

**Cinematic Reliquaries:**

**Key Aspects of Physicality in *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (1962), and *Joan of Arc at the Stake* (1954)**

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In 2007, a team of researchers at Raymond Poinaré Hospital just west of Paris conducted an extensive investigation into a mysterious jar allegedly discovered in 1867, which bore the enticing label, “Remains found under the stake of Joan of Arc, virgin of Orleans.”<sup>1</sup> If authenticated, these relics would constitute a remarkable discovery for researchers and devotees of the iconic warrior saint, as they would represent her only known physical remains. Indeed, for her religious followers, the relics would provide concrete evidence of the claims made by some witnesses to her execution 600 years earlier – namely, that Joan’s organs had miraculously withstood destruction by fire.<sup>2</sup> In other words, these relics represented a potential manifestation of a centuries-old miracle in the twenty-first century.

When it became clear, however, that the remains were not Joan’s but instead fragments of a mummified Egyptian cat, disappointment was evident in the team’s response. Phillipe Charlier, the head forensic scientist on the project, said “he was ‘astonished’ by the results. ‘I’d never have thought that it could be from a mummy.’”<sup>3</sup> Despite the well-documented practice of relic fraud, where animal bones are passed off saintly remains, the researchers at Raymond Poinaré had clung to the hope that the bones belonged to Joan.<sup>4</sup>

In 1436, only five years after Joan’s execution, a woman named Claude surfaced from obscurity, claiming to be the warrior saint. Her charade was successful, convincing one of Joan’s

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<sup>1</sup> Michaela DeSoucey et al., “Memory and Sacrifice: An Embodied Theory of Martyrdom,” *Cultural Sociology* 2, no. 1 (2008): 109. The bones were housed by the Archdiocese of Tours starting in 1867 after their alleged discovery. They are currently in the possession of a museum in Chinon. See Christian Panvert “Bone Fragment not Likely of Joan of Arc,” *Associated Press*, December 16, 2006, <https://apnews.com/article/75707d33622b34b18e9f8320e9d77561>.

<sup>2</sup> Declan Butler, “Joan of Arc’s Relics Exposed as Forgery,” *Nature* 446 (April 2007): 593.

<sup>3</sup> Butler, “Joan of Arc’s Relics Exposed as Forgery,” 593.

<sup>4</sup> On the widespread recognition of relic fraud in the Middle Ages and subsequent strategies for authenticating newly acquired relics, see Patrick Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 213-15.

brothers that she was, in fact, the lost Maid and that she had survived her execution at the stake.<sup>5</sup> According to Pierre Sala, the imposter eventually gained an audience with King Charles VII of France, during which she tearfully confessed her deception.<sup>6</sup> Like Joan, Claude was brought to trial at the University of Paris. While the outcome of her trial remains unknown, one thing is evident: the success of such a con relied on preexisting demand for Joan's revival, a desire to experience Joan's physical presence once more.

The stories of the twenty-first-century forensic researchers and the fifteenth-century false Joan demonstrate a collective longing for the martyr's physical presence that spans hundreds of years. If Claude responded to public interest in renewing their physical connection with Joan by attempting to embody her, Phillipe Charlier and his team responded to the same demand by searching for viable relics. But why does such a longing exist, and how has it sustained itself for so many centuries? Joan of Arc's body was completely obliterated when she was burned at the stake – an intentional act on the part of her captors, who sought to destroy any possible relics out of anxiety over her potential achievement of sainthood. This concern permeates the pages of the trial transcript, as can be seen in Article fifty-nine of the formal accusations against Joan:

At St. Denis in France, Joan offered and set up in a high place of the church the arms she carried when she was wounded in the attack on Paris, that they might be honored by the people as relics. And in the same town, she had candles burned and poured the melted wax on the heads of children, telling their fortunes and prophesizing their future through this sorcery.<sup>7</sup>

Even the mere suggestion of a cult of Saint Joan was too much for her judges to tolerate, and the rumor that Joan was fostering such a cult before her death only sealed her fate as a

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<sup>5</sup> Dyan Elliot, "Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc," *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 1 (February 2002): 52–53.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Sala, a courtier serving Charles VIII, heard the story from Charles VII's chamberlain. Jules Quicherat, *Proces de Condemnation et Rehabilitation de Jeanne d'Arc, Dite la Pucelle* (Paris: J. Renuoard et cie., 1847), 4: 277.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Hobbins, trans., *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 150.

heretic.<sup>8</sup> There was no way around it; her body would have to be completely destroyed to prevent relics from circulating after her execution. Joan's ashes would later be scattered into the Seine, ensuring that none of her devotees could collect and venerate her remains. The English selected burning as the method of execution not only for its powers of obliteration but also because it was perceived as humiliating: "One of Joan of Arc's final statements was a cry of outrage about the manner of execution by burning, as it signified an unclean death, and the idea of which her prosecutors were keenly aware."<sup>9</sup>

Joan's captors' conscious religious suppression and humiliation, most obvious in their decision to destroy and discard of her body in an insulting manner, constitute a moment of cultural trauma for those who recognize her as a religious visionary.<sup>10</sup> In his 2004 study, Jeffrey C. Alexander defined cultural trauma as that which "occurs when members of a collectivity feel that they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways."<sup>11</sup> As I will outline moving forward, Joan's martyrdom, and the methodical cruelty with which it was carried out, constitutes a foundational moment in the collective consciousness of those who view her as a religious, cultural, and national hero. Her physical absence (i.e., the lack of relics) is a constant reminder of that trauma and therefore demands a remedy of some sort.

Adopting Michaela DeSoucey et al.'s theory of martyrdom, this paper examines the modern era's most prevalent response to the trauma of Joan's death: cinematic adaptations of her

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<sup>8</sup> Elliot, "Seeing Double," 49.

<sup>9</sup> DeSoucey et al., "Memory and Sacrifice," 106.

<sup>10</sup> We might also frame it as one component of the prolonged trauma experienced throughout western Europe during the Hundred Year's War.

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1.



story.<sup>12</sup> I will treat filmmakers as hagiographers, figures who survive the dead saint and take an active role in shaping their public image.<sup>13</sup> In DeSoucey's words, "Through memorial and commemoration, these actors consistently realize and reprocess the body's cultural power well past the moment of death, making martyrs physically present and cognitively memorable."<sup>14</sup> This framework highlights the importance of the saint's body for sustaining their cult, making it particularly valuable for analyzing widespread devotion to figures such as Joan, who lack tangible physical remains. My thesis examines three filmmakers, Carl Dreyer, Robert Bresson, and Roberto Rossellini, all of whom use Joan's body as a powerful tool for eliciting emotional responses from their audiences. In this sense, their cinematic endeavors can be seen as an extension of the medieval hagiographic tradition, building upon the established language of miracle and martyrdom to sustain Joan's cult in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>15</sup>

The spiritual capacity of film is well attested to in Paul Schrader's acclaimed study, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer*. Placing the film in a long lineage of transcendental imagery (alongside figures of the Byzantine Christ Pantocrator and icons of the Virgin and Child), Schrader asserts,

Film has developed a transcendental style, a style which has been used by various artists in diverse cultures to express the Holy...This common form was not determined by the filmmakers' personalities, culture, politics, economics, or morality. It is instead the result of two universal contingencies: the desire to express the Transcendent in art and the nature of the film medium.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In her 1990 survey, Nadia Margolis counted 38 cinematic portrayals of Joan. This statistic is outdated at this point and requires updating but demonstrates that by the end of the twentieth century, Joan of Arc films were already abundant. See Nadia Margolis, *Joan of Arc in History, Literature, and Film: A Select, Annotated Bibliography* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> DeSoucey et al. call these figures "reputational entrepreneurs." However, for the purposes of authenticity and clarity, I will refer to them as hagiographers.

<sup>14</sup> DeSoucey et al., "Memory and Sacrifice," 100.

<sup>15</sup> For the promotional role of the hagiographer, see Dyan Elliot, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 48–49.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Schrader, *Transcendental Style in Film: Ozu, Bresson, Dreyer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018), 35.

Although not exclusively applied to religious subject matter, this transcendental style is consistently used in Joan of Arc films, particularly ones that focus on her martyrdom.<sup>17</sup> Due to this spiritual capacity, hagiographic films can function as devotional objects in and of themselves. Subsequently, when viewing Joan of Arc films through a devotional lens, striking connections emerge between the medieval and the modern eras. Indeed, as I will show, filmmakers seek to remedy the cultural trauma surrounding the loss of Joan's physical remains by transposing her body onto film by way of the actress. This process not only promotes the cult of Joan to modern audiences but also preserves and expands upon (either consciously or subconsciously) medieval notions of saintly female embodiment.

The most intuitive starting point for any discussion of the body is an examination of it in isolation. Defining medieval concepts of the body and its operations have plagued scholars for decades. Caroline Walker Bynum addresses the complexity of this issue, writing,

In a sense, of course, 'the body' is the wrong topic. It is no topic or, perhaps, almost all topics...we no longer think there is such thing as the body – a kind of 'flesh dress' we take up, or put off, or refurbish according to the latest style. Whatever our position on "antiessentialism,"... no one in the humanities seems to feel comfortable any longer with the idea of an essential 'bodiliness.'<sup>18</sup>

These issues of essentialism are complicated even further when considering bodies on film, bodies that we know to exist in the real world but which we only experience in their photographed and frequently fictionalized capacities. The medieval body of Joan of Arc is delivered to us in film through a series of modern filters: the filter of the camera, the filter of the

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<sup>17</sup> For instance, Schrader discusses in detail Ozu's highly secular "family-office" cycle. Schrader, *Transcendental Style*, 8-10.

<sup>18</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, "Why All the Fuss About the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective," *Critical Inquiry* 22, no. 1 (Autumn 1995): 2.

filmmaker, and the filter of the actress.<sup>19</sup> Is there any correspondence between this cinematic body and the body burned to ash in 1431?

In order to address this question of resonance between the original and reimagined body of Joan of Arc, I will first provide a brief contextual orientation to the three films examined in this paper: *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (d. Carl Dreyer, 1928), *Joan of Arc at the Stake* (d. Roberto Rossellini, 1954), and *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (d. Robert Bresson, 1962). Next, for the core of my analysis, I will discuss four medieval themes across the films related to Joan's body. I have organized these themes by beginning with the most interiorized (Joan's discrete bodily functions) and ending with the most exteriorized (reception of the actresses who portrayed Joan). Ultimately, I argue that these cinematic sites of physicality mark the filmmakers' hagiographic utilization of Joan's body and that this hagiographic treatment is indebted to medieval notions of the female saint's body.

## Cinematic Background

Before closely analyzing each of the three films, it is first necessary to offer some brief background information. On paper, the films share some striking similarities: all three are twentieth-century European productions directed by some of the most notable auteurs in film history. Starting with the oldest – and most influential – of the group, I will provide essential narrative and production context for each film.

*The Passion of Joan of Arc* is widely regarded as the most accomplished of the Joan of Arc films, despite its relatively early release date.<sup>20</sup> Its stylistic impact is largely attributed to the

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<sup>19</sup> The specific order of these filters is somewhat ambiguous; distinctions between the camera as agent and director as agent are difficult to pinpoint, and so they could easily be swapped.

<sup>20</sup> Notably, *The Passion* is the first Joan of Arc film to be released after her canonization in 1920. There are eleven known examples of Joan films produced before 1928, the earliest being *Jeanne d'Arc* (d. Hatot, 1898). Other notable titles include *Joan the Woman* (d. De Mille, 1916–17) and *Jeanne d'Arc* (d. Méliès, 1900). Despite this impressive body of silent era works, the majority of Joan films date to after 1928. See Margolis, *Joan of Arc in History*,

performance of Renée Falconetti, a stage actress with no other major film credits to her name. Condensing the interrogations of Joan into a single day prior to the execution, Dreyer paints an eerie portrait of the hours leading up to her death. Making frequent use of extensive and prolonged close-ups of Falconetti's face, Dreyer captures the luminosity of her eyes and the minutest details of her many facial expressions, demanding that his viewers linger on her visible pain and sorrow. The film's haunting imagery has profoundly influenced modern popular understandings of Joan. As Carina Yervasi has asserted, "it is the Dreyer close-up of Falconetti's face that is...the cornerstone of any discussion of the body of Joan of Arc."<sup>21</sup>

A notably international production, helmed by a Danish director and sponsored by the French Société Générale des Films, *The Passion* is seemingly free from the nationalistic bent that plagues many of its successors.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, the film emerged from the nineteenth-century cultural craze following Joan's rediscovery by historians, an academic wave undeniably rooted in French nationalist sentiment. In 1841, Jules Michelet produced the first major biography of Joan, titled *Jeanne d'Arc*, a work that "invented Joan of Arc for the modern era" and one in which he "announces Joan's most sanctifying traits...her honesty, generosity, and good sense. While praising her in these terms, he transferred them to the French people as collective traits."<sup>23</sup> In the early twentieth century, Joseph Delteil, a follower of Michelet, wrote the original version of *The Passion's* screenplay, which was based on his biography of Joan, also entitled *Jeanne*

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*Literature, and Film*, 393–402. For the stylistic influence of Dreyer's Joan, see Tony Pipolo, "Joan of Arc: Cinema's Immortal Maid," *Cinéaste* 25, no. 4 (2000): 20–21.

<sup>21</sup> Carina Yervasi, "The Faces of Joan: Cinematic Representations of Joan of Arc," *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* 29, no. 3–4 (1999): 12.

<sup>22</sup> Especially during World War II and the post-war era, Joan films were rife with nationalist discourse. For examples of Allied productions, see *Joan of Arc* (d. Victor Fleming, 1948), *Jeanne avec nous* (d. Claude Vermorel, 1952), *Joan of Paris* (d. Robert Stevenson, 1942), and *Joan of Ozark* (d. Joseph Santly, 1942). For a Nazi production likening Joan to Hitler, see *Das Mädchen Johanna* (d. Gustav Ucicky, 1935). For a later portrayal of Joan as Hitler, see *St. Joan* (d. Stephen Rumbelow, 1977).

<sup>23</sup> Nadia Margolis, "Trial by Passion: Philology, Film, and Ideology in the Portrayal of Joan of Arc," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 445.

*d'Arc* (1925). Nadia Margolis has claimed that Delteil's account of Joan was the most physically evocative one yet and that "Delteil's Joan makes a strong yet sensuously feminine savior, one who cleaves alternately to him and to the soil of France. Writing thus as a patriotic Pygmalion, he carries Michelet's imagery to surrealistic and erotic extremes."<sup>24</sup> Though Dreyer and Delteil butted heads, leading Dreyer to rewrite the screenplay entirely, it is necessary to acknowledge its nationalistic roots (as Dreyer did by including Delteil in the film's opening credits).<sup>25</sup>

While *The Trial of Joan of Arc* is the latest of the films examined in this paper, it bears an undeniable resemblance to *The Passion*. Stark black-and-white images, prolonged shot lengths, and meditative silence unite the two. Indeed, Bresson and Dreyer comprise two of the three directors discussed by Schrader in *Transcendental Style* precisely because of the aesthetic affinities of their work.<sup>26</sup> However, despite these similarities, Bresson claimed to despise *The Passion*, stating, "I understand that at the time this film was a small revolution, but now I only see all the actors' horrible buffooneries, terror-stricken grimaces which make me want to flee."<sup>27</sup> This statement points to a key difference between the two directors' approaches; while Dreyer seeks to evoke the audience's empathy, Bresson adamantly precludes any possibility of an empathetic response to Joan.<sup>28</sup> His Joan, portrayed by Florence Delay, is decidedly stoic, denying the viewer any trace of emotional intimacy.

Another key divergence from *The Passion* is Bresson's blatant employment of national politics in his narrative, as evidenced by his use of sound and language. Although the trial is

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<sup>24</sup> Margolis, "Trial by Passion," 465.

<sup>25</sup> See also Margolis' study of Dreyer's other academic inspiration, Anatole France, who sought to reemphasize the Middle-French manuscripts of the condemnation trial: "Such re-gallicization of the heroine may have been an attempt to return her more fully to her people." Margolis, "Trial by Passion," 454.

<sup>26</sup> While Schrader also acknowledges Rossellini as a practitioner of transcendental film, he posits that Rossellini's oeuvre is not as transcendental as the works of Dreyer, Bresson, and Ozu. Schrader, *Transcendental Style*, 41–42.

<sup>27</sup> Schrader, *Transcendental Style*, 145.

<sup>28</sup> Kevin J. Harty, "Jeanne au Cinéma," in *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Charles T. Wood (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1996), 255.

similarly condensed to the span of a couple of days before Joan's execution, Bresson provides more opportunities to sympathize with the judges. Sound technology (which was not available to directors of the silent era, like Dreyer) empowers Bresson to explore the verbal aspect of the trial more fluidly; while the judges speak French, the prison guards and the trial spectators speak English.<sup>29</sup> This linguistic decision is an anachronistic but creative liberty taken by Bresson to effectively illustrate the Anglo-French tensions frequently projected onto Joan's story in the modern era.<sup>30</sup> Bresson's English guards are almost cartoonishly villainous in their unyielding desire to see Joan burn at the stake, rendering the French judges – particularly Pierre Cauchon, who was the Bishop of Beauvais and presiding judge in the trial – benign in comparison. This treatment was registered by viewers of the film at the time of its release, such as theologian Jean Guitton, who, in a 1962 promotional interview alongside Bresson, asserted that "I think that for the first time Bishop Cauchon, in history, or at least in film history, is represented in an almost sympathetic way."<sup>31</sup> Kevin J. Harty has argued that by intentionally excluding well-known English figures, such as the Earl of Warwick, Bresson achieved a narrative free of nationalism. "The English," he writes, "are almost absent from the film."<sup>32</sup> However, I would argue that it is precisely the omission of historical figures, such as Warwick, and the creation of a new set of English villains (i.e., the prison guards) that make the film's English presence all the more notable and politically pointed.

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<sup>29</sup> Notably, English-speaking characters in the film are unnamed and uncredited. However, there is little information available about the thought process that went into this production decision.

<sup>30</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the history of Anglo-French discourse surrounding Joan, and its ties to discourse regarding her virginity, see Anke Bernau, "'Saint, Witch, Man, Maid or Whore?': Joan of Arc and Writing History" in *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, and Sarah Salih (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

<sup>31</sup> "Robert Bresson and Jean Guitton Interview After Screening of *The Trial of Joan of Arc*," interview by Radiodiffusion Télévision Française, November 1, 1962, video, 4:04, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VmJCGp27YWo>. While the original interview was conducted in French, the English translation comes from the subtitles on the video.

<sup>32</sup> Harty, *Jeanne Au Cinéma*, 256.

Produced approximately ten years before *The Trial*, *Joan of Arc at the Stake* is the most stylistically anomalous of the three films that I examine in this paper. It is in color, it is operatic, and perhaps most interestingly, it is achronological. Based on an oratorio by Paul Claudel and Arthur Honegger (*Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher*, 1938), the film stars Rossellini's wife at the time, Ingrid Bergman, and is the last film of their infamous period of collaboration before their divorce in 1957. Catholic spirituality was a recurring theme for this father of Italian cinema. Four years earlier, he had released *The Flowers of St. Francis* (1950), a life of the patron saint of Italy based on a fourteenth-century novel, *Fioretti Di San Francesco*. Furthermore, the hero of his most well-known film, *Rome Open City* (1945), is a priest who valiantly resists the Nazi occupation of Rome. Thus, turning to Joan of Arc appears to have been an inevitable next step in Rossellini's exploration of sanctity and sainthood, especially since Bergman had already played her in the post-war American blockbuster *Joan of Arc* (d. Victor Fleming, 1948).<sup>33</sup>

Irreverent and often baffling, *The Stake* disregards the structure of nearly every Joan of Arc film that came before it. The film opens with Joan tied to the stake before she is about to burn. She then slips into a visionary state, whereupon she meets a Dominican friar who guides her through a series of visions that filter her memories through a highly symbolic lens, revealing the significance of her life and work.<sup>34</sup> The judges appear to her as farm animals, the political players of the Hundred Year's War as playing cards, and France as a barrel of wine.<sup>35</sup> Though heavy-handed, this treatment has a refreshing levity and makes no pretension at accurately

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<sup>33</sup> For a more comprehensive exploration of the impact of Rossellini's spirituality on his films, see Lisabeth During, "Saints, Scandals, and the Politics of Love: Simone Weil, Ingrid Bergman, Roberto Rossellini," *SubStance* 45, no. 3 (2016): 16–32.

<sup>34</sup> Honegger's script suggests that this friar is St. Dominic himself. For this paper, I will be referring to translated script released as part of the program for Marion Cotillard's performances of the opera with the Barcelona Symphony in 2012. Arthur Honegger, *Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher*, trans. Thomas Neel (Barcelona: Medici.TV/Museec–France, 2012), 11.

<sup>35</sup> For an analysis of the symbolism of the card and wine scenes, see Robin Blaetz, "Strategies of Containment: Joan of Arc in Film" (PhD diss. New York University, 2003), 144–146.

replicating the historical events of Joan's life and death. The outlandish and flamboyant narrative and production choices reveal the hagiographer's religious and political biases. In this sense, it is, perhaps, the most transparent of our films about the active curation of the saintly image inherent to hagiographic film production.<sup>36</sup>

Whereas the Dreyer and Bresson films have received the most scholarly attention of all the Joan of Arc Films, the Rossellini has been overwhelmingly ignored.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, I believe it is productive to analyze the three films alongside each other because of a key common feature: the use of Joan's execution as their narrative focal point (as suggested by each film's title). As Robin Blaetz astutely observes, all three "[stress] the trial and passion of Joan rather than her accomplishments. [They presuppose] some knowledge of Joan as a romance war hero and [concentrate] on the less spectacular but ultimately more intriguing phases of the romance in which the hero has to justify and defend her actions."<sup>38</sup> Their collective fixation on Joan's death renders this sampling of films ideal for considering the resonances between medieval and modern treatments of Joan's body since the ultimate destruction of that body is paramount to their narratives. Thus, for the core of my analysis, I will analyze five key aspects of physicality in *The Passion*, *The Trial*, and *the Stake*.

## Seeing, Hearing, Bleeding, Crying, Vomiting, Lactating

This section is the first of four that addresses the treatment and portrayal of Joan's body in *The Passion*, *The Trial*, and *the Stake*. All three directors draw attention to Joan's body, encouraging viewers to scrutinize it and reflect on its religious potency. Though their reasons for

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<sup>36</sup> While the other two films both highlight the trial transcript as their source material at the outset, laying claim to historical authenticity, Rossellini makes no such claims of academic authority.

<sup>37</sup> The most extensive discussion I have found of *Joan of Arc at the Stake* is in Blaetz, "Strategies of Containment."

<sup>38</sup> Blaetz, "Strategies of Containment," 133. This statement refers specifically to *The Passion*, *The Stake*, and *The Trial*, as well as Otto Preminger's *Saint Joan* (1957). Blaetz's is the only other study I have found that combines these three films together for analysis.



encouraging such scrutiny may differ, the resulting effect in all three films is to confirm Joan's visionary abilities and make her body tangible for viewers who have no other option for a physical connection with the saint. My examination of Joan's cinematic body in isolation leads to a better understanding of the directors' methods for illustrating her physical sanctity.

In this section, I focus on bodily functions, specifically seeing, hearing, bleeding, crying, vomiting, and lactating. While these functions can sometimes be triggered by exterior stimuli, they are primarily physiological and spiritual processes that occur within Joan's body. Furthermore, the bodily fluids produced by these functions – for instance, blood – are granted the status of relics, even though no such relics of Joan survive. Here, it is useful to distinguish between the physiological and spiritual processes of the body, keeping in mind that medieval theologians acknowledged the interrelationship of the two and understood both to occur in the body. Take hearing, for example. Hearing is primarily a physiological process; sound waves travel through the ear canal, reach the ear drum, and are transmitted as electrical signals to our brains. However, for the medieval saint, hearing could also occur as a spiritual process in the context of a visionary experience. Though seemingly contradictory, these two orders of hearing occur within the confines of a single body as part of an elaborate mind-brain complex.

To begin, I would like to return to that “cornerstone” of Joan in cinema, Dreyer's close-up of Falconetti.<sup>39</sup> More specifically, I will closely consider Joan's gaze in these shots, the function of vision in *The Passion*, and its correspondence to medieval theories of vision. Turning to the remarkable close-ups, this framing method simultaneously restricts the viewer's perspective and opens up endless possibilities for Joan's perspective. First, it is worth noting that the decision to frequently limit the viewer's field of vision to Joan's face is a highly intentional

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<sup>39</sup> Yervasi, “Faces of Joan,” 12.

one on Dreyer's part. Unlike in Bresson's *Trial*, Dreyer's camera utilizes its panoramic abilities, frequently panning, trucking, and zooming to offer viewers a comprehensive picture of the trial hall and the numerous judges' reactions to Joan's responses. That we are offered no such flexibility of perspective when watching Joan speaks to the importance that Dreyer placed on Joan's gaze. In so doing, he forces the viewer to consider the inner workings of Joan's mind for prolonged periods of time without sufficient information to draw any conclusions about what she sees.

Take, for example, an early sequence in which Joan is interrogated. The shot-reverse-shot structure corresponding to Cauchon's questions and Joan's answers places the audience in the perspective of the interrogator; whenever Joan answers, we are encouraged to discern her face for any signs of dishonesty or guilt. However, Joan's sightlines and expressions do not allow for discernment; her eyes shift upwards and downwards, often fixating on something in the distance that remains inaccessible to the audience. While our vision is limited to the confines of the on-screen space, Joan's vision is limitless, gazing outwards into spaces we cannot pinpoint (Figure 1). This dynamic underlines Joan's visionary status in contrast to the restricted, earthly perspective of the audience (and the judges). Vision thus plays a key physical and spiritual function in the film to which only Joan has privileged access.

In his production of *The Passion*, Dreyer aimed for an engagement with the Middle Ages that went beyond the superficial. Specifically, he wanted to find a way to replicate and deliver to his audience the spiritual psyche of the fifteenth century. For the French general release of the film in 1929, he released a statement entitled "Realized Mysticism in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*," which reads,

Even beforehand, I was aware that this project made specific demands. Handling the theme on the level of a costume film would probably have permitted a portrayal of the

cultural epoch of the fifteenth century, but would have merely resulted in a comparison with other epochs. What counted was absorbing the spectator in the past; the means were multifarious and new.<sup>40</sup>

Dreyer's meticulous replication of medieval notions of the visionary can be understood as one of these "multifarious and new" techniques for achieving historical absorption. The distance Dreyer places between what the audience is able to see and what Joan (inexplicably) sees is in keeping with medieval theories of intellectual vision. According to Augustine's tripartite model of vision, intellectual seeing represented the highest level of vision because it "employ[s] neither the eyes of the body nor the eyes of the soul" as opposed to the lesser forms of corporeal and spiritual vision.<sup>41</sup> Intellectual vision could only be granted by God and thus was a concrete marker of a visionary's sanctity. The infinite possibilities of Joan's vision in *The Passion* reflect the inaccessibility, superiority, and validity of her visionary capacity. The audience, who sees only with corporeal eyes, cannot even begin to grasp what Joan sees intellectually. *The Passion's* celebrated close-ups are not merely a triumph of evocative *mise en scène* but a striking authentication of Joan's visionary experience through medieval means.

Seeing, however, marks only one of the two key sensory components of Joan's visionary experience, hearing being the other. In the trial transcripts, the auditory components of Joan's visions, her signature "voices" (which she insisted belonged to St. Michael, St. Catherine, and St. Margaret), took center stage and were subject to intense scrutiny on the part of the judges.<sup>42</sup> Anita Obermeier and Rebecca Kennison have asserted that the primarily auditory nature of Joan's visions resulted in her condemnation and execution. As they argue, Joan's judges

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<sup>40</sup> An English translation of the essay was republished in Carl Theodor Dreyer, *Dreyer in Double Reflection: Translation of Carl Th. Dreyer's Writings About the Film (Om Filmen)*, ed. and trans., Donald Skoller (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), 47–50.

<sup>41</sup> Anita Obermeier and Rebecca Kennison, "The Privileging of Visio Over Vox in the Mystical Experiences of Hildegard of Bingen and Joan of Arc," *Mystics Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (September 1997): 141.

<sup>42</sup> For the first instance in the trial where Joan identifies the voices as St. Margaret and St. Catherine, see Hobbins, *The Trial*, 64–65.

perceived her voices as a testimonial weakness compared to the visual experiences of other mystics due to the theological framework of fifteenth-century inquisitional culture. They write,

For the vision-oriented mystic, the process of relaying the mystical message is more difficult, as she has to translate the visionary tableau into text, whereas a voice-oriented mystic needs only to repeat the words, which requires less participation on the mystic's part. We suggest, therefore, that a vision is simultaneously a greater and more indirect claim to authorship and authentication, while a voice is a lesser but more direct claim.<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps this evidentiary weakness is why filmmakers rarely reveal Joan's voices. Of the three films examined in this paper, only Rossellini's *Joan of Arc at the Stake* seeks to authenticate the voices by making them audible to viewers.<sup>44</sup> In the film, the voices manifest as sopranos singing off-screen (presumably from the heights of the firmament). These female voices correspond with Joan's assertion that the voices belonged to St. Margaret and St. Catherine, thereby authenticating her testimony and status as a visionary saint.<sup>45</sup> Notably, however, the operatic voices do not perfectly align with Joan's description of the voices during the trial, where she states that

They spoke exceedingly well and beautifully, and she understood them perfectly. Asked how they spoke, if they have no other body parts, she answered: "I leave that to God." She says further that the voice is lovely, pleasant, low, and speaks in French.<sup>46</sup>

The trial document points to the discrepancy in sonic quality between Joan's account of the "low" voices she hears and the higher register of singing heard in the film. Nevertheless, the film carefully replicates one key historical fact about the voices – namely, that Joan's voices were

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<sup>43</sup> Obermeier and Kennison, "Visio Over Vox," 138.

<sup>44</sup> If I were to expand this study to a broader set of Joan films, I suspect that this proportion would become even smaller. Interestingly, in *the Stake*, we also hear a demonic voice from hell, identified as "Yblis" by the friar. Honneger, *au bûcher*, 43.

<sup>45</sup> In Honneger's script, these singing parts are also designated as St. Catherine and St. Margaret. Honneger, *au bûcher*, 50.

<sup>46</sup> Hobbins, *The Trial*, 73–74. The issue of differing language is somewhat unavoidable, given that the performance was filmed in Italian, but it is interesting that Joan specifies pitch (or perhaps volume) as "low," while Rossellini and Honneger assign the part to a soprano.

audible to her but not to the clergy members who judged her. In a pointed moment, the first time that the voices encourage Joan to return to earth, the friar looks at Joan and asks, “Who are you talking to?” Confused that he is unable to hear the voices, as she and the audience can, Joan responds, “Are you deaf? Don’t you hear the voices saying ‘Joan! Joan! Joan! Daughter of God! Go! Go! Go!’” This scene marks the pinnacle of Joan’s spiritual journey in the film, just before she decides to return to the physical world and face her execution. It signifies a reaffirmation of her sanctity, which she initially doubts in the wake of the judges’ accusations, and which is reinforced by the friar’s inability to hear the saintly voices. Just as vision is positioned as a privileged ability in Dreyer, an auditory spiritual experience is privileged in Rossellini. However, unlike Dreyer, who conveys this privilege by excluding the viewer, Rossellini makes this privilege evident by including the viewer and excluding the Dominican friar.

Sensory experiences, specifically those entailed in her visionary experiences, receive significant attention from filmmakers such as Dreyer and Rossellini, who seek to authenticate Joan’s sanctity as it undergoes judicial scrutiny. But what of her other bodily functions? The films also showcase numerous instances of bodily fluids and their attendant physiological processes that hold historical significance imbued with hagiographic meaning. Therefore, I will now examine the appearance of four bodily fluids – vomit, tears, blood, and breastmilk – and consider how they effectively function as relics of Joan of Arc transposed onto film.

Before addressing these fluids’ significance as relics, it is important to first consider the heavily gendered aspects of bodily fluids within medieval conceptions of the human body, particularly in religious practice. As Ann Matter writes, “From Aristotle on, it was a premise of philosophy as much as of medical theory that women were by nature cold and wet, as opposed to

the hot, dry character of men.”<sup>47</sup> This permeability to fluids is precisely what predisposed women to ecstatic religious experiences, but, as later medieval theologians would assert, also what predisposed them to demonic possession.<sup>48</sup> When directors portray Joan as leaky with bodily fluids, as Dreyer most certainly does and Bresson does to a lesser extent, it is a direct commentary on Joan’s gender and a method of authenticating her spiritual authority.

Keeping these gender dynamics in mind, I will now discuss the appearances of bodily fluids in the Joan of Arc films. The first of these is the relatively brief treatment in *The Trial* of Joan’s last-minute illness as food poisoning an episode that culminates with her vomiting (off-camera) and resorting to bed rest.<sup>49</sup> Though the offending fish stew is displayed prominently, Joan’s face is quite notably omitted from the sequence in which she reveals her sickness to the doctor; as Joan speaks, the camera remains fixed on the doctor, guard, and Cauchon, such that we can only hear her voice. This visual emphasis on the external forces that inflict harm (both the fish soup itself and the men who imprison her), rather than on Joan’s injured body, is in keeping with Bresson’s general focus on the exterior of the saintly body, as will be explored further in later sections of this paper.

More than any other Joan of Arc film, *The Passion* fixates on bodily fluids, most frequently tears, but also blood and breastmilk. The aforementioned close-ups achieve some of their most emotionally impactful moments when Joan cries (Figure 2). The crying motif is repeated in the execution scene, where several female onlookers openly weep in response to Joan’s tears as she is guided toward and tied to the stake. The empathetic connection established

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<sup>47</sup> E. Ann Matter, “Theories of the Passions and the Ecstasies of Late Medieval Women,” *Essays in Medieval Studies* 18 (2001): 3.

<sup>48</sup> Matter, “Theories of the Passions,” 5.

<sup>49</sup> This contrasts with Dreyer’s portrayal of the illness, which he treats as a fainting spell. For a historical account of Joan’s illness, see Hobbins, *The Trial*, 152, 166-167.

between the passionate Joan and the spectators highlights the spiritually evocative power of tears. According to Elina Gertsman, a similar emotional connection can be observed in late medieval depictions of weeping Christ:

In inviting people to cry along with him, the sculpted Christ offered an early exemplar for emotive devotion, which found expression in late medieval images that participated in complex networks of affectivity, establishing a dialogic relationship with pious exercises.<sup>50</sup>

By portraying the affectivity of Joan's tears, Dreyer simultaneously reinforces Joan's resemblance to Christ and reaffirms her sanctity. Such affective tears were a marker of spiritual union with God that became increasingly important for holy women in the later Middle Ages and imbued them with social power.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Dreyer demonstrates the social power of these sacred tears in the film's closing scene, during which a public riot breaks out in response to Joan's execution. The emotional outpouring that begins in response to Joan's tears culminates in a moment of cathartic political action against her executors. Just as sacred tears carried immense social power in the late medieval world, for Dreyer, they catalyze vehement widespread anger in the moments after her physical loss.

Shifting our attention to blood, one of the film's most graphic scenes is when Joan is bled by a doctor after she falls faint in response to her captors threatening her with torture. A single shot of the knife pressing into the crook of Joan's elbow and the impressive stream of blood that flies into a pan is emblematic of Dreyer's tendency to embrace the elements of body horror inherent to Joan's story (as will be discussed later regarding his execution scene). The methodical restriction of Joan's arm with a bandage to encourage the flow of blood evokes

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<sup>50</sup> Elina Gertsman, ed., *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History* (New York & London: Routledge, 2012), xiv.

<sup>51</sup> Kimberley-Joy Knight, "Si Puose calcina a' propi occhi: The Importance of the Gift of Tears for Fourteenth-Century Religious Women and Their Hagiographers," in *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History*, ed. Elina Gertsman (New York & London: Routledge, 2012), 139–140.

visceral discomfort and immediately calls to mind the other restrictions enacted on Joan's body, such as her imprisonment (Figure 3).

Finally, during the execution scene, a close-up of a baby breastfeeding is intercut with shots of Joan as she slowly suffocates in the smoke. Joan gasps, and the baby looks up in recognition, only to return to feeding. Nadia Margolis notes that this detail is directly tied to the narrative of breastmilk as a "lifegiving force" in Joseph Delteil's "Hymn to Milk" from his biography *Jeanne d'Arc*.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, this insertion is one of the rare vestiges of Delteil's original influence over the film, his obsession with breasts and milk sneaking into Dreyer's narrative at its climactic moment. While Delteil's screenplay reads, "le lait de toute la Normandie irradie dans l'atmosphère, en larges taches blanchâtres," Dreyer's makes no mention of the breastfeeding child anywhere.<sup>53</sup> Margolis also observes that "these lactation allusions reinforce Joan's connection with St. Catherine...since milk – not blood – gushed forth from her body, according to accounts of her beheading."<sup>54</sup>

It is important to note that all three types of bodily fluids in *The Passion* (tears, blood, and breastmilk) are frequently associated with relics of Christ and the Virgin Mary.<sup>55</sup> Many have

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<sup>52</sup> Margolis, "Trial by Passion," 471. For an excerpt of the "Hymn to Milk," see Joseph Delteil, *Joan of Arc*, trans. Malcom Cowley (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1926), 11: "Oh Milk which pourest forth thy bounty even into the manna and the meadow, mild, magnificent, omnipresent Milk, navel of matter, heart of the body, essential formula and summary of physics."

<sup>53</sup> Rough translation: "The milk from all over Normandy radiates into the atmosphere in large whitish spots." This surreal excerpt is somewhat difficult to interpret, but is emblematic of Delteil's treatment of milk as a nourishing fluid inextricably tied to notions of the motherland. Margolis, "Trial by Passion," 471. The only mention of milk in Dreyer's screenplay during the execution scene is as follows: "An old woman approaches, hands Joan a cup of milk, weeps and kneels." Carl Theodor Dreyer, "La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc" trans. Oliver Stallybrass, in *Four Screenplays* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1970), 70.

<sup>54</sup> Margolis, "Trial by Passion," 471. For another medieval association between Joan and milk, see stanza twenty-four of Christine de Pisan's *Dittié de Jehanne d'Arc*, in which Joan "feeds France with the sweet, nourishing milk of peace." Translation from Barstow, "Female Mysticism," 40.

<sup>55</sup> Gertsman cites a tear relic formerly housed at the Trinity Abbey in Vendôme (and now lost) as a rare primary relic of Christ in the Middle Ages. Gertsman, *Crying in the Middle Ages*, xi. Medieval blood relics of Christ include the Westminster Blood Relic, promoted by Henry III of England, and the Relic of the Precious Blood, housed in the Basilica of the Holy Blood in Bruges.



commented on the film's well-documented and unsubtle projection of Christ onto Joan.<sup>56</sup>

Bloodletting, in particular, has Christological associations. For example, Margolis compares the blood-letting pan in this scene to the one in Bosch's *Christ Before Pontius Pilate*.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, Leanne Groeneveld cites numerous medieval comparisons between the Passion of Christ and phlebotomy.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, Bynum argues that the veneration of blood relics of Christ was a form of blood piety in medieval Europe that was distinct from, but parallel to, the Eucharistic tradition.<sup>59</sup> When directors spill Joan's bodily fluids, especially blood, before us on film, a resonance between the relics of Christ and the would-be relics of Joan is established. In this regard, Dreyer adheres closely to the medieval hagiographic convention of portraying saints as analogs of Christ. As Karen Winstead summarizes,

Imitation was the cornerstone of the principal medieval genre of biography, the form of religious biography known as hagiography. Christian martyrs imitated Jesus Christ by professing his message and dying for it; non-martyred saints, or confessors, likewise imitated him by professing... that message, but also imitated Christ's suffering by enduring illness and practicing asceticism.<sup>60</sup>

Therefore, Dreyer utilizes Joan's bodily fluids as symbolic resonances of Christ, which is a primary aspect of his attempt at historical absorption. Furthermore, the bodily fluids are essential vehicles for conveying the hagiographic tradition's influence over Dreyer's cinematic treatment of Joan.

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<sup>56</sup> For the Christological metaphors in Dreyer, see Yervasi, "Faces of Joan," 13; Harty, *Jean Au Cinéma*, 244–45; and Margolis, "Trial by Passion," 469.

<sup>57</sup> Margolis, "Trial by Passion," 478.

<sup>58</sup> Leanne Groeneveld, "Letting or Leaking Blood? Christ's Wounded Masculinity," *Tessera* 33 (Winter 2003): 146–148. Groeneveld gives three examples of medieval comparisons between the passion and phlebotomy, namely a sermon by Martin of Troppau (c. 1215–1278), "On Envy" in the *Fasciculus Morum* (c. 1300), and another sermon delivered in 1273 by Ranulphe de la Houlbonnière.

<sup>59</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages," *Church History* 71, no. 4 (December 2002): 688.

<sup>60</sup> Karen Winstead, *Volume 1: The Middle Ages, The Oxford History of Life-Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 3. For the Christ imitation motif in medieval theatrical traditions, see Marla Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain: Medieval and Post-Modern Martyrs, Mystics, and Artists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 42.

When Dreyer likens Joan to Christ, just as hagiographers have done to saints since the Middle Ages, he encourages viewers to scrutinize her body. Specifically, he encourages us to look upon the body reverently, as a sanctified entity with access to the divine. This reverent scrutiny contravenes the malicious scrutiny of Joan's judges and executors, who seek to obliterate the body and, in doing so, quell her religious following. How does the gaze operate in the three films, and what purpose does it serve? Moving away from *The Passion*, I will now examine instances in *The Trial* and *The Stake* where Rossellini and Bresson more explicitly address the issues of scrutiny, surveillance, captivity, and freedom regarding Joan's body.

### The Body in Space

Having examined the cinematic body of Joan in its isolated form, internal functions, and qualities, I would like to shift focus to how it operates within an environment. Location – physical, geographic, and cultural – has always played an essential role in the popular narratives of Joan. The pervasive Joan-as-France metaphor, for example, featured in discussions about the saint even before her execution took place.<sup>61</sup> Issues of political space and identity, specifically what constituted French and English territory, were certainly of primary concern to Joan herself:

Asked whether God hates the English, she said she knows nothing about the love or hate that God has for the English nor what he will do with their souls; but she knows for certain they will be driven from France, except those who stay and die, and that God will grant the French victory over the English.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, it is no surprise that Anglo-French discourse is embedded into many popular portrayals of Joan, both historically and in the modern era. Along the line of this Anglo-French tension also lies a tension between liberation and captivity; Joan's body in captivity is a body

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<sup>61</sup> Daisy Delogu, *Allegorical Bodies: Power and Gender in Late Medieval France* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 167–178.

<sup>62</sup> Hobbins, *The Trial*, 110.

under the power of the English, while her liberated body is a body that fights for the liberation of France. As her captors, the English are empowered to scrutinize and degrade Joan's body, attacking her bodily integrity and, by extension, her sanctity. How hagiographers navigate this dynamic on film can reveal a great deal about which aspect of Joan's story they find compelling. As I will show, Bresson's narrative is intensely focused on Joan's captivity, revealing a deep preoccupation with her political persecution as a form of martyrdom. Alternatively, Rossellini's narrative displays a strikingly raw religiosity in its fixation on spiritual liberation through visionary experience.<sup>63</sup>

A notable throughline in *The Trial* is the film's examination of Joan's body during her confinement by her captors. Accordingly, Bresson pays close attention to her body not in isolation but within the context of space. One sequence illustrates this fascination particularly clearly; in the scene, the judges decide to move their questioning from the public hall to Joan's cell.<sup>64</sup> No establishing shots are provided at the beginning of the scene to provide a sense of what little open space might exist within the cell. Instead, Bresson defaults to the simple shot-reverse-shot structure used in the previous questioning scenes, alternating between mid-shots of Joan and the Judges corresponding to questions and answers. Compared with the previous questioning scenes in the hall, which frequently utilize establishing shots of Joan walking into the space, this technique minimizes the size of the prison cell, restricting the viewer's perspective to the space directly surrounding the bodies of Joan and the judges.

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<sup>63</sup> Despite this, there are definite nationalistic streaks to *The Stake*, seemingly inherited from Honneger's original opera script. See, for example, the opening song where the chorus chants, "And all of France was without form and void... Lord save us from the lion's jaws and the power of the unicorns." Honneger, *au bûcher*, 19.

<sup>64</sup> In the actual trial, this shift to interrogation sessions in the prison cell occurred on Saturday, March 10, roughly two months into the trial process. See Hobbins, *The Trial*, 86.

Furthermore, unbeknownst to Joan, Cauchon and an English guard spy on her through a hole in one of the walls. This scene is emblematic of Harty's observation that "Bresson's technique is almost voyeuristic; the film displays a fascination with doorways and peepholes."<sup>65</sup> Point-of-view shots looking into the cell through the wall reveal Cauchon's perspective: Joan sits with her back turned to us, her body perfectly framed by the organic outline of the stones (Figure 4). This framing reduces nearly all of the shot to negative space, enclosing Joan visually even further, and represents the judges' myopic obsession with her body. Our perspective is eventually reversed, such that we see Cauchon's eye peering in from the outside. The shift from a long shot of Joan's entire body to an extreme close-up of the eye positions Joan as the object of Cauchon's gaze, illustrating the power dynamics exercised through surveillance (Figure 5). All the while, Cauchon and the guard whisper to one another about what they hear. When the matter of Joan's virginity arises, the guard sneers, "It's grotesque. She's lived with soldiers and slept in the straw with them and she's still a virgin?"

Throughout history, Joan's gender and sexuality have been the most closely scrutinized of all the aspects of her physicality, beginning during the trial itself. Joan's judges repeatedly called into question the authenticity of her claimed virginity.<sup>66</sup> Although the scrutiny of Joan's virginity was theologically justified – her credibility as a visionary saint largely rested on her virginal status – there is also an element of sexual predation in this thread of the trial.<sup>67</sup> Scholars have long speculated that Joan was the victim of sexual harassment by her captors; her vehement statement that she "prefers to do penance once and for all by dying, rather than endure the

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<sup>65</sup> Harty, *Jeanne Au Cinéma*, 255.

<sup>66</sup> The principle evidence levied against Joan in this regard was a prior legal dispute with a local man who claimed to have been engaged to Joan. See Hobbins, *The Trial*, 91–92.

<sup>67</sup> In regard to the theological and rhetorical necessity of interrogating Joan's virginity, see Bernau, "Saint, Witch, Man, Maid or Whore?," 217. Bernau writes, "The truth of her body is connected to other truth claims in a number of significant ways."

torment of prison any longer” has been interpreted by some a reference to possible incidents of gang rape.<sup>68</sup> Though this argument is highly conjectural, it has gained enough traction over time to make its way into films like Bresson’s, where Joan herself alludes to an attempted rape (as discussed below).

Despite the ways in which her virginity (or alleged lack thereof) was weaponized against her as a tool to discredit her visionary capacity, it remained a central aspect of Joan’s self-identification and a label that she wore with undeniable pride. Examining Joan’s famous self-stylization, *La Pucelle* (the virgin), Maud Burnett McNerny asserts, “By choosing this particular epithet as her title, Joan claims an identity that is both founded on bodily integrity and linked to hagiography, an identity that would be fetishized by her supporters and detractors alike.”<sup>69</sup> We can thus understand the judges’ attacks on Joan’s virginity as attempts to undermine the bodily integrity that she had established for herself through rhetorical means as well as the characteristics that demarcated her as saintly.

*The Trial* seeks to vividly recreate the judges’ obsession with Joan’s virginity. Their hyper-fixation on her body, illustrated by Cauchon’s eye peering through the hole in the wall, takes on a sexual undertone. The aforementioned English guard is frequently used to illustrate this phenomenon; his leering commentary is the device through which Bresson indicates the significance of Joan’s virginity. In a disturbing exchange with Cauchon, he offers the unsettling threat, “If it’s virginity that gives her strength, we’ll make her lose her virginity.” Commenting on an earlier off-camera examination of Joan conducted by noblewomen that confirmed her virginity, Cauchon responds, “That’s what gives her strength.” Virginity, an essential aspect of

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<sup>68</sup> Hobbins, *The Trial*, 197–198 and Anne Llewellyn Barstow, “Joan of Arc and Female Mysticism,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 1, no. 2 (1985): 42.

<sup>69</sup> Maud Burnett McNerny, *Eloquent Virgins From Thecla to Joan of Arc* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 198.

Joan's physical existence and a great source of frustration for her captors, is revealed largely through dialogue, likely because such an abstract concept is difficult to illustrate visually.

Nonetheless, Bresson recognizes virginity's significance and verbally reminds the viewer of it repeatedly. In light of the Englishman's threats, the film's implication of an attempted rape the night before her execution is readable as an attempt to destroy Joan's fortitude and bodily integrity through sexual humiliation.

While Bresson is concerned with the captivity of Joan's body and the physical limitations imposed on it, Rossellini is concerned with its liberation through spiritual means. This is evident in the film's primary setting, which is in and of itself free of physical constraints. The majority of the film takes place in an abstract, void-like space where Joan experiences her visions.<sup>70</sup> We are introduced to this space at the film's outset, as a rotating spiral of angels sing to introduce Joan (Figure 6).<sup>71</sup> The spiral presumably exists at the upper level of a spiritual void; an overhead shot reveals Joan burning at the stake at its very center, beneath the angels, before she begins to float upwards (Figure 7). Shadowy and immersed in mist, it is difficult to distinguish whether these angels are statues or actors, heightening a sense of spiritual uncanniness. By opening the film this way, Rossellini establishes his hagiographic narrative as concerned with Joan's spiritual journey above all else and encourages the viewer to keep in mind the heavenly realm of angels throughout the remainder of the film.

Because the body of Joan that Rossellini portrays is not intended as her literal physical body but rather a spiritual image of her body that exists in a visionary space, it remains

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<sup>70</sup> There is evidence to suggest that Rossellini was very concerned with creating an immersive sense of this space for his viewers. An article published in *Variety* indicates that the director wanted to film the performance in CinemaScope, a lens technology designed to produce a longer aspect ratio that could be projected onto a long, curved screen, enveloping the audience. "Rossellini Won't Use C'Scope on his 'Joan,'" *Variety*, March 1954, 13.

<sup>71</sup> In Honegger's opera script, these figures are labeled only as "chorus." whether or not Rossellini intends them to be angels, saints, or both, is unclear, in part because of the visual murkiness of the scene.

unconstrained by her earthly captors. Rossellini's Joan wanders through the visionary void, exuberantly throws her hands into the air, and even smiles. Compared with Bresson's taciturn Joan, who is starkly contained in her movement and often literally restrained by shackles, Rossellini's spiritual Joan appears undeniably liberated.<sup>72</sup>

In light of Rossellini's overwhelmingly positive treatment of spiritual liberation, I will now consider portrayals of Joan's death – a process of separation of the spirit and the body. Martyrdom poses complex questions regarding our understanding of the body in that it is bittersweet; the saint's now-manifest holiness counterbalances the horrors of their violent death. In Joan's case, where the body was annihilated in an act of conscious religious deprivation, hagiographers must navigate this bittersweet tension carefully, such that the sanctity of the body, the injustice of its destruction, and the ultimate spiritual liberation are all acknowledged. As I will observe in the next section, the three directors balance these aspects to varying degrees, resulting in slight shifts in the narrative.

## Execution Scenes

As previously discussed, *The Passion*, *The Trial*, and *the Stake* are united by their thematic focus on Joan's death. I have already touched on some aspects of these scenes: the utilization of bodily functions and their eroticized treatments. Therefore, in this section, I will now focus on the death process itself because each film's method for portraying this essential moment is starkly different. From destruction to disappearance to apotheosis, these contrasting portrayals of death nevertheless all convey the cultural significance of this pivotal moment.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Even Joan's awkward, penguin-like scuffle towards the stake in Bresson's *The Trial*, which I argue is the most liberated movement in the next section, is notably more restrained than the movement in Rossellini.

<sup>73</sup> I am grateful to Professor Delogu for suggesting to me the evocative turn of phrase, "destruction, disappearance, and apotheosis."

Dreyer's execution scene is notable for its grotesque treatment of Joan's death. Her death is a forgone conclusion of the film, made evident simply through its title, which quite explicitly references the crucifixion of Christ. Indeed, throughout the film, the shadow of death looms large over Joan's person. In a prime example of foreshadowing, early in the film, a fly crawling across Joan's forehead anticipates a worm that crawls out of the eye socket of a skull in a much later shot, a gory sneak peek at the horror which is to come.<sup>74</sup>

Once the moment of death arrives, Dreyer offers us an unabashedly graphic version of the scene. From the first sickening inhalation of smoke, Joan quivers and cries, and we anticipate the destruction of her body as her nostrils flare to inhale more. When she suddenly jolts, her eyes widening and her neck twisting backward unnaturally, it is clear that the flames have reached her feet, and her flesh is beginning to burn. Throughout the process of the burning, we can see the outline of Joan's corpse as the flames increasingly disfigure it, her charred silhouette gradually slumping forward (Figure 8). This shot strikes a balance between visual clarity and obscurity; knowing that the flames have consumed her, we are left to imagine the details of blistering and disfigurement. These painful visuals simulate the performative horror of Joan's public execution, intended as messaging to the onlooking population. Here, trauma is expressed through the inclusion of graphic imagery; Dreyer seeks to inflict some version of the visual trauma that would have been experienced by those who watched Joan burn in the fifteenth century (in keeping with his stated ethics of historical absorption).<sup>75</sup>

Of course, no film will ever be able to perfectly replicate the horrors of a public burning, with the exception (perhaps) of documentary footage.<sup>76</sup> Joan's execution, in particular, entailed

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<sup>74</sup> Similar to a medieval memento mori.

<sup>75</sup> Pipolo notes that some of the film's most graphic images were in fact omitted after demands from the Catholic Church to censor it and are lost to us today. Pipolo, "Immortal Maid," 20–21.

<sup>76</sup> For an example of documentary footage of death by burning, see *Praying With One Heart* (d. Lo Pham, 2008).



horrors that no filmmaker has dared to represent, chief among them the judges' decision to display her burnt corpse midway through the execution in order to ascertain her gender.<sup>77</sup> As François Meltzer writes, "With Joan's genitalia facing the crowd, what was in fact displayed was that she was not a man. This was only the last of a series of violations, but it was certainly one of the most heinous."<sup>78</sup> The sexual violence of this moment is almost unfathomable, especially coupled with the mind-numbing body horror, and its omission suggests that there are limits to Dreyer's ethic of historical absorption. Impossible to convey cinematically perfectly, it is no surprise that subsequent filmmakers have taken a notably more abstract approach to portraying the violence and trauma of the execution than Dreyer.

In *The Trial*, the emphasis on the loss of her physical body, as well as any potential non-corporeal relics, indicates Bresson's recognition of the execution as both a site of cultural trauma and the site of Joan's liberation from captivity. Before she is escorted out of her cell, Joan concludes that she will arrive in Paradise that night "With God's help." Her shackles are subsequently clipped so that she can walk free to the stake. In a later sequence, a close-up of Joan's bare feet scurrying forward as she approaches the stake contrasts with the numerous close-ups of her shackled feet in prior scenes, suggesting that, paradoxically, Joan's procession toward her execution is the most liberated movement in the film. At the same time, this scene vividly depicts the execution's obliteration of any of Joan's possible physical remains. A haunting final shot of Joan, framed centrally as she calls out "Jesus!" is the last glimpse we are given of her body before the entire shot is obscured by thick smoke. The rest of the scene is

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<sup>77</sup> A first-hand account of this aspect of the execution, recorded in a Parisian journal reads as follows: "The fire was raked back and her naked body shown to all the people and all the secrets that could or should belong to a woman, to take any doubts away from the people's minds." Anonymous, *A Parisian Journal 1405-1449*, trans. Janet Shirley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 263.

<sup>78</sup> François Meltzer, *For Fear of the Fire: Joan of Arc and the Limits of Subjectivity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 200.

comprised of a crucifix, held up to the sky by a priest, surrounded by billowing clouds of smoke. When the air clears, the stake is completely bare, except for the chains that had held Joan in place. The scene thus presents a clever vanishing act, with Joan's body present one minute and completely gone the next; the finality and totality of her physical destruction are starkly evident (Figures 9 and 10).

Beyond the body itself, Bresson also takes care to emphasize the destruction of Joan's potential relics. At the outset of the film, a written prologue summarizes the life and death of the saint. It reads in part, "Joan of Arc died on May 30, 1431. She has no tomb, and we have no portrait of her." This brief note signals the cultural loss at the heart of Bresson's conflict – the ongoing absence of Joan through her lost body and image – and suggests that the portrayal of Joan on film may act as a solution to this trauma. The following statement, which seeks to lend the film credibility through the use of historical source material, "We have something better than a portrait: her words to her judges at Rouen," implies that her lost likeness is much easier to remedy than her lost body (whereas the missing portrait is addressed here, the missing tomb is not). Later, after Joan leaves her cell to be executed, the English priest storms in and declares, "I don't want a single hair to be left, not one." Two assistants then clear the room of her personal belongings, which we later see dumped on the pyre in order to burn with Joan. The vehemence with which the priest calls for the destruction of any potential relics serves as an acknowledgment that Joan's physical presence, through surviving belongings and body parts, has enough cultural power to threaten English occupation.

In many regards, Rossellini's *Joan of Arc at the Stake* functions as a single, prolonged execution scene. The film is conceived as a series of visions that Joan experiences while burning and follows a (disorienting) achronological structure. This framework results in a narrative

where the corporeal process of death is revealed in primarily incorporeal spaces (as discussed in “The Body in Space”). With this expansive treatment of death in mind, I would like to focus on the final moments of the film, during which Joan exits her visionary state and awakens as she is about to be burned, as its discreet “execution scene.”<sup>79</sup> In keeping with the rest of the film, this scene is notable for its emphasis on the spiritual element of the execution rather than the destruction of Joan’s corpse. Specifically, Rossellini treats Joan’s death as a moment of apotheosis, in which she is liberated from her physical body.

First, it is worth noting that Joan exits the visionary space consciously, willingly, and even enthusiastically. At the behest of her voices, who demand that she “Go! Go! Go!,” she throws her hands into the air, ecstatically cries, “It will be me who will be burned as a gracious candle!” and walks directly into the hands of her captors (presumably in the physical world once more.) Once tied to the stake, the voice continues to call out to her encouragingly, “Joan, you are not alone!” even as Joan screams in terror, “I don’t want to die!” This externalization of the torment occurring in Joan’s mind shifts our focus as viewers away from the bodily dread of the moment and towards its spiritual significance. When a judge approaches Joan and informs her that signing the recantation statement will free her from her chains, she indignantly responds, “It’s the truth that ties my hands and prevents me to sign!” In this scene, physical captivity (emphasized by the literal chains) aligns with Joan’s spiritual resolution, and it is clear that the chains will only be broken through spiritual means. Even as she burns, she complains that the chains have not been broken. Then, in the most visually striking moment of the film, she throws her hands into the air again and cries, “I’m breaking them! I broke them!,” as her body becomes

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<sup>79</sup> Whether or not this execution is, in fact, just another vision, is up for debate. Given that we already saw Joan burning at the start of the film and that this end sequence appears to move backwards in time, the chronology is rather murky.

translucent and begins to ascend towards the spiritual void (Figure 11).<sup>80</sup> Finally, at the zenith of her apotheosis, she is subsumed by the spiral of angels and appears as a glistening star at its center.

Thus, Rossellini's portrayal of Joan's execution pointedly ignores the body horror of the moment, reframing her death as a positive moment of spiritual liberation and victory. This approach echoes a tried-and-true narrative that is frequently projected onto an excerpt of the trial transcript from March 14:

The voices say to her, 'Take it all in good part; have no thought for your martyrdom; at the last, you will come to the kingdom of heaven.'.... She says 'martyrdom' because of the pain and trials she suffers in prison. She does not know if she will suffer great pain, but leaves this to God.<sup>81</sup>

McInerney best summarizes the common interpretation of this passage:

The words of Joan's voices lend themselves to an obvious interpretation: They promise her deliverance, not from the prison of the English at Rouen...but from the prison of flesh, through death.<sup>82</sup>

Though it is unclear whether this interpretation aligns with Joan's intentions in making the original statement, it has proven undeniably compelling in the centuries after her death as divine foreshadowing. By emphasizing this narrative of her bodily liberation, Rossellini seeks to replicate the medieval Christian ideal of an ecstatic, apothotic martyrdom, with its disavowal corporeal life, and retrospectively applies it to Joan's own words from the transcript. The specific mode for representing Joan's soul in this scene – a translucent image of the actress soaring upwards in the frame – does not necessarily adhere to medieval depictions of the soul departing the body. Moshe Barasch has observed that throughout the Middle Ages, there was no consistent

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<sup>80</sup> This moment has definite orgasmic connotations. For more on the eroticization of Joan of Arc in film, see Blaetz, *Strategies of Containment*.

<sup>81</sup> Hobbins, *The Trial*, 102

<sup>82</sup> McInerney, *Eloquent Virgins*, 208. This messaging is also alluded to in Bresson, though less explicitly.

method of depicting the soul, and furthermore, that souls were portrayed rather generically rather than in resemblance of the bodies that they departed from.<sup>83</sup> However, the scene does replicate a particularly medieval conception of the moment of death, as explained by Barasch:

The medieval mental picture of the departing soul tries to capture, on the level of the visual imagination, the moment of dying. In doing so, it does not concentrate on the body, that has now become a mere corpse, but on the pneumatic component of man, his soul.<sup>84</sup>

Accordingly, Rossellini's depiction of Joan's assumption is so concerned with the journey of her spirit, illustrated through dazzling transcendental imagery, that the body is entirely forgotten by the end of the sequence. Here, the complete physical absence of Joan in the wake of her death is expressed in the disavowal of her own body; for Joan, her body no longer matters, and Rossellini follows suit. The spiritual departure is final, and subsequently, the body ceases to exist, no matter how important it is to Joan's devotees.

Whereas Bresson treats the burning as a vanishing act (wherein the vanishing is itself a form of violence), Dreyer wants his audience to understand in keen detail the violence of Joan's physical destruction. Rossellini takes things one step further and abstracts Joan's execution, revealing death's capacity to grant entrance to heaven. The immediate juxtaposition of these methods gives way to an affinity of intent upon close examination; all three films seek to convey the cultural loss of Joan's death through different extreme treatments. As a result, the totality of Joan's absence in the aftermath of the execution is evident to viewers of any of the three films. For Dreyer, this absence is illustrated through destruction, for Bresson through disappearance, and for Rossellini through apotheosis. However, the sense of loss for the viewer that follows each is the same.

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<sup>83</sup> Moshe Barasch, "The Departing Soul: The Long Life of a Medieval Creation," *Artibus et Historiae* 26, no. 52 (2005): 19.

<sup>84</sup> Barasch, "The Departing Soul," 15.

## Body of Saint, Body of Actress

Up to this point, I have examined treatments of Joan's physicality within the boundaries of each individual film. This section shifts focus to the extra-filmic world of popular culture and reception in order to address the social functions of these Joan of Arc films. By expanding our purview in this way, we can begin to consider a key question that remains: when we watch Joan of Arc films, do we see the body of Joan or the body of the actress playing Joan? In the absence of relics and contemporary portraits of Joan, the faces of the actresses come to stand in for the saint, leading to a conflation of their identities. This phenomenon is especially apparent in the cases of two of the actresses discussed in this paper, Renée Falconetti and Ingrid Bergman, which I will examine in more detail in this section. To understand their significance, it is first necessary to elaborate on the theatrical tradition of saint plays that predates these cinematic productions.

Reenactments of the lives of virgin martyr saints long predate the invention of cinema; we might even consider the "false Joan," Claude, as one of the first actresses to portray Joan of Arc.<sup>85</sup> In her introduction to *Eloquent Virgins from Thecla to Joan of Arc*, McNerny recounts a theatrical tradition that has taken place in the Burgundian village of Alise-Sainte-Reine every September since 1661: a public performance of *The Martyrdom of Saint Reine*. Each year, young girls from the village vie for the role of St. Reine, a role whose primary requirement is not acting ability but the possession of virginal, saintly qualities: "to this day, the young woman chosen to enact her [Reine] must be 'pretty, intelligent, able to sing, and most importantly of all absolutely above suspicion in her personal life.' If she acquires a boyfriend between one September and the

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<sup>85</sup> For the discussion of the "realness" of the false Joan, see Elliot, *Proving Woman*, 294–295, and Elliot, "Seeing Double," 53–54.

next, she will not be asked to resume the role.”<sup>86</sup> The strict moral criteria for the children aiming to play Reine demonstrate that when it comes to portraying the sacrosanct figure of a virgin martyr, acting is not just acting, and theater is not just theater. “When the girl in pink steps onto the stage where the saint’s relics have so recently rested,” writes McInerney, “she *is* Reine, virgin and martyr, for the space of an hour or two.”<sup>87</sup>

When cinematic hagiography began to emerge as a prominent genre in the earliest stages of film history, it was the latest iteration of a well-established theatrical ritual: the physical resurrection of saints through the transposition of their identities onto those of the actors who portrayed them.<sup>88</sup> Marla Carlson counts sixteen female martyr plays produced before 1448 and argues that these plays encouraged internalized spiritual reflection for audience members, as opposed to modern performances of martyrdom, which are frequently aimed at spurring political action.<sup>89</sup> It is notable then that responses to actresses portraying Joan on film have often been politically and spiritually charged.

The ubiquity of Dreyer’s close-ups of Falconetti in *The Passion*, in combination with Falconetti’s otherwise nonexistent film career, has resulted in the Joan of Arc and the face of the actress becoming synonymous in the public mindset.<sup>90</sup> Even at the time of production, perceptions of Falconetti and the character she portrayed began to merge, a narrative promoted primarily by Dreyer himself. In his brief remarks on *Realized Mysticism*, he remarks, “In Falconetti...I found what I might, with very bold expression, allow myself to call, ‘the martyr’s reincarnation.’”<sup>91</sup> He echoes this sentiment in greater detail in his preface to *The Story of Danish*

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<sup>86</sup> McInerney, *Eloquent Virgins*, 8–9

<sup>87</sup> McInerney, *Eloquent Virgins*, 2.

<sup>88</sup> For nineteenth century saint films, see the earliest attempt at a Joan of Arc film, *Jeanne d’Arc* (d. Georges Hatot, 1898). See also *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* (d. Georges Méliès, 1898).

<sup>89</sup> Carlson, *Performing Bodies*, 42.

<sup>90</sup> Yervasi, “Faces of Joan,” 12.

<sup>91</sup> Dreyer, *Dreyer in Double Reflection*, 50.

*Film* (1960), arguing that the process of embodying Joan had profound and irreversible effects on Falconetti:

What was it that happened in Falconetti's core during such filming? She could not explain it herself, so we ended up describing it as this mysterious something that, by its very nature, should be experienced and not explained...She *lived* the part of Joan of Arc. It was clear that she had Joan in her.<sup>92</sup>

Here, just as the medieval mystic's visionary experience is privileged and framed as inaccessible to the ordinary people around her, Dreyer similarly privileges Falconetti's experience on set as inexplicable. Yervasi has noted that another aspect of the projection of Joan onto Falconetti is the actress's tragic death by suicide in 1946, which some have dubiously ascribed to the emotional duress she underwent while filming *The Passion*.<sup>93</sup> Thus, statements like the one in Dreyer's preface, made over a decade after Falconetti's death, must be taken with a grain of salt; it seems that, in retrospect, it was easy to cast Falconetti as a tragic figure akin to Joan.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, the urge to recast Falconetti's struggles with depression as further proof of her pseudo-mystical relationship with Joan can also be seen as speaking to a wider desire to see the saintly body revived in the body of an actress. This desire would subsequently be taken to its logical extreme by the general public with Ingrid Bergman.

Ingrid Bergman portrayed Joan of Arc on the screen twice, first (and most famously) in Victor Fleming's American epic, *Joan of Arc*, and later in *Joan of Arc at the Stake*. It was a role she had longed to play for years and one in which she had invested her celebrity image. In a promotional spread entitled "Woman of Vision," Hollywood photographer Bud Graybill

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<sup>92</sup> The preface is cited in Yervasi, "Faces of Joan," 17.

<sup>93</sup> Yervasi, "Faces of Joan," 16–17.

<sup>94</sup> "Realized Mysticism" was initially published in 1929, a year after production and over ten years before Falconetti's death. Therefore, it seems that there was some sense of affinity between Falconetti and Joan at the time of production, although how strong this affinity was is unclear.



recounted a photo shoot with the actress nearly ten years before she secured the role in Fleming's production:

She took off the coat to her suit, put it on backwards, and said, "Would you mind shooting some character poses of Joan of Arc?" Since her first day at the Royal Dramatic School in Stockholm, Sweden, she had dreamed of playing the role of the French peasant maid who burned at the stake as a witch because she heeded the call of God to lead the French army to victory. Miss B. has a tenacious will and those stills were part of a long-range plan. For years she had studied the character and molded within herself that was Joan.<sup>95</sup>

It is conceivable that Bergman began cultivating her public image a decade in advance, anticipating the charged nature of the role and the potential media scrutiny any actress who accepted it would face. Tellingly, this narrative was repeated in numerous magazines and advertisements as the origin story for Bergman's relationship with Joan.<sup>96</sup> She was the perfect actress to portray the saint, not necessarily because of her acting technique but because of the personal affinity she had developed for her. Another reviewer wrote, "They have made her [Joan] live again in the person of Miss Bergman as she must have been in the days of her adventure long ago."<sup>97</sup> Though nobody seems to have gone so far as Dreyer's language of "reincarnation" in reference to Falconetti, by the late 40s, it is evident that Bergman had successfully and irrevocably entangled her public image with Joan's.

In 1948, *Joan of Arc* received glowing reviews, with Bergman's performance heralded by critics as a triumph: "Ingrid seems to have fallen under the spell of the mystical maid of Orleans, as her screen performance is ardent and of compelling sincerity."<sup>98</sup> In the eyes of the public, Joan's spirit had found a new home in Bergman. Nevertheless, six years later, one reviewer remarked, "Not even the presence of Ingrid Bergman, or the austere yet imaginative staging of

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<sup>95</sup> Durward Graybill, "Woman of Vision," *Movieland*, August 1948, 26–27.

<sup>96</sup> Blaetz, "Strategies of Containment," 52.

<sup>97</sup> Kate Cameron, "Ingrid Bergman an Inspired Saint Joan," *Radio Flash* November 27, 1948, 4.

<sup>98</sup> Kate Cameron, "Ingrid Bergman an Inspired Saint Joan," *Radio Flash* November 27, 1948, 4.

Roberto Rossellini, can disguise the pretentiousness of this production. *Joan of Arc at the Stake* is a dull, dreary and pointless effort.”<sup>99</sup> How could one actress have seemed in one moment made to play a saint but entirely unsuitable in the next?

The answer lies in the public’s reaction to the details of Bergman’s personal life. In 1949, while still married to her first husband, Bergman had an affair with Rossellini and became pregnant during their first collaboration, *Stromboli* (1950). The scandal remains one of the most notorious in film history, engendering a wave of vitriolic hatred towards Bergman, who was accused of deceiving the public with her saintly acting persona.<sup>100</sup> In the gossip columns, one fan wrote, “I have to laugh when I think of the high ideals that were supposed to be upheld by Ingrid Bergman. *Joan of Arc* itself seems a little sullied by Miss Bergman’s escapades...It’s coincidental, and a pity, that having played both saint and sinner in the movies, Miss Bergman seems to want to go to the same extremes in her private life.”<sup>101</sup> The scandal even made its way to the floor of the United States Congress, where Colorado Senator Edwin Johnson delivered an impassioned speech insisting that Bergman and Rossellini were “inspired by the Devil.”<sup>102</sup> Adrienne L. McLean has observed how the moral and political conservatism of Hollywood at the time fanned the flames of censure against Bergman:

To a Hollywood and America in the throes of witch-hunts, blacklists, and crises of containment, the “domino effect”...of Bergman’s affairs, in conjunction with others that had recently occurred, must have made the flaunting of them seem even more heinous.<sup>103</sup>

Rossellini and Bergman’s decision to reprise the role of Joan in *The Stake* was seen by many as an attempt to reclaim her former place as the film industry’s rightful Joan of Arc.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> [Myro?], “Joan of Arc at the Stake,” *Variety*, October 27, 1954, 76.

<sup>100</sup> Adrienne L. McLean, “The Cinderella Princess and the Instrument of Evil: Surveying the Limits of Female Transgression in Two Postwar Hollywood Scandals,” *Cinema Journal* 34, no. 3 (Spring, 1995): 44.

<sup>101</sup> Eileen Sullenberger, “Bergman’s Folly,” *Modern Screen*, August 11, 1949, 26.

<sup>102</sup> McLean, “Cinderella Princess,” 47.

<sup>103</sup> McLean, “Cinderella Princess,” 49.

<sup>104</sup> Blaetz, “Strategies of Containment,” 52, and Yervasi, “Faces of Joan,” 9.

Nevertheless, this effort seemed futile. Returning to her native Sweden for the film's theatrical premiere, Bergman was received with hostility. As she recounted, "Only last night I read an article which said I am a woman showing herself for money and that the fire at the stake resounds to the crinkling of bank notes."<sup>105</sup> Just as the young girl selected to play St. Reine cannot acquire a boyfriend between her performances, Bergman's scandalous acquisition of a new husband between productions irrevocably damaged her perceived connection to Joan.

The case studies of Renée Falconetti and Ingrid Bergman demonstrate a fascinating byproduct of the contact between twentieth and fifteenth-century popular cultures inherent to Joan of Arc films: an overlap between the cult of saints and the cult of celebrity. The female saint and the actress are similarly revered figures, and both face intense public scrutiny over their bodies, so this is a somewhat natural conversion of popular fanaticism. However, upon further examination, we can see that within this symbiotic relationship, the actress exists perpetually in service to the saint she portrays. Falconetti's portrayal of Joan was so effective that her own became subsumed by Joan's in public memory, such that even her director remembered her *as* Joan. Similarly, Bergman faced lasting public resentment due to her failure to maintain a saintly comportment in her personal life. Twentieth-century audiences craved Joan's physical return through the medium of film, to the point that they did not view the actresses who played her as anything more than vessels for the martyred saint.

## Conclusion

This paper began by asserting that Joan of Arc's death constituted a moment of cultural trauma for religious devotees that demanded remedy through the restoration of Joan's body to the broader public. Three eminent filmmakers of the twentieth century, Carl Dreyer, Roberto

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<sup>105</sup> "The Cold Folks at Home," *Modern Screen*, June 1955, 20.

Rossellini, and Robert Bresson, fulfilled this need by immortalizing Joan's body through film, by way of the actress's body. In so doing, they positioned themselves as modern hagiographers, adjusting Joan's story as they saw fit in order to keep her alive in the public memory. Although their portrayals of Joan's sanctity and martyrdom differed, their methods all emphatically responded to the loss of Joan's body.

However, whether these responses are successful in remedying the cultural loss remains an open question. Viewers watching these films at different times and viewing spaces may respond to these hagiographies in drastically different ways. A twenty-first-century American atheist watching Dreyer's *Passion* on a laptop screen may not respond to the obliteration of Joan's body in the same way as a French Catholic viewer during the film's 1928 premiere at the Cinema Marivaux in Paris. These highly specific circumstances of transmission are so fleeting that it is impossible to replicate the viewing experiences and emotional responses of the films' original audiences. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that slight differences in the films' hagiographic methods might provoke different responses. Dreyer's graphic treatment of the body encourages abject horror, Bresson's fixation on Joan's captivity encourages outrage, and Rossellini's transcendence to a plane of spirituality encourages serenity. Further research into the religious reception of these films may bring us closer to understanding the emotional and spiritual intricacies of audience responses, but I suspect that they will always be partially ambiguous.

In this analysis, I have only touched on three of at least thirty-eight depictions of Joan of Arc on film.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, my analysis covers only a small portion of the content within these three films. Therefore, a great deal of research is left to be done on Joan of Arc films' relationships to the medieval cult of saints and their function as hagiographies. Certainly, the

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<sup>106</sup> Margolis, *Bibliography*, 393–406.

focus might shift to more recent Joan films of the twenty-first century in order to assess changes in modes of hagiographic storytelling across film history. More broadly, films that portray other medieval saints, such as Hildegard von Bingen in *Vision* (d. von Trotta, 2009) or Rossellini's *The Flowers of Saint Francis*, deserve examination as part of a hagiographic genre of film. While the historical obliteration of Joan's body demanded her physical return through film, other cinematic hagiographies may respond to different spiritual needs depending on their subjects. For a saint such as Francis, whose physical remains are prolific and accessible, hagiographic films do not need to restore his body to the public in the same way as they do with Joan. This distinction suggests that the Joan of Arc film represents its own unique subgenre of hagiographic film: the cinematic reliquary. Filmmakers transpose Joan's historical body onto physical rolls of film, making it tangible to her devotees and, in turn, providing them with a long-awaited connection to the martyred saint.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor, Professor Tamara Golan, for her excellent support and mentorship over the course of this project.

## Index of Images



*Figure 1: One of Dreyer's celebrated close-ups, in which Joan gazes outward, inscrutable to the viewer.*

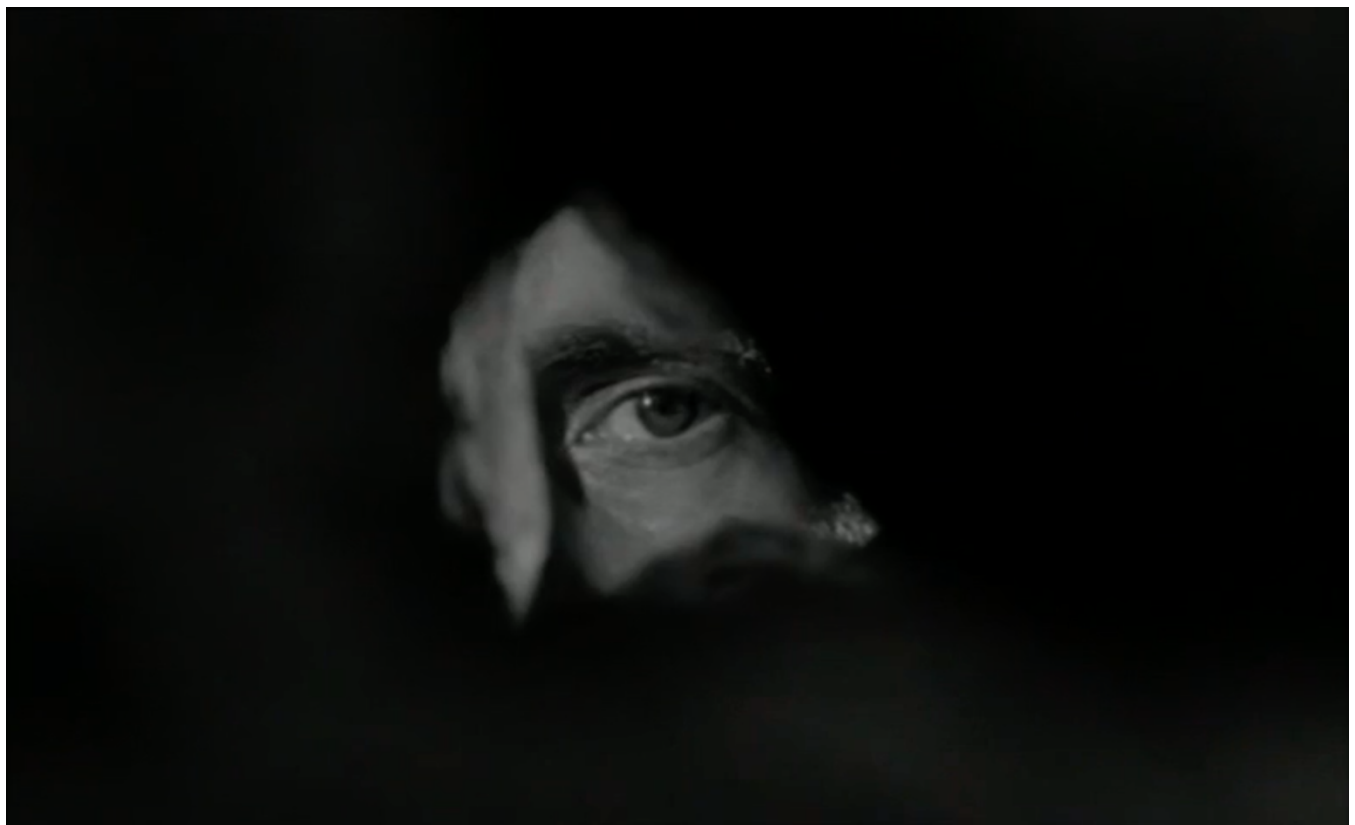
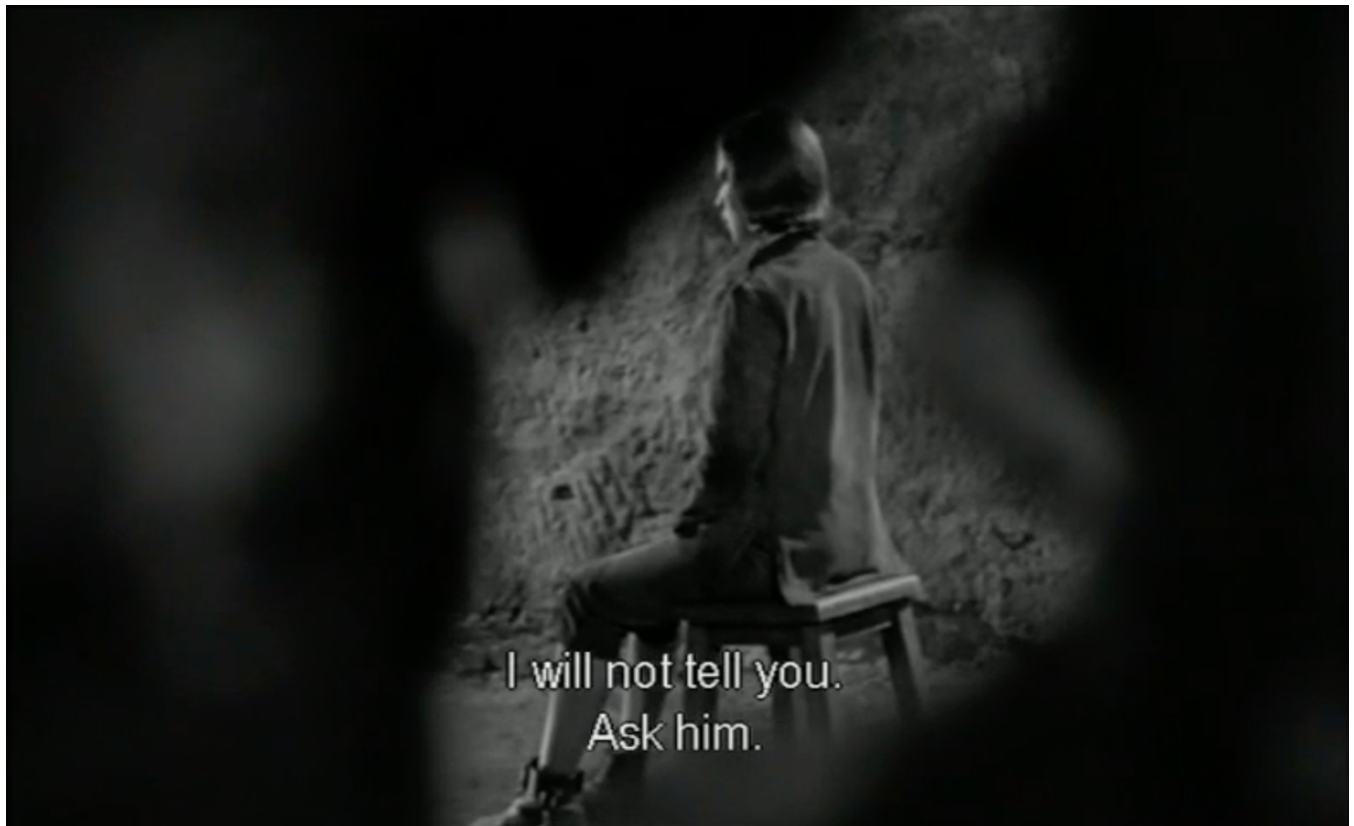


*Figure 2: Another Dreyer close-up, this time with a single tear spilling over Joan's face.*



*Figure 3: Joan is bled by the doctors in "The Passion," her blood flying forcefully into the pan.*





*Figures 4 & 5: In "The Trial," Joan is viewed from one side of the peephole, and Cauchon's eye from the other.*



*Figure 6: Rossellini's murky spiral of angels, viewed at eye level.*



*Figure 7: The spiral viewed from an overhead shot.*



*Figure 8: Joan's charred corpse slumps forward during Dreyer's execution scene.*



*Figures 9 & 10: Bresson's Joan is seen tied to the stake at the beginning of the execution, only to entirely vanish by the end of the scene.*





*Figure 11: Rossellini's apotheotic depiction of Joan's death in "The Stake."*

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