Joan of Archetype: Gendered Images of Joan’s Heroism in French Cinema

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Joan of Archetype: Gendered Images of Joan’s Heroism in French Cinema

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the Department of French and Francophone Studies from The College of William and Mary

by

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Over the course of six hundred years, a hero can take on many names. Maybe you’ve heard of Joan of Arc. Joan the Maid? Or perhaps the Maid of Orléans? The woman whose heroism earned her a permanent place in the modern collective consciousness -- let’s call her Joan of Arc, or just Joan -- has transformed over and over again until the facts about her very real life are obscured. Who was this shepherdess turned warrior, and why is she so important?

Joan was born in 1412, in a small village called Domremy in what is now the northeast of France. She spent her childhood minding sheep and learning of stitching and the Roman Catholic faith tradition from her mother, Isabelle Romée. Around the age of 13, Joan began to hear voices, which she attributed to Catholic Saints Michael, Catherine, and Margaret, instructing her “to expel the English, who had occupied northern France during the Hundred Years’ War, and secure the coronation of Charles VII of France” (“Joan of Arc, St”). The English had allied themselves with the Burgundians of Northern France in a war of succession after Charles IV of France died without an heir. When Joan was sixteen, she began her journey to confront the Dauphin Charles (future King Charles VII), the heir apparent to the French throne after the death of his father, and tell him of her vision. In order to do this, Joan ran away from home and took refuge with her uncle, who helped her get the attention of Lord Baudricourt (a French nobleman who would have had communication with the Dauphin Charles) at Vaucouleurs. He, in turn, gave Joan an escort so she could safely and effectively get to Charles’s court at Chinon. Once there, Joan told Charles VII of her visions and requested an army to lift the English siege at Orléans.
As a seventeen-year-old peasant girl, Joan “was the wrong age, class, and gender to engage in warfare,” but her visions were appealing to Charles’s court, and there was a prophecy telling of a maid (a virgin) from Lorraine who would save France (“Joan of Arc, St”). To substantiate Joan’s claims that she was sent from God, Charles sent her to a trial at Poitiers (1429), where Church leaders questioned her about her faith, her upbringing and her virginity. They found no reason to obstruct her from leading French troops, and so Charles VII supplied her with funds and an army, which she used to accomplish a “fast and decisive victory” at Orléans (May 8, 1429), which was the French military’s first major victory since 1415 (“Joan of Arc”). Joan continued to make great progress against the English troops in France and went on to secure her second goal: see Charles crowned King of France at the cathedral of Rheims (July 1429).

With her two initial goals met, Joan began to have more trouble in battle. Soldiers on the French side were in awe at the pure, living legend in their midst: the fulfillment of a prophecy declaring that France would be “restored by a virgin” (Warner 26). The English and Burgundian soldiers were less enamoured, and not at all convinced of Joan’s sanctity, calling her a whore and a witch. At Compiègne, she was captured by the Burgundians (May 1430), who eventually sold her to the English. “A specific, English-controlled church court” tried Joan (January - May 1431) and ordered her executed “for political and military reasons, although it couched its decision in religious language” (Taylor). The transcript of this trial still exists today, and within it are clear indicators of both Joan’s unwillingness to submit to her accusers and the foregone conclusion of the biased court. This trial focused more on Joan’s “mépris de l’état qui convient au sexe féminin” (“disregarding of the state which is proper for the female sex”) than on her actual
claims to be sent from God (Quicherat 13). Indeed, the first article of her condemnation in response to her wearing men’s clothing comes twelve articles before the first one condemning Joan’s violence in battle. In a Church where killing someone is breaking one of the Ten Commandments, it is clear that the council charged with Joan’s condemnation was perhaps not acting on solely scriptural grounds. The patriarchal need to frame Joan as an unholy scourge to humanity reflects not only the English goal of disqualifying Charles VII’s coronation, but also the male goal of keeping a revolutionary woman in her place and not allowing her to be a role model to other women. At all of nineteen years old, Joan was burned at the stake (May 30 1431) “comme hérétique et sorcière” (“as a heretic and witch”) (Conley). Thus ends Joan’s life, but her story has lived on, for well over five hundred years.

The first revival of Joan’s life and mission came only twenty five years after her death. King Charles VII, even though he did not pay Joan’s ransom to prevent her being sold to the English, convened a rehabilitation trial in 1456 to nullify the results of Joan’s initial trial. Joan’s family members, soldiers, sympathetic members of the first council responsible for Joan’s execution, and others generally in favor of Joan of Arc came to give testimony to the good and holy side of Joan. The council declared Joan’s condemnation and execution to be “null and void” for not following due process in an ecclesiastical trial (Taylor). By clearing Joan’s name, Charles VII simultaneously revalidated his own kingship. If a sorceress had ensured his coronation, his rule was questionable at best, but if it were to be proven that her charges were false, then his reign was safe.

After Joan’s name was cleared at the rehabilitation trial, the world largely lost interest in her for the next three centuries, except for the people of Orléans, who continued to annually
celebrate Joan’s lifting of their siege and who “consistently kept Joan alive in their memories” (Taylor). During the eighteenth century, Joan, along with the entire era of the Middle Ages inspired “un mépris général” (“a general dislike”) among the French intellectual and cultural elite. This displeasure was primarily fueled by a secularist movement that was disappointed with the influence the Catholic Church held over Medieval France, and certainly over Joan, who is recorded to have touted her piety whenever possible. A well-known Enlightenment writer, Voltaire, took Joan to be “une malheureuse idiote” (“an unhappy idiot”) (Winock 4444). It was not until the nineteenth century that Joan of Arc returned to the forefront of French consciousness in a positive sense, but since then, it is impossible to deny “la richesse de la vie posthume du personnage” (“the richness of the posthumous life of the character”) (Winock 4427).

In contrast with the eighteenth century, the nineteenth century was known as the “siècle de Jeanne d’Arc” (“century of Joan of Arc”) (Winock 4434). This was partially due to the Romantic movement’s increased interest in Medieval society and glorification of the past and partially due to resurgence of Catholicism after Napoleon abdicated. It was during this time that the transcriptions of Joan’s trials were translated into French, and her most enduring biography (*Joan of Arc* by Jules Michelet, 1853) was written. During the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, French society rebuilt Joan as an image of “la patronne des envahis” (“the patron saint of the invaded”) (Winock 4434). Concurrently, the nineteenth century was a critical time for the construction of competing national and patriotic (cultural) identities across Europe -- a process that took on new meaning during the early years of the Third Republic in France, which was established at the fall of the Second Empire of France in its defeat in the Franco-Prussian war.
The Third Republic sought to frame its legitimacy and vision of an indivisible and democratic Republic by reprioritizing French history to de-emphasize the importance of the Catholic Church and the French Monarchy yet still reach back far before the Revolution to common mythical ancestors (like the Gauls) and heroes (like Joan of Arc) so as not to completely alienate more traditionalist French citizens. With Joan perceived as a national hero and no longer the idiot that Voltaire had made her out to be, “tout le monde s’en réclame” (“everyone claimed her for themselves”) from that point onward (Winock 4435). All of sudden, images of Joan were everywhere; statues were erected, restaurants and hotels were named after her, and covers of children’s notebooks had her likeness on them. Joan the hero captivated the French imagination; the Third Republic even considered making Joan’s birthday, January 6, the national holiday instead of July 14, the date of the storming of the Bastille, which sparked the French Revolution. From the nineteenth into the twentieth century, “l’utilisation mythologique de Jeanne” (“the mythical use of Joan”) outstripped the more critically analyzed historical figure. During this time, three prevailing myths circulated, as described in renowned French historian Michel Winock's influential contribution on Joan to Pierre Nora's landmark multi-volume *Realms of Memory (Lieux de memoire)* series: Joan as a Catholic (and Legitimist/Monarchist) hero, a Republican hero (including both a politically moderate liberal/patriotic variant and a politically radical proto-revolutionary variant), and a nationalist hero. France was an ideologically very divided country from the Revolution (1789 - 1799) through at least the 1940s. French historians (including Winock) often refer to this period of polarization as a protracted "Franco-French" cold (civil) war. The French Revolution brought an end to the Ancien Régime (system of hereditary monarchy) but did not settle once and for all what kind of polity or society France would be
afterward. The type of regime, the relationship between church and state, religion's place in society, and economic justice remained divisive hot-button issues for decades. In this context, the aforementioned three versions of Joan as hero were not just somewhat different slants that appealed to different groups; they represented competing and ostensibly irreconcilable versions of French national identity.

Before describing how Joan was championed as the hero of multiple causes, let us define “hero” more precisely. As individuals, we have heroes who epitomize qualities that we value; but as a society, classifying someone as a hero is a much larger and more complicated matter because it entails using these valued traits to encourage larger groups of people to act a certain way or value a certain trait. Groups put forward their heroes as “people of outstanding courage or ability, admired for bravery or nobility, models for others to follow” (Lotze 26). This final distinction, being a role model, is most visible in Joan’s many iterations as a representative hero of a group. Raoul Girardet, a French historian specializing in French nationalism, in his book *Mythes et mythologies politiques* (*Myths and Political Mythologies*), outlines four different kinds of mythical heroes: the protector (an old, established hero whom society calls out of retirement), the conqueror (a hero who responds to the moment and has great success, but who is ultimately struck down), the legislator (a hero who is known for their sagacity) and the prophet (a hero who leads their people into a new political, physical, or cultural environment). Joan’s life story is well described by the myth of the conqueror, solidifying her status as a mythical hero. A hero is also defined by her “world-historical, macrocosmic triumph,” according to Joseph Campbell, American mythologist (Lotze 27). Taking the status of role model and the presence of victory over some antagonistic force to be the two main qualifying traits of what it is to be a hero, Joan
clearly fits this description and also fits into the heroic constructs of mythologists like Campbell and Girardet.

In 1905, Joan was declared Blessed by the Catholic Church, and then canonized as a Catholic saint in 1920. Pope Benedict XV cited Joan’s purity and virtues as reasons why she was saintly, but strategically left out her divine mission and martyrdom. “Un acte politique de la part de Rome” (“A political act on the part of Rome”), Joan’s canonisation nearly five hundred years after her death at the hands of the Catholic Church was an attempt to take advantage of Joan’s mythical status among French citizens in order to make amends with a nation that had formerly been a Catholic stronghold (Winock 4446-4447). As a Catholic saint, Joan’s image continues to be used to show an endorsed lifestyle of piety and virtue. She is held up as a standard to attain, a goal to reach; just like other saints, she is a certified Catholic hero. Even so, those contrary to the Catholic tradition framed Joan, who rebelled against the institution of the Catholic Church, as a “précurseur de Luther et de Calvin” (“precursor to Luther and Calvin”) (Winock 4451).

Many of these anti-Catholics were also anti-monarchists, and Joan was their “sublime incarnation” (Winock 4449). The Republicans called upon Joan’s peasant roots and her triumphant story to display “la montée en puissance des petits” (“the growing in power of the small”) (Winock 4450). The more radical factions of the left interpreted Joan as a quasi-revolutionary figure, encouraging the people to rise up against the oppressive regime. She represented for them the ability to make of oneself a hero, regardless of background. Simultaneously, the monarchists, frequently Catholics, rallied behind Joan, citing her divine mission to uphold the French monarchy, in which she had great success. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth, the saintly Catholic Joan was seen as also
staunchly monarchist among France's most reactionary conservatives, who were both Catholic traditionalists and Legitimists (i.e. pining for a return to a divine-right absolute monarchy filled by direct descendants of the Bourbons). Both those who wanted to overthrow the French system and those who longed for the old ways held up Joan’s victory as proof that the quality of hers that they chose (either peasant-born or monarchy-defending) was correct and good. If nothing else, the ability of these antagonistic groups (Catholic/monarchist and Secular/republican) to each claim Joan to rally their followers solidifies her place as one of France’s great heroes precisely because she can stand for anything that is “French”: “tantôt divergente, tantôt convergente ; c’est la bonne Lorraine une et divisible” (“sometimes divergent, sometimes convergent ; the good girl from Lorraine is one and divisible”) (Winock 4470). She is the providential hero who saves a France characteristically threatened with extinction/disaster, thereby uniting a fundamentally divided nation, and simultaneously instrumentalizing its further division in her usage by contrasting ideological movements.

Finally, the third image that Winock discusses is Joan as a nationalist hero. Similar to the French Republicans, Joan’s victory is owed to “l’enracinement paysan : la tradition, le travail, le peuple” (“rooting in peasantry : tradition, work, people”) (Winock 4456). However, for the French nationalist (right-wing, populist, antirepublican, antiparliamentary, militarist, and xenophobic), particularly during the turn of the twentieth century, France was defined against the Jewish people and other so-called foreign elements of corruption. Joan represented France itself in “le mythe de juif corrupteur et le mythe de Jeanne redemptrice” (“the myth of the corrupting Jew and the myth of redeeming Joan”) (Winock 4458). This anti-Semitic binary shows the extremity of her role as a nationalist hero; when the “true” France was against Judaism, Joan, its
hero, proved why. In “la rhétorique du rassemblement, de l’union” (“the rhetoric of assembly, of union”), Joan represented French solidarity against encroaching forces that were always spun as “anti-France” (Winock 4461-4462). This included uniting Europe against foreign communist forces, representing the French fascist party’s desire to be seen as true French, encouraging citizens to do their part during World War I, and simultaneously being called upon to validate both the Vichy occupation of France and the Resistance during World War II.

Joan was the epitome of Frenchness to the point that a Parisian delegate to the National Assembly in 1920 said that “il n’y a pas un Français, quelle que soit son opinion religieuse, politique ou philosophique, dont Jeanne d’Arc ne satisfasse les vénérations profondes. Chacun de nous peut personifier en elle son idéal” (“there isn’t a single French person, regardless of their religious, political, or philosophical opinions, for whom Joan of Arc does not satisfy a profound veneration. Each one of us can personify in her our ideal”) (Winock 4460). Joan is a French hero, and she is also a hero of every French individual. This characterization largely holds true for the latter half of the twentieth century and the first two decades of the twenty-first.

In the last fifty years, Joan’s role has been primarily political, though her image is still being used to sell products as irrelevant as cheese and beans. Virtually all French political factions today lay claim to Joan and bend her image to suit their ideology. The most vocal and devoted political fans of Joan, however, tend to be the supporters and sympathizers of the far right (national populist) Rassemblement National (National Rally, formerly known as the National Front), spearheaded by founder Jean-Marie Le Pen and current party leader Marine Le Pen (Jean-Marie’s daughter), which has aggressively recycled the ultra-nationalist Joan to promote an anti-immigrant discourse. On the other side of the political spectrum, the left has
been far more discreet about its admiration for Joan. For instance, Segolène Royal, a finalist in the 2007 presidential election (and the first French woman to have that distinction, Marine Le Pen being the second in 2017), “compared herself to the heroine of France, fighting against daunting odds for the sake of her people” (Crawford). While Joan today clearly belongs to everyone, there is still residual tension around her given how loudly ultra-conservatives and far-right nationalists tend to drown out the others with their version of Joan.

Over the course of six hundred years, Joan has become a universal figure with something to offer to everyone. Moreover, she is seen as the triumphant personification of all things French, even worldwide. It stands to reason, then, that she would be a fan favorite in cultural production. She has been the object of over twenty operas and plays, over twenty prominent monuments, more scholarly texts than one can count, over sixty famous paintings, and over forty films worldwide. Eighteen of these films have been produced in France, and those will be the object of this study of Joan’s heroism -- as it relates to French women over time -- because “film, like literature, plays an important folkloric and ritualistic role by offering narratives in which social codes and assumptions are presented and validated” (Maddox 21).

Certainly, Joan is not alone in her status as a French female hero. Queens like Marie de Medici are remembered for their contributions to French government and society. Louise Michel and Simone Veil pushed the boundaries of womens’ roles in French government and politics. Artists, literary figures, and performers like Olympe de Gouges, George Sand, Sonia Delauney and Edith Piaf used their media to spark changes in French society. The actress Sarah Benhardt and the fashion designer Coco Chanel redefined the look of the “modern woman” (Zeyl). Marie Curie and Simone de Beauvoir changed the way that the world thought about science and gender.
Even Marianne, the allegorical image of French republicanism has personified Frenchness. French citizens, especially women, looked to these figures to learn how to behave “French.” Joan is, however, by far the most widely known. “Tout citoyen français, à un moment de sa vie, a reçu le message” (“Every French citizen, at some moment of their life, has received the message”) that Joan of Arc is a nationalistic, religious, and feminist icon in France whose life serves, in many refashioned ways, as a guide for how to be a good French woman (Winock 4427). Joan, by nature of being a woman, displays women’s qualities “which are attributed to all women, whether they embody them or not” (Maddox 17). Because of this representative nature of female heros, Joan is a symbol at any point in time of the pinnacle of what any woman can hope to achieve as a hero. In these films as cultural artifacts, Joan stands for not just what is good, but specifically what is good for women. Consequently, cinematic portrayals of Joan’s femininity are particularly important -- especially in France. Over the course of French cinematic history, the character of Joan morphs in a way that reflects women’s changing role in society. mirroring the twentieth century transition from passive icon/inspiration to active warrior/hero.

The theoretical backbone of this thesis depends on first and foremost Marina Warner’s book, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism*. In this text, Warner, a historian and mythologist, discusses the many recurring images of Joan the “heroine of history” over time (3). I found these images to be consistent with ones shown in the first two periods of film to be discussed here (1890s - 1940s, 1950s - 1970s), and they reveal some insight into the way that French filmmakers viewed Joan and women heroes during this time. Literature specialist Jenny Howe’s work on monstrous femininity provided the background for the angel/monster dichotomy that is essential to analyzing the earlier films. In this binary system, women could
exist as either pure (sexually) and good or as dangerous (sexually) and evil. This made qualifications of women as virtuous figures like mother and nun desirable for women, and others like whore or witch undesirable because societal acceptance was contingent on being an “angelic” woman. I also leaned on American scholar Robin Blaetz’s texts regarding the many cinematic interpretations of Joan of Arc in international cinema and how they reflect societies’ notions of gender and class as well as ways to extract oneself from hierarchies in both of these categories. In my final chapter on the most modern films, I depended on Medieval scholar Margaret Maddox, whose work on the male constraints around cinematic Joan were crucial to the understanding of the French corpus, which is entirely male-directed.

As far as film analysis goes, Gayatri Spivak and her theories of subalternity and philosophical definitions of “agency” helped me classify the many Joans as primarily active or passive characters. Simply, agency “denote[s] the performance of intentional actions” which indicates the inverse of “patiency,” which is the receiving of actions (Schlosser). Over my three chapters, I speak primarily of the presence or absence of agency in Joan, who, as a woman, has been denied “autonomy” (synonymous here with agency) because of her status as a subaltern (Laoui). According to Spivak, the subaltern is any individual who, for identitarian reasons, does not have access to hegemonic power. In a patriarchal society, all women fall under this category, though some more than others based on socio-economic status, racial identity, etc. For context of feminine textual images, Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler both offer apt views of feminist performances of literary figures, which served as links to societal conceptions of women. Irigaray, a second wave feminist, talks about women’s bodies in “scopique” (“scopic”) and “phallique” (“phallic”) economies, where they are worth less than men’s (24-25). She also
discusses the ways that men maintain this hierarchy: through the male gaze and through a phallogocentric language. The concept of the male gaze is particularly important in this thesis since films are visually consumable goods and the male directors’ take on Joan the mythical figure is the object of most of my analysis. Butler, a third wave feminist, offers a discourse on gender performativity without which this thesis could not exist. She, echoing Simone de Beauvoir (one of the earliest French second-wave feminists) “clearly underscores the distinction between sex, as biological facticity, and gender, as the cultural interpretation or signification of that facticity” (522). This distinction allows for flexibility of gender performance among female Joan figures (the object of my analysis), because there is “nothing about femaleness that is waiting to be expressed,” instead, all ideas of femininity and masculinity are possible, and necessitated in different circumstances (522).

Of the eighteen French-produced films, I was able to obtain and watch eleven. I split these eleven films into three chronologically and thematically organized periods. Each chapter of this thesis comprises one of these periods, and in each, I discuss two films that are emblematic of my general findings in each period. In chapter one, I will discuss films from 1898 - 1929 and specifically Georges Méliès’ Jeanne d’Arc (1900) and Carl Dreyer’s La passion de Jeanne d’Arc (1928). These films characterize Joan as passive and feminine: an altogether weak character. While she is the technical heroine of these movies because of her status as a historical hero, she does not act in traditionally heroic or powerful ways, but instead depends on men for help. Emphasized in these films are Joan’s virtues, more than her actions. During and leading up to this time period in France, women’s heroism was fashioned inside the “angel/monster” dichotomy, described above from Howe’s article, wherein a woman could either be good and
inspiring or evil and dangerous. For a woman to be a hero meant representing an “idea of goodness” (Warner 225) (especially in their sexuality) to men who would act heroically on behalf of the virtues the woman represented.

In chapter two, I explore how this masculine center of action is upheld in the time period spanning 1954-1962. In the postwar period, women in France achieved many political and social advancements, not the least of which was the right to vote. They had proven, to themselves and to French society, during World War II that they were capable in many of the same roles that had been previously restricted to men, especially managerial and business positions (not to mention as Resistance fighters). In the cinema of this time, specifically Jean Delannoy’s Destinées (1954) and Robert Bresson’s Le procès de Jeanne d’Arc (1962), the Joan character has fully transformed from the passive, traditionally feminine character of chapter one to an active, traditionally masculine character. This masculine Joan is able to achieve the “autonomy denied to women who conformed to a traditional female role” (Maddox 30), which ultimately reinforces the patriarchal hegemony through the continued impossibility of autonomy among feminine women, even though the presence of agency in a woman at all was still an advancement.

Finally, in chapter three, I cover the continually increasing agency in the Joan character from 1989 to 2019. I use both second and third wave theories to discuss why filmmakers were not interested in creating films about Joan of Arc for nearly thirty years, and how, when they were interested again, they gave Joan a powerful femininity previously not seen. I use Jacques Rivette’s Jeanne la pucelle (1994) and Luc Besson’s La messagère : l’histoire de Jeanne d’Arc (1999) to exemplify this new possible “woman renowned for doing something on her own” without the aid of masculinity or men (Warner 9). These changes over time reflect changes in
women’s roles in French society. Societal shifts over the twentieth century allow women, via Joan, to “actualize the Hero archetype” to the greatest extent possible given that “Western culture denies the Feminine Divine” which is the mirror image of the Feminine Hero (Maddox 19). However, other, later films, like Philippe Ramos’ Jeanne Captive (2011), are not consistent with this powerful feminine imagery, and I argue that this has to do with Joan being an object of entirely male directors, which ultimately means that every progressively more powerful Joan is a male-imagined figure. While it is important that powerful women should be portrayed in film, since they provide role models for female audience members and reflect societal notions of female heroism, this heroism is lessened by its being dictated by men. I conclude by exploring the results of this male-dominated female hero figure and how it alludes to a continued male ability and desire to control women’s bodies, actions, and potentials.
Chapter 1 - Joan the Maid: the Pure Feminine Icon
Through World War II (1890s to 1940s)

The history of projected film began in Paris in 1895, in a small dark room where the Lumière brothers presented their first short film to a small audience. A short three years later, the Lumière brothers produced *L'exécution de Jeanne d'Arc*, one of the first films ever made, and the first of many films depicting all or part of the life of French heroine, Joan of Arc. In the select audience present in 1895 was future director Georges Méliès, who in 1900 followed the lead of the Lumière brothers and made his own short film about the life of Joan of Arc, creatively titled *Jeanne d’Arc*.

From the very beginning of film as a medium Joan was an important figure. While most films in the first years of cinema showed “local scenes and activities, views of foreign lands, short comedies and events considered newsworthy,” (“A Very Short History of Cinema”) revelling in the new media of film rather than its subject matter, *L'exécution de Jeanne d'Arc* and *Jeanne d’Arc* both tell a story: that of Joan’s life and death, which shows her importance as a figure in the French collective imagination. Her story is among the first narratives to be put in a film format and is one that directors return to frequently: there have been at least eighteen non-documentary feature films about Joan produced in France between 1898 and today.

Five of these eighteen films make up what I will call the first period of films having to do with Joan’s life. This first period spans from the birth of cinema in the 1890s and runs through the end of the Second World War in the 1940s, during and after which the role of women in society underwent great changes which were reflected in cinematic Joan.
For instance, it was not until just after the Second World War that women in France finally received the right to vote, but that struggle was well underway during this first period. While many women wanted to participate in political affairs, other women and most men found women to be “différentes, immatures, influençables, inférieures, ne peuvent prendre une part intelligente et autonome à la vie publique” (“different, immature, influenceable, inferior, not able to take an intelligent and autonomous part in public life”) (Assemblée Nationale). During the time period of this chapter, girls had only just recently won the ability to attend high school. This was followed in 1907 by the right for a woman to spend her own salary without her husband’s say, and then, starting in 1938, she was able to enroll in a university without her husband’s permission. Since men had until this point been regulating women’s financial habits and education, it is clear that women were seen as infantile, inferior citizens. They were thought to embody goodness and selflessness, but also helplessness and dependence. Without the right to vote especially, women lacked two significant things: 1- an official recognition by the French government of the value of women’s minds, and 2- a veritable leap forward on the path toward true agency. Agency, and specifically female autonomy, “can be defined as freedom to make specific choices and the right to behave in ways that in a man would not lead to a loss of respect” (Maddox 10). While this construct seems “to affirm sexual difference and male superiority,” it served as a basis for understanding equality in a restrictive, patriarchal society, like the one in France during this time period (Warner 217). While agency via the right to vote was the goal of the feminists/suffragettes of this time, it was not a quality that women writ large had in French society.
The period of films discussed here reflect this reality, and so the Joan in these early films is passive, without agency. Cinematic Joan of Arc before the Second World War was a pure, representative icon. She is not an active hero, in the sense that she does not act of her own will, if at all, on screen. However, she inspires heroism in her male, agentive companions. Additionally, Joan was canonised in 1920, precisely in the middle of this period, during which time the Catholic Church used her as a “rallying point” of their own (Warner 220). In centuries past, France had been a Catholic stronghold against more liberal secularists across Europe, but as republican values began to pervade French society, the Catholic monarchists lost ground. Both sides harkened to Joan as the hero of their movement; the monarchists recalled how half of Joan’s mission was to reinstate the king of France, Charles VII. Simultaneously, the secularist republicans decried the Catholic Church for its treatment of France’s “heroine of the Hundred Years’ War” (Warner 191). By canonizing Joan of Arc, the Vatican was hoping to solidify a weakening Catholic base in France that was all in agreement about, if not unified by, Joan’s status as a national hero. While bringing France back to Catholicism may have been the Vatican’s goal, explicitly they declared that Joan was sainted for her purity and virtues, so as to provide an example for good Christian women to follow. Outside of politics, this saintly, inspirational, passive, and non-controversial Joan is the image seen in cinema during this entire time period.

Within this period, there are two distinct sub-periods. The first includes the films before World War I: The Lumière brothers’ L'exécution de Jeanne d'Arc (1898), George Méliès’ Jeanne d’Arc (1900) and Albert Capellani’s Jeanne d’Arc (1908). Filmmakers were still learning how to create moving pictures, and not quite yet using them as an art form. The second sub-period spans the gap between the two World Wars; significantly, no Joan of Arc movies were released during
either war. This second sub-period comprises Carl Theodor Dreyer’s *La passion de Jeanne d’Arc* (1928) and Marco de Gastyne’s *La merveilleuse vie de Jeanne d’Arc* (1929). Avant-garde films, characterized by “making film with experimentation as its central part,” rose to prominence during this pre-World War II span (“Avant-Garde”). The disorienting, quick close ups and exceptionally high and low camera angles used by Dreyer in *La passion de Jeanne d’Arc* are good examples of this new experimental and artistic conception of film. Even though the medium of film developed immensely in an artistic sense across this time period, the Joan that we see in this entire first period of films holds a nonetheless consistent role: that of iconic hero. “Jeanne d’Arc est la France,” (emphasis in original, Winock 4458). She represents the cause for which her soldiers were fighting via her passive and feminine heroism of the pre-World War II era. In these films, Joan takes the form of a humble, virtuous woman who needs men to act on her behalf, since she is without agency, as were the women of France at this time.

Marina Warner, a historian and mythographer, lists Joan among the great virgin icons of history in her book, *Joan of Arc: the Image of Female Heroism*. Within this framework of the virtuous virgin, which is the image of Joan seen in this pre-World War II time period, heroism comes not from great acts, but from personality traits. Méliès and Dreyer both play into this “convention of female personification of virtue” in their angelic, passive Joans (Warner 218). Just as Marianne, most well known for her portrayal by painter Eugene Delacroix in “Liberty Leading the People,” personifies “all the Republican ideals” of France, so too does Joan encapsulate virtue (Warner 229). Marianne, though, much like the Joan of this first period of films, was no more than a “feminine allegory”; it mattered little that she represented the grand values of the new Republic, because her role was exclusively representative (Hunt 93). Though
Joan was a real individual, in this period of films, she is portrayed as a representative figure of “forces of good” (Warner 147). Through Joan’s virginity and associated virtue in Méliès’ *Jeanne d’Arc* and Dreyer’s *La passion de Jeanne d’Arc*, her heroic deeds result from her status as a “figurehead” of the French cause (Warner 212).

As an example from this first sub-period, I will look at Méliès’ *Jeanne d’Arc*, starring Jeanne Calvière. While being a silent film of only ten minutes, *Jeanne d’Arc* is still ten times longer than the Lumière brothers’ *L’exécution de Jeanne d’Arc*, and so it is better able to develop the shared theme of passive femininity. Méliès was the first director to include multiple scenes in his films, which adds importance to Joan’s story: one of the first stories to be told in full on film. Méliès was also not a practicing Catholic, so Joan’s early appearance in cinema speaks to her popularity as a national hero figure. As far as Méliès’ technique was concerned, “in his mind, theater and screen were two aspects of the same thing,” therefore, the camera in *Jeanne d’Arc* is stationary, as if filming a play taking place on a stage (Sadoul et al. 250). Méliès is known for his special effects, which are more prevalent in later films, like the fantastical *Le voyage dans la lune (A Trip to the Moon)* (1902). More importantly however, are his developments in narrative in a period where most films were marvelous for simply displaying recorded movement.

*Jeanne d’Arc* opens with Joan receiving a vision from her saints Michael, Marguerite, and Catherine. Joan immediately falls on her knees in recognition of her lowly position in relation to them. She observes the convention of averting her eyes in front of celestial beings, proving herself a humble, virtuous woman. Again, when Joan approaches Vaucouleurs, shown below in Figure 1.1, she goes down on one knee, physically lowering herself in front of the male guard in acknowledgement of her dependence upon him. While it is true that Joan had
to ask for help from many men along her journey it was a stylistic choice on Méliès’ part to incorporate this physical manifestation of subservience into two of his total of eleven scenes. It plays a disproportionately large role in the film, and reinforces the idea of a weak, feminine Joan who depends on the whims of men to help her on her way.

Upon her arrival at Lord Baudricourt’s court, Joan makes her plea for assistance to go to Dauphin Charles’ court and is laughed at. When instead of agreeing to help her, Lord Baudricourt offers Joan a cup of wine, she takes it, and, as pictured in Figure 1.2 below, tosses it onto the ground. This rejection of an alcoholic beverage, a common vice, shows Joan’s purity as a “good” woman and establishes her eligibility as female hero. By “linking spiritual virtue” (the opposite of the vice she has rejected) “with revelations of the higher world expressed in the feminine,” (Joan, as a woman hero, stands for all her gender in a way that a male hero would not) Méliès’ Joan proves herself as the personification of holy virtue and thereby worthy to be followed into war (Warner 226). To underline this eligibility, Méliès juxtaposes his simply,
modestly dressed Joan with a member of Lord Baudricourt’s court. This woman, shown above in Figure 1.2, has bare arms, a low-cut dress, and dances with skirts in hand, showing off the skin of her legs in the process. She is the epitome of frivolity and sensuality: dangerous traits for a woman to have, and ones that exclude her from being perceived as a heroine. With regards to sexuality, women fell on one of two supercharged poles: “virtue meant meekness and humility and nature meant carnality” (Warner 147). Especially compared to this loose woman who epitomizes carnality, austere Joan is the perfect image of a meek and humble virgin, one who could be held up in front of an army of men as a virtuous idol to fight and die for, the closest to heroism that a woman could come in the early 1900s.

Méliès shows Joan’s distance from battle in the parade scene as Joan and her army prepare to leave the city. Joan, on horseback, precedes the entire army by fifteen seconds, a significant amount of time in a movie that is only ten and a half minutes long. She is the first of only five mounted members of the army, which demonstrates separation from the actual
battlefield, primarily via comparison to the roles of the others on horseback: two bugle players, one lady, and one presumed army leader. The buglers signal movements of the army, but do not fight; the lady dressed in long skirts most certainly will not be involved in any fighting; the army leader, while engaged in battle strategy, will not be at as high risk of injury or capture as those on foot. Joan also has trouble controlling her horse, a sign of military incompetence. She rides onto the scene, then her horse immediately backtracks and a village resident must grab the reins to guide the horse forward, as seen above in Figure 1.3.

In the only battle scene of this film, Méliès demonstrates, once again, Joan’s distance from the actual fighting. She is the only figure on horseback, and while she is armed and dressed similarly to the other male soldiers, she uses her sword to urge on her soldiers, not to fight. Joan’s sword is a phallic symbol in the tradition of Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst. French feminist Luce Irigaray, who uses Lacan as a foundation for her theory, talks about “l’economie phallique” (“the phallic economy”) wherein only the male phallus has value and the female body has none (24). In Lacan’s framework, women recognize this phallic power, and so
they try to metaphorically castrate and steal the male phallus, but are incapable of properly wielding its power. While Lacan’s psychoanalytic theories were not yet known when Méliès made his film, the sword as a phallic image is independent of this theory, and Joan’s inability to wield its power indicates her passivity and weakness as a woman aspiring to be greater than her station. It is also relevant, in this scene, that Joan’s horse is white, symbolizing her purity and especially virginity, both of which make her an ideal figurehead at the front of the fight -- an icon representing all virtue, for which her soldiers would fight. She represents these ideals even too well; upon being captured by the enemy, Joan makes no fight, as seen above in Figure 1.4. In the right of the frame, Joan’s sword-bearing arm can be seen pointing her sword specifically away from her attackers, who handily remove her from her horse. This passivity was appropriate in a woman, a rightful pawn to the desires of men with no agency of her own, a quality included in the trope of “the damsel in distress.” It is underlined by her need of rescue, which is equivalent to the inability to save herself. This captivity until “being saved from a dangerous situation” (Pelton
38) frames Joan in the role of damsel in distress, emphasizing her passivity and goodness in need of saving. Joan’s soldiers storm the castle to save their figurehead once they know she has been taken, but they do not succeed.

After being condemned by her captors, Joan is burned at the stake. In most movies about her life, the film ends with her death. However, Méliès shows Joan’s arrival in heaven after her death, surrounded by choirs of angels, seen below in Figure 1.5. Not only does this place Joan among the angels, but it simply proves her goodness. “To indicate that their maidenliness is proof against all sexuality, these maidens sometimes...are this assimilated to the angels” (Warner 235). In order to go straight to heaven upon her death, Joan must have been virgin, sinless, a true embodiment of virtue. This simultaneously makes her the ideal figurehead to encourage men to fight bravely in battle and places Joan in a very Marian framework, specifically in terms of obedience, which is a form of passivity. “Often likened to the Virgin Mary in an Annunciation scene,” (Foxwell) Joan is obedient to her voices and humble, the perfect candidate for a bodily assumption into heaven, another Marian dogma in Catholicism. The assumption of Mary’s
physical body had to do with its incorruptibility and perpetual virginity, in conjunction with the sinless state of Mary’s soul. By mirroring the Marian assumption into heaven, Méliès emphasizes Joan’s purity, both physical and spiritual, which ultimately makes her the perfect candidate for a woman hero at the turn of the twentieth century.

This same passive and iconic Joan can be seen in the more complex films from between the World Wars. Since film technology and technique had advanced so greatly since 1900, directors were able to use the camera angles, and not just the content of the film, to depict their characters in a more specific way. The best example of this from between the World Wars is Dreyer’s *La passion de Jeanne d’Arc*, which, compared to the pre-World War I films, demonstrates a more cinematically developed concept of Joan’s passivity and “good” femininity. Together with de Gastyne’s *La merveilleuse vie de Jeanne d’Arc*, it shows a transitional heroine who is certainly still without power, but who is beginning to have a limited amount of agency. While these two films serve as a bridge between this first period of Joan of Arc films and the second, this transitional Joan is still fixed in the framework of the “angel/monster dichotomy,” wherein women who step out of the virtuous angel role cause fear among men as “a site of instability, of systemic crisis and collapse” (Howe ii).

Within this dichotomy, a “good” woman, and therefore the only woman who can spur men into action and thereby acknowledged as a heroine, falls under the angel category; she is pure, chaste, humble, and, above all else, passive and obedient. As a woman begins to refuse “to assimilate fully into the patriarchal order that organizes and produces” her, she is seen as a monster: an abnormal creature not fit to be anything but demonic (Howe ii). We see in Joan’s trial that the Church elders perceive her as monstrous, since she aspires to an unfeminine level of
agency. Warner describes this monstrosity in terms of the “assumption that only manliness is equivalent to strength and a woman’s victory is a travesty of the natural order, worthy of...horror” (207-208). A powerful woman was frightening, and had to be restrained or removed.

In *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, starring Renée Jeanne Falconetti, Carl Theodor Dreyer parallels the death of Joan of Arc with that of Jesus Christ. While the Church was an institution that Dreyer, described by *The Guardian* as “an obsessional artist who was an enemy of all institutions, cinematic as well as social,” did not subscribe to himself, it was featured, directly or indirectly, in many of his films (Rosenbaum). As far as actual filming went, Dreyer certainly took advantage of all the technical advances since Méliès' *Jeanne d’Arc*, even inventing some himself, to add to his depiction of the trial and death of Joan of Arc. Part of the avant-garde film movement, Dreyer was known for pulling from realism and expressionism equally, which is shown especially via his closeups. Dreyer presents a Joan who “is simple, innocent, and meek,” (Hobbins) one who is an angelic saint of a woman, passive and feminine in all the right ways to be a hero.

*La passion de Jeanne d’Arc* focuses on the story of Joan’s trial and ultimate burning at the stake. This framing of the narrative is significant, compared to other films that follow Joan throughout her whole journey. Dreyer instead chooses to include only the times when Joan was entirely at the mercy of others, with no control of her own: her imprisonment and death. The plot sets Joan up as a passive figure in her situation, encouraging the generalization that this passivity was lifelong, a trait of Joan’s, rather than situation dependent.

Another main theme is Joan’s femininity. Joan as a hero, is a “cynosure in the history of ideas about virtue, about women, and about heroism,” (Warner 193) and so Dreyer’s portrayal of
a virtuous, angelic woman, suggests Joan’s heroism, once again, as an icon. This pure womanhood combined with her passive nature is also indicative of the angel/monster dichotomy discussed above.

Even though Dreyer’s film has some dialogue, it is still a silent film, so the visual aspects are the most salient. A majority of the film is spent panning back and forth between Joan’s face and those of her captors. Though dressed and coiffed somewhat androgynously, there is no mistaking the contrast between Joan’s young, soft, round face that “remained the ideal feminine,” (Warner 213) compared to the angled, wrinkled faces of her captors. This insistence on Joan’s

Fig 1.6 (L) & 1.7 (R) Screen Captures of Dreyer’s La passion de Jeanne d’Arc 6:04 & 7:24

physical facial features runs throughout the movie, and serves as a constant reminder of Joan’s femininity, especially by juxtaposing it with many male faces, as seen in Figures 1.6 and 1.7, above.

Dreyer also uses Joan’s face to portray her as angelic, or even Marian, by framing it in a circle of light, basically anytime her face is the focus of the camera, as seen below in Figure 1.8. This circle of light, present throughout the entire film, appears like a halo of light behind Joan’s
head, when, like in the majority of camera shots, her face is the only thing in view. With her eyes cast to heaven, Joan looks like the classical portrayal of a woman saint, and yet “a defeminised feminine, closer to the angels than to mortal women” (Warner 226). The concept of virtue has traditionally been thought to reside in a perfect feminine form, and so not in a sexual or specific body. Dreyer’s Joan exists within this framework which uses the feminine but not the female to personify virtue. By framing Joan in a halo, Dreyer is presenting a recognizable image of the Virgin Mary or any other female saint. In historically Catholic France, these images (statues, paintings, etc.) adorn many street corners, homes, and museums, so contemporary French society would have been well acquainted with this iconography. Additionally, Joan’s face is nearly always filmed from above. This is contrasted with the downward gaze from above that Joan frequently receives from her interrogators, as seen above in Figure 1.9. Joan’s upward gaze denotes a lower power status of someone looking literally from below, and the downward glare from her judges indicates a higher power status. By displaying Joan’s relatively low physical
position and by making her look holy throughout the film, Dreyer effectively portrays Joan on the angel side of the angel/monster dichotomy, even while he shows Joan’s captors’ belief that “the woman’s body is the monster’s body,” which would warrant her killing (Howe 19). This feminine iconography had two sides: “abstract qualities - beauty, peace, justice, and, at the negative pole, anger, lust, envy - are almost without exception feminine in gender” (Warner 226). Women didn’t just represent virtuous traits; they also were the emblems of temptation, hysteria, jealousy. It was a dichotomous system, weighted toward the negative pole. If a woman was not the personification of beauty and peace, she must then personify lust and envy. In order to attract followers to accomplish her heroic deeds, Joan had to embody “the potential of virtue in women and of the virtuousness of whatever cause she was used to represent” (Warner 234), which is precisely how Dreyer portrays her. During the trial, Pierre Cauchon, the chief judge, displays this dichotomous mindset when belittling Joan: “vous n’êtes pas fille de Dieu...vous êtes le suppôt de Satan” (“you are not a daughter of God...you are the acolyte of Satan”) (Dreyer 31:27). This explicit statement of Joan’s belonging to a hellish, and therefore monstrous, class precludes her from being the divinely sent heroine she claims to be in the eyes of her judges. At the same time, the construction of Cauchon’s denouncement of Joan as not godly and therefore Satanic denotes Dreyer’s dichotomous logic: that of the woman’s identity being either pure and angelic or dangerous and monstrous. Joan’s judges concur that she is a dangerous monster, but Dreyer wants to show Joan’s angelic, and therefore heroic, side. He underscores this in the postscript of the film, which begins: “les flammes protectrices entourèrent l’âme de Jeanne lorsqu’elle s'éléva vers le ciel” (“the protective flames surrounded Joan’s soul while it ascended into heaven”) (Dreyer 1:20:27). Like in Jeanne d’Arc, the ascension of Joan, or in this case, her soul, into
heaven shows her angelic nature, in contrast with the monstrosity as which her judges construe her.

This danger of a “monstrous” woman is often rooted in the threat of female agency and sexuality. Joan’s captors, when she refuses to let them speak poorly of King Charles, denounce her for her pride, saying: “l'orgueil de cette femme est insensé...jamais on n’a vu en France un pareil monstre” (“The pride of this woman is senseless...France has never known such a monster”) (Dreyer 53 23). Pride, a masculine trait associated with agency (because in order to be proud of something, it must come from a place of self-assuredness), makes Joan monstrous to her interrogators, along with her insinuated promiscuity, as seen through her “habit impudique” (immodest dress) of men’s clothing (Dreyer 31:01). Yet we barely see her dress, or her body at all. As seen in both Figures 1.6 and 1.8 above, indicative of the majority of the shots of the film, the camera cuts Joan off at the neck, displaying her feminine, emotional face and none of her body. This not only asexualization but desexualization of her body is central to her construction as an angel. As a personification of all virtues, Joan “belong[ed] to the world of ideas, where sex
has no place” (Warner 235). Without a visible body, she cannot exist as the sexual being that her interrogators accuse her of being, thereby placing her on the positive pole of feminine iconography. Additionally, the only times Joan’s whole body is present, she is shown in chains, as shown in Figure 1.9 above. This again shows a well-regulated, not loose, androgynous body. There is no freedom, and no feminine sexuality, making Joan’s body a vessel of restraint, and therefore purity. In addition, however, the negative connotation of chains indicates a forceful restraint on the female body since the “female body is cast by varied medieval writings as unnatural, monstrous” (Howe 22). Certainly while Dreyer’s Joan is a virtuous woman hero, she is still “the angel of men's imagination,” existing in this male cinematic universe (Gordon).

While it is possible that Dreyer may be using new cinematic technology and experimenting with an expressionist aesthetic which revolves around the face, the director's intent does not change the impact of the camera shot. In removing Joan’s body from view, Dreyer makes her the perfect, asexual angel, which allows her to be the perfect iconic heroine.

And yet, Dreyer makes it clear that Joan’s body, while invisible to viewers, is still victim to the male gaze. Joan’s guards harass her on two different occasions. The first time, they take away her ring, and Joan does not try to stop them. As the guards parade out of the cell, however, they confront Joan’s fake confessor (who pretends to be sent from King Charles so Joan will be truthful with him), who returns Joan’s ring to her. The disgruntled guards then retreat to a peephole, seen below in Figure 1.11, where they can see everything going on inside Joan’s cell. Of all the action that happens in this scene, Joan is the object. All of the actions are being done to her; the guards steal from her, her confessor returns an item to her, and she is ultimately the object of the male gaze through this peephole. Male power comes from the domination of the
visual field, making up an “économie scopique,” according to French feminist philosopher, Luce Irigaray (24). In this visual economy, the power of looking belongs to men, and the burden of being the object of their gaze falls upon women, as we see through this peephole shot. Joan’s lack of an active role in this scene underlines her passive receiving of action, which reinforces her role outside of any action.

The second time Joan’s guards harass her, they place a mock crown on her head and taunt her as she wears it without protest, as seen below in Figure 1.12, just as Jesus was tortured with a crown of thorns and did not fight back. Dreyer’s title, La passion de Jeanne d’Arc, alludes to the Passion of Christ, which tells the story of Jesus’ trial and death. As Joan approaches the stake on which she shall be burned, this analogy is most evident. Immediately upon exiting the castle where she was being held, a woman offers Joan water to drink, just as “Veronica wipes the face of Jesus” and offers Him water (“Stations of the Cross”). Then again, as Joan nears the stake, she falls, clutching a metal cross to her chest, similarly to how Jesus falls carrying His cross three times on his way to Calvary. Just before His death, Jesus assures the faithful criminal at His
crucifixion that “today you will be with me in Paradise,” (Luke 43:23). Joan similarly asks God, her Father, “serai-je avec Vous ce soir au Paradis?” (“will I be with you tonight in Heaven?”) (Dreyer 1:12:03). While we saw previously that Joan is a Marian-like iconic hero in Méliès’ film, Dreyer connects his Joan directly to the Son of God, Jesus Christ Himself. “She is more closely associated with martyrdom for her spiritual beliefs than with any other aspect of her condemnation” (Yervasi), making the connection to the most important spiritual figure in Catholic France even more clear. “By casting Joan as a Christ-figure,” Dreyer emphasizes Joan’s purity and underlines her passivity while being tormented (Hobbins). And the Son of God, fully divine and fully human, is the most pure being to have ever existed. Through this comparison, Dreyer elevates Joan’s feminine qualities of purity and patient passivity, especially to the will of God. However, he also exhibits a more transitional, progressive mindset toward Joan and her role as a hero; Jesus was a much more active hero than his mother Mary, whose “embodiment of virtue” (Foxwell) is similar throughout history to Joan’s. The visible, physical Joan, however,
still harkens back to images of Mary, which complicates this comparison. While Dreyer still perceives Joan’s heroic virtues to be Marian, the comparison to Jesus indicates a small step toward accepting a more active role for a woman hero, if she exhibits masculine traits, which is seen in the next period of film.

During the course of the trial, Joan looks to her fake confessor before answering any questions posed to her by the interrogators. While Joan’s responses are pulled directly from the transcript of the trials, only her words were transcribed, so if Joan received help from someone during her trials, it was not recorded. Dreyer creates a male voice of reason to help coach Joan through the trial in order to show her inability to answer the trap questions laid before her by her judges. Joan, shown above in Figures 1.13 and 1.14, shows her puzzlement before the difficult questions, then her subsequent relief upon receiving help from her confessor. Dreyer shows a Joan aware of her inability to outsmart the established, intelligent men, and provides her a male source of help, without whom, Dreyer insinuates, she would not have been able to come up with such witty answers. Dreyer’s reimagining of Joan’s trial to include Joan’s dependence on a man
to accomplish her goal reinforces his image of Joan as an iconic hero, who could not act on her own.

Women in pre World War II era France had minimal capacity to act, and very few agented female role models to look to as inspiration. While they had seen some advancement post World War I as they took over men’s jobs, only a handful of wealthy women had their lives permanently changed. For most women, their only heroic capacity lay in using their lived humility and virginity to inspire men to act in a pure and just manner on their behalf. A woman could use her weakness to inspire men to act for her, but she never had the space or the ability to act herself. Since it is accepted historical fact that Joan of Arc is a French heroine, the cinematic figure of Joan must demonstrate the ability of a woman to behave heroically. In this first period of films before World War II, this heroic Joan is passive, even weak. After the social upheaval of World War II, however, Joan undergoes some changes of her own.
Chapter 2 - Joan the Warrior: Usurper of Masculine Domain

Post World War II - Birth of Feminist Movement (1950s - 1970s)

During the World Wars, Joan of Arc was the face of French patriotism. While soldiers were fighting across Europe, Joan’s image at home was shifted out of cinema towards propaganda in order to engage women in the war effort. More than one “poster exhorting women to save their country through savings bonds used Joan as the epitome of female national heroism” (Foxwell). Though as discussed in the introduction, “la mémoire de Jeanne n’est pas une mémoire neutre : fractionnée, débattue, instrumentalisée, elle exprime aussi les conflits d'idées qui ont divisé les Français depuis l’aube des Temps modernes” (“the memory of Joan is not a neutral memory: fractioned, debated, instrumentalized, she also expresses the ideological conflicts which have divided the French since the dawn of modern times”) (Winock 4431). It follows that all possible conflicting French ideological sides during both wars used the image of Joan of Arc as the hero of their cause. In World War II, the Vichy occupation government created propaganda against the English (and the Allies in general) framing them as the ones who burned Joan at the stake while simultaneously the Resistance took Joan, “l’incarnation de la résistance contre l’étranger” (“the incarnation of resistance against the foreigner”) (Winock 4460) to be their patron national saint. Since Joan was so busy representing all possible causes during the wars, she was unavailable to be portrayed in film. From De Gastyne’s La merveilleuse vie de Jeanne d’Arc in 1929 to Jean Delannoy’s Destinées (“Daughters of Destiny”) in 1954, cinema was silent on Joan. When she returned though, she had undergone a transformation; this new Joan was more of a soldier and less of an emblem, the latter of which was falling out of
usefulness in the World Wars. As trench warfare removed much of the chivalry and romanticism of war, a pure female figure representing the values for which nations were fighting was not enough to inspire the tired, hungry soldiers. Certainly, Joan’s image was still being used to represent varied causes, as described above, but women writ large were no longer expected to be pure housewives. Contrary to the Vichy government, which “despised women, seeing them as incompatible recruits to the politics of virility” (Diamond 96), women in the Resistance played large, instrumental roles. They fought alongside men and had leadership positions within the movement. However, at the end of World War II, many French men felt threatened by women’s “newfound independence” and strove to keep women under their control, both on an individual level and a societal one (Diamond 127). When Joan returned to French film, she reflected the agency found in newly opened roles for women during and after the war effort, shifting away from a feminine, passive hero to an active, masculine one. With this transition, the Joan of these male-directed films is clearly more heroic and active, which is an improvement to the passive heroism of the first period, but by emulating men to achieve this, she is “affirm[ing] male supremacy” (Warner 155).

This second, transitional movement of French feature-length films about Joan’s life spans from the post-war 1950s to the 1960s, the birth of the feminist movement in France, and beginning of “La Seconde Revolution Francaise” (“The Second French Revolution”), a time of great social change in France, according to Henri Mendras, a French sociologist. This period of film parallels the era of the Trente Glorieuses, the thirty years 1945 - 1975 where France knew unprecedented economic growth. Before that, though, was the postwar transition period, when women in France were “finding themselves in the roles of head of the household, organizing and
supervising the children’s education, mistress of the farm, manager of a small business,” since the adult male population had been away at war (Diamond 159). This new powerful position created conflict between women and their husbands as the latter returned home, but some men were able to accept their wives’ newfound power. Women began to have more say in family matters, which spread into society at large. More and more young women were attending high school and universities, which meant that female artists were also becoming more common. Directors like Agnès Varda were creating New Wave films and writers like Simone de Beauvoir were contesting women’s secondary situation in French society. While the powerful, independent woman was no longer impossible at this time, it was still radical, and so not a common experience among French women. That being said, a common experience was taking small steps toward that autonomy. While many women were pushed out of jobs as men came home, it was not as systematic as it had been after World War I. From pre- to post-war, “the number of working women across all the professions increased from 34.2 per 100 women in the population in 1936 to 36.7 in 1946” (Diamond 170). The growth of women in the workforce was in this case more permanent (by 1970, 50 per 100 women were working). During the war, women had access to jobs and training that led them to the beginnings of full-fledged careers, something previously available only to men. This shift toward equality was reflected in the Constitution of 1946, declaring “the law guarantees women equal rights to men in all areas,” just two years after women had gotten the right to vote as a reward for their work during the Resistance (Diamond 173). Equality in law and equality in practice would prove to be two different things, however. While women could work jobs, there were certain jobs that were more “suitable” to women, such as textile work. There are certainly exceptions to this, but in general, even employed, voting
women who were recognized as full citizens, “had no autonomy or power” (Diamond 194). Women in the postwar period could not work without their husband’s permission and they certainly did not have legal access to contraception or abortion (these rights were won in 1966, 1967, and 1975, respectively). Perhaps more political and professional opportunities were available to women, but by requiring the involvement of a presupposed husband ensured that women’s new rights were clearly based in patriarchal hegemony and designed to allay women’s frustrations while keeping them in a secondary place in society.

Cinematic portrayals of Joan during this period reflect the paradoxical state of French women. She begins to act with true independence and agency; however, it is still clear that men have the real power in society. For this reason, she is depicted with more masculine qualities and portrayed as a usurper of male prerogatives. Joan’s masculine, active character on screen in this period fulfills a new role for women in France, but also imparts the societal knowledge that men were still the only ones with real power, and so if a woman wanted to be a real, active hero, she had to essentially become a man.

While this desire for agency and heroism involved women trying to be like men, it was never women trying to be men. Transvestism is a common theme in films about Joan of Arc, because it “it unsexes her and dehumanises her, but does not confer manhood upon her.” (Warner 147). This can be contrasted with notions of transexuality, which involve not a desire to have what the other sex has, but rather the internal knowledge that one’s biological sex does not match one’s gender identity. While perhaps in the future, Joan will be a champion figure for the LGBTQIA+ movement in film as she has been on the streets, during the Trente Glorieuses, “cross-dressing to pass as a man does not challenge the structure of heterosexual relationships”
(Sproles), which was necessary to the telling of this story. While perhaps women in France were enjoying new liberties, this was only within the framework of patriarchal heterosexual marriage, one of the traditional institutions on which French society was centered in the postwar era.

During the Trente Glorieuses, five French films were made about Joan’s life: Jean Delannoy’s *Destinées* (1952), Robert Enrico’s *Jehanne* (1956), Claude Antoine’s *Jeanne au vitrail* (1961), Robert Bresson’s *Le Procès de Jeanne d’Arc* (1962) and Francis Lacassin’s *Histoire de Jeanne*. In terms of cinematic movements, “the disruption caused by the war saw the avant garde regain the upper hand,” which included minimalist work like that of Robert Bresson (Pulver). In the postwar period, cinema was mainly bare bones: in black and white, trying to tell stories with a moral. Films of this postwar period were usually careful not to rock the societal boat that had just been righted with the end of World War II. Bresson, for example, as a Catholic and former prisoner of war, did not bother with theatricality. He hired non-professional actors, minimized use of a musical score, and avoided excessive camera angles (contrary to those of Dreyer in *La passion de Jeanne d’Arc*). Since minimalism was a response to and movement away from expressionism and poetic realism, minimalist artists tried to remove everything that was considered unessential. Within this movement, the films most critical to this postwar, pre-feminist movement Joan of Arc, are Delannoy’s *Destinées* and Bresson’s *Le procès de Jeanne d’Arc*. In these films, power still belongs to masculinity but the female hero is allowed to borrow a cloak of masculinity that enables her agency, creating an active, masculine Joan.

Once again, Marina Warner’s book, *Joan of Arc: the Image of Female Heroism*, offers us a theoretical lens through which to consider Joan as a masculine and active hero. Warner presents Joan as distinguishing herself from previous femininity, therefore making herself masculine, and
giving herself access to hegemonic power, which reinforces her agency. “Joan of Arc is a preeminent heroine because she belongs to the sphere of action, while so many feminine figures or models are assigned and confined to the sphere of contemplation” (Warner 9). As women are starting to have access to the same means to act that men have, the idea of a hero is itself becoming more homogeneous and masculine as well. Women are moving into this sphere of action and exchanging their femininity for the capacity for heroic action.

As the first film to really encapsulate this active Joan, Delannoy’s *Destinées*, starring Michèle Morgan, juxtaposes her with two other female figures in wartime. *Destinées* is a tripartite film; the first part recounts the tale of an American war widow who goes to France to follow her husband’s last footsteps, and must interact with his mistress to do so. Joan’s story takes the middle position, and is followed by a screen adaptation of the Greek play, *Lysistrata*, the tale of how women during the Peloponnesian Wars refused men sex until they agreed to peace. The first and final parts of this movie serve as an interesting juxtaposition to Joan’s own war story, which necessitated her role as a hero, when the women in the other two parts of the film would not necessarily have been perceived in this role. Together, these three short films display different iterations of sexual power in the hands of women. The mistress in the first part of the film is not a problematic character, but rather a helpful one, which indicates a progressive attitude toward extramarital sex. Joan’s virginity and refusal of men negates their sexual power over her, and so gives her some of that power. Finally, in *Lysistrata*, the Greek women use their sexuality as a diplomatic tool to leverage peace. While, ultimately, all three of these stories are still safely within a patriarchal framework (the dead soldier is not penalized for having an affair, Joan’s imitation of masculinity reinforces male superiority, and men are ultimately the
decision-makers of peace in *Lysistrata*), they display three different kinds of growing feminine sexual power, each directed by a different individual. Delannoy, part of the Resistance during German Occupation, directed only the segment on Joan. While he may have been politically and socially progressive, his films had an “old-fashioned ring to them,” according to his contemporaries (Bergan). His more radical social ideas dictated his treatment of heroic Joan to some extent, whose masculinity, while not revolutionary per se, shows a transformation of what was acceptable in a female hero.

From the very beginning of Joan’s portion of *Destinées*, she is clearly a much more agentive character than she was in any previous film about her life. Since the plot of the film does not encapsulate Joan’s entire life, Delannoy begins Joan’s portion by describing via introductory text her journey up until the start of the film, including her victory at Orléans, the coronation of Charles VII, as well as Joan’s failure at Paris. The text continues, establishing Joan as alone, without an army or support from her king, but that nevertheless, she “a décidé de poursuivre sa mission” (“decided to proceed in her mission”) (Delannoy 25:27). This introduction denotes a significant shift from the Joan seen in Méliès’ and Dreyer’s films, where Joan would never have been credited with “deciding” anything. And yet here, before even setting eyes on Joan the character, it is clear that this Joan is capable of not only making decisions, but doing so without the support of her king or her army. This agency is supported by Delannoy’s choice in setting for the film. In the half hour, Delannoy only tells the story of Joan once she has gone rogue after losing support from her king. While this eventually leads her to capture at Compiègne, this is the only time historically where Joan is working for herself and no one else. She truly is taking her heroic mission and her life into her own hands, and taking an active role in
her heroism, which is characteristic of this second period of feature films of Joan’s life. “En obéissant à ses voix particulières, Jeanne d’Arc n’écoutait en réalité que sa conscience individuelle, qui lui commandait de sauver la France. C’était une révoltée, croyant en elle-même, en dépit des théologiens” (“In obeying her particular voices, Joan of Arc really was only listening to her individual conscience, which was commanding her to save France. It was a revolt, believing in herself despite what the theologians said”) (Winock 4444). Delannoy’s progressive, anti-institutional political leanings certainly set him up to create Joan independent of religious/monarchical justification for her actions. This sentiment is echoed in Joan’s own words later in the film as she is discussing strategy with the lord of an unnamed village and a wealthy Englishman. The two men inquire after why Joan needs money if she is in the village with the king’s blessing, forcing Joan to admit “je ne viens pas de la partie du roi” (I haven’t come on behalf of the king) (Delannoy 33:12). She continues, informing them that “le roi s’oppose [à]” (“the king opposes”) her current strategy (Delannoy 33:20). These statements from Joan indicate her disregard for the authority of the king over her actions. Joan is clearly making her own decisions on how to wage war, and is taking no advice, not even from her king (or any other male authority figure). This almost excessive level of masculine independence from others shows a clear break from the passive Joan from the first period of films.

Joan’s clear capacity to act is paired in this time period with typically masculine traits. For instance, throughout the course of the film, Joan is never in a dress, but rather spends the whole time in tights and a tunic, identical to her male counterparts. Her tunic can be seen below, in Figure 2.1, but more importantly this screenshot shows Joan’s haircut. While women, called garçonnes (the feminisation of the word “garcons,” meaning “boys”) in France, or flappers in
America, cropped their hair during the 1920s, it was in a distinctly feminine style, closer to the short hair of Dreyer’s Joan than to Delannoy’s. In Destinées, Joan’s hair is identical to that of some of her male companions, as illustrated in later figures. While Dreyer’s Joan’s distinct hairstyle distinguished her from her male interrogators in its difference, Delannoy’s Joan’s hair includes her in the male world of the film, and distinguishes her from the long-haired women she meets in town. Joan had to have masculine traits in order to be allowed in her masculine heroic role in this era. “Le docteur Bertrand de Saint-Germain, dans son ouvrage La Psychologie morbide dans ses rapports avec la philosophie et de l’histoire (1860), expliquait le cas de Jeanne par le fait qu’elle n’aurait pas eu tous les “attributs” et tous les “sens” de la femme” [“Doctor Bertrand of Saint-Germain, in his book Morbid Psychology in its Relationship With Philosophy and History (1860),” explains Joan’s situation by the fact that she must not have had all the “attributes” and all the “senses” of a woman”] (Winock 4446). In a historic and mythical lens, men could not understand how Joan the woman could have accomplished such heroic deeds, and
so she had to be contrived as masculine, if not male. This masculinity allows her to act upon her own free will, which is incredibly important in this period’s notion of heroism.

Joan’s most clear display of masculinity is in her controlling manner. The first example of this is within the first five minutes of this half-hour film, when the horse of one of Joan’s travelling companions collapses from exhaustion. Pierre, another of Joan’s travelling companions, begins to exclaim “j’en ai assez!” (“I’ve had enough!”) over and over again (Delannoy 26:32). Joan, on the contrary, is not concerned by either the horse’s tumble or Pierre’s outburst, and simply asks him “j’entends, Pierre, pourquoi tu cries?” (“I hear you, Pierre, why are you shouting?”) (Delannoy 26:51). This calm retort to Pierre’s emotional reaction underlines Joan’s masculinity by juxtaposition. While it would be expected of a woman to react emotionally to a perceived obstacle, Delannoy instead chooses a man to react in this feminine way, thereby emphasizing Joan’s own masculinity in comparison. Not only is she masculine in her absolute calmness, but also in her relative calmness to her male travelling companion. In this “paramount respect, Joan defied the quiddity of her sex and ignored what seemed its natural destiny. She went across prescribed boundaries, she became the opening that is not open, the square that is not squared, when she declared herself a maid but lived as a man” (Warner 138). Joan’s depicted control over her emotions in Destinées alludes to her greater situational control, as shown later in the film. In this masculine control and agency, the figure of Joan in the 1950s reflected the new realm available to women, but only as long as it perpetuated a masculine-centric hegemony.

Joan’s physical positioning in the scenes of Destinées also alludes to her masculine power and control over situations. Given that her group of travelling companions was down a horse, two people had to share one horse before they arrived at the unnamed village to ask for
provisions. Presumably, since Joan was the smallest among her companions, she was the one to share her horse. Instead of giving up the reins to her brother and letting him take over, she

Fig 2.2 Screen Capture of Delannoy’s Destinées 30:46

maintains her leadership in the situation, as seen above in Figure 2.2. This rejection of stereotypical gender hierarchy puts Joan in a masculine position, allowing her to maintain agency and power. When Joan enters the house of the unnamed village’s lord, she is seated at the head of the table, in a large, ornate chair. Then as she leaves the house, ready to depart from the village, she alerts her group of entirely male companions that she has decided the time to leave has come. The fact that the men were all waiting for Joan’s decision and that she made the decision entirely on her own indicates how significant her power was over these men. A feminine woman, expected to be passive and obedient to others, would not be able to lead a group of men decisively. The fact that Joan can and does underlines her masculinity. As they process out of the village to continue fighting, all of Joan’s noble peers, including the lord of the village, who joins her and provides her an army, leave her alone at the head of the army. This place of honor and power solidifies her status among men, which, in turn, reinforces Joan’s own masculinity. As
discussed in the previous chapter, “the female figure has come to be perceived as universal and
transcendental, while the male figure tends to be seen as more individual” (Foxwell). By
transitioning from feminine and passive to masculine and active, Joan’s position at the head of
her army has similarly undergone changes. Where she used to be a figurehead, leading the army
symbolically, now she stands alone at the forefront, as an individual ready for action. In a world
where a woman can act like a man without punishment, a new level of masculine power and
agency becomes accessible, thus changing the face of what female heroism looks like.

Joan’s control of her emotions is part of her masculine ability to control situations.
Sometimes, however, this supersedes control and becomes pride. When the church bell rings as
Joan is travelling, she and all her travelling companions dismount from their horses and kneel to
pray. Joan goes apart from her companions to petition her heavenly voices, which have been
silent for a while, to speak to her again. Instead of a humble plea however, Joan angrily shouts:
“vous n’avez plus le droit de vous taire comme vous m’avez parlé si longtemps” (“you aren’t
allowed to be silent since you’ve been talking to me for so long”) (Delannoy 28:28). By any
standard, telling heavenly beings what they are and aren’t allowed to do is a display of
arrogance, which is a masculine trait simply because in order to comport oneself pridefully, one
must also be able to act in ways of which they can be prideful. Pride is also associated with
masculinity because it opposes proper femininity, which was to be humble, subordinate; and “the
rejection of femininity is associated with positive action” (Warner 147). Thus, pride links agency
(the positive presence of action) and masculinity, and so by displaying an arrogant Joan,
Delannoy connects his Joan with both of these traits.
Femininity is also still somewhat split into the angel/monster dichotomy in this period. In *Destinées*, Joan is not the only female character; all the other women in the film are, whether sexually promiscuous women or good mothers, her foils. At the same time, by representing traditional feminine roles, these foils also push Joan into the masculine realm, where she has a “unique standing: she is a universal figure who is [a masculine] female -- neither a queen, nor a courtesan, nor a beauty, nor a mother, nor an artist of one kind or another, nor a saint. She eludes the categories in which women have normally achieved a higher status that gives them immortality, and yet she gained it” (Warner 6). In gaining this heroic status outside of permissible female roles, Joan has been reframed as masculine, in order for society to come to terms with her heroic deeds. Just before Joan’s arrival into the unnamed city, its lord was awakened and made aware of her coming. There is a woman in bed with him, and she appears extremely sexualized, with her nightdress off of both shoulders, exposing the tops of her breasts, as seen above in Figure 2.3. Addressing the woman in his bed as a “putain” (“whore”) who has asked what she should do, the lord instructs her: “tu t’habilles et tu fais mon bagage, et vite”
(“you get dressed and pack my bag, and quickly”) (Delannoy 30:15). This woman reflects the feminine passivity seen in previous films, associated here with weakness and vice. Asking questions before acting and being obedient to a male figure solidify her as not only passive, but weak in nature. Two minutes later, as Joan goes to enter the dwelling of this lord, the woman who had been sleeping with him is leaving. Once the lord thinks Joan is out of sight, he hits the woman and sends her on her way with a bundle of her things. As the representation of an illicit sexual relationship, she is the essence of why feminine women could not be heroes: because femininity was the root of sexual vice.

Violence against sexualized women is shown again within the next two minutes of film, when a woman from the square approaches Joan, blaspheming against the Virgin Mary and questioning Joan’s command of the French troops, since “a girl dressing up as a man, and acting as one successfully, is rife with controversy” (Foxwell). The woman’s dress is falling off her shoulder, exposing her collarbone in a suggestive manner. Before a full-fledged fight breaks out between the two women, the lord of the village breaks up the conversation, as seen above in
Figure 2.4 by pushing over the blasphemous woman, and then kicking her when she tries to stand up. The lord’s actions and the woman’s inability to act exemplify how feminine (and sexualized) women were denied agency in society and how, as carriers of vice, it was acceptable to deal with them in violent ways. Joan’s masculinity and agency hide her status as a woman, and differentiate her from feminine roles, thereby allowing others to view her as a man, or at least man-like, and to ignore the way she acts outside the suitable roles for her gender.

Joan is also contrasted with the feminine role of mother in this film. A mother approaches Joan to beg her to pray for her child who has just passed away without being baptised, meaning his soul would not be able to enter Heaven. Instead of showing motherly compassion, Joan utters a single, emphatic “non” (Delannoy 36:09). Joan rejects this connection with a feminine role to “set herself apart” from what was (and still is) generally perceived to be the weaker sex (Warner 145). While she ultimately does fulfill the woman’s request, it is only once the woman, angry at being refused, tells her to go away, implying that she is not needed. Joan had also just been lamenting how “je ne suis plus la Pucelle maintenant” (“now I am no longer the Maid”) (Delannoy 35:28). In this case, Joan is speaking less of her virginity and more of its reputation. Joan the “vièrge guerriere” (“virgin warrior”) (Winock 4433) had won battles and frightened the English and created almost a cult following in France, but given that the lord of the village would not help her, Joan’s reputation was clearly on the line, and it seemed as though it no longer had the same effects of garnering followers. Thus, it’s clear that Joan is not motivated by any sort of pure, shared motherly love to help this mother in need, but rather a duty to uphold her pride and reputation, much more masculine motivations.
Just before this request is made of Joan, Pierre, the emotional travel companion from earlier, finally decides to return home to his family. Joan ridicules him for this, saying, “peut-être moi aussi je me marierai avec quelqu’un et j’aurai des enfants” (“maybe I will also marry someone and have kids”) (Delannoy 35:28). Even in jest, Joan’s comment is frightening to her brother, who immediately replies, “mais c’est pas vrai” (“but that can’t be true”) (Delannoy 35:28). A woman wielding this much power could only be viewed using a masculine lens. If she were to marry a man and therefore be his subordinate and bear his children, she loses the ability to act of her own free will, a trait intensely linked to heroism. Joan’s brother’s immediate denial of Joan the hero’s womanly potential to marry and have children makes this linkage clear. This contradiction of both the mother role and the previously described sexually promiscuous women with Joan’s heroism continues the relegation of femininity into either a pure, positive camp or a dangerous, negative as it did in the first period of films. However, Joan’s masculinity is an allowable escape from this dichotomy that did not formerly allow for any woman to have agency, because having any level of autonomy was to immediately be placed on the dangerous side of the dichotomy. Given that Joan is still identifiably female, but not at all feminine, this film, which is indicative of the period, exhibits a break from this rigid dichotomy to allow women to act like men and thereby “usurp the privileges of the male and his claims to superiority” (Warner 145-146).

Even though a woman had to exhibit masculine qualities in order to have the agency necessary to be a hero, Delannoy was not at all advocating for or even hinting at any notion of gender fluidity or transsexuality. Transsexuality is not a concept that would have been easily tackled in minimalist film during this time period between 1940 and 1970, and Delannoy also
makes a point of establishing Joan as a woman in a couple minor but significant ways. One of these is Joan’s response to the baby who, after prayers, is resuscitated long enough to be baptized. When the baby wakes and begins to cry, Joan takes a close look at him and says “il a faim” (“he’s hungry”) (Delannoy 38:26). Even though Joan has no experience mothering children, she is able to ascertain from the cry what the baby needs, a skill that only a woman could have, and thereby reconciling masculine Joan with her essential woman-ness. The other main example of this is when Joan speaks of the importance of knowing herself as the Maid. In the Catholic Church, from the 1400s during Joan’s lifetime until today, the idea of feminine virginity and sexual purity among women is much more discussed and encouraged than male chastity. Joan has been known unequivocally throughout history for these traits, not in small part because “tous les auteurs insistent sur sa pureté, sur sa virginité” (“all authors insist on her purity, on her virginity”) (Winock 4457). The association with the word “virgin” reminds viewers that even though Joan may act with the power of a man, she is indeed a “true” woman underneath, adhering to cultural and religious concepts of feminine sexual purity.

Joan’s masculine power is magnified further in Bresson’s Le procès de Jeanne d’Arc “a film that seems designed to invert Dreyer’s Passion at every turn” (Hobbins) starring Florence Carrez. First and foremost among this inversion is the minimalism that Bresson was known for; Le procès de Jeanne d’Arc was “stripped of any flesh of gestures and emotion,” (Hobbins) a clear contrast with Dreyer’s emotional, Expressionist La passion de Jeanne d’Arc. This contrast also leads to a Joan that is the precise opposite of Dreyer’s feminine and passive figurehead. In Le procès de Jeanne d’Arc, the masculine and active hero fits into Bresson’s bare-bones vision; where Dreyer’s Joan mastered the art of expressing herself without words and with great
emotion, as was integral to the Expressionist style, Bresson’s Joan is all witty retorts and stoicism. Competing with the increasing popularity of television, *Le procès de Jeanne d’Arc* did not fare well at the box office. However, the fact that the film was not well received does not affect its ability to reflect the female heroic space at the time.

The parts of Joan’s life that directors choose to portray are integral to interpreting the situational heroism that Joan embodies. In the case of *Le procès de Jeanne d’Arc*, Bresson seems to rewrite the script on Joan’s passivity and femininity exhibited in the first period of films by focusing on the events in Joan’s life where she would be expected to be passive and instead paints her as active and agentive -- masculine. “By becoming male, the female escaped subordination” in both historical eras and modern memory (Warner 152-153). Throughout Joan’s trial, captivity, and ultimate death, the times when she is most out of control of her life, Bresson’s Joan is still strong, active, willful, and therefore masculine.

While she is being questioned during her trial, Bresson’s Joan looks directly into the eyes of her interrogators, in contrast with Dreyer’s Joan, who would look away. Looking away,
speaking, as seen above in Figure 2.5, Bresson’s Joan instead redirects this respect and reverence toward herself, holding her head high and not showing fear of or deference to the men with whom she is interacting. Instead, she puts herself on a physically equal plane with them, “aping their appearance in order to usurp their functions,” which “defied men and declared them useless” (Warner 155). This display of intense pride and confidence is consistent throughout the trial, as exemplified in her telling her interrogators to “croyez-moi, si vous voulez” (“believe me, if you want to”) (Bresson 11:25). This fearlessness and audacity is not present in previous, feminine and passive Joans, showing a development toward acceptance of an active role for a woman hero.

This active role is most visible in Joan’s verbal clashes with her interrogators. As the first public questioning session draws to a close, Bishop Pierre Cauchon, who was charged with leading the proceedings of Joan’s trial, forbids Joan from leaving her cell. Given that Joan had a guard at all times outside her cell, this was a formality more than anything; it would have been impossible for Joan to leave her cell. This inevitability makes the Bishop’s statement a simple display of power, since regardless of whether he said it, it would still happen. And yet, upon
hearing this prohibition, Joan stands, becoming the only one in the room doing so, other than Bishop Cauchon. As visible in Figure 2.6 above, this places her physically above the all-male audience and at equal height with the interrogators on their raised platform. This assertion of power by taking up space is an incredibly masculine contrast to the Joans of pre-1940 who had to be guided by male companions to move in physical space. This new Joan “disturbs expectations of “saintly” girls and gender roles,” (Yervasi) even ultimately walking herself out to the stake to be burned to death. Her look of defiance matches her steely resolve as well as her verbal response in the trial: “je n’accepte pas cette défense” (“I don’t accept this prohibition”) (Bresson 4:20). Joan is also aware that regarding the words exchanged in this space, she will continue to live in her cell at the mercy of her interrogators. By standing up (literally) for herself, she asserts her own will, and denies the subjugation ordered of her by the Bishop, which previous, more feminine Joans would have accepted.

Later in the trial, Joan puts herself on an equal physical plane with someone even greater than her interrogators: King Charles VII. One of the principal interrogators asks Joan if she had ever seen her likeness made into an image. She replies that she had seen one wherein “je présentais une lettre à mon roi. J'étais à genou; il était à genou” (“I was presenting a letter to my king. I was kneeling; he was kneeling”) (Bresson 18:30). While those questioning Joan would not have recognized Charles as the rightful King of France, they would still understand that a king in a Catholic country is greater than a bishop. By mentioning that she and the king were on the same physical level, even though they both were kneeling rather than standing, Joan intimates to her interrogators that she is greater than even they are, because she is on an equal standing (or kneeling, as it were) with the king. She shows this disdain for the supposed power of
her interrogators again more explicitly later. When asked by Bishop Cauchon if she is not subject to the “église militante,” or the terrestrial Church, Joan replies “oui, notre Seigneur premier servi” (“yes, our Lord served first”) (Bresson 33:42). Basically, Joan denies the terrestrial Church its power over her, putting herself directly under Christ in the hierarchy. The Catholic Church has always taken great pride in its intermediary role between Heaven and Earth, so by negating the importance of this role, Joan is effectively insulting the very basis of the Church as an institution. This assertion of higher status highlights Joan’s pride, an “external [mark] of masculinity” (Yervasi) and desire to fight back against those who wish to wrong her.

Throughout the many days of her trial, Joan makes it clear to her interrogators that she will not go down quietly. In addition to verbally challenging the Bishop’s command, she also accuses him of his own crimes: “prenez garde, vous qui vous dites mon juge, vous assumez une grande charge” (“watch out, you who call yourself my judge take on a heavy burden”) (Bresson 5:32). In becoming the accuser herself, Joan flips the script of her interrogation, regaining a significant amount of power in the trial. She bolsters this power mere seconds later, when asked to swear to tell the truth: “je dirais la vérité, mais je ne dirais pas tout” (“I will tell the truth, but I won’t tell the whole truth”) (Bresson 5:39). Joan could have effectively done this (told the truth but not the whole truth) during the course of the trials and been the only one to have known. By declaring this intention, however, Joan presents a massive challenge to the Bishop’s authority, by simply not respecting his convention of telling the truth. It is also notable that Bresson did not write these lines; they come from the transcript of Joan’s trial itself. That being said, Bresson’s choice to include them in Le procès de Jeanne d’Arc shows growth in Joan’s development of agency. While Joan’s trial was portrayed in La passion de Jeanne d’Arc, Dreyer did not choose
to include any of Joan’s more challenging lines, showing that “even in negative, through what is 
 omitted, what is not discussed...the preoccupations of a shared culture” are revealed (Warner 7). 
 In the 1920s when Dreyer was filming, a snide woman was not only unheroic, but villainous and 
 dangerous, which is revealed in Dreyer’s decision not to include some of Joan’s responses from 
 the trial that could be classified as testy. Bresson’s decision to display a more feisty, agentive 
 Joan shows the transition of cultural ideas of female heroes from a passive, uncontroversial 
 figure to a more active, commanding one. 

 Additionally, later in the trial when Joan is asked who advised her to don masculine 
 clothing, she tells her interrogators to “passez outre” (“disregard”) (Bresson 6:21). Surprisingly, 
 Joan’s interrogators do not press the point, and do in fact disregard that question and move on to 
 the next. On another day when Bishop Cauchon asks Joan about the significance of a ring that 
 they have taken from her, Joan replies: “vous, Evêque, vous en avez un à moi, rendez le moi” 
 (“you, Bishop, you have one of mine, give it back”) (Bresson 15:40). Even though Joan is 
 technically the object of the interrogation, she takes matters into her own hands and makes 
 herself the subject of a demand: return her ring to her. Even once the trial moves into Joan’s cell, 
 where Joan no longer has the capacity to move as she once did, she uses her verbal agency to 
 assert herself. While Joan was still moving back and forth between her cell and the room where 
 the trial takes place, Bresson highlights this physical movement by showing each time Joan 
 makes the trip. While this can be repetitive to the viewer, it emphasizes Joan’s capacity for 
 movement/action: “heroic masculine...behavior” (Yervasi). Once this capacity to move is gone, 
 she still “subjectifies” herself and makes demands of Bishop Cauchon: “je requiert qu’on me 
 permet d’entendre la Messe et de recevoir de la Communion à la fête de Pâques” (“I require that
I be permitted to attend Mass and receive Communion on Easter”) (Bresson 31:48). Joan makes it clear that this trial will be run on her terms, not the Bishop’s. While Joan’s charges are being read to her, she stands abruptly after the seventh charge, declaring “je proteste de toutes mes forces contre les fausses accusations portées contre moi” (“I protest with all my force against these false accusations made against me”) (Bresson 35:08). During the whole movie, Joan refuses to submit to the authority of the patriarchal Church, taking an active role in her own defense, unlike what either Méliès’ or Dreyer’s passive Joans would have done. Bresson’s Joan carries this all the way to the stake, trying aggressively to free herself from the restraints keeping her in the flames, as seen above in Figure 2.7. Ultimately, she is an active hero, who has the ability to act and uses it frequently, with great pride.

After each session of the trial before it took place in her cell, Joan turns and leaves when she is ready to go. She is followed by her guards, who accompany her back to her cell. Joan leads this small group, and is not guided or told what to do in any way. By taking control of the little that remains up to her, Joan demonstrates a masculine assertion of power, clearly “a refusal, indeed, a reversal of traditional gender roles” (Yervasi) compared to the Joans of Méliès and
Dreyer. Bresson reconstructs the script of actions that take place in spaces where Joan was at her most powerless by showing her as creating/taking/having agency even in these spaces, suggesting Joan’s status as an active, agentive, and masculine hero.

Joan also exhibits this masculinity in her suppression of emotion. Clearly troubled by the inevitability of her continued captivity, Joan bursts into tears upon her return to her cell, as seen below in Figure 2.8. The timing and cause of this emotional breakdown is significant. The tears are presumably hopeless ones, frustrated at being in captivity. This frustration, rather than habituation, to subjugation displays Joan’s masculine accustomedness to acting of her own volition, and not that of others. Additionally the tears are most likely a symptom of the same slew of emotions that she was feeling when she stood up to Bishop Cauchon. By suppressing her tears until she was alone in her cell, Joan prevents displaying any sign of emotional weakness to the interrogators, showing instead a strong side, before breaking down on her own. That Bresson chooses to display any amount of Joan’s crying, though, indicates his interest in reassuring the audience that she is a woman, even if she has been acting in a masculine way. Had Joan been a
male hero, the emotional scene would not be included in the film, but since Joan is female and therefore a stand in/role model for the entire female sex, she must be recognizable as a woman.

Bresson also accomplishes this reminder of femininity via Joan’s hair, visible in all the photos of Joan thus far, and which is longer than in previous films from both this period (Delannoy) and the previous one (Dreyer). It also looks similar to hairstyles popular in the 1960s, when *Le procès de Jeanne d’Arc* was released, which more visibly connects the Joan on the screen to women in the audience. Not only was Joan, as a female hero, representative of what these women could aspire to, she was a role model: someone contemporary women could see themselves in. As Joan dressed in a masculine manner to establish her agency, women in the 1960s were also beginning to wear more “copycat fashions...from executive suits to the workers’ look, the oversized boiler suit and faded dungarees” (Warner 155) and performing masculinity in a way that allowed them to act of their own volition. Yet, the feminine versions of masculine clothes were tailored to the female body. In this way, there was still no confusion about the sex of the wearer. Just as in *Destinées*, Bresson uses Joan’s physical appearance, in this case her hair, to reinforce her status as a woman, albeit a masculine and active one. So even though Bresson’s Joan is a masculine one in her actions and dress, her hair is longer than most men would wear, reinforcing her womanhood, distinct from her femininity, which is not shown to a great extent.

In a situation where a woman would normally be an object of the male gaze, Joan establishes herself as masculine by making herself the subject of her own gaze. While she is being interrogated, Bishop Cauchon slips out on at least three occasions and peers in at Joan with an Englishman via a peephole in the stone. On the third occasion, Joan acknowledges that she knows that she is under surveillance, and while she is answering a question having to do with the
“sign” that she was shown to recognize King Charles VII disguised in the crowd, Joan turns and looks disdainfully over her shoulder, as seen above in Figure 2.9, as if to inform Bishop Cauchon and the Englishman that she is aware of their presence. This simple awareness of an otherwise stealthy gaze puts the power back in Joan’s arena, and shows how her “pride is attached to her body” (Yervasi) in a way that a feminine woman could not have pride, since her sexualized body was associated with vice. Had Joan not looked back, she would have been the simple object of the powerful male gaze, but by returning the gaze, she makes herself the subject of a new gaze, reducing Bishop Cauchon and the Englishman to objects of her gaze. In an “économie scopique” (“scopic economy”) which privileges sight because it is the tool by which men dominate women, the subject of this gaze is necessarily masculine (Irigaray). By exhibiting this gaze, Joan turns her object-ness as a woman into subject-ness as a masculine hero figure.

This same transformation can be seen in Bresson’s depiction of Joan’s virginity. After Joan has been examined by a group of holy women and declared to have an intact hymen, these results are shared with Bishop Cauchon. Upon hearing Joan is indeed a virgin, he responds “oui, c’est ce qui fait sa force” (“yes, that’s where she derives her strength”) (Bresson 24:11).
According to Foxwell, “great strength was perceived as inherent in virginity.” Joan’s virginity, instead of being a point of passive, feminine virtue, is a source of great strength. By not subordinating herself to a man sexually, Joan can maintain her masculine power and agency. Thus, her virginity is a proof of this power, one which Bishop Cauchon desperately hopes to prove untrue, and fails.

One of the greatest signs of the passivity shown in feminine heroes of the first period of Joan of Arc films was dependence on men. In Méliès’ *Jeanne d’Arc*, this took the form of asking male permission before taking action and in Dreyer’s *La passion de Jeanne d’Arc*, Joan has a male figure to look to during her trial, who indicated how she should answer questions. In Bresson’s *Le Procès de Jeanne d’Arc*, a male figure is again present, dressed in white, trying to help provide Joan with answers. The first time he tries to help, as seen below in Figure 2.10, Joan completely ignores him, and does not even look in his direction. The second time he indicates how Joan should respond to a question, she does pay attention and does heed his feedback. However, this does not continue; Joan does not look over at him until after she has answered any given question, and then finally, in the last instance shown in the film, Joan is asked a question,
and the man in white tries to get Joan’s attention to give her his opinion, but Joan does not notice. Again, near the end of the film, the man in white approaches Joan illicitly to advise her to submit herself to the Church so that she will be saved. Joan looks at him blankly without replying until he turns and leaves. Joan’s independence of outside help for her cleverness is subtly underlined when one of the English soldiers in charge of her guards instructs them “that anyone who tries to approach her and advise her will go to the stake with her” (Bresson 14:12). By including this line, Bresson shows that Joan had no access to others’ opinions of what she should do, emphasizing her intelligence and agency. While in Dreyer’s film, the assistance of a man was necessary for Joan to feel comfortable interacting with powerful men, Bresson’s Joan barely even gives an afterthought to the assistance of the man in white, showing her “prideful, inflexible, assured” ability to defend “herself and even attack” (Yervasi). Given the popularity and acclaim that Dreyer’s La passion de Jeanne d’Arc knew, it would make sense that Bresson would be familiar with it. If that is the case, the man in white from Le procès de Jeanne d’Arc harkens back to the false confessor from La passion de Jeanne d’Arc and thereby creates a direct contrast between Dreyer’s and Bresson’s Joans. While the former was passive and needed help, the latter is active and confident, and shrugs off a man’s attempt at meddling in her answers. This confidence exudes power and therefore masculinity, showing Joan’s development over the forty years between the films.

The social developments over the course of World War II that lasted into the postwar period launched a re-imagination of female heroism. With the ability to work and be the breadwinner for the family in peacetime, as well as a legal declaration of equality, French women were able to act of their own volition in ways that were not previously possible. That
being said, the spheres where power was found were still culturally masculine, and access to those spaces involved an abandoning of feminine attributes. For Joan the hero on screen, this meant that she shed her figurehead role and took on one of an active, engaged, androgynous warrior, one who “n’eut pas manqué, si elle avait vécu” (“would not have missed, had she been alive”) the battles of the World Wars (Winock 4434). As the feminist movement gains momentum in the 1970s, however, Joan no longer has to check her femininity at the door in order to be allowed into a heroic space.
Chapter 3 - Joan the Amazon: The Beginnings of Feminine Heroism

Feminist Movement to Present (1980s - 2010s)

Before being able to fully discuss this last period of films, it is important to note that between the last film of the second period and the first one of the third, there are almost three decades during which Joan was absent from the screen in France; Francis Lacassin’s *Histoire de Jeanne* came out in 1962 and Pierre Moinot’s *Le pouvoir et l’innocence* came out in 1989. Internationally, films continued to be produced about Joan of Arc’s life, even in the USSR, but France, the hero’s homeland, was silent. Beyond feature films, she was in no major new French TV programming, theatrical productions, visual arts, monuments, written literature, or even video games (“Cinematography and Film: Joan of Arc”). It is only natural to wonder why? Was she being reprocessed? Is it a retaliation of male directors against the feminist movement, for fear of them using Joan as a figurehead? Were male feminist sympathisers taking a long time to learn how to “correctly” portray this woman figure? Is it a case of learning how to abandon the “binary logic, such as activity/passivity...head/emotions, intelligible/sensitive,” angel/monster, “and so forth”? (Kenny 17). I cannot imagine that feminists were done with Joan as a figure, since she did return to film and social movements alike, but perhaps she was viewed as off limits, belonging only to a man’s view, since they had monopolized the telling of her myth for so long.

To me, the most compelling answer to the problem of Joan’s puzzling absence from French cinema during this period is that the French discourse on women during this time of absence was beginning to be rewritten. This may have made it impossible to reimagine Joan --
the most sacred of all feminine heroic archetypal figures in France -- in any meaningful way by any director or even feminist while women and the broader culture were fundamentally rethinking what a woman was and could be. As a result of the student riots in May 1968 against Gaullist paternalism, consumerism, capitalism, neocolonialism, and a whole host of other issues, a new sort of feminism was born in France, now part of the international second wave of feminism. The language used during this phase of feminism, which lasted until the late 1980s before the postfeminist movement took over in popularity among young women, spoke mostly to the female body and how to accomplish “une écriture féminine” (“a female/feminine writing”) (Cixous). Second wave writers like Simone de Beauvoir, Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva wrote about exiting the binaries imposed by gender, privileging female voices and styles of writing, and allowing women to be sexual in ways they weren’t previously allowed to.

This sexual revolution was paired with general legislative and social advancements. In 1967, contraception was made legal and accessible, only one year after women were legally permitted to seek employment “sans le consentement de leur mari” (“without the permission of their husband”) (“Quelques Dates Clés De L'histoire Des Droits Des Femmes”). In 1972, a law was passed mandating equal pay for equal work among men and women, and three years later another law passed forcing all educational facilities to accept male and female students. Finally, in 1975, abortion was legalized, allowing women to have full autonomy over their bodies.

As these progressive laws and societal changes were becoming a reality, Joan was notably absent. I found it spectacularly odd that Joan, the French national hero and a woman who had exercised “male” leadership qualities on the battlefield unlike any other woman in modern history, should not have a cinematic presence during this reimagining of femininity. That being
said, her possession by the Church and her status as a virgin, set her outside of this primarily sexual and corporeal revolution.

Regardless of why she was excluded, a new Joan does resurface in French cinema in 1989, as the second wave of feminism gave way to the third. Even though the status of women had morphed without Joan, she, as the “epitome of heroic virtue,” (Foxwell) returns changed in significant ways to continue to reflect the ways that women had access to heroism and power in society.

This third wave of feminism that takes place during the course of this period was seen as “a new departure in feminist politics and a break with the essentialism of the second wave” (Kenny 20). While the second wave of feminism centered on a strategic liberation of women’s bodies (and language) away from the view/touch (and phallogocentrism) of men, the third wave was less focused on the oppressive power of men and more on celebrating all female bodies, whether they were straight, Christian, and married with kids, or transgender, atheist, and living in a polyamorous relationship. The third wave of feminism tries to establish a woman’s ability to live the way she wants, be that married or single, working or not, having children or not. In this way, traditional femininity receives a bit of a boost because, from a feminist standpoint, it is no longer equated with weakness; it is just as valid as any other way of performing femininity. Third wave feminists like Judith Butler “have disputed causal explanations that assume that sex dictates or necessitates certain social meanings for women's experience” (520) which allows for much larger flexibility of acceptable performances of femininity and masculinity in women. This allows films about Joan of Arc to have a more feminine, agentive hero, which is precisely what we see in this third period of films. The third wave framework of empowering all women and
prioritizing “action over theoretical justification” (Snyder 175) provides the stepping stone to move from the second period of films to this new third one, while simultaneously offering an explanation of why Joan was absent during the second wave. A powerful feminine hero could not appear on screen before this concept was solidified.

From 1989 to present, seven theatrical release feature films were produced in France about the life of Joan of Arc: Pierre Moinot’s *Le pouvoir et l’innocence* (1989), Jacques Rivette’s *Jeanne la pucelle* (1994), Luc Besson’s *La messagère : l’histoire de Jeanne d’Arc* (1999), Laurent Preyale’s *Jeanne d’Arc* (2004), Philippe Ramos’ *Jeanne Captive* (2011), and Bruno Dumont’s *Jeannette : l’enfance de Jeanne d’Arc* (2017) and *Jeanne d’Arc* (2019). Across this large expanse of time were several cinematic movements. First, the New Wave was coming to an end. Jacques Rivette was part of this movement wherein the previous tradition of theatrical formality of cinema was put into question and frequently ignored to produce a more naturalistic, improvisational sort of film. Then came the “cinema du look,” to which Luc Besson subscribed. This movement emphasized the visual appeal of its films more than previous movements, and often focused on alienated main characters, so Joan was a good pick. More recent cinema as an art form has come under the name of the New French Extremity, or the cinema of the body. Director Bruno Dumont is an integral part of this movement, which is known for its transgressive artistic radicalism, specifically as it relates to portrayals of bodies. Within this broad range of films, the two that best express the newfound possibility of femininity and heroism in this third period are Rivette’s *Jeanne la pucelle* and Besson’s *La messagère : l’histoire de Jeanne d’Arc*. Perhaps because they are at the forefront of this period, when femininity was a new trait in a national hero, they represent it best. However, I will briefly touch on some of these more recent
films (Ramos and Dumont) at the end of this chapter. For now, Rivette and Besson demonstrate a feminine and active hero, which was not seen in any films before the 1980s.

Unfortunately, Marina Warner’s book that has provided the theoretical foundation for my previous two chapters was written in the 1980s, so it does not cover the additional imagery of Joan after the third wave of feminism has begun. Joan of Arc film scholar Robin Blaetz also has not written about Joan and French society past 1994. However, both of these prominent scholars compare Joan to an Amazonian woman, and I found this comparison to be especially true in this period of films, so I used Mikaela Carpenter’s dissertation about Wonder Woman, an Amazon, and an All-American mythical hero, whose image has undergone a transformation over time as women’s roles changed in society, just like Joan. As Wonder Woman morphs to fit into a modern, feminist society, she empowers herself “in these narratives in which the feminine can be rediscovered in contrast to the dominating patriarchal masculine” (Carpenter 36). Similarly, this period of films is the first where Joan is an “ideologically ideal female” and also a “narratively empowered woman” (Carpenter 18).

As was the case at the beginning of the second period of films, the third period of films is starkly different from everything before it. Specifically, Jacques Rivette’s Jeanne la pucelle, starring Sandrine Bonnaire, “turns both Dreyer and Bresson inside-out” (Hobbins). Rivette, as a New Wave auteur, included “a strong personal point of view in his films,” (“Jacques Rivette”). He was also known for the immense length of his films, which was certainly the case for Jeanne la pucelle, a nearly five hour film in its entirety. Rivette directed historical period pieces off and on throughout his decades-long career, and dabbled in fantasy toward the end. Jeanne la Pucelle was one of his last films, and was a return to a historical period piece in a period where he was
otherwise interested in fantasy. During this film saga of Joan’s life, Rivette “dramatizes the whole life of Joan...and yet...bypasses the trial itself” (Hobbins). This skipping the trial, like Delannoy does, reinforces Joan’s agency. Because agency is not a new facet to Joan the hero figure, I will focus primarily on the novelty of femininity coexisting with this agency. In this period, Joan is a little snarky, a little more emotional, and a lot more agentive while in feminine dress. In *Jeanne la pucelle*, Joan spends the first half hour of the film in a dress. She shows just as much agency then as she does in the rest of the film (in more masculine or androgenous dress), suggesting a consistent character throughout the entire film. Since the presence of this agency in a feminine hero (i.e., femininity does not come at the price of agency as in the first period of films, nor does agency or the female hero have to be masculinized as in the films of the second period) is so new to portrayals of Joan, my focus will be on the first half hour of the film.

Unlike any of the previous Joan films, *Jeanne la pucelle* begins with the voice of a woman. Isabelle Romée, Joan’s mother, is the first person visible in the film, as well as the first to speak. She narrates the premise of the film, recounting how religiously she raised her daughter, who then left home to accomplish what her voices told her to do. Isabelle then denounces Joan’s death, foreseeing for those responsible “la damnation de leurs âmes” (“the damnation of their souls”) (Rivette 5:11). These words are taken from the rehabilitation trial in 1455, which King Charles VII called together in order to reclaim his right to the French throne. Using Isabelle Romée’s account to start the film about Joan’s life serves both as an introduction for what the film will encapsulate, but also puts a woman's testimony in a privileged space. It reveals an “underlying feminine narrative” while it “reasserts power in the woman’s voice, emotion, and rationality” (Carpenter 36). Being the “first” of anything is a distinction that has
historically not been allowed to women (unless they were in an all women’s category, which would necessarily fall behind that of an all men’s category, like sports). Putting the testimony of Isabelle Romée in this privileged first position in the film shows that women in this time period in which the film was made are being given more of a say in society. They have a voice, and with that voice comes agency, without the necessity of appearing masculine, as was the case in the postwar period.

One of the most important aspects of agency is the voice. In Joan’s case, her voice helps her use her own power rather than that of the men around her. In nearly every film about Joan’s period of captivity among the English, some version of guards attempting to rape Joan once she

is forced to wear a dress after abjuring is either pictured or spoken about. In Jeanne la pucelle, it is pictured, as seen above in Figure 3.1 and Joan gets out of the situation by screaming. In previous films, a nobleman happens to enter Joan’s quarters while she is silently struggling with her captor and saves her, but in Rivette’s film, Joan cries out to call attention to her assault. In this way, Joan shows she can use her voice in addition to her physical motion to achieve her

Fig 3.1 Screen Capture of Rivette’s Jeanne la pucelle 4:11:43
goals, which solidifies her agency. Since all “Joan of Arc films are essentially films about the female body,” (Yervasi) it is also worth noting that in the time when this last period of films was being made, women are just beginning to use their voices to talk about sexual assault. Rivette reflects this reality through Joan’s response to her assault, giving the female body more agency than it has had in the previous films. When Joan’s interrogators confront Joan the following day regarding why she has changed back into men’s clothing, they ask her who forced her to do so. Joan takes full responsibility: “personne ne m’a obligé; c’est moi qui a voulu” (“no one made me do it; I wanted to”) (Rivette 4:17:53), and in doing so, acknowledges her agency. Joan puts on her men’s clothing again ostensibly to prevent easy access to her body, but she ultimately does so because she wanted to, not in reaction to anyone else, which underlines her ability to accomplish her own will.

The Joan in Jeanne la pucelle visibly shows this movement away from masculinity as a prerequisite for having agency. For the first half hour of the film, Joan has a dress on, as seen above in Figure 3.2, but she acts no differently in a dress and long hair than she does later in her masculine clothing and short hair, or even armor. Joan frequently agitates and paces when she speaks, which is the case during the whole movie, and which is a way for Rivette to underline
Joan’s capacity to act. In the words of Sandrine Bonnaire, an exceptionally well known actress and favorite of many filmmakers (including Agnès Varda of the New Wave movement), who played Joan in *Jeanne la pucelle*, Rivette wanted an “active, courageous warrior” (Yervasi). By using the word “active,” Bonnaire shows on Rivette’s behalf a new societal option for (non masculinized) women since the last period of films. In the 1990s when this film was made, a woman does not need to pass as a man in order to have agency; the new category of feminine and agentive has been opened to women. Joan displays this most clearly in the first half hour of this film, while she appears physically feminine. During this portion of the film, Joan rejects her uncle's strong encouragement to leave Vaucouleurs, where she has been trying (and failing) for several weeks to get an escort to see Dauphin Charles. When her uncle makes to leave the city, Joan flatly tells him, “je ne pars pas” (“I’m not leaving”) (Rivette 9:21). This exemplifies Joan’s agency and, more specifically, her ability to disagree with a powerful male figure even as she is still physically presenting as feminine. The societal distancing from a masculine-only center of authority allows our heroine, Joan, to rise to a position of authority and agency herself, in all her feminine glory.

During the course of the film, Joan displays this authority in her skill on horseback. This can be directly contrasted to Méliès’ portrayal of an incompetent, feminine, Joan who could not control her horse in the first period of films. Even in a dress, Rivette’s Joan sits astride her horse, giving her more control over the animal. In this instance, the combination of a woman in a dress and the powerful position on a horse clearly displays the ability of feminine women to hold (literal, physical) positions of power in society, showing Joan as visibly “le paradigme de l’héroïsme” (“the paradigm of heroism”) (Winock 4448).
Another way this film sets itself apart from previous period films about Joan is the way it portrays other women. In the first period, no other women were present in the films in any substantial roles, and in the second period, all women characters other than Joan were her foils; they showed what femininity was, while Joan embodied masculinity. In this third period of films, Joan is one among other strong, heroic, agentive women. Thus, she is a better “representative of liberation” (Blaetz 218) surrounded by other possible representations of feminine heroism. In the beginning of the film, as Joan’s uncle tries to convince Joan to leave Vaucouleurs, Joan’s host, Catherine, flies at him and berates him for not trusting Joan. During Joan’s captivity with the Burgundians, another powerful woman appears: Joan of Luxembourg, the mother of John of Luxembourg (Joan of Arc’s captor). Joan of Luxembourg held the purse strings of the Luxembourg family’s wealth after the death of her husband, and she used this leverage to threaten her son. Knowing that death awaited Joan of Arc were she to be sold to the English, she informed John of Luxembourg that if he gave Joan to the English, she would disinherit him. The financial power she had over her son lasted as long as she lived; Joan of Arc was not sold to the English until after the death of Joan of Luxembourg. Certainly influenced by the agency of her grandmother, little Joan, the daughter of John of Luxembourg, also rebels against her father. Bitter at being told what to do by his mother but unable to ignore her, John lashes out at his daughter, telling her she has not improved on her embroidery. She replies “je n’aime pas faire ca, c’est tout” (“I don’t like to do this, that’s all”) (Rivette 3:56:54). Hers is certainly not the reply of a dutiful, obedient daughter. These other powerful, agentive women show that Joan the hero is no longer an outlier for being a woman, she is now representative of any woman, making heroism accessible to all women.
While women in the 1990s are feeling more confident and empowered than ever, many men are trying to hold them back, to “keep them in their place.” This pushback from men is also present in this period of Joan of Arc films, even though they depict events that took place over 500 years ago. When Joan asks the priest at Vaucouleurs for spiritual guidance, he informs her, “tu discutes trop” (“you argue too much”), to which Joan replies, “c’est un péché?” (“is that a sin?”) (Rivette 23:06). The priest does not reply. As women are beginning to find their voices and use them, especially through the feminist movement, patriarchal institutions like the Catholic Church are trying to smother them, rejecting new ideas of what femininity can achieve, preferring to relegate women to roles of wife and mother and religious auxiliaries like nuns. Some secular men also expressed their bitterness at women entering the workplace, in a way that echoes how Joan’s escort talked about her in their first days together. As Joan gave orders to the group, two stepped away and complained about how “elle se prend déjà pour notre capitaine” (“she’s already taken it upon herself to be our captain”) (Rivette 39:33). Her companions were unused to a woman in charge, or even equal to them, and instead of relegating her to the same pure roles as the Church, they made her out to be a whore. As the two men continued their side conversation, one insinuated that if Joan really were a virgin, she would not be by the end of their journey, thanks to every man on the trip. These two reactions (secular and religious) are echoes of the two ways that women were previously denied agency and put in either an angel or a monster role. It is also important to note that these reactions were in response to, not preventative of, women having agency, and in Joan’s case, they did not prevent her from behaving heroically and actively as “le catalyseur d’un monde nouveau” (“the catalyzer of a new world”) (Winock 4449) … and as their military commander. Additionally, as seen in the
multitude of powerful, agentive women in this film, for the most part, women have exited this dichotomy. When Joan expresses her frustration at King Charles VII’s order to retreat from Paris, one of her comrades tells her “c’est vrai, tu n’es pas un ange après tout” (“it’s true, you aren’t an angel after all”) (Rivette 3:22:33). By expressing Joan’s imperfection as a real woman in this way, Rivette makes it clear that not only is Joan not an angel figure, but that she, along with other female hero figures, has completely removed herself from the angel/monster dichotomy.

Once Joan has received the escort she needed from Vaucouleurs, she undergoes a physical transformation. She acquires men’s clothing and cuts her hair short, as seen below in Figure 3.3. While the length she chooses is shorter than that of any other woman in the film, it is also longer than that of any man in the film. Rather than being an in between space, this length speaks to a communal space of “sexual ambiguity, without “leaving a doubt” about whether Joan is female” (Yervasi). In these films from the third period, I am highlighting the ways that Joan displays femininity and agency because that is a new combination, not because it is the only way she acts. Masculinity and agency continue to co-occur in this period, just like in the second one, but the co-occurrence of femininity and agency reveals something more pertinent in this period.
about women’s roles in French society. This is the first time that a feminine Joan has had access to agency, which is why that femininity is primarily what I am underlining in this chapter.

Some of the clearest examples of Joan displaying femininity are the instances of her showing her emotions. While in battle at Orléans, Joan’s shoulder is pierced by an arrow. This event has been recounted in previous films, such as *La merveilleuse vie de Jeanne d’Arc* of the first period. In earlier films, Joan was stoic through her wounding and the removal of the arrow, but not so for Rivette’s Joan. She cries the entire time that her wound is being addressed, asking anyone who will listen if she will be okay. To underline that her outburst was primarily emotional and not necessarily warranted, Rivette sends several new people to Joan’s side, each time asking, “c’est sérieux?” (“is it serious?”), to which the answer was always no (Rivette 2:24:33). This display of emotions, previously associated with weakness because women were thought to be the only ones to have emotional outbursts, is now a neutral testament to Joan’s femininity and makes her a “a very human heroine” (Hobbins). This humanity in the shape of femininity does not take away any of her strength, because of her character as a whole. When she was injured, Joan was bravely leading her men in battle. To be in battle, actively fighting, is an undeniably masculine position. Again, in the second half of the film as Joan tries to enter Paris, she is shown bravely fighting and strategizing alongside her men, but then one of her pages is struck and killed by an arrow shot from the Parisian ramparts. Joan, shocked by the first personal death she has witnessed over the course of her fighting, shuts down, letting her emotions take over, as seen below in Figure 3.4. Her comrades must carry her away from the now dangerous site. The juxtaposition of these scenes of masculine fighting and Joan’s feminine responses to tragedies within them is the crux of the gender discourse in *Jeanne la pucelle*. Both masculinity
and femininity are seen as equally, if differently powerful. Therefore, there are more opportunities for agency for Joan, our hero, than in previous films -- even when she shows her feminine side.

The presence of Joan’s feminine side also does not diminish her agency, but rather the agency of the heroine seems to grow in this last period of films. While in the second period of
films, Joan was much more involved in battle than in the first period, she is exponentially more so in this last period. Previously, Joan has never been pictured actually wielding a weapon in combat, and yet, in *Jeanne la Pucelle*, Joan “was more than a figurehead—she actually fought,” (Crawford) seen above in Figure 3.5 threatening a man whom she has just defeated in combat. This increase in agency on Joan’s part, even though she has been displaying feminine traits throughout the course of the film, shows that femininity is a source of strength, something new in heroic discourse. This femininity also coincides with lots of activity that women simply did not do in the Middle Ages, like jousting. Joan, as she waits at Chinon for King Charles VII to grant her an army to confront the siege of Orléans, practices with a lance on horseback. The Duke of Alençon arrives as she is doing so, and inquires to one of the courtiers present about the maid who has come to save the King. The courtier gestures at Joan as she squarely hits her target and rides triumphantly toward them. The Duke addresses Joan as she dismounts: “je n’ai jamais vu fille accomplir un tel exploit” (“I’ve never seen a girl accomplish such a feat”) (Rivette 1:02:47). The Duke’s marvelling at Joan’s jousting mirrors the way that men didn’t quite know what to do with women in the 1990s who were accomplishing feats previously off-limits to women. Joan, after receiving this backhanded praise from the Duke, ignores him entirely, and asks the courtier about him as if he were not there. It’s clear that his opinion does not matter to Joan and this fact shows Joan’s independence from the patriarchal system where a man always has more power, more say. In fact, once the courtier explains to Joan that this man is the Duke of Alençon, a cousin to Charles VII, she tells him, “vous, soyez le très bienvenue,” (“sir, welcome”) (Rivette 1:03:13). Joan effectively welcomes the Duke to his own cousin’s court, stripping him of the opportunity of holding any power over her.
This autonomous and feminine power is Joan’s biggest crime over the course of her trials in *Jeanne la pucelle*, both the preliminary one at Poitiers requested by Charles, as well as the one in Rouen that ultimately led to her death. At Poitiers, her interrogators accuse her of “orgueil,” (“pride”) partially because she believes in her revelations without the explicit endorsement of any clergyman, but also because she is abandoning gender norms (Rivette 1:08:21). Upon being asked why she was wearing men’s clothing, Joan told her interrogators that she was not aware that wearing clothes meant for the opposite sex was forbidden, as her interrogator suggested. She defended herself by declaring: “j’ai pris l’habit qui convenait pour ce que je dois faire” (“I put on the clothes that were appropriate for what I have to do”) (Rivette 1:07:25). By de-emphasizing the gender of her clothing, Joan effectively removes herself from either gender’s roles. “She has extended the taxonomy of female types; she makes evident the dimension of women’s dynamism” (Warner 9). This marks a step away from the masculine Joan of the second period because Joan is not tying agency to masculinity anymore, and so she does not need the masculine accoutrements of dress or behaviour to establish her agency.

Joan displays pride and confidence in front of this same council at Poitiers when she is asked for a sign to prove that her revelations are divinely inspired. She quickly fires back: “je ne

Fig 3.6 Screen Capture of Rivette’s Jeanne la pucelle 1:19:25
suis pas venue à Poitiers pour faire des signes” (“I didn’t come to Poitiers to make signs”) (Rivette 1:18:07). Joan declares to her interrogators that she has nothing to prove to them, even though that is the point of the trial. By establishing that she owes nothing to this long table of old men, this third period Joan distinguishes herself from previous Joans who operated within a patriarchal form of hegemony by acknowledging the inherent power of masculinity. Now Joan uses a feminist discourse to display her heroism primarily in defying men’s quests for power over her. This Joan “challenges the reigning dichotomies” (Blaetz 218) and occupies physical space fearlessly, standing above all the male members of her interrogation, as seen above in Figure 3.6, and again at the end of her trial when she declares that she will not repent. She also understands that female power is frightening to men, and takes advantage of it. Once she has arrived in Orléans, the male leaders there do not take her seriously. They begin to make plans to attack without her, but she catches wind of it and joins their meeting, scolding them for not inviting her. She asks, “que craignez-vous de moi?” (“what do you fear from me?”) (Rivette 2:03:23). Within this statement is the assumption that the premise of her exclusion -- her status as a woman -- is precisely what they fear from her, a leader, a hero. This same fear of powerful women is shown during Joan’s captivity with the Burgundians. She is constantly restrained by her captors, be it by physical force or by chains, not as a sign of a lack of agency, but rather a testament to her agency. Her captors fear her actions if she were to act unrestrained, and so they place limits on her movement.

All of that being said, as a societal reflection of heroines, cinematic Joan does not have infinite power, just as women still are not structurally equal to men in modern society. Joan, for all of her novel exploits as a woman, hits the glass ceiling in the last quarter of Jeanne la pucelle,
when she is penalized for being “a deviant woman for assuming male prerogative” (Yervasi).

One of Charles VII’s courtiers mansplains war to Joan, who has experienced it firsthand and who therefore understands it personally and intimately. He tells Joan, who is trying to strategize, “tient ta place, Jeanne, celle d’un bon soldat,” (“stay in your place, Joan, that of a good soldier”) (Rivette 3:27:26). While it is an accomplishment for a woman to be called a “good soldier” because previously that was a masculine role forbidden to her, the role of courtier still represents an exclusive masculine space. Thus, Joan, though she has made huge advancements over the course of her cinematic history, finds that men still hold onto much power in society and do not react well to women who assert their own.

In Luc Besson’s La messagère : l’histoire de Jeanne d’Arc, starring Milla Jovovich, Joan makes more inroads toward male levels of power in society. Besson builds Joan’s heroic status by moving her away from a religious background. La messagère is the most fictional of all of the French films about Joan’s life until this point. While in Besson’s film, Joan’s hometown is attacked and Joan’s older sister killed, in reality, Joan had a relatively calm and easy childhood, and did not even have an older sister. In this fictional space, Besson frees himself to make a point. He also “addresses the central problem of Joan’s voices more clearly and directly than any other film on the subject” (Hobbins). This new territory, according to Hobbins, a historian specializing in medieval France, can either undermine Joan as a hero, or turn her into a “powerful woman or an inspirational leader.” I argue that it does the latter. Regardless of intent/effect, there is no denying the spectacle that is this film, especially as it relates to Joan’s voices. Being one of the big names in the film movement “cinéma du look,” Besson was known for his angsty characters, “graphic representations of the alienated youth of François Mitterrand’s
France” (Potier). Although Besson was criticized for the theatricality of his films at the cost of their substance, this potential superficiality does not take away from my ensuing arguments about Joan’s heroism.

*La messagère* sets itself apart from all previous Joan films most clearly through Joan’s inner voice. Throughout the film, there are religious overtones in Joan’s quest, such as Joan’s constant desire for confession, or the way she berates her soldiers for taking the Lord’s name in vain. However, the angelic/saintly voices guiding Joan are absent during the whole movie. In their place is a young boy, seen below in Figure 3.7, who grows up into a young man and then morphs at the end of the film into an elderly man. Instead of hearing her divine mission from angels, Joan merely recounts a loud wind and a bell ringing and a disembodied voice. Only once in the film are angels present, and they are made of broken stained glass: the result of this loud wind. This evident movement away from the more explicitly Catholic version of Joan serves to make her actions more her own. Moving Joan away from an angelic calling is the ultimate way to make her a more agentive character. Given the intense trauma that Joan experiences at the

Fig 3.7 Screen Capture of Besson’s *La messagère* : l’histoire de Jeanne d’Arc 2:58

beginning of the film, it is a frequent and convincing argument that Joan’s inner/spiritual voices are somewhat religious hallucinatory manifestations of this trauma. If this is the case, it does not preclude Joan from acting more of her own volition than of a religious calling, which is the most
important aspect for my analysis. Having agency is certainly possible within the saint framework, however, by creating a secular framework in which to view Joan, she is able to act in a way that is more “loyal to her innermost convictions,” (Warner 3) because she is not divinely inspired. Since Joan's mission also does not derive explicitly from these encounters, she is her own messenger insofar as she bears witness to and acts upon her own desires, trauma, and conceptions of revenge and patriotism. Being the sole director of her actions makes her the most agentive and therefore the most powerful of the Joans we have met over the course of a century of film, and this in a more feminine incarnation, too.

In place of divine inspiration, Besson gives Joan a personal reason for her mission. At the very beginning of the film, Joan’s older sister Catherine is pinned against the cabinet door, behind which Joan is hiding, as she is being sexually assaulted by an Englishman. Catherine resists, and is killed; the sword penetrating her is a second violent penetration of her body. It is almost as if Joan is being raped as well in her hiding place, as the sword penetrates that space as well, as shown above in Figure 3.8. After this trauma, the happy-go-lucky religious Joan morphs into a sullen, angry child. This is the beginning of an unholy Joan, who wants to avenge her sister’s brutal murder, which is ultimately the driving force behind Joan’s “divine” mission in La
messagère. Even though Joan, in fact, did not have an older sister, and her town was never attacked by English soldiers, this fabricated trauma gives Joan a reason other than divine calling to pursue her quest (and any subsequent divine encounters seem secondary and superfluous). This secular Joan is immediately apparent; at Catherine’s funeral, Joan does not cross herself at the appropriate time, even though the two women behind her do so. Her face is emotionless. The next time Joan goes to confession, she declares to the priest that “tout ce que je veux c’est de voir les Anglais brûler en enfer pour tout jamais” (“all that I want is to see the English burn in Hell for the rest of time”) (Besson 16:57). Though she is still using religious language (and she will continue to do so throughout the film), it is clear that Joan has a grudge against the English that she cannot turn over to God in confession. Besson strengthens this secular side to Joan’s mission by reflecting it in her surroundings. As Charles VII’s mother convinces him to accept Joan into his court, she does so not by citing Joan’s holiness, but her ability to re-energize a tired army. Then again, when Joan is being interrogated by the English, the trial is concerned primarily with logistics, like “comment espérez-vous lever le siège d'Orléans si vous ignorez tout de l'artillerie moderne?” (“how did you plan to lift the siege at Orléans if you don’t know anything about modern artillery?”) (Besson 48:05). The secular environment Joan is in, even though Joan’s role in it is explicitly religious, harkens back to Joan’s own secular mission. By giving Joan a personal vendetta, Besson strengthens her as a woman hero and thereby gives her a weapon “to deal with the definition of femaleness” (Warner 15) by adding power and agency to it. She is no longer acting at the whims of any masculine divinity, but rather following her own orders. Joan acknowledges this explicitly at the end of the film, just before she is to die at the stake. She is not allowed to have a proper confession, so she confesses to the cloaked man who has been the
image of her internal voices (/hallucinations induced by her trauma) throughout the film: “je me suis battue par vengeance et désespoir” (“I fought out of vengeance and despair”) (Besson 2:23:29). Though he had hinted at it throughout the film, Besson explicitly makes his viewers aware that this Joan was only internally motivated. With this increased agency, Joan is an exceedingly powerful figure.

This power is alluded to visually when Joan is still a young girl. After attending confession, thirteen-year-old Joan does a victory lap around her village, and tumbles down a grassy hill. As the camera pans out, we see that she has fallen directly next to a shining sword, seen above in Figure 3.9. Her body position mirrors the perpendicular angles of the hilt and blade of the sword, inspiring a comparison between the two. In a visible way, Luc Besson is showing his viewers that this little girl is as powerful as any good weapon, and that she will play a soldier’s role in a situation that is much larger than she is. A peasant girl, she didn’t seem like much of a warrior, but Besson alludes here to the formidable fighter she will make herself into. Over the years, the myth of Joan of Arc has come to portray her as a “rebelle à la hiérarchie catholique, résistante à l'occupation étrangère, brave jusqu'à la témérité, compatissante à tous les opprimés, lucide d’instinct sans instruction” (“rebel against the Catholic hierarchy, resistor against foreign occupation, brave to the point of temerity, compassionate to all oppressed, lucid
by instinct without instruction” (Winock 4450). The combination of rebelliousness in a patriarchal system, masculine bravery, feminine compassion, and creativity is the ideal French hero of the modern myth. It is only through these feminine traits that Joan fully reaches her potential as a hero in today’s society, and Besson portrays this best in the battle at Orléans. Joan rallies all of the tired men, jumps into the enemy camp and opens the bridge from within, all without being injured or even attacked. Joan’s creativity in battle shows simultaneously her inexperience and her power and success, all attributed to her status as a woman.

There is another formidable female character in this film, Charles VII’s mother in law, Yolande of Aragon. As a historical figure, she was a substitute mother to Charles, and supported his right to the French throne more than his own mother, providing for him and protecting him when his own family turned against him. Seen below in Figure 3.10, she serves on his council, and is the first woman portrayed as doing so in any of the Joan movies. She is a powerful figure in the film; she convinced Charles to see Joan for the first time, against the wishes of the rest of Charles’ council, funded Joan’s army as the leader of the House of Anjou, as well as dictated to her son when it was time to let Joan go, when the Burgundians were asking for a ransom sum.

For a character who has not appeared in any previous Joan film, Charles’ mother in law gets a lot of screen time in Besson’s La messagère. Her sway over her son, a king, as a subplot in the story
of French heroine Joan of Arc adds to Joan’s heroism and “function[s] to disrupt the ideologically male monomyth of the hero” (Carpenter 44). Having more than one agentive, powerful woman in the film reinforces the access that any woman has to heroism, just like in Rivette’s Jeanne la pucelle.

Besson’s Joan mirrors Rivette’s Joan in a few significant ways. One of these instances is near the end of the film, when Joan has recanted her “heretic statements” and has committed to wearing only women’s dress. English soldiers enter her cell and tear her clothes off her body and provide her with men’s clothing, forcing her to decide between pudicity and her life. While the soldiers are upon her, Joan screams and kicks, using her voice to call attention to and fight against her assault, just like in Rivette’s Jeanne la pucelle.

The other of these similar scenes happens over the course of her interrogation on matters of faith in front of Charles’s court. Like in Rivette’s Jeanne la pucelle, Besson’s Joan is asked for a sign to prove that she comes from God. Joan responds, “je ne suis pas venue pour faire des tours” (“I didn’t come here to produce a magic trick”) (Besson 48:41). Even though Joan, as “a laywoman...had no right to trust in [her voices] without the formal permission of the Church” (Warner 128) according to patriarchal society, she ignores the status quo and asserts her ability to think, speak, and act. Similarly to Rivette’s Joan’s declaration that she did not embark on her journey to make signs for this group of men, Besson’s Joan sends the message that she does not owe any proof to any member of the council. In doing so, she refuses to partake in the patriarchal hegemony that dictates that all men have power over all women. This declaration of independence from patriarchal authority is part of the foundation for the existence of a feminine hero. In order to accomplish her heroic deeds, Joan must take power into her own hands and
move away from the patriarchy, which is one of the defining themes of the Joan films of this third film period.

In this way, Joan’s femininity and status as an independent woman is vital to her status as a hero. The simple act of removing herself from a patriarchal hegemony is heroic, and so it adds to the valor of her military action. The image of Joan in armor on horseback with a long blonde braid, seen above in Figure 3.11, epitomizes this new ground. Besson’s Joan is the first to express any physical femininity while in soldier’s dress, which suggests that these two gendered spheres are starting to overlap. The warrior’s role denotes power and heroism. The expression of this in a feminine physical body is a clear movement away from the acknowledgement of masculine superiority in the last film period, but also from Rivette’s powerful Joan, who was physically masculine or physically feminine, but never both (in spite of being assertive and powerful as both). “By never pretending to be other than a woman and a maid, she was usurping a man’s function by shaking off the trammels of his sex altogether to occupy a different, third order” (Warner 145-146), a new kind of agentive woman. Once Besson’s Joan cuts off her long hair in a fit of frustration, she expresses her femininity primarily, like Rivette’s Joan, through her presence of emotion. After the first time that she is excluded from a planning meeting, Besson’s Joan yells at her comrades out of frustration. She apologizes for her emotional outburst (both
apologies and outbursts are behaviors frequently, if negatively, attributed to modern women), and then Dunois, one of the captains, invites her to join them in planning. This invitation demonstrates that these feminine actions do not, in fact, exclude her from power, but rather effectuate it. Besson repeats this pattern when Joan is injured in battle. Upon being removed from the field, she cries and whimpers at the arrow stuck in her chest. When she is told that if the arrow is not removed, she will die, Joan pulls herself together and pulls the arrow right out of her body, a heroic feat at which all the men near her marvel. Moments of emotion lead to some of Joan’s strongest accomplishments. This pattern is most clear after the battle has finished, and Joan goes into a hysterical fit over all the dead bodies strewn about the battlefield. This emotion coincides with her comrades’ celebration about their massive victory over the English, and then is followed by Joan’s single-handed confrontation of the entire English army, as seen above in Figure 3.12, where they relinquish their hold on Orléans. The victory at Les Tourelles, which led to the French reoccupation of Orléans, was one of Joan’s greatest military achievements.

Besson’s choice to show the most emotional Joan (borderline hysterically so) as a forerunner to her most heroic displays the intricate connection between Joan’s femininity and her heroism.

Frequently in response to her emotional outbursts, Joan’s page, John, tells her, “calme-toi” (“calm down”) (Besson 58:32). This denigration of Joan’s emotions does not take
away from her heroic power and agency in Besson’s La messagère, but it does point toward a societal discomfort with this newfound feminine power in a “patriarchal status quo that could not withstand strong women” (Carpenter 30). Men often feel threatened by the presence/leadership of empowered women, and this subtle but repetitive action on the part of John reorients the story toward this framework, especially given that all of the directors of French films about Joan’s life have been male, even up until today. This male writing of Joan the female hero simultaneously adds to and takes away from her heroism across the last century.

After Joan’s nearly thirty-year absence from cinema, new third wave feminists created “an intersectional and multiperspectival version of feminism” (Snyder 175), which created a space for Joan to return in a multitude of forms, including positive portrayals by de facto progressive male allies of third wave feminism like Rivette and Besson. Throughout the course of this chapter, I have focused on the new Joans: the feminine, active ones who represented a new kind of hero compared to previous films. They are the most important because they are indicative of societal and political advancements and therefore could not have possibly existed in earlier cinema. However, Rivette’s and Besson’s two films are not necessarily the only kind of Joan to exist in this modern, postfeminist period. Philippe Ramos’ (Jeanne Captive, 2011) and Bruno Dumont (Jeannette : l’enfance de Jeanne d’Arc, 2017 and Jeanne, 2019) have both produced more antiquated versions of Joan within this period of films.

In Jeanne Captive, starring Clemence Poesy, Ramos tells the story of Joan’s captivity. He does not include her mission to get to Dauphin Charles, her military successes (or failures), or even her trials. Additionally, the movie is not even entirely about Joan -- it follows a secondary storyline of a healer who comes to help Joan after she throws herself out of one of the towers at
Compiègne, where she was a prisoner. While every single film up until this point has ended with Joan’s execution, Jeanne Captive continues for several minutes after Joan’s ashes are dumped in the river, following other characters. If Ramos’ storyline weren’t enough to display Joan as a passive character, Joan herself has no dialogue until forty five minutes into the ninety minute film. That means that for an entire half of the film, Joan is silent. Joan’s passivity, combined with her silence and Ramos’ storyline, resembles Méliès’ and Dreyer’s films more closely than it does Rivette’s or Besson’s.

Jeannette : l’enfance de Jeanne d’Arc, starring Lise Leplat Prudhomme, is an eccentric musical about Joan of Arc’s childhood. Joan is played by a nine year-old, and the whole film is so fantastical I must admit I had trouble getting anything substantial out of it. Dumont also released Jeanne, the sequel to Jeannette : l’enfance de Jeanne d’Arc in late 2019, which unfortunately meant that it did not make it into my corpus, but the same young actress who played Joan in Jeannette : l’enfance de Jeanne d’Arc continues in the same role in Jeanne. Perhaps this shows an infantilization of Dumont’s perception of Joan, but honestly, this Joan does not resemble any other. Perhaps it is a parody of the seriousness with which many other directors have told Joan’s life story.

These two outlier films show the diversity of this final period. The third wave feminism welcomed an image of women and society that was “less rigid and judgmental” than the second wave (which took place during the thirty years that no films were made about Joan’s life), which was “antimale, antisex, antifemininity” (Snyder 179). This opening of possibilities for women encourages a diversity of women’s gender performances, which is seen through the diversity of Joans in this final period of films. Perhaps the presence of a more passive, contemporary Joan is
a reaction on the part of the male director against the new autonomy of women: an effort to reclaim authority by presenting a representative of all French women who is powerless and dependent on men.

In fact, every single Joan, from 1898 to 2019, is dependent on men. Every single one of the eighteen films produced in France about the life of Joan of Arc is directed by a man. Certainly, actresses and producers and screenwriters all contribute to the ultimate portrayal of the hero, but the director has the first and last say. This male-governed Joan, then, is the only Joan known to French cinema. Even though the heroic figure of Joan has undergone massive changes that parallel the societal situation of French women, she is still the “angel of men’s imagination” (Gordon) and men’s alone. Perhaps Joan’s life as a Catholic saint is not revolutionary enough to feminist or even women filmmakers. Yet, Joan is anything but a gender-conforming woman, and she was one of the first real gendered heroes whose “activities were exceptional only because she was a woman” (Warner 225) and because she was successful in a space where she was not technically allowed. Over the years, male directors have had to come to terms with this truth; Joan transcended the boundaries put around women’s bodies and activities and she did it well. In the first period, she was relegated to being a passive, and therefore a symbolic facade of a hero. In the second period, she was disguised as a man, and therefore allowed to behave as one. In this third and final period, she breaks free of these constraints, but only because her male directors have allowed (or not, as the case is with Ramos) her to do so. Evidently, male directors are still exercising their historical privilege to put words in the mouth of women by shaping the heroine that stands in for them all. Thus, while Joan’s advancements toward becoming a more powerful,
heroic figure are substantial and important, they also allude to the necessity for further societal change for women to truly take control of their own actions and representations.
Conclusion - Joan the Captive: A Testament to Women’s Continued Subordination

For over six hundred years of myth and a century of cinema, Joan of Arc has captured the imagination of France. She has stood for causes as diverse as anti-Semitism during the Dreyfus affair to Socialist Ségolène Royal’s attempt to be elected France’s first woman president in 2007. This anachronistic woman has been molded to fit each new “now” and reflect its realities for women who also feel persecuted by the patriarchal institutions of their time, as Joan was persecuted by the Catholic Church. The varying cinematic representations of Joan that I have examined in this thesis are therefore not simply different retellings of Joan’s life story, but also “tell...yet another story, one about our concept of the [female] heroic” (Warner 7). From her first film appearance in 1898 (in a film by cinema pioneers Auguste and Louis Lumière) to her most recent in a film (Bruno Dumont’s dramatic sequel to his 2017 musical comedy about Joan’s childhood) released during the writing of this thesis in 2019, Joan has stood for what it means to be a good French woman. Because she is undeniably a role model for nearly every French cause, and since “elle a sauvé la France” (“she saved France”), Joan of Arc is the quintessential hero figure. As a woman, then, she stands in for all women, and in that way is representative of female access to heroism at any point in time. This representation shifts significantly over the course of three distinct periods of French film that mirror broader societal changes in that status and perception of French women.

In the first period of films about Joan’s life, lasting from the inception of film in the 1890s to the 1940s, the character of Joan was exceedingly feminine and lacked agency. She was frequently moved in physical space by other, male, characters and looked to them for help in
order to achieve her goals. An “epiphany of Virtue’s many faces,” Joan was a pure figurehead who inspired men to accomplish great victories (Warner 235-236). She was viewed as an angel, the epitome of all things good and virtuous, and in need of men to act on her behalf. Literary figures of women in this time were relegated to either side of an angel/monster dichotomy. On the angel side, where Joan must fall in order to be perceived as heroic, were mothers and religious women, and then on the monster side were prostitutes and independent women. During this period, women had minimal rights in French society. They could not vote, they could not work without their husband’s permission, and they certainly did not have legal access to birth control. Thus, the French feminine ideal in the first period is passive and feminine, which is equated with virtuousness, as seen through the Joans of Georges Méliès and Carl Dreyer. In Méliès’ Jeanne d’Arc (1900) starring Jeanne Calvière, Joan is frequently on her knees and asking for help: physically low in positioning as well as figuratively low in the patriarchal hierarchy. She is also associated with virtue: batting the wine out of the hand that offered it to her, and finishing the film in heaven surrounded by angels, a Marian image that Catholic France would have recognized. This virtue places her on the angelic side of the angel/monster dichotomy, which allows her access to feminine heroism of the time. Dreyer’s La passion de Jeanne d’Arc (1928) starring Renée Jeanne Falconetti, parallels Joan’s trial and execution to that of Jesus Christ, which continues to emphasize Joan’s virtue, while also giving her a little more agency than the Marian Joan in Méliès’ film. The setting of the film at Joan’s trial and execution underlines Joan’s passivity; never in Dreyer’s film do we see Joan in battle or persevering to get to the Dauphin. Rather, men move her in physical space, and she is a captive whose death ultimately is decided by a group of men.
Maintaining this framework wherein men have agency and good women cannot, the Joan character in the second period, which lasts from the 1950s to the 1970s, takes on male accoutrements and character traits to access autonomy, agency, and active heroism. In *Destinées* by Jean Delannoy (1954) starring Michèle Morgan and *Le procès de Jeanne d'Arc* by Robert Bresson (1962) starring Florence Carrez, Joan dresses more similarly to other male characters, she occupies powerful physical positions, and she does not display emotions other than anger or frustration. These more masculine Joans have the pride, power, and respect from other men that the first period Joans lacked. While in the first period of films, Joan of Arc was the only female character of note in the films, in the second period, other women have larger roles against which Joan is foiled. These other women fall into the monster/angel dichotomy, while Joan is separate, reinforcing her masculinity. By needing to act masculine to gain agency, this Joan is a “tribute to the male principle, a homage to the male sphere of action,” (Warner 155). Delannoy’s Joan is portrayed at a period of her journey where she had the most autonomy: after King Charles VII abandons her and Joan continues to gather soldiers and fight against the English. She uses this autonomy to demand respect from her masculine peers, while Delannoy uses it to foil Joan against other female characters in roles like mother and whore. Bresson’s film, the inverse of Dreyer’s in every way, flips the script on Joan’s trial and shows her autonomous movement in physical space and her disdain for male authority. Thus, Joan’s pride and ability to “subjectify” herself in situations where she was supposed to be the object both underline the agency and masculinity of this period of female heroes. In the time period when women were working more than ever before and beginning to get certain rights, it was clear in society that “women can do men’s work, are as good as men, are up to men of every station; but men remain the touchstone
and equality a process of imitation” (Warner 155). Having fought and held leadership roles in the Resistance during World War II, women were more aware of their ability to do the same things men did and do them well. This new autonomy was made possible by societal advancements like the right to vote and the right to work without a husband’s permission. Still, femininity was not valued, and so it was discarded among women who wanted autonomy. Joan, as a female hero of the era, reflects this, and is pictured with the agency of a masculine character.

These first two periods of film coincide with what is today called first wave feminism. This movement mostly centered on attaining the right to vote and other legal protections for women, and it was not particularly concerned with theories behind oppression because they were caught up in struggling against legal inequalities. Thus, gender norms were not necessarily in question here, which is reflected in the first two periods of films about Joan of Arc. Once the right to vote was won, first wave feminism transitioned to second wave, which was extremely interested in textual, linguistic, and cultural manners of male oppression. The goal of the second wave in France encouraged the deconstruction of the patriarchal hegemony through written texts rejecting phallogocentrism. Through a “combination of activism in language and politics” (Kenny 13), the movement brought about continued advancements in bodily autonomy, like legalized contraception and abortion. Given these advancements and Joan of Arc’s role as a female hero, it is surprising that she was not in any cultural productions for the duration of the second wave. Even though Joan defied gender roles hundreds of years before anyone had ever said the phrase “gender roles,” neither feminists nor anti-feminists took Joan as a patron saint of their movement. Perhaps feminists felt that Joan was too established as a nationalistic hero to become a feminist one, or saw Joan’s virginity as prudish and too religious. Then again, maybe
anti-feminists wanted to keep Joan from the spotlight during the movement for fear of her image being used to promote a feminist agenda. Either way, it is culturally significant that Joan, the French hero of nearly every historical cause since the dawn of the nineteenth century, was absent, not only from the (anti)feminist movements, but also from France’s collective consciousness, as seen through cultural productions like film.

After a notable absence during the second wave feminist movement in France, Joan returns to cinema in the 1980s, and is a much more feminine character. Second wave had given way to the third wave by the 1980s, and its members “actively play[ed] with femininity” (Snyder 179). This was a new, intersectional movement that was anti-judgment of other women and pro-expansion of definitions of femininity. More political than theoretical, this movement looks to expand equality both among women and between womxn (referring to all women, not just those whose biological sex is female) and men. With the transition into third wave feminism came a comfort in empowered femininity, and this is the kind of hero Joan embodies. As women were recognized societally as equal to men, powerful women no longer needed to emulate men to achieve their goals, and so they moved toward a “focus on empowering the individual, and highlighting the uniqueness of women’s identity” (Kenny 21). This empowering of all women, rather than just the masculine ones, allowed for femininity and agency to be paired in a hero like Joan of Arc. In this time period, the character of Joan in Jacques Rivette’s Jeanne la pucelle (1994) starring Sandrine Bonnaire and Luc Besson’s La messagère : l’histoire de Jeanne d’Arc (1999) starring Milla Jovovich is surrounded by other powerful women. She is emotional, but more powerful than even the masculine Joans were in the second period, engaging in battles and questioning male authority to greater extents than previously. In Jeanne la pucelle, Rivette
covers every aspect of Joan’s mission except her trial. In doing so, he removes the narrative of a passive captive Joan. Rivette also presents a visibly feminine Joan for the first half hour of his nearly five hour film and thereby displays femininity and autonomy as coexisting, even though his Joan appears more masculine for the rest of the film. Besson’s Joan in *La messagère : l’histoire de Jeanne d’Arc* is the first to visibly represent masculinity and femininity at the same time, in a scene where Joan is in armor on horseback but has a long blonde braid streaming out behind her. This Joan is the pinnacle of agency; she is her most emotional (even hysterical) right before some of her most powerful moments. Joan as a character here comes full circle, having rejected passive femininity in rejecting passivity *and* femininity in the second period, then swinging back to accepting and creating a powerful femininity in this third and final period.

For all her heroism, Joan, as a female cinematic figure, is still under male authority. Every single one of the eighteen French films about her life has been directed by a man. While certainly, other crew members and the actors and actresses (particularly the lead actresses starring as Joan: Calvaire, Falconetti, Morgan, Delay, Bonnaire, and Jovovich) make vital contributions to each film, ultimately, one man (Méliès, Dreyer, Delannoy, Bresson, Rivette, and Besson) is at the helm of each cultural production. It is surprising that this powerful female figure has been subject to the male imagination for the last century, and no woman filmmaker has stepped up to reclaim her. Perhaps women are being discouraged from directing this kind of historical myth, or perhaps it does not interest them. At any rate, no matter how agentive the character of Joan is, her image is itself dictated by men, and therefore Joan, the cinematic incarnation of feminine heroism, is fully or partially under the control of men. This male voice that overarches even the most powerful versions of Joan in the third period of Joan films
considered in this thesis (e.g., Rivette and Besson) is problematic, and indicates an anxiety among men in France’s patriarchal society as women become routinely more autonomous. It suggests that women’s advancements are owed to the generosity of men, which negates any aspect of self-ownership in female heroism. Even when a good-natured director allows Joan to be agentive, the discourse of permission keeps all the power effectively in the male sphere. Third wave feminism, known for its “welcoming politics of coalition” (Snyder 176), encouraged male participation in the movement. Perhaps male film directors took this allyship and used it to more subtly maintain their privilege.

Not all directors are subtle about it. In some more modern French films, notably Philippe Ramos’ Jeanne Captive (2011) starring Clemence Poesy (Bruno Dumont has also released Jeannette : l’enfance de Jeanne d’Arc (2017) and Jeanne (2019), both starring Lise Leplat Prudhomme, which are the other films more modern than Jeanne Captive but are too fantastical for my analysis), the Joan on screen is more like one of the first period, and not the third. By only including Joan’s captivity between Compiègne and her trial Ramos effectively robs Joan of all agency; she does not even speak during the first half of the film. In English, this film title is The Silence of Joan. It is clear that Ramos is silencing Joan, whose agency has been present in other recent films. By stripping it away from her, Ramos reduces Joan to a passive, powerless representative of women, even as women are making steps closer and closer to equality. This reaction against Joan’s autonomy is an effort to reclaim her, and in so doing, reaffirm superiority over women writ large.

I will be interested to see the first female-directed film about Joan of Arc. Why not a Joan film by Claire Denis, Diane Kurys, Catherine Breillat, Virginie Despentes, Julie Delpy, Céline
Sciamma, Rebecca Zlowtowski, Mia Hansen-Love, or Julia Ducournau? Among other things, such a film would mark a grand step beyond the previous appropriation by men of the “regulated body in the Joan of Arc legend” (Yervasi). Indeed, for men and patriarchal society as a whole, Joan has represented not just heroism, but her physical wholeness and intactness as a virgin. “Virginity is a fact of her story, but it is also a means of containing her as a dangerous woman” (Maddox 28). Once this story inherently about the female body is back in the hands of a female director, I think that Joan of Arc will undergo another shift and become even more agentive, with her director showing, rather than allowing, her power. Perhaps a transgender or nonbinary Joan could solidify her already existing representation of the LGBTQ+ community or a Joan could confront more explicitly the theme of sexual assault in a way that would resonate in the #MeToo era (or the French version, #BalanceTonPorc). For now, Joan’s heroism in existing films can be seen as a testament to the progress French society has made toward accepting and encouraging powerful women, but the male domination of her cinema bears witness to how far French society still must go before women can be heralded as “the primary stuff of heroes” (Warner 3) and no longer secondary.
Annotated Filmography in Chronological Order

Period 1


This black and white minute-long film displays a weak, feminine Joan of Arc on her way to the pyre. Dressed in all white with long hair, she is moved in physical space exclusively by men, except to fall on her knees to beg the Bishop to spare her.


In eleven short scenes that resemble theater more than cinema, Méliès tells Joan’s whole story, from receiving her heavenly mission as a child to being burned at the stake. He frames Joan in a Marian imagery by showing Joan’s physical body arriving in Heaven and by emphasizing her humility and virtue. Joan is frequently on her knees asking permission and help; this feminine Joan also lacks agency.


Dreyer’s expressionist film is heralded as a masterpiece: one of the few films on this list that have received good reviews. Joan’s trial and execution are presented in a way that mirrors Jesus Christ’s, which underlines Joan’s virtues and her angelic nature. Dreyer uses camera angles in addition to intertitles to display Joan’s passivity and femininity.


In this silent, feature-length film, De Gastyne portrays a transitional Joan between periods 1 and 2 of this thesis. Following Joan from the inception of her mission to its fiery end, De Gastyne keeps his Joan character traditionally feminine (upholding virtue in herself and other women and some conversation manners that convey respect toward her interrogators) but gives her a little more range of physical motion than Dreyer, for instance, gave to his Joan.

Period 2

Delannoy only directed the middle feature of the tripartite film *Destinees*, which tells three separate stories of women in wartime: widow who meets her husband’s mistress when she tries to follow his final days, then Joan of Arc after King Charles VII has abandoned her so she must go on her own to continue fighting the English, and then *Lysistrata*, a Greek play about women in the Peloponnesian war who refuse their bodies to men until peace is achieved. The Joan within this middle section is visibly very masculine and very agentive.


This minimalist film with non-professional actors used Joan’s trial transcript as its basis. Bresson included some of Joan’s factual, but sassier lines, which suggests an increase of power in the heroine. Though the entire film is only about Joan’s trial and execution, Bresson still highlights her independence, both in physical movement and in smart retorts to Church elders whom a young Catholic woman ought to respect.

Period 3


This TV movie talks explicitly about Joan’s controversial role as a woman leader. Both Joan’s council and her soldiers comment on her men’s dress and independence multiple times. Joan is feminine appearing when she is at her weakest and masculine appearing at her strongest.


New Wave director Rivette produced a two-part TV movie telling Joan’s saga from Vaucouleurs to her execution. However, in skipping the trials, he not only differentiates his film from many previous renditions of Joan’s life story, but he also only shows scenes where Joan is at her most powerful and independent.


This traumatic film of the “cinema du look” movement has a graphic sexual assault scene at the beginning, which Besson uses to frame Joan’s “divine” mission for the rest of the film. Joan is intensely powerful and independent, but also hysterical and unhinged. Besson’s solution for Joan’s supposed “heavenly voices” is a religiously coated inner monologue stemming from her traumatic experience, most likely.

Ramos here recounts Joan of Arc’s journey from being captured at the battle of Compiègne and then ultimately being sold to the English. Joan does not speak for the first half of the film, and when she does, it is not powerful. This film is also the only one about Joan of Arc’s life to have a secondary storyline: about a healer who comes to help Joan after she throws herself out of a high tower in Compiègne.


Dumont, part of the “cinema of the body” movement, produced a fantastical quasi-musical about the childhood of Joan of Arc. Joan’s friendships and family relationships are displayed in ways that no previous film had given time to.
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