

Through a Political Lens: Joan of Arc  
From Myth to Modern Fragmentation

HONORS THESIS

Presented to the Honors Committee of

Texas State University-San Marcos

In Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements

For Graduation in the Mitte Honors Program

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May 2007

Introduction

Joan of Arc has become a modern signifier for ideological beliefs in both American and French societies. Politicians and film directors have adopted Joan's image to empower women, discriminate against minorities and to promote revolutionary ideas, all in an effort to lend authority to their own personal agendas. What modern scholars now understand is that exploiting Joan is not restricted to the modern era. In fact, Joan has been manipulated since her initial contact with politically motivated people in her own time. Joan has been a source of evaluation and manipulation since the fifteenth-century; this is especially evident in examining Joan's condemnation trial. The condemnation trial was used as a veil to conceal a long political struggle for power between three main factions (Burgundian, Armagnacs, and English). Joan's dissemination has only increased as society has progressed technologically. Modern film makers have created a "Joan character" that they alter and manipulate based on political sympathies. For the purposes of this analysis, we will examine modern film and how it has fictionalized Joan, her history, and how the political parties in France have manipulated Joan in their struggle for control over her image and what it signals. By choosing to adapt Joan to modern ideologies, film directors continue to perpetuate the myth that Joan's condemnation was based on religious factors alone.

In an effort to show how Joan's trial was motivated by politics and how her image is continually attached to modern *ideologies*, it will be necessary to review the turbulent situation that Joan was born into.<sup>1</sup> Understanding initial manipulations of Joan will allow for a clear picture of how she has been fragmented in modern depictions. An analysis of some of the

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the term *ideology* in reference to modern society is borrowed from previous research collected by John Gerring in "Ideology: A Definitional Analysis." The definition claims that *ideology* is an "organization of opinions attitudes, and values – a way of thinking about man and society. We may speak of an individual's total ideology or of his ideology with respect to different areas of social life; politics, economics, religion, minority groups, and so forth" (Adorno et al. 1950:2).

dominant discourses and ideologies circulated in Joan's society will be followed by an analysis of modern depictions of Joan in film and political propaganda. Much the same way that myths and prophecies were used to give authority to political ideologies in Joan's time, modern film directors and political parties use myth and prophecy about Joan in their messages. The political agendas that appropriate Joan's image and distort her history enforce perpetual misconceptions about Joan and medieval history in general. Religious belief in the Middle Ages was often manipulated to lend authority to political ideologies (not unlike modern society); this is especially evident when studying Joan of Arc.

Since it would be impossible to give a thorough analysis of every political concept using Joan's image since her inception, I will focus on how Joan's history has been distorted in modern cinema and shaped into a symbol for political factions. In examining films about Joan, the initial use of Joan as a political pawn in medieval society will become evident throughout the analysis. Reconstituting Joan will illuminate the sophisticated collaboration between religion and politics in the Middle Ages and help us see the necessity of taking both arenas into consideration when attempting an accurate portrayal of Joan of Arc. To reassemble Joan we have to understand that religious and mythical propaganda were manipulated based on political undertones at Joan's condemnation trial, and continue to be altered based on shifting political tides in the modern era.

## Historical Context

Joan of Arc's history and legacy began to be molded from the moment she arrived at the Dauphin's court (Charles VII) in Chinon, France, in February of 1429. Charles and his propagandists used myth and French tradition to gain support for Joan and her mission. France's traditional idea of kingship, known as the "religion of the monarchy," began during the Merovingian dynasty (Fraiooli, *The Hundred Years* 44). Clovis, (d. 511) converted to the Christian beliefs of his Burgundian wife in exchange for protection in battle. Clovis was baptized by Saint Remi, bishop of Reims and was "anointed with a holy balm, or salve, in a ceremony blending kingship and religion" (Fraiooli, *The Hundred Years* 46). The rituals were further enriched by Hincmar (845c-882), who claimed that a dove had delivered a Holy Ampulla of the sacred baptismal oil used on Clovis and blessed by the hand of God. In French tradition kingship was ordained and granted by God. The blending of religion and politics accounts for the belief that Reims is the official site for all legitimate coronations. Being crowned at Reims, Charles's right to the throne would have immediate justification in French belief. A chronicler and contemporary of Clovis, Gregory of Tours drew parallels between Clovis and King David in the Old Testament and furthered the blending of French kingship and religion (Fraiooli, *The Hundred Years* 46). By connecting the Dauphin to Joan through literature, myths, and divine belief French traditions are upheld.<sup>2</sup> Tradition lends authority to Joan and makes her mission seem more plausible, enabling peasant and noble alike to follow her into battle.

The French army had suffered many defeats throughout the long war with the English and a staunch nationalistic pride had been established through patriotic poetry.<sup>3</sup> This poetry claimed that France was God's chosen country, connecting France to the legacy of successful

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<sup>2</sup> *A Woman As Leader of Men: Joan of Arc's Military Career* posits that Joan's army heard about Joan and her miraculous trek through Burgundian infested territory in route to the dauphin and suggests her safe passage attested to her ability and divine origin (Devries 11).

<sup>3</sup> I borrowed the term "patriotic poetry" to refer to poetry by Robert Blondel, Eustache Deschamps, and Charles d' Orleans from Deborah Fraiooli's "The Literary Image of Joan of Arc: Prior Influences".

rulers like Charlemagne. The kings of France were also compared to the Old Testament kings by the political propagandist of Philip IV, some going as far to say “that Christ carried the *fleur-de-lis* and the *oniflamme* as his banners” (Fraïoli, *The Hundred Years* 53).<sup>4</sup> Pope Clement V alleged that France was God’s special land and had been selected by the Lord to carry out his commands.<sup>5</sup> France was ripe for saving and a receptive mood for a hero was set. This mood made Joan and her mission easy prey for manipulation. In fact, from the inception of Joan’s mission in Charles’s court, she was subjected to the machinations of others to fit their political purpose. The court needed Joan to gain support quickly to remind the French army to have pride in its nation, and help rally the troops to victory over the English. To facilitate this connection nobility placed emphasis on the vernacular language because “it contributed to the growth of national consciousness” (Bennett 349). The use of the vernacular language helped connect nobility to the peasant class, this connection was fundamental to increasing army recruitment. The war had begun to affect the average people of the peasant class because of heavy taxations and because of the “forced requisition of food and livestock (that) emptied peasant larders and barns” (Bennett 348). The court needed to connect with the class that comprised its army and fighting spirit. The Hundred Years War had intense periods of fighting and armies were needed for extended periods, Charles was dependent on the peasant class to increase his numbers as infantryman and archers. Joan claimed divine inspiration and was a peasant, these traits made her perfect for solidifying the connection between nobility and the peasant class. Charles and his propagandist used Joan as a vehicle for propaganda. They circulated material sanctifying her mission during the weeks it took Charles to have her orthodoxy and chastity investigated at

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<sup>4</sup> The *Oriflamme* refers to a narrow banner of red silk, given to French kings by the abbot of St. Denis.

<sup>5</sup> Information about Pope Clement V’s papal bull came from *Joan of Arc and the Hundred Years* (Fraïoli).

Poitiers, and the “evidence suggests that the focus at Poitiers was mainly on folk prophecies useful for political propaganda” (Fraiori, *The Early Debate* 57).

The French political system was hierarchic, with God at the top followed by king, and then his people. It was necessary for Charles and his supporters to validate Joan’s mission through God. In order to understand how myths and history work together to give authority to what we view as fact, we need to establish a working vocabulary. Ben Halpren achieves this in a simple definition found in the article “‘Myth’ and ‘Ideology’ in Modern Usage” Halpren sheds light on the “socially dynamic” relationship between myth and history. Myth and history actually work to reinforce each other, thereby lending authority to both. Charles’s propagandist chose to appropriate literature that the French people were familiar with and adapted it to the royal cause. Charles had the documents reinterpreted by scholars in favor of France and Joan.

A Merlin prophecy became a sign of Joan’s arrival, proclaiming a promise that France would be liberated by a virgin maid of Lorraine.<sup>6</sup> *Bridlington* a poem from 1362 – 1364 was also reinterpreted to support France and Joan. The poem’s authorship is debated, but its importance lies in the reference to a ‘maid prophecy’ that allegedly came from Bede. The “so-called” Bede prophecy became a foretelling of Joan’s arrival date.<sup>7</sup> The poem was appropriated by the French and the reference attributed to Bede about the young girl carrying a banner became a reference to Joan. Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* was also seen as a signal of Joan’s arrival: “There will be a virgin who will ride in arms against the backs of the English archers and her sex and the flower of her virginity will keep secret,” (Fraiori, *The Early Debate* 63). Marie Robine, a hermit and visionary living in Avignon’s cemetery went to visit Charles VI to offer

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<sup>6</sup> Deborah A. Fraiori points out in “The Literary Image of Joan of Arc: Prior Influences” that Joan of Arc’s contemporaries associated her with the prophecies of Bede, Merlin, the sibyls, and the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth, *De prophetiis Merlini*. The “virgin maid from Lorraine” prophecy is attributed to Merlin.

<sup>7</sup> See *Joan of Arc: The Early Debate* (Fraiori 62).

him council during the Schism. Marie had a vision foretelling that a maid would wage war against French enemies to save the kingdom. Marie was initially scared because she believed the weapons and armor in the vision were intended for her to use. These types of circulated prophecies were good sources for propaganda lending authority to Joan's mission.

Joan's contemporary, Christine De Pizan, also helped establish Joan's authority with her poem *Ditié De Jehanne D' Arc* in 1429. As the biographer of Charles V, Pizan had authority as a courtier and educated woman. An accomplished French woman of letters could persuade the public that Joan was sent from God to aid France. Pizan's poem was written in Paris, Anglo-Burgundian lands and has been viewed as a piece of propaganda aimed at garnering support for Charles's march on Paris, and "it appears the *Ditié* was pressed into the service of royalist propaganda ... within six months of its composition" (Fraioni, *The Early Debate* 124). Pizan used prophecy to construct the events of her time; after all, many French beliefs and traditions were steeped in myth and prophetic literature. The poem's content cited the prophecies of Merlin, Bede, and Monmouth, but Pizan went further to legitimize Joan by connecting Joan to the heroic females in the Bible: "I have heard of Esther, Judith and Deborah, who were women of great worth, through whom God delivered his people from oppression ... but He has accomplished more through this maid" (Pizan). At the request of Charles, Jacques Gelu drafted a treatise which venerated and legitimized Joan's mission. Like Pizan, Gelu associated Joan with Deborah and Judith from the Bible: "It was easy for God, even by the exploits of girls and women, to bring about victories" (Fraioni, *The Hundred Years* 61). Pizan's *Ditié* gave Joan motherly virtues like the "feeder of France" and the source of the "sweet nourishing milk of peace." Pizan claimed that Joan's mission surpassed heroines in the Bible, elevating Joan to heroic men in the Bible: "Moses upon whom God in His bounty bestowed many a blessing and virtue, miraculously and

indefatigably led God's people out of Egypt. In the same way, blessed Maid, you have led us out of evil!" (Pizan). The descriptions comparing Joan to heroic figures in the Bible gave Joan an authoritative legacy, much like Charles and his association with Old Testament kings. The literature and prophecies circulated about Joan deepened the spiritual connections by mirroring the Virgin Mary or Eva/Ave Maria prophecies: "France will be lost by a woman and shall thereafter be restored by a virgin" (Pernoud 33). The Eva/Ave prophecy states that Mary (Ave Maria) will redeem the sins of Eve and restore humanity. In the Joan prophecies, Charles's mother Isabeau of Bavaria was constructed as the woman responsible for losing France by signing the Treaty of Troyes and the 'maid from Lorraine' is France's savior. Joan denied any pagan associations or connections to the prophetic literature at her Rouen inquiry, but the secular and religious texts attached to Joan made her susceptible to inquiries about her religious beliefs by her adversaries.

Anne D. Lutkus and Julia M. Walker suggest that the date on Pizan's poem, "the last day of July" needs to be evaluated. The scholars suggest that "for Pizan to see the taking of Paris as a point of contention, (between Charles and Joan) her poem must have been written two days after July 29. Pizan's *Ditié* has been read by Lutkus and Walker as a piece of political propaganda that "uses the power of prophetic history to place herself clearly on the side of the maid," (Lutkas, Walker 156). If Pizan dated her poem earlier than the actual date it was written, she may have been attempting to affect the outcome of the Paris conflict and gain support for Joan (inside Paris's walls) over Charles. Joan's admission that she was sent from God and the connections to heroic Bible figures established by Pizan and others (both mythical and prophetic) associated Joan with religious ideology. Filtering Joan through a religious lens minimizes the role she played as a political pawn for royalty, theologians and canonists. The associations between Joan

and prophetic literature were similar to the religious associations between France and Charles. Though it is difficult to separate Joan of Arc from religion, it is also problematic and inaccurate to ignore the political maneuverings that led to her death.

In an effort to understand the politics of her time, a review of the factions involved in France's internal war and the long-running one with the English will be helpful. The French civil war began with a struggle for power over France between Louis d'Orléans, brother of King Charles VI, and his cousin John the Fearless, duke of Burgundy. This struggle culminated in Louis's murder in 1407. Louis's murder signaled the beginning of the internal rivalry existing in France that was rampant in Joan's time. Charles d'Orleans, Louis's son, married the daughter of Bernard VII, count of Armagnac and formed an alliance that eventually led to the count becoming constable of France. To further complicate matters, the English King garnered support from the Burgundian faction through a victory at Agincourt in 1415, and renewed the war in France based on an old English claim to the French throne.<sup>8</sup> English success led to the signing of the Treaty of Troyes in 1420, ceding France to England upon Charles VI's death. The treaty effectively disinherited Charles upon the death of his father "because of his complicity in the murder of John of Burgundy ten years earlier, at Montereau" (Wood 24). The treaty also spawned rumors about Charles's legitimate right to the throne; people began to say that Charles was the illegitimate son of Isabeau of Bavaria and Louis the duke of Orleans (Charles VI's brother). Whether or not Joan actually assured Charles that his birth was legitimate and therefore the rightful heir has to be speculative: "Though Joan spoke simply of having transmitting to the king certain 'revelations' that had been made to her ... Armagnacs asserted that she had revealed God's own affirmation of the legitimacy of Charles's birth and rule" (Sullivan 70).

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<sup>8</sup> The English claim to the French throne surfaced in 1328 with the death of Charles IV, who died without a male heir. At his death, Charles IV's nephew Edward III of England (on mother's side) claimed the throne through birthright. Though later denied, the claim was one of the causes feeding the power struggle over the French throne.

Rumors about Charles's birth circulated, claiming he was illegitimate. The rumors stemmed from speculation about Charles disinheritance in the Treaty of Troyes, and it was in the best interest of the Royal party to quell them. Sala, Guillaume Gouffier, the lord of Biossy claimed to have heard Charles express anxiety over the legitimacy of his birth in the days proceeding Joan's arrival. Sala also claimed Charles admitted praying for a divine sign: "Numerous scholars, including Jules Quicherat, Régine Pernoud, Marie-Véronique Clin, and Pierre Duparc, have accepted Sala's report that Joan recalled to Charles a prayer he had recently made" (Sullivan 70). The royal party tried to nullify the Treaty of Troyes, citing religious belief as the foundation for their political motivations. Charles's party used the argument that an heir cannot be disinherited by human agency, that he was a vassal of God and holding his lands according to the desire of God. It is only through God that Charles can become king of France: "It was Joan's mission to maintain – and even to publicize – that God wanted Charles to be king *despite* Montereau" (Fraiooli, *The Hundred Years* 66). The Royal party needed to reconnect France to God and establish a connection between Charles and divinely ordained kings of the past. This idea of tradition and legacy was transferred to Joan, in order to legitimize her mission and establish Charles as the rightful ruler of France. The efforts of Charles and his propagandists paid off, the army and peasant class were reinvigorated by the treatise circulated about Joan and therefore willing to follow a woman sent by divine orders.<sup>9</sup>

Charles set out to prove that Joan's mission was legitimate and began by having her virginity and her faith tested by experts. In May of 1429, after a lengthy investigation of Joan at

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<sup>9</sup> Information pertaining to the theological treatises: *De quadam puella*, *De puella aurelianensi dissertatio* and *De mirabili victoria* was garnered from Fraiooli in *Joan of Arc The Early Debate*. The *dissertation* by Jacques Gelu supported Joan's mission. The *de quadam puella* is separated into twelve points that judge if Joan was sent by God, six for the maid's cause and six against. *De mirabili victoria* was the most popular, (known in Paris, Bruges, Venice, Rome, and Spain) and favors Joan over detractors. *De mirabili victoria* refers to a "first miracle" and Fraiooli believes the chronicler is referring to Orleans. Fraiooli suggests the above texts were sources used by Christine De Pizan when writing her *Ditié*.

Poitiers and the subsequent disbursement of propaganda attesting to her legitimacy, Joan went to relieve Orleans. Each victory was viewed by the French people as a 'miracle,' as fulfillment of prophecy. Joan was successful in driving back the English army and her victory served as testament to her authorization from God. Joan's legitimized authority as the savior of France provided her with ample followers and her popularity spread among the armies. June of that same year brought Joan success during the battles of the Loire campaign which led to the Dauphin being crowned king Charles VII in July. Following his crowning, Charles had less use for Joan and began to isolate himself from her. Joan was certain that it was time to retake Paris and believed that if the duke of Burgundy wanted a truce, he would have attended Charles's crowning. Charles wanted to buy time to negotiate a truce with the Burgundian faction before marching on Paris. The eight days Charles waited to negotiate gave the Burgundians a lead and time to rally English forces to help them retain Paris.

Charles VII delayed his arrival in Paris because of truce negotiations. Joan grew restless and made the decision to attack Paris on September 8, 1429 without Charles. Joan was wounded in her thigh during the attack and retreated. Charles did manage to sign a second truce on August 21 with the duke of Burgundy (to last four months). Joan heard rumors that the duke planned an attack at Compi gne, so she once again prepared for battle. Joan was successful in the minor skirmishes she encountered on her way to the city. Trying to relieve the city on May 23, 1430, Joan was captured at the gates, by a Burgundian archer. Turned over to John the Good, Joan was then handed over to the English. Charles refused to try and ransom Joan, though he had amassed prisoners worth trading for her. Sold to the English, Joan was put on trial for heresy and sorcery in the city of Rouen.<sup>10</sup> Joan was initially charged with sorcery, devil worship, and witchcraft but

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<sup>10</sup> Basic background information about Joan's successful campaigns, capture and trial can be located in *Medieval Europe: A Short History* by Judith M. Bennett and C. Warren Hollister.

these charges became irrelevant throughout the course of the trial and Joan was convicted and burned at the stake for *heresy*.<sup>11</sup> Heresy would necessitate a church trial and canon law dictated how church trials were to be conducted. However, if canon law had been adhered to, Joan would have been held in an ecclesiastical prison and under female guard; instead, “Joan was treated as a prisoner of war, chained and guarded by soldiers” (Pernoud, *Her Story* 105).

As a result of the Great Schism (1378-1415), the intellectuals at the University of Paris tried to exert more clout in church operations. The university supported the establishment of the General Council: “so that it would act as co-ruler of the church along with the papacy, in a situation loosely parallel to the way that the king of England was ruled by Parliament and the crown” (Pernoud, *Her Story* 106). In supporting the English claim to the French crown, the Paris intellectuals could secure political power as a national assembly. The university intellectuals hoped the development of the General Council would eventually lead to a parliamentary style government (modeled on England), affording them a powerful voice in government affairs. Bishop Cauchon and others wanted to rid themselves of Charles and Joan because they were threats to their political authority. Loyal to the English cause, the Rouen interrogators asserted their power in Joan’s condemnation. Though Cauchon invited the vice-inquisitor to the Joan’s tribunal, he only attended when pressed, after all the preliminary sessions were completed. Church inquisitorial procedures were further ignored when no formal charges were levied against Joan and all accusations were supplied by anonymous sources: “The technical use of interrogation procedure and evidence was well below inquisitorial standards” (Peters 69). Cauchon further disregarded inquisitorial procedure in his haste to burn Joan. In past trials conducted by ecclesiastics, the defendant was remanded to the authority of the secular arm

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<sup>11</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, heresy refers to, “theological or religious opinions at variance with the ‘catholic’ or orthodox doctrine of any Christian Church.”

before execution.<sup>12</sup> Though Joan was remanded to the secular arm, procedure was once again neglected because no official sentence was pronounced against her. The Rouen bailiff noted in Joan's rehabilitation trial that Joan was rushed to the scaffold before he even pronounced her sentence. The disregard for procedure was emphasized in article twenty-four of the nullification transcripts: "That without any further sentences from the secular judge, the English, inspired by rage against her, immediately led her to the stake under a large escort of armed men" (Pernoud, *Her Story* 155). At one point in the trial, Cauchon flexed his political muscle on behalf of the university, by demanding that the bishop of Beauvais conduct the trial. Cauchon's letter highlights his political motivation: "Our intention is to recover the aforesaid Joan and get her back under our control on one or another of the charges regarding our Faith if it should happen that she should not be convicted or attained with the charge of heresy" (Pernoud, *Her Story* 108-109). Cauchon was already aware at this point in the trial that it would not be easy to convict Joan of heresy because he had already deposed a number of people from Domrémy and neighboring villages. Joan's second virginity test confirmed Joan's virtuous nature and therefore her honesty.

The clerics involved in Joan's Rouen trial were graduates of the university with degrees in canon law and theology, but they chose to repeatedly disregard canon law in the trial proceedings. Their blatant disregard could be viewed as evidence that they were placed in positions as interrogators of Joan because of their Burgundian and English sympathies. In later testimony, Aimond de Macy, a Burgundian knight, reported that Joan was visited by the earls of Warwick and Stafford and John of Luxembourg. At the meeting, Warwick offered to pay Joan's ransom if she refused to fight against him in the future.<sup>13</sup> The interrogators also admitted when

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<sup>12</sup> See *Joan of Arc: Her Story* (Pernoud 135).

<sup>13</sup> See *Joan of Arc: Her Story* (Pernoud 128).

questioning Joan that they had civil ties (political) along with religious ones: “Chose one or more from among those here, to counsel you: they are doctors of theology and of canon and civil law” (Trask 130). Karen Sullivan, challenges the accuracy of the Rouen trial transcripts in her book *The Interrogation of Joan of Arc*, she regards the transcripts as a construct between Joan and her interrogators. They collaborated on creating the context of her mission and her history. The interrogators frequently bombarded Joan with long sessions of questions, often interrupting her answers with overlapping questions by multiple clerics. They were aggressive in their questioning and often indirect or subtle with their meaning, causing Joan to contradict herself. There were times that Joan modified her answers based on the dissatisfaction of the clerics to her initial responses. Most of the questions were unclear in context because they were presented to Joan as if she came from an educated background, like the educated theologians and canonists. Edward Peters suggests that though there were canonical aspects in Joan’s trial, many events went against inquisitorial procedure: “The technicalities of Joan’s conviction and the turning over to the secular arm as a relapsed heretic were largely political” (Peters 69). Peter’s conclusion seems to be particularly accurate when reviewing the methodology of the interrogators. The judges gathered testimony from outside sources and it influenced how they formulated their questions aimed at Joan. The manipulation of evidence outside trial proceedings and the arbitrary method used in collecting it gives credence to Peter’s argument. The clerics gave authority to evidence by deciding what was legitimate for review and what was to be ignored. Peters also emphasizes that fourteenth-century France inquisitorial practice was controlled by secular authorities under the tutelage of the theology faculty at the University of Paris.

The interrogators of Joan relied heavily upon the *discretio spirituum* or “discernment of spirits,” what Saint Paul defined as one of the graces of the Holy Spirit to determine if Joan’s revelations were truly from God or works of the devil.<sup>14</sup> Jean Gerson, another prominent theologian loyal to Charles was relieved of his position at the University of Paris and moved to Lyons. Gerson was an established authority on *discretio spirituum* (used in determining the nature of Joan’s voices) because of a series of treatises he composed that finally illuminated the concept as a “rational, articulable process and developed guidelines to train clerics in exercising it” (Sullivan 33). When the Burgundians captured Paris, the University of Paris’ political sympathies shifted from Armagnac to Burgundian or from Joan to her Rouen interrogators. Throughout the Rouen inquiry Joan referred to the register at Poitiers as proof that she had been judged by theologians and that her mission was authorized. The Poitiers ecclesiastical documents were never reviewed at Rouen and Joan’s appeal to see the pope was denied. The register from Poitiers is lost to modern scholars and there is no definitive proof as to when it went missing. A summary of the findings, *Poitiers Conclusions* (about thirty lines), survives and the rest of the information that scholars have about the Poitiers interrogation is from the nullification trial transcripts in 1456. Gelu’s treatise was also ignored at the Rouen inquiry, probably because of Gelu’s royal sympathies. Fraioli posits that the “(Poitiers) decision was two-tiered: ecclesiastical first, and then secular and military” (Fraioli, *The Early Debate* 48). If politics were not the motivation behind Joan’s condemnation, then a Rouen inquiry would seem like an exhausted avenue because of Poitiers’s investigation in March of 1429, which also used *discretio spirituum* to interrogate Joan.

It would seem logical that the Poitiers interrogation would be of little interest to Joan’s Rouen interrogators as a valid document. The Poitiers inquiry was conducted by supporters of

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<sup>14</sup> Information about the *discretio spirituum* was obtained from *The Interrogation of Joan of Arc* (Sullivan).

Charles, and no one at Rouen supported Charles or his claim to the throne. In “The Lost Interrogation at Poitiers,” Charles T. Wood posits that Joan’s mission was manipulated and shaped based on the needs of Charles: “Her life was given historical shape by the dynastic needs of the man she made king” (Wood 28). Wood points out that the maid and Charles did not know that Joan’s mission would culminate at the coronation. It seems important to note here that nullification witnesses claim that Joan’s initial mission included two miracles: the retaking of Orleans and Charles’s coronation. The political undertones (supplied by Charles’s supporters) at Poitiers’s inquiry may have been motivation for the Rouen judges to ignore the record of methodology used by Joan’s inquisitors: “Part of the conviction that Poitiers was merely an exercise in politics rests on the belief by some that the maid’s interrogators were not primarily theologians” (Fraiooli, *The Early Debate* 47). Woods believes that Joan’s mission may have only included raising the siege at Orleans and that the register may have been destroyed during the nullification process. To follow Woods’ theory, if the purpose of Poitiers was to investigate Joan’s faith and her “sign,” the Poitiers register would have reflected that Orleans was Joan’s “sign” of legitimacy, and would have concluded there. If accurate, the Poitiers documents may have destroyed the legitimizing effect of the coronation at Reims, which would have been an important distinction during the nullification trial. However, it seems more likely that the documents would not have survived the Rouen judges because they made a deliberate effort to suppress or distort any propaganda that was pro-Joan.

The *Internet Medieval Sourcebook* gives the modern public an opportunity to review the transcripts of Joan’s trial. The translations offer useful insight into the intense political situation that Joan was involved in. The transcript commentary explicates that many of the dioceses appointments (Joan’s Rouen interrogators) were funded and provided for by the English King:

We see Jeanne pitted against sixty skilled politicians, lawyers, ambassadors, trained in all the complexities of legal questioning, all of them versed in academic casuistry. Most of them were avowedly her enemies. Her victories for Charles VII had driven many of them, including Bishop Cauchon, out of their dioceses, away from their seats of authority and revenue. They were of the University of Paris and Jeanne had threatened Paris. If she had succeeded in that they would have been utterly ruined.

Documentation survives detailing the amount of money Cauchon received from the English crown for his work on Joan's trial. The receipts specify amounts tendered and what dates of Cauchon's employment the funds were paying for.<sup>15</sup> On the second day of the public trial, Joan was questioned by Jean Beupère. Like Cauchon, Beupère owed his authority to the English crown because he had "achieved the confirmation of the university's privileges from the queen of England and the duke of Gloucester in 1422" (Pernoud 110). In the ensuing drama after Joan's death, people involved in the trial began to doubt the fairness of the tribunal and sentence. Cauchon actually jailed a friar for ten months when the friar claimed that Joan's judges had been wrong in their methodology and assessments. The upheaval must have worried Cauchon because by June of 1431 he had obtained letters from King Henry VI that promised financial and legal aid to anyone sued for their role in Joan's trial.<sup>16</sup>

The livelihood of Joan's interrogators depended on making the English king happy, and his authority depended on France's subjection and Joan's death (the link between French royalty and its people). Joan was a symbol of the royal party's link to the people of France and to God; she validated and was validated by their God, rightful king, and long-standing cultural beliefs

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<sup>15</sup> See *Joan of Arc: Her Story* (Pernoud 236).

<sup>16</sup> See *Joan of Arc: Her Story* (Pernoud 141).

and tradition (ancient prophecies and myths). This fact threatened to subvert the dominant political ideology by the English and Burgundians: that the English king was the ruler of France. In transcripts that duplicate a “letter addressed by our mother the University of Paris to our Lord the King of France and England,” Charles VI’s crowning at Reims is not recognized by Joan’s judges which is obvious by the letter’s opening address. The hegemonic struggle between the political factions made Joan a threat to the dominant parties. Joan was mired in a triangle of opposing politics and was thrust into a battle of wits with scholastically trained men that were loyal to the English camp. An analysis of the shifting politics in Joan’s society shows how religious ideologies took a backseat to political ideologies and aspirations.

## Joan in Modern Film

Much the same way that myths and prophecies were used to give authority to political ideologies in Joan's time, modern film makers use myth and prophecy about Joan as a vehicle for their political message, and as a result, distort her history. In addition to Joan's image being distorted by political candidates, films about Joan of Arc have become a source used to perpetuate myths about her and about the medieval era. An analysis of the three films, *Joan the Woman* by Cecil DeMille in 1916, *La Passion de Jeanne d' Arc* by Carl Theodore Dreyer in 1928, and *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc* directed by Luc Besson in 1999, shows how modern cinema blurs the lines between myth and history, continuing to perpetuate the myth that Joan's trial was motivated strictly by religious factors. As we have seen, the use of myth and ideology factored heavily in the focus of Joan's trial. Both aspects steered scrutiny away from the illegalities (no representation or lawyer) of the trial and its motivation by politics. By placing Joan in a religious context, the interrogators began to dismantle the very aspects about Joan that lent authority to her mission, the myths and ancient prophecies. The films by DeMille, Dreyer, and Besson reinterpret Joan through a modern lens. The film directors' end up distorting Joan's history and the perceptions that their audiences have about what Joan should represent. As a result, Joan becomes attached to new political ideologies that originally were not associated with her. Additionally, most films about Joan of Arc have become a source used to perpetuate general or popular myths about the medieval era, especially in Demille's 1916 film.

DeMille's *Joan The Woman* overtly attaches Joan to modern politics. His depiction distorts Joan's history and the role of her judges. DeMille's original cut of the film exceeds two hours and theatre owners complained that the film length prevented them from having the routine

four screenings a day. DeMille agreed to cut the film from the original thirteen reels to eight, but refused to alter the dual narrative that placed Joan in her era and in modern trench warfare.<sup>17</sup> Created before her canonization, there are two versions of the film, one for American audiences and one for French audiences. The main differences between the two versions is that the American cut creates a love interest for Joan because of the American debate on gender roles: “A comparison of the two versions of the film suggests that the version of *Joan The Woman* intended for American audiences had more to do with the changing roles of women in the war years than with the patriotism that underlies the French version” (Blaetz 51). For the purposes of this analysis, I will focus on the American version of this film but it is important to note that the differences between the two versions demonstrates how historical films are often framed by their own place and time.<sup>18</sup> The film depicts Joan in a pose reminiscent of Christ on the cross, only stretched across a lily (the *Fleur de lis*, France’s official symbol). In the following scene, Joan appears as a vision to a World War I English soldier in a French trench. The soldier finds her legendary sword and receives a vision of Joan. In the vision, Joan (Geraldine Farrar) tells the soldier: “The time has come for thee to expiate thy sins against me” (*Joan The Woman*). As Kevin J. Harty argues, in “Jeanne Au Cinema” DeMille’s appropriation of Joan attempts to associate her with a modern “call to arms” (Harty 242). After Joan’s death in DeMille’s film, the English soldier that has visions of Joan “expiates” his sins against Joan with by dying on French soil during a World War I mission.

Harty’s analysis emphasizes DeMille’s overt parallelism of Joan’s history to modern suffragists, citing the initial titles in the film as his evidence: “Founded on the life of Joan of Arc, the Girl Patriot, Who Fought with Men, Was Loved by Men and Killed by Men – Yet withal

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<sup>17</sup> See Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture: *The Silent Era* (Higashi 119).

<sup>18</sup> See *Visions of the Maid: Joan of Arc in American Film and Culture* (Blaetz 64).

Retained the Heart of a Woman” (*Joan The Woman*). DeMille manages to interpret Joan’s history in relation to the political upheavals of his own time, making Joan a modern figure in the “Battle of the Sexes.” In the narrative depicting Joan’s life, she encounters an English soldier during a raid on her village. DeMille’s Joan hides the soldier from the French army and nurses his wounds. The English soldier falls in love with Joan, but she tells him that she will never marry; Joan opts for “spiritual redemption at the cost of romantic fulfillment” (Higashi 124). The soldier that had visions of Joan in the beginning scenes is the same English soldier that Joan nurses back to health in the memory flashbacks. During the battle at Orleans, the English soldier pierces Joan in the thigh with an arrow and nearly kills the woman he pledged to love (one reason why the ‘reincarnated’ soldier has to expiate his sins in the end). Later, while Joan is imprisoned the love-stricken soldier attempts to rescue Joan when she is almost raped in her cell. The actual trial transcripts never allude to a romantic love interest or to Joan’s rape. DeMille’s tactic to relate Joan to modern audiences suppresses and distracts from many aspects of Joan’s life and time that are crucial to understanding the circumstances surrounding her death: “He adopted such a narrative strategy at the expense of historicity because he resorted to dramatizations that either were fictional or could not be authenticated” (Higashi 187).

The film was protested against by Catholic circles because of DeMille’s depiction of Clergyman as “sadistic Catholic clergy (that) execute her as a deviant woman for assuming masculine prerogatives” (Higashi 137). The Cardinal Film Corporation went so far as to print pamphlets that characterized Cauchon as a man who “did not hesitate to misuse the mighty power of the church to defeat his personal enemies” (Higashi 138). Joan’s interrogators at DeMille’s trial appear in white hoods, reminiscent of the Ku Klux Klan regalia. The regalia used in DeMille’s film also resemble the robes used by Catholic layman (as far back as the thirteenth-

century) during the eight day procession leading up to Easter, for Semana Santa (Holy Week) in Spain. The capuce or hood worn by the penitents resembles the Klan hood but does not share its roots with Klan symbolism. The transference of Klan traits onto the Christian Church of Joan's time is one way that DeMille sets out to make the judges look like terrifying Latin Christian Church interrogators. DeMille may have deliberately made the judges look like the Klan members to strike fear in American audiences: "The Klan had reorganized itself in 1915 in what would turn out to be a rising tide of nativism that swept across the country and that DeMille obviously viewed with some alarm" (Harty 243). It is possible that DeMille wanted to make the Catholic clergy presiding over Joan's trial comparable to the violent deeds associated with the Klan. The corrupt image fits with the modern connotations associated with medieval inquisitions. The capuce from Semana Santa was also used in texts that helped perpetuate horror stories about the Spanish inquisitors in the nineteenth-century. DeMille may have been familiar with the types of horror stories that stretched inquisitorial procedure and factions to mythic proportions. One such text, *Secretos de la Inquisición* by Joaquin Maria Nin, was filled with many illustrations of torture and displays the inquisitors in hoods, similar to the hoods in DeMille's film.

In DeMille's film, Joan is threatened with hot pokers and flames in a torture chamber under the watchful eye of her hooded inquisitors. At one point, the director cuts from a man holding flames under a shackled Joan to Joan's face twisted in pain. Though Joan experienced mental torture, she was not tortured with hot pokers, subjected to the rack or strappado. DeMille depicts Joan's hands tied and lifted above her head with chains that could be tightened or loosened at the inquisitors' whim. In the trial transcripts sections of Joan's testimony reveal that torture was implied or Joan felt verbally threatened with torture: "If you were to have me torn limb from limb and send my soul out of my body, I would say nothing else. And if I did say

anything, afterwards I should always say that you had me say it by force” (Trask 132). Trial transcripts reveal that Joan was continually pressed to recant and finally decided to out of her fear of being burned at the stake: “Now you churchmen, take me to your prison, and let me be no longer in the hands of the English” (Trask 134). Joan later admits in trial transcripts that she recanted out of fear of the fire, and that her abjuration is an act of treason against God (revealed to her by her voice). Joan knows she has been abandoned by the church and realizes that her martyrdom is at the hands of the English and their sympathizers:

Alas! If I had been kept in the Church’s prison, to which I had submitted – if I had been kept by churchmen, instead of by my enemies and adversaries, I should not have come to such a miserable end. Oh, I appeal to God, the great judge, from this great wrong and oppression! (Trask 143).

In Karen Sullivan’s text *The Interrogation of Joan of Arc*, Joan’s pain is described as a “symbolic violence,” a pain derived from questioning. Joan suffered when others questioned and doubted her voices and mission, “the experience of what is still today known in French as *la question*, ‘torture’” (Sullivan 105). DeMille’s film implies that Joan is tortured in a dungeon in front of hooded inquisitors, not the mental torture that Joan endured by aggressive and vague questions. Edward Peters clears up many of the myths concerning medieval inquisitions:

Joan’s confinement in an English military prison was strictly against inquisitorial procedure; the technical use of interrogation procedure and evidence was well below inquisitorial standards; the technicalities of Joan’s conviction and turning over to the secular arm as a relapsed heretic were largely political (Peters 69).

In fact, Peters claims that the only canonical trial Joan was allotted was posthumously at her rehabilitation trial in 1456, where she was acquitted of *heresy*.

The 1928 Joan film, *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* by the Danish filmmaker Carl Dreyer, was the first post-canonization film about Joan.<sup>19</sup> Dreyer choose to focus solely on Joan's condemnation trial (after she is captured by the English) and execution. Dreyer condenses the twenty-nine interrogations into one day of tribunal sessions and prison incidences, where Joan is antagonized by interrogators and guards, and threatened with torture. Dreyer based the screenplay on trial records, evidenced by the presence of the *Chambre Des Députés* in the opening scene. This is not the only book in Dreyer's film. Joan swears on a Bible before her questioning ensues. The Bible is chained, a common practice in medieval libraries. Chained books are often misinterpreted as evidence that the medieval church implemented a 'book chaining' practice to exert control over scripture interpretation. In actuality, many hours were spent producing copies by hand, so medieval texts were valuable and measures were taken to protect them. In the Middle Ages, reading and writing were separate skills, taught in academic environments to people that had the money to pay for it (not the peasant class). Dreyer depicts how Joan is locked out of reading scripture (chained Bible) because she could not read Latin, a language reserved for the educated.

What is absent in Dreyer's film is the collaboration between the secular and ecclesiastical authorities involved in the trial, and the collaboration between Joan's judges and the English and Burgundian factions. Dreyer's decision to focus on the religious aspects of Joan's trial may have been in an attempt to mirror his juxtaposition of Joan's and Christ's death. Joan is a Christ-like figure in Dreyer's film, evidenced in his decision to condense Joan's trial into one day and his decision to reveal the human drama of Joan's death (a mirror of Christ's human suffering before his execution), and the bloodletting scene (blood spurts from Joan like it does from Christ's spear

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<sup>19</sup> The popular biography about Joan written by Joseph Delteil in 1925 was a basis for Dreyer's vision (Harty 243). Dreyer also relied heavily on the previous work of Anatole France (*Vie de Jeanne d'Arc*, 1908) and the most popular Joan scholar in Dreyer's era, Pierre Champion.

wound). In the film, Joan is led to the scaffold by an ecclesiastical authority and preached to from a pulpit. Joan signs the abjuration, but the audience never sees Joan recant or remove her women's garments as a symbol of her recantation. Dreyer then shows Joan receiving the sacraments before she is finally executed. Joan did receive the sacraments before her death. The bishop of Beauvais consents to allow Joan the sacraments after confession, which seems odd considering she was an excommunicate. The fact that Joan was given the Eucharist demonstrates that her death was strictly motivated by political sympathies, not the nature of her Faith. The twenty-third article in the nullification transcript (1456) addresses the contradictory nature of giving the sacrament to Joan, suggesting the act as proof that Joan's Rouen judges knew that Joan had submitted to the Church Militant and God.<sup>20</sup>

Dreyer also made the controversial choice to use close-ups and revolutionary camera angles to convey the hypocritical actions of the inquisitors in the tribunal sessions. When reading the transcripts from the trial, the hypocritical nature of Joan's judges is obvious. Dreyer attempts to depict the hypocritical nature of Joan's judges through his manipulation of camera angles, so the clergy appear menacing, sardonic, and diabolical even. Ironically, Dreyer's focus on close-ups virtually excludes the collaboration between the religious and secular factions in Joan's trial, the actual hypocrisy. The close-up frames eliminate peripheral views, and the possibility viewers have to infer scheming side-line activities between secular authorities and the interrogators. In actuality, Joan's interrogators relied on what the guards overheard in Joan's cell and on the desires of the English and Burgundian alliances to develop their techniques for questioning. Dreyer attempts to convey religious and secular collaboration in one trial scene where Joan is harassed by prison authorities. Joan's harassment by prison authorities in Dreyer's film takes the form of a crown and arrow fashioned as a scepter. The guards place the crown on Joan's head

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<sup>20</sup> See *Joan of Arc: Her Story* (Pernoud 154).

and mock her with sneers and laughter. Nadia Margolis posits that this scene furthers the connection between Christ's and Joan's death (Christ mocked as "the King of the Jews"). Margolis's conclusion is plausible considering the overt comparisons between both figures throughout the film. The crowning scene also mirrors literature from the early nineteenth-century that falsely asserts that Joan was the illegitimate daughter of Isabeau of Bavaria and Louis of Orleans, making her Charles VI's sister (Pernoud 222). Dreyer continues to model his Joan on Christ with his depictions of her being threatened with torture. Joan is threatened with saws, pokers, blades, hooks, and the wheel, all tools to inflict ripped and torn flesh. Joan being threatened with torture parallels Christ's torture before his execution; his skin was torn open by whips and pierced by implements of torture (Margolis, "Trial by Passion" 475).

Portions of the film were censored because the Catholic Church criticized the portrayal of ecclesiastical judges, who are constructed as the sole cause of Joan's death. After the world premiere, the French extreme Right threatened to protest opening night in Paris. The decision was made to allow the Catholic clergy to view the film in a closed premiere and comment on the debated scenes: "Both the church and other censors excised sections of the film unfavorable to the church, against Dreyer's will, prior to allowing the film to be screened before the French public" (Margolis, "Trial by Passion" 474). As a result of this closed premiere, many of Dreyer's original scenes had to be toned down. One example of the effect of the censor can be found in the bloodletting scene after Joan faints: "While the inferior outtakes version manages only a trickle, the official version shows an impressive, needle-like spurt, which then laces her arm's white surface with whatever blood does not spill into the pan held out to catch it" (Margolis, "Trial by Passion" 478). In emphasizing the religious aspects of Joan's trial and death, Dreyer veils the political maneuverings involved in Joan's execution. In actuality, religion was used as

an excuse for Joan's judges and adversaries to remove her from political hegemony. It would seem like a natural inclination to use religion to discredit Joan; after all, religion was used to authorize Joan.

Luc Besson's 1999 film, *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc* eliminates most of the interrogation of Joan at her condemnation trial instead opting to show Joan's interrogation conducted by her Conscience (Dustin Hoffman). The choice to use the Conscience attributes most of Joan's visions of God's commands for her to supernatural belief. Instead of Joan's mission being attributed to the dictates from God through the saints, Besson reduces her visions to swirling clouds, ringing bells, and thunder (Haydock 13). In actuality, the transcripts reflect that Joan was confident in the dictates of her voices, and recollected them with clarity. Besson's decision to reduce Joan's visions to a figment of her imagination and manic delusions is a product of the modern supposition that medieval religion was superstitious. The focus on Joan's subjective thought constructs her in a modern fashion that film audiences can relate to. Michel Foucault points out in his text *The History of Sexuality* that outside forces set in motion a proliferation of discourses that define who you are and what you decide to do (Foucault 18). Foucault defines discourse as not only speech and written materials, but also as the ideologies and institutions which dictate the beliefs in society. In our postmodern world, individuality is no longer a subjective act but has become to be understood as the product of environment, church, government, military, and political institutions. Besson distorts Joan's history in order to draw on modern fears about war and freedom fighters. In "Shooting the Messenger: Luc Besson at War with Joan of Arc," Nickolas Haydock effectively demonstrates that Besson filters Joan's history through a modern lens motivated by politics. Haydock posits that *movie medievalism* has distorted historical events with "appeals to patriotism and national identity" (Haydock 2). In

making Joan's interrogation a struggle of conscience, Besson modernizes Joan's history and questions the validity of divine callings.

Haydock challenges that Joan's divine calling in the film was set-up to look like it was really urgency for *jihad* (Haydock 3).<sup>21</sup> The Joan that Besson illustrates is "the product of repressive social forces" (Haydock 4). In the film, Joan watches her sister murdered and then raped at the hands of a marauding Englishman, an event that is not found in historical records: "Joan testifies that she and her family escaped their village (Domrémy) before it was attacked" (Haydock 4). Besson makes it appear that Joan is on a mission motivated by frenzied revenge. In fact, many scenes show Joan frightened and doubting of her voices. After the brutal battle at Orleans, Joan (Milla Jovovich) is shocked by the utter devastation and death she sees and begins to question herself and her interpretation of Christ's purpose for her. Jovovich dreams that a grown Christ asks her what she has done to him, as he bleeds profusely from a deadly head wound. In fact, when Joan is pressed repeatedly in her trial to identify her voices, she reluctantly does so after deferring on at least two occasions. Joan identified her voices not as God's voice but as words delivered on behalf of God by "Saint Catherine and Saint Margaret" after hours of intense interrogation (Sullivan 28-29). Besson's depiction of Joan's interrogation by the Conscience, robed in a monk's black cowl replaces her actual visitation by saints (described in trial transcripts). The interrogation leads to self-questioning by Joan and the Conscience "seeks not to shake her faith in God but in her self" (Haydock 12).

Joan's Conscience in *The Messenger* personifies self-doubt and the struggle between what is real and what is a figment of imagination. Haydock challenges that Joan's interrogation in Besson's film ends with her realization that all signs are arbitrary. For Haydock, Besson's

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<sup>21</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "jihad" as a war or crusade for or against some doctrine, opinion, or principle; war to the death. Also seen as a religious war of Muslims against unbelievers in Islam, inculcated as a duty by the Koran and traditions.

close-ups give the audience the feeling that Joan is imprisoned in her mind. When Jovovich as Joan reaches her breaking point, she admits that she may have read more into mundane events that may have not been connected to her in the first place:

So I helped myself... and I saw signs... the ones I wanted to see – and I fought, out of revenge and despair. Yes, I was proud, - stubborn – selfish – and cruel... I was all the things that human beings believe they are allowed to be when they're fighting for a cause (Haydock 19).

Haydock posits that Besson shows doubt as “no match for faith – and no bar to it either” (21). I agree with Haydock’s conclusion that Besson depicts Joan’s history based on modern anxieties about faith. However, I disagree that the continual doubts that confront Joan leads to a better understanding of her faith and sanctity. In Besson’s film, Joan abandons her faith in her judgments and her faith that God has spoken to her. Joan is destroyed by her self-doubt, not redeemed by her faith. She is martyred believing that she misinterpreted Christ’s purpose for her and that she massacred people on the battlefield in the name of herself not in the King of Heaven’s name (as the trial transcripts state). In the end, Joan dies believing she wronged God and was selfish in her actions. Besson demonstrates that faith can be misinterpreted and that people’s faith can be destroyed by doubt. For Besson’s Joan, her faith is destroyed by her doubt and her questioning leads her to the realization that the nature of Faith arbitrary.

In an age of suicide bombers and religious extremism, Besson’s depiction of Joan’s struggle looks like an attempt to equate Joan’s mission to that of modern day terrorism and religious *jihad*. Joan’s mission was authorized through religion because that was the culture she lived in, but her involvement in the war, her capture, and condemnation were motivated by political factions. When Joan was needed to win the support of French people, the religious

factions that interrogated her at Poitiers found her mission and person “ordained by God.” In contrast, the religious factions loyal to the English at the Rouen inquiry found her to be a heretic. Religion does not appear to be the prime motivator for Joan’s interrogators; they seemed to authorize or condemn her based on where their political sympathies happened to be at any given moment.

## Conclusion: Joan's Fragmentation

An analysis of the politically motivated methods that condemned Joan demonstrates that religion was manipulated to authorize Joan's death. With the advent of film, we see how Joan is an icon manipulated to perpetuate political ideologies and myths about medieval history. Often historicity takes a back seat to political ideology, obvious in incidences like Geraldine Farrar dressing herself in the American flag at the *Joan The Woman* premiere in New York to sing the national anthem.<sup>22</sup> The methods used in the three films discussed blur the lines of myth and history, of fact and fiction. When commenting and expanding on the political undertones in *Joan The Woman*, Sumiko Higashi discusses how Joan was often used to overcome American prejudice against avant-garde factions of Paris (140). Higashi draws attention to an advertisement that poses the questions: "Would Joan of Arc Be Burned Today? ... Is the World Freed of the Arch-Enemies of Truth – Ignorance and Superstition?" The advertisement addresses modern misconceptions that Joan of Arc's judges were superstitious: " "Popular religion" in the fifteenth-century is often imagined as a tissue of superstitions, little ritual stupidities, and small deliveries practiced by the wretched, ignorant peasants in their naïveté" (Pernoud 162). But as this analysis proves that Joan's adversaries were anything other than highly educated and politically connected is a misconception.

As viewers and readers of Joan's history, we are entitled to question how modern constructions of Joan distort historical facts. And if historical facts have been reduced to modern constructions, what does that achieve and say about the nature of the ideologies that are the foundations of society? After her death, Joan became an immediate rallying point for French

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<sup>22</sup> See *Visions of the Maid* (Blaetz 55).

people and the desire to claim her image was a point of interest for city government and religious factions. At times these factions have collaborated and other times they have vied for control over Joan's image. When English troops withdrew from Orleans on May 8, 1429, the French community organized processions to offer thanks to God and the patron saints of the city (Sts. Aignan and Euverte).<sup>23</sup> Along with this procession, the city government in Orleans began to venerate the Maid by funding a festival honoring her on May 8, the memorial of the Orleans relief. In 1435, the Orleans' community hosted the festival (*mystère du siège d'Orléans*), where city officials assembled platforms at significant battle sites to reenact the siege of 1429. Both civil and religious leaders participated in the festival proceedings. The first festival was funded by Gilles de Rais, Joan's companion and by the city government: "The sergeants of the duke of Orleans supervised the orderliness of the procession so as to prevent laymen from mixing with the clergy" (Pernoud, *Her Story* 244). By the time Charles regained Paris in 1436, the English threat had been greatly diminished, in part due to Charles's peace treaty with Burgundy. The success of reclaiming the kingdom of France spurred Charles and his people to reclaim Joan through the festival. The city government covered the festival expenses, which ranged from the sermon and alms disbursed to "dressing the choir boys and the banner-bearer in new clothes" (Pernoud, *Her Story* 244). After the nullification in 1456, presided over by Cardinal d'Estouteville, festival attendants were given an indulgence of one year and ten days by the Cardinal.<sup>24</sup> Though for all the appearances of a strictly religious procession, the festival was almost entirely funded by the city government. The festival still occurs every year, except during times of political unrest.

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<sup>23</sup> The information about the Joan of Arc festivals was collected from *Joan of Arc: Her Story* (Pernoud).

<sup>24</sup> An Indulgence is the remission of temporal punishment and the guilt of sins that are already forgiven by God. An Indulgence reduces the sinners' time in penance on earth or in purgatory, when mortal sins require an eternal punishment.

Although monuments to Joan began appearing as early as 1502, it was during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that Joan iconography began to be used overtly in political symbolism. By 1820, Joan was recognized as a martyr of the people and as a victim of the church and crown (McWilliam 393 - 394). In 1874, the first monument by the New Republic was an equestrian monument by Emmanuel Frémiet of *Jeanne d'Arc* and was erected in Paris. In 1896 another *Jeanne d'Arc* equestrian monument by the artist Paul Dubois was funded by the state for Reims. These monuments became political centers to debate religious and political beliefs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The debate became especially apparent when an official holiday was planned for Voltaire on May 30, 1884 – the same month and day of Joan's execution. Joan admirers were livid and planned protests at the Frémiet statue. Joan supporters did not want to share the day of commemoration with Voltaire after his representation of Joan as a prostitute in his text, *The Maid of Orleans*. Joan followers began ceremonies at the statue, covering it with bouquets and wreaths. Every May between 1894 and 1899 abbé Théodore Garnier, a nationalist cleric, led supporters in a pilgrimage from Union Nationale to Frémiet's statue and by 1904, youth were beginning to flock to the statue to protest the actions of Amédée Thalamas, a history teacher that had disputed a student essay based on Joan's divine revelations. Thalamas's scholarly approach to Joan studies was skeptical and rational in manner: "He recklessly asserted, so it was alleged, that Joan was simply a mascot and, since she probably was raped in prison, consequently died without her signal attribute, her virginity" (Margolis, *The French Right* 278). At the Frémiet statue, protesters against Thalamas's method challenged police and subsequently four students were arrested. By 1914 the Action Française began to reclaim Joan for anti-republicanism and detractors of this agenda protested by leaving wreaths with messages like "papal victim" and "socialist" at the Joan statues. The Action Française was

condemned in 1926 by the Catholic church for their anti-Semitic discriminations and their preference for nationalism over obligations to the church (Hanna 233). The Francaise began to say that they had become “papal victims,” and were being submitted to a similar condemnation as Joan. The popularity of Joan monuments as gathering sites for protest is not limited to France. In America a *Joan of Arc* equestrian statue was erected in New York by 1915 and women suffragist were ridiculed for dressing like Joan and holding protest rallies at the monument.<sup>25</sup>

Joan monuments in Paris demonstrate how religion can veil political machinations and hegemonic struggle. The conflict over Joan’s image by the Action Francaise, the extreme-left communist party and the Third Republic show how Joan’s persona can be fragmented by two different factions. For the republicans, Joan was a revolutionary and a martyr of the catholic establishment and for the anti-republicans Joan was a symbol of the monarchy. The Action Francaise was especially astute at manipulating Joan and using her in ways that were contradictory. The Francaise attempted to wrest Joan back from the republican party as a symbol of Francaise purity and devotion to the monarchy. When the Third Republic began to dominant French politics, the Francaise altered their strategy, becoming more nationalistic and less Catholic. When condemned by Pope Pius XI, the Francaise equated their condemnation to the injustice Joan suffered at her condemnation by the “Holy Inquisition” (Hanna 233). Some would argue that Joan’s canonization was an attempt by the Catholic church to reclaim Joan as a religious icon, “as a saint and martyr whose humble origins and patriotic credentials could be exploited to enhance the church’s appeal in rural communities” (McWilliam 394).

Jean-Marie Le Pen and his National Front Party, founded in 1984, have managed to use Joan to appeal to Catholics (Right) and to leftist groups; “but also to the workers, whom he wooed away from the Left with the latest version of Anglophobia: the resentment of immigrant workers,

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<sup>25</sup> See *Visions of the Maid* (Blaetz 34).

the scab labor – and thus bane of the unions – of France since the 1960s” (Margolis, *The French Right* 280). As the analysis of Joan statuary has proven, Joan’s image is not contained to religious arenas. The interpretation of Rouen transcripts is not restricted to scholarly and religious circles either. Le Pen manipulates a portion of trial transcripts attributed to Joan in his anti-immigration platform. The transcripts tell us that Joan was asked if God hated the English by her interrogators and Joan remarked: “As to God’s love or hate for the English, and what he will do to their souls, I know nothing. But I do know that they will be driven out of France” (Trask 122). For Le Pen’s party, Joan is a symbol of resistance against foreign invaders, and justification for discriminating against Muslims in France. The 2007 presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy utilizes Joan as a symbol of France’s dedication to their Christian heritage, which excludes France’s large Muslim population. Ségolène Royal, Sarkozy’s opponent plugs herself as the new savior of France: “Ségo makes no secret of the fact that she sees the 15<sup>th</sup> century Maid of Orleans as a model for her one-woman campaign” (Bremner, *The Royal Road*). The political parties in France continue to manipulate Joan’s history to suit their platforms. Their manipulation fragments Joan, much like her interrogators did, by choosing to exclude certain aspects of her character and history.

Immediately after Joan’s death, myths began to proliferate, and attempted to reinterpret her. One report by a friar claimed that the Englishman that lit her pyre saw a white dove emerge the moment that Joan gave up her spirit (Pernoud, *Her Story* 136). Legend said that Joan’s heart did not burn in the fire but as DeVries points out “even if it did, this organ and her ashes, according to more credible witnesses, were scooped up by her executioner and tossed over a bridge into the Seine,” (DeVries, *A Military Leader* 33). In fact, 2007 news reports confirm the ever-present fascination with Joan. *The New York Times* reported on the findings of a recent scientific study

conducted on a “rib bone” presumed to be Joan’s and housed at Chinon castle. The results confirmed the bone was a fake relic, an actual Egyptian mummy bone. The bone and the cat’s femur have now been dated between seventh to third centuries: “The fake was put forth in the nineteenth century, perhaps to support the process of Joan’s beatification,” (The Associated Press). Fascination with Joan was immediately apparent after her death, in the form of Joan imposters. Claude des Armoises began impersonating Joan in 1439. The chronicler of St. Thiabault-de-Metz reported that Joan’s two brothers saw Claude and immediately recognized her as Joan. Joan’s brother went to see the king with a message from the new “Joan” and tried to garner supportive funds. In August 1439, Claude appeared as “Joan” in Orleans, where she was honored with a reception and banquet; she was given money for her help with the 1429 siege. Claude later confessed her imposture before the University of Paris. A letter of pardon from 1457 survives and documents that Jeanne de Sermaize, was detained in prison for three months for representing herself as Joan the Maid.

The modern film industry continues to create a “cult of Joan imposters” when they adapt Joan to screen. Film directors mold Joan into a fictional character when they pick and chose what lens they want to filter her through. Joan has managed to remain an icon with the ability to be manipulated into everything and anything that viewers may consider ideal. Joan of Arc adaptations range from the socially conscious to the ridiculous. Memorabilia can be found on the internet, where Joan’s image is manipulated as an advertising gimmick in “Joan of Arc Spicy Chili Beans.” Tee shirts sporting slogans like “Girl’s Knight Out,” “Medieval Feminist” and “Real Women Wear Armour” have become indicators of feminine strength for new generations of Joan fans. We have only to wait and see who Joan will become next, what group she will be the spokesperson for, and how her appropriations will distort medieval history. But without a

doubt, the trend for circulating Joan representations will continue to conflict with each other and, like her initial condemnation, be motivated by political undertones.

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