours or the goddams'?

DUNOIS: Be quiet, and listen to me. If I were in either of those forts with only ten men I could hold it against an army. The English have more than ten times ten goddams in those forts to hold them against us.

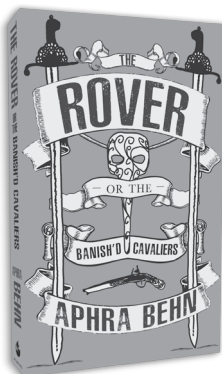
JOAN: They cannot hold them against God. God did not give them the land under those forts: they stole it from Him. He gave it to us. I will take those forts.

DUNOIS: Single-handed?

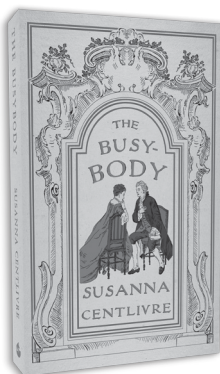
JOAN: Our men will take them. I will lead them.



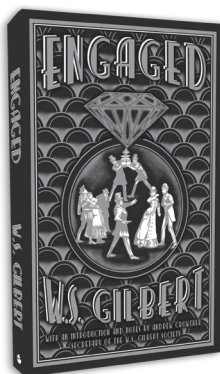
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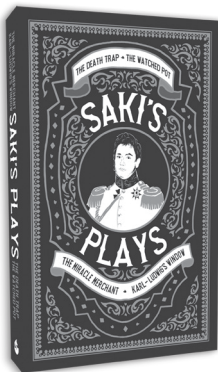
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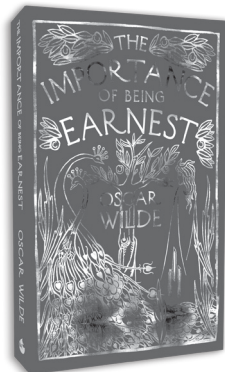
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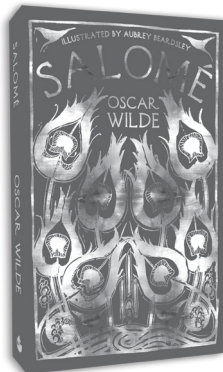
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