

Il tema: Antropocene e post-antropocene

Utopianism, History, Freedom and Nature: Shaw's Theory of "Creative Evolution" in Saint Joan¹

Utopismo, storia, libertà e natura: la teoria dell'"evoluzione creativa" di Shaw in Saint Joan

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Abstract. This paper aims to investigate some important elements of the thought of George Bernard Shaw, more commonly known as one of the most famous playwrights of the twentieth century. Shaw's philosophy dwells on the relationship between man and nature and especially the concept of freedom. Among all his works, it was decided here to analyse *Saint Joan*. In re-imagining the historical Joan as a heroine in a play of ideas, Shaw made use of the known facts about Joan of Arc and Joan's statements at her trial. Nonetheless, he made changes to emphasize her personal dignity and independence by contrast with the tyranny of institutions. Although he departed from the historical background, whitewashed her adversaries, and condensed episodes in Joan's biography, he sought to be true to her confidence, courage, integrity, and common sense. His theatrical presentation is, in some respects, at odds with the Preface that accompanies the published play.

Keywords: independence, Joan of Arc, democracy, freedom, utopia.

Riassunto. Questo articolo si propone di indagare alcuni elementi importanti del pensiero di George Bernard Shaw, più comunemente conosciuto come uno dei più

¹ For academic recognition and scientific attribution, parts 1, 2, and 3 are written by Anna Rita Gabellone and part 4 is written by Shoshana Milgram Knapp.

famosi drammaturghi del XX secolo. La filosofia di Shaw si sofferma sul rapporto tra uomo e natura e soprattutto sul concetto di libertà. Tra tutte le sue opere, si è deciso di analizzare *Saint Joan*. Nel reimmaginare la Giovanna storica come eroina in un teatro di idee, Shaw si è servito dei fatti noti su Giovanna d'Arco e delle dichiarazioni di Giovanna al processo. Tuttavia, l'autore ha apportato delle modifiche per enfatizzarne la dignità personale e l'indipendenza in opposizione alla tirannia delle istituzioni. Pur discostandosi dallo sfondo storico, eliminando gli avversari e sintetizzando gli episodi della biografia di Giovanna, ha cercato di rendere ragione della sua fiducia, del suo coraggio, della sua integrità e del suo buon senso. La sua presentazione teatrale è, per certi aspetti, in contrasto con la Prefazione che accompagna l'opera pubblicata.

Parole chiave: indipendenza, Giovanna D'Arco, democrazia, libertà, utopia.

1. Saint Joan Between History and Utopia

As we approach the centennial of *Saint Joan: A Chronicle Play in Six Scenes and an Epilogue*, we aim to offer a new reading of *Saint Joan*, one of George Bernard Shaw's most criticized plays. Composed three years after the canonization of Joan of Arc in 1920, it premiered on December 28, 1923, at the Garrick Theatre in New York; on March 20, 1924, it was performed on the London stage with Sybil Thorndike (for whom Shaw had written the part) at the New Theatre in Saint Martin's Lane.² It has been the subject of debate ever since. The debate was further fuelled by the long preface Shaw wrote for the play in May 1924. To understand Shaw's goals and to appreciate his achievement, this article proposes to take into account Shaw's ideas (original to him, as well as learned from others) about the individual and society, history and thought, and the temptation to see and shape the future in the image of what might be called a "utopian vision."

During the writing of this play, Shaw was in Ireland with his wife Charlotte,³ who encouraged her husband in this project. For technical information about Catholicism and Joan's background, Shaw consulted Father Joseph Leonard, an Irish priest and Vincentian scholar then teaching in London, who helped him in reconstructing the life of Joan of Arc (c. 1412 – May 30, 1431). This work was immediately at the centre of bitter controversy. A key issue was Shaw's statement in the preface that there were "no villains in the piece." But if Joan is a saint, how then can no

² Bertolini, "Shaw's Plays in Performance," 149-61.

³ On this specific aspect and the personality of G.B. Shaw's wife, see Myers, *Married to Genius*.

blame be assigned to those who abandoned, accused, or executed her? If Joan is entirely innocent of heresy, is no one to be deemed guilty for her death? Yet in addition to not vilifying Bishop Cauchon, who put Joan on trial, Shaw appears to defend, rather than condemn, the institution of the medieval Catholic Church. For Shaw, among the most distinguished Irish playwrights of the twentieth century and one who described his family background as “Irish Protestant,” attacking Catholicism would have been too obvious. He did not see Catholics as the villains, and he did not see Catholicism as the enemy. His attitude toward Cauchon and the Inquisition does not denote conversion from Protestantism to Catholicism. Shaw, on the contrary, sought to explain a particular episode in history through the lens of his theory of “creative evolution,” which itself was a development of his ideas on history.

The necessity for Shaw of an evolution of the human race is an aspect that he had addressed more directly in other works, from *Man and Superman* (1903) to *Back to Methuselah* (1918-1920). Less salient in *Saint Joan*, this theme was nonetheless a key to the play, worthy of further investigation and reflection. It is indeed not aligned with contemporary science but is part of the history of ideas.⁴ Shaw’s “vitalist” theory may initially come across as an eclectic mix of the ideas of Samuel Butler, Henri Bergson,⁵ Arthur Schopenhauer, Henrik Ibsen, and Friedrich Nietzsche. For this reason, it has frequently been dismissed as a consequence of the author’s eccentricity and not regarded as a way to explain the difficult relationship between humans and nature.⁶

The philosophy that forms the background of *Saint Joan* negotiates and explores the relationship between the individual and society. History, the study of the past, can contribute to a grasp of the present and to progress in the future. It is precisely having chosen an event that happened in the past that leads Shaw to question paradigms such as historicism and evolutionism. In this regard, the playwright specifies that *Saint Joan* not only represents people and events of the past, but it is also a work about time itself: the protagonist, Joan of Arc, provides us with the necessary elements to analyse and become aware of the modern situation. Shaw clearly takes a position against the view that history is monolithic or fixed: grasping and interpreting historical truth, he maintained, required navigation between present and past contexts, values, and principles. Accord-

⁴ Hale, “The Search for Purpose in a Post-Darwinian Universe,” 192-3.

⁵ In 1911, Russell shared with Shaw and others an honorary dinner for Henri Bergson, who was angered when Shaw joked that Bergson had been inspired by his “creative evolution,” rather than the reverse. Cf. Carpenter, “Shaw and Bertrand Russell,” 25-54.

⁶ Bowler, *Evolution*; Bowler, “The Spectre of Darwinism,” 48-68; Ruse, *The Evolution-Creation Struggle*.

ingly, as noted, the author does not condemn the behaviour of the medieval Catholic Church.

Hayden White points out that modern writers have a “hostility towards history,” along with “an underlying conviction that the historical consciousness must be obliterated if the writer is to examine with proper seriousness those strata of human experience which it is modern art’s peculiar purpose to disclose.”⁷ The Preface might lead one to see Shaw as a modern writer in this sense.

Saint Joan draws on this very new concept of utopia because Shaw uses the historical investigation of an event in the past, the medieval France of Joan of Arc, to analyse the present, secessionist Ireland, and ultimately questions the possibility of a better society for the Irish people. It is in the preface to *Saint Joan* that Shaw compares Joan’s medieval military struggles in France to the Irish battle.⁸

Moreover, historicism so understood provides an impulse towards evolutionism as a unique historical process. Universal laws formulate observations related to a certain invariant order, while the observation of a unique event cannot lead us to formulate universal laws: in fact every law must be verified by another case. But the evolutionary process should be unique, so it cannot be verified, and therefore it is not law. *Saint Joan*’s Epilogue transports the audience to a universe beyond historicist hopes in which no meaningful change is possible. In this way *Saint Joan* expands Shaw’s denial to consider an evolutionist analysis of the very nature of history. Recourse is due to Arnold Toynbee who holds that the poverty of the historicist is a poverty of imagination,⁹ which is the reason why Joan of Arc utopistically imagines, locked up in her prison, a better society than the one of her present. In this way historicism can delimit certain conditions for the future progress of humanity. The evolutionist cannot claim scientific control of nature, but he can deduce necessary elements for progress so that a new world can be realized.

Shaw questions, even before 1923, the notion of history as the progress of man. In this regard, he states, “the period of time covered by history is too short to permit any progress in the popular sense of the evolution

⁷ Hayden White, “The Burden of History,” *History and Theory* 5 (1966): 115, quoted in Watt, “Shaw’s ‘Saint Joan,’” 82.

⁸ Certainly, we can say that Shaw does not follow a linear path on the Irish question. In fact, during the period of revolutionary transformation, on the one hand he states that Ireland is presented as a country now ruined by a regressive and retrograde type of patriotism, and on the other hand, however, as Brian Moore argues, he shows strong political support for the Irish resistance.

⁹ See Toynbee, *A Study of History*; for the geopolitical issue see Chiantera-Stutte, “Scontro di Civiltà?” 117-37; Castellan, *Ascesa e declino delle civiltà*.

of the human species.”¹⁰ Despite this, as Watt notes, “Shaw’s activities as a Fabian, his repudiation of Darwinism and articulation of a Lamarckian ‘Creative Evolution,’ and his adamant defence of the power of the individual all communicate the variety of optimism view about human nature which underlies historicism.”¹¹ It is precisely on this aspect that an interesting contradiction in Shaw’s thought emerges: in the Epilogue of *Saint Joan*, which is set in or after 1920 (the date of Joan’s canonization), he puts the past under indictment through the following questions that Joan asks herself at the end of the play: “O God that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive your saints? How long, O Lord, how long?” These questions confirm that no change has occurred after five hundred years; in fact, Shaw’s works provide considerable evidence of his pessimism and doubts about the possibility of meaningful change. The world is still incapable of being led up the evolutionary ladder by its historical heroes, regardless of material progress or momentary trends, which is why positive change is always projected by Shaw into a possible future. The work recalls the inescapable destiny of the historical hero who is tasked with designing a new society that is different from the contemporary one that often results in the destruction of individual genius.

Contrary to considerable criticism of Shaw’s growing disillusionment after 1918, his attitude toward history was always marked by an ironic pessimism that simply became more pronounced after World War I. It is only right, however, to dwell also on the doctrine of Creative Evolution, which carves out a cautiously optimistic view of man, in order to try to get a complete picture, if at all possible for an author such as Shaw.

2. Creative Evolution

As we have already mentioned, Shaw’s works, particularly *Saint Joan*, express a remarkably pessimistic view of the possibility of significant change in the world contemporary to him. The author projects an eventual transformation on the future and entrusts “historical heroes,” namely individuals, with the task of contributing to human evolution, the purpose *Saint Joan* sets for herself with her death.¹² Shaw starts from the political inadequacy of the human animal, responsible for the incompetence of the European political elite, “who, failing to see beyond the neo-Darwin-

¹⁰ Cf. Shaw, *Collected Letters*, II, 294.

¹¹ Watt, “Shaw’s ‘Saint Joan,’” 82.

¹² Hence the parallelism with Arnold Toynbee’s “creative minority,” which takes on the task of finding useful solutions to orient the entire society to respond to the stimuli determined by the changes of context and not by the laws of nature. Cf. Toynbee, *A Study of History*.

ian struggle for existence, led countries into the tragedy and carnage of the trenches.¹³ For Shaw, the way to make modern civilization survive is to make humanity reach a higher degree, something that could be accomplished by a conscious control of human evolution. Shaw's theory, which he called "creative evolution," certainly borrowed some elements, in addition to Bergson's *L'évolution créatrice*, from Samuel Butler, the author of *Life and Habit* (1870) and of *Erewhon*. Butler argued that there were three essential levels in the hierarchy of life, conscious effort, habit, and instinct, linked in a recapitulatory model of development based on the Lamarckian theory of inheritance of acquired traits. The "natural" or "instinctive" elements were acquired through repeated exercise of conscious effort, which, becoming habitual, would be transformed – through generations – into unconscious instinct.¹⁴ Shaw believed that it was possible to reverse this hierarchy and, with some debt to Arthur Schopenhauer as well, believed that through repeated conscious efforts it would be possible for the individual to eventually regain control and elevate humanity.

Shaw's pessimism grew, as Piers Hale notes:

Although he tried to see the outbreak of war in 1914 as a purgative renewal of European politics, it represented a human trauma that darkened his views thereafter. After the Treaty of Versailles, which Shaw, like others of his time, prophetically viewed as a staging of a second world conflict he was only too ready to sympathise with the whole range of alternative experiments in government that dominated the 1920s and 1930s. The elitist ideal inherent to the idea of the superman made it easy for him to accept the singular effectiveness of Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin, in each of whom Shaw, at one time or another, saw the imprint of the life force at work.¹⁵

That, however, is another story. The theory of creative evolution as "the potential saviour of humanity" was accompanied by a dark side, as Hale points out. Shaw was convinced that most human beings were not able to tell the good from the bad, and thus could not be leaders. For leaders who could save society, one needed to identify and activate men with the skills and the alignment with the "life force":

[...] the controlling agency in Shaw's view of life was not that of humanity, but rather was that of the "evolutionary appetite" of the life force (Shaw 1949, 466). [...] [T]he fact that the life force did not pursue any preconceived plan, but rather proceeded through a process of "trial and error," meant that humans could at best only guess at the actions they could take in hopes of

¹³ Hale, "The Search for Purpose," 201.

¹⁴ Cf. Butler, *Life and Habit*, 45-8.

¹⁵ Hale, "The Search for Purpose," 205.

achieving truly progressive development (Shaw 1949, 458). In this sense, under Shavian Lamarckianism, humanity remained every bit as blind to purpose and progress as under the “accidental” processes of natural selection. The Dark Side of Shavian biology, however, does not lie in our being blind to the ultimate purpose or mechanisms of the life force, for this is arguably no different to the Christian view of an all knowing caring God, whose “mysterious ways” are hidden from us, but are always guided by the Love and benevolence He feels for His creation. Rather, the dark side of the Shavian life force lies in the fact that it cares for nothing more than its own necessary self-expression, and, as Shaw was keen to point out, if the human experiment failed to come up to the mark, then humanity would be dropped, just as the life force had dropped its earlier evolutionary experiments with lower, less developed species than us. As Shaw noted: “The power that produced Man when the monkey was not up to the mark, can produce a higher creature than Man if Man does not come up to the mark... Nature holds no brief for the human experiment: it must stand or fall by its own results. If Man will not serve, nature will try another experiment.” (Shaw 1922, xvii-xviii) Shaw repeated these sentiments in 1946 in a letter to *The Freethinker* in which he wrote: “Mankind is an experiment in godhead, so far not a successful one... But the life force will no doubt try again.” (Shaw 1885, 339) In view of this [...] Shavian “Creative Evolution” was as void of moral significance, as the materialistic neo-Darwinism that he so strenuously objected to.¹⁶

Shaw, like all Bergsonians, believes that the will is the great creative force of the Universe, that Reason is but a faculty evolved by man, and that progress is a means by which to achieve its super-rational ends. Shaw affirms the insufficiency of reason and progress and does not explain the essence of life in a rational way, but like Bergson through a vital impulse. To understand life it would be necessary to live it again and not to consider it as a machine governed by inexorable laws or as the realization of a plan.

In addition to rejecting reason in everything, the playwright also denies the concept of progress in *Saint Joan* when he justifies the behaviour of the Holy Inquisition. In fact, the author, who attempts to explain Catholicism in terms of Creative Evolution, presents a clash between the Middle Ages and modernity, while believing that both worlds must be shown at their best, which is why the Holy Inquisition was able to say everything that was necessary for the medieval world. Shaw states that Joan of Arc was condemned, after a very careful and conscientious process, not by villains: “what we are really interested in is what men do to the best of their ability and with good intentions, what ordinary men and women believe they should and will do in spite of their objectives.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Hale, “The Search for Purpose,” 206-7.

¹⁷ Shaw, “Santa Giovanna,” 112-4.

And again, “Joan had a far fairer trial by the Church and the Inquisition than any prisoner of her type and in her situation suffers in any official court today; and the decision was made strictly according to the law. In the same work the inquisitor may boast that he proceeded in perfect order.”¹⁸ Joan was condemned, according to the official account of her trial, because of her refusal to submit the question of the truth of her visions to the judgment of the authorities of the Church. If such anarchy were allowed, said the Inquisitor, “men and women would arise everywhere, claiming to have divine and angelic revelations and could sow lies and errors to imitate this woman.”¹⁹ During the preparatory inquiry, Joan was asked if she thought her voices would leave her if she married. “I do not know,” she answered, “and I leave that to my Lord.” “Would you answer the Pope clearly?” they asked. “I summon you,” she answered, “to take me to him, and I will answer all that it will be my duty to answer.”²⁰ In her trial, Joan stated, “I well believe that our Holy Father, the Pope of Rome, the bishops and other ecclesiastics are for the protection of the Christian faith and the punishment of heretics, but as for me and my deeds, I will submit only to the Church of Heaven, to God, to Our Lady and to the Saints of Heaven. I firmly believe that I have not erred in the faith, nor would I want to make a mistake.”²¹ As Christopher Hollis, a contemporary reviewer of the play, explained:

Shaw, in his preface, rightly reminds his readers that Papal Infallibility is not unconditioned. It is conditioned by its very nature. The Pope is infallible when he speaks “*ex cathedra* on matters of faith and morals and to the whole world. The Pope then speaks with the voice of God. But it is not only through his Popes that God speaks. He also gives certain chosen people direct mystical experience. Nor does the Church have any right *a priori* to deny the validity of a direct Divine message which any person claims to have received. [...] If, as a result of revelation which pretends to be divine, a person ascribes to God a purpose different in any way from that which the Church teaches Him to possess, then the Church has the right to condemn that pretended revelation.”²²

Those who tried Joan were skilled enough to realize the force of Joan’s argument. It is impossible to write about *Saint Joan* without understanding the context in which the Church of the Middle Ages arose.

In *Saint Joan*, Shaw mentions the processes of the supernatural but to overcome the era of reason (contemporary with him) and arrive at that

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Hollis, “Mr. Shaw’s ‘St. Joan,’” 162.

of the “will”, in which the “capable” individual will be able to achieve the good of all. He believes in the supernatural no more than Hume or Matthew Arnold²³ or Huxley²⁴; he differs from them only because time has made him more sceptical, he is willing to admit that the laws of nature are a little stranger than the people of the last century had accepted. Where it was said that “miracles don’t happen,” he says that miracles sometimes do happen, but they are not miracles. Such a confession would be, to quote a phrase from *Back to Methuselah*, a confession of faith in “a messy God.”

3. Natural Freedom

Nature, by endowing humans with intelligence, has given them an unlimited field of invention and manufacture, that is, it has provided them with a power of freedom; Creative Evolution is freedom without reason. Intelligence can put three dangers before us: first, to turn our activities only to selfish purposes and against social welfare; second, as only man among all individuals knows that he must die, this consciousness can weaken the enthusiasm that keeps him attached to life (which also contributes to the idea that one survives after death). The third danger is that the awareness of risk and the unexpected causes people instinctively to create images of favourable powers brought by the vital impulse. In all three of these dangers religion intervenes as a defensive reaction of nature against everything that is depressing for the individual and dissolving for society in the exercise of intelligence. Shaw seriously tried to make Free Thinking free, challenging all accepted beliefs and analysing the paradigm of man’s freedom. At the end of Saint Joan’s epilogue, it becomes clear that Joan’s isolation is an attempt by the playwright to help us imagine her as she really was; segregation is a way to clearly affirm the value of freedom over life itself. It is important to understand, however, that the freedom that Shaw speaks of for Joan is not simply the freedom of movement, although this was important to her, but is primarily the freedom to let the imagination reach her through her senses. In this regard Joan states, “I can still hear the wind in the trees, the larks in the sun, the young lambs crying, and the blessed church bells sending the voices of angels floating up to me on the wind. Without these memories I cannot live.”²⁵ The imaginative freedom of which the protagonist speaks is exclusively auditory. It is through utopian thinking, fuelled by imagination, that Joan still feels

²³ In this regard, see Ryals, “Arnold’s *Balder Dead*,” 67-81.

²⁴ For this, see H.G. Wells, Huxley, and G.P. Wells, *Science of Life*.

²⁵ Shaw, “Santa Giovanna.”

free despite her incarceration and can plan a new France that will only be realized in the years to come, just as Shaw imagines a new Ireland. In *Saint Joan*, man is completely free only through the state of imagination not subjected to any vital necessity.²⁶ Thanks to all these three forms of imagination Joan is able to overcome even the fear of death and be completely free in her thinking.²⁷

The play's epilogue shows Joan's awareness of the possible utopian sequel to the ordeals of her trials and the stake. The epilogue, which differs in tone and setting from the rest of the play, allows Joan to see and be seen by those whom we have seen earlier in the play, like her comrades and foes. In the epilogue, she is heartened when she understands that the sacrifice of her life has served for the realization of a new society: "I hope that men will be better after knowing my conduct, my memory would not be so important if you [Peter Cauchon] had not burned me."²⁸ These words indicate the necessity of the protagonist to look at the future generations to be able to give a meaning to her sacrifice. Only in this way can she contribute to the realization of an effective change for the society to come. Joan accepts the modality of her death because she is convinced that this will serve to revive her in the imagination of her future audience. It is only when her representation will be imprinted in the memory of humanity that her actions will acquire true meaning. During the time before and during the writing of the play, Shaw, an Irishman, had the Irish political suffering in mind. The death of Joan is arguably comparable to the sacrifice of the Irish who fell in battle in the Irish Civil War, a struggle that will serve to build a better world for their children.²⁹ In addition, the fear of death is explained by Shaw through the "voluntary longevity,"³⁰ according to which death itself goes through changes. Writing to Wells, Shaw states "death is an evolved expedient and not an eternal condition of life";³¹ consequently only through "creative evolution" could humanity develop. Shaw hypothesized that the duration of life could eventually be extended with the force of will. In fact, compared to the past,

²⁶ This philosophy opposes Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill's optimistic view of human nature, which, through the "progressiveness of the human mind," pushed man and history toward a "better and happier state" that exists not only in the imagination.

²⁷ Moran, "Mediations in Time of Civil War," 147-160.

²⁸ Shaw, "Santa Giovanna."

²⁹ See Moran, "Mediations in Time of Civil War," 155-157.

³⁰ This theory is taken from an earlier hypothesis by Weismann in *The Length of Life* (1889). The author argues, "I hold that death is not a primary, but a secondary necessity acquired as an adaptation. Death must be viewed as an event that is advantageous to the species as a concession to the external conditions of life, and not as an absolute necessity, essentially inherent in life itself" Cf. Weismann, "The Duration of Life," 24-25.

³¹ Shaw and Wells, *Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells*.

man could live longer, on average, as a sign of progress of the species. It was clear to Shaw that humanity was now at a point where an increase in longevity had become an evolutionary necessity. In this regard Shaw argued, “life has lengthened considerably since I was born, and there is no reason why it should not lengthen ten times as much after my death.”³²

In *Saint Joan*, Shaw also attempts to explain the motivations for creative evolution to gain a vital impulse. In the play, he attempts a detailed analysis of Saint Joan’s miracles, which he explains as an “evolutionary appetite,” a need for a superman. Such language comes dangerously close to that of Wells,³³ when he refers to life “using” it to fulfil the purposes of the creative evolution of a superman. In *Saint Joan*, the Inquisitor’s appeal to the “accumulated wisdom of the Church” is the way Shaw, who has never claimed to be a Catholic, approaches the Church. It is the attitude of a man who is eager to understand, but unable to do so. The era that canonized St. Joan would have been just as unready to receive her as the era that burned her. Shaw’s interpretation of the trial of Joan of Arc follows a common thread: able-bodied men must adopt the right course of action, which is not always the easiest, but is the best for politics and thus for society. Shaw developed his own meta-biological theory through which he could anticipate, in time, the great improvement of the human intellect. Although this would not be an immediate process, he, in *Man and Superman*, recognized that the evolution of a race is entrusted to the superhuman: exceptional men who even in the course of history are launched into existence by the life force.³⁴

Bergson also seeks refuge with the superman and divides humanity into masters and slaves through a process of “psychic dimorphism.” In Bergson’s social philosophy, the soul of the common man is too small, so there must be a mystical genius that offers the common man the inspiration of love for all humanity, because only this mystical genius can save nations from mutual extermination. While Toynbee is inspired by Bergson for the “Movement of Retreat and Return” through which to save humanity, the author puts in place the “creative minorities,” that is, groups of individuals who collectively perform the same service to humanity that the great mystic performs, as we have already said.³⁵

The idea of the superman leads, for Shaw, to eugenics, a fact that is proper to mention here. Shaw’s support for the development of contemporary eugenics is well known, but like Wells, he believes that many ele-

³² Shaw, *The Case for Equality*, 1-16.

³³ See Wells, *An Experiment in Autobiography*; Wells and Shaw, *Experiments on Animals*.

³⁴ Shaw, *Man and Superman*.

³⁵ Coulborn, “The Individual and the Growth of Civilizations,” 69-89.

ments must be revised.³⁶ First, he is convinced that the aspirations of the proponents of the eugenics movement could not be compared to the irreducible power of the life force that was continually searching for a more perfect form of expression.³⁷ Beyond this, of course, was that, given man's imperfect state and limited knowledge, it was unlikely that mere humanity could question the needs of the life force. This was especially the case with the majority of men who, obsessed with mechanistic neo-Darwinism, denied the very existence of such a force. In 1913, when British enthusiasm for eugenics was reaching its zenith, Shaw addressed the Circle of the National Liberal Club and argued that positional eugenic selection was not at all the same as cattle breeding, the analogy commonly invoked by eugenicists. Nature provided a wide variety of people with different attributes and dispositions; however, such natural differences were complicated and often obscured by the imposition of artificial hierarchies. Thus, the first and only truly positive eugenic measure that could be considered, Shaw believed, was the removal of the artificial distinctions imposed on humanity. It was to this end that Shaw advocated the necessary conditions of equality and freedom that would be created only by men endowed with superior cognitive abilities, which will be made known by the skills acquired. Then the natural progressive flow of the life force present in them would be able to proceed unimpeded. Hence the need for Shaw to direct human progress to create a society of only the "best," to inhabit a new and better world as Joan of Arc imagines in the epilogue to the play Shaw wrote.

4. Independence in Shaw's *Saint Joan*: History Revised and Revived

George Bernard Shaw stated, as both a boast and a confession, that his 1923 play had added nothing to the historical record. "It is the easiest play I have ever had to write. All I've done is to put down the facts, to arrange Joan for the stage. The trial scene is merely a report of the actual trial. I have used Joan's very words; thus she spoke, thus she behaved."³⁸

But was Shaw's *Saint Joan* a mere reflection of the nature, thoughts, and actions of Joan of Arc? Is it actually true that Shaw's story, as he implied, was essentially the same as Joan's history? Did he in fact do no more than quote her transcribed words and record the known facts? Or did Shaw re-imagine Joan as a heroine to serve his purposes in a play of

³⁶ Ray, "Eugenics, Mental Deficiency and Fabian Socialism," 216.

³⁷ Shaw, *Man and Superman*.

³⁸ Pearson, *G. B. S.*, 342.

ideas? As Anna Rita Gabellone has shown in her section, Shaw had ample reasons, in his overall perspective on history and historicism, for his strategy in composition, i.e. for his policy of using literary license and turning Joan's history into his own story. Shaw, we shall see, adapted Joan's words and altered the events of her life. The goal of the present section, a companion to that of Anna Rita Gabellone, is to delineate some of Shaw's choices and their implications for the play's theme and characterization.

We begin with Shaw's use of Joan's own words at her trial, for which we have a verbatim transcript. The source for Joan's words is Jules Quicherat's *Procès de condamnation et de réhabilitation de Jeanne d'Arc, dite La Pucelle*, published in five volumes, over the course of several years (1841-1849). The English translation of that transcript is a book Shaw knew: T. Douglas Murray's *Jeanne D'Arc, Being the Story of her Life, her Achievements, and her Death, as attested in Oath and Set forth in the Original Documents*.³⁹ Shaw clearly used Murray's edition of the transcript. Shaw, equally clearly, modified it, as Arnold Silver, among others, has pointed out.⁴⁰

Silver addresses, for example, Shaw's modification of Joan's explanation of her attempt to escape from one of the prisons where she had been confined. The historical Joan said that of course she wanted to escape: "Never was I prisoner in such a place that I would not willingly have escaped." She had made the attempt because she did not accept her imprisonment, and believed that if God favoured her freedom, she would succeed in her attempt. She would try again, she said, if the door were left open: "If I saw the door open, I should go: that would be leave from Our Lord. [...] But without this leave, I shall not go."⁴¹ Joan's point is that she would escape if she could, but, if she did so, she would be acting with God's permission.

Shaw's Joan makes the same points, with more succinctness and wit. She poses a rhetorical question: "Why would anybody leave a prison if they could get out?" She answers her question: "If you leave the door of the cage open the bird will fly out." She attempted to escape, she says, as any creature would. When she is told that her question amounts to "a confession of heresy," she poses another rhetorical question: "Am I a heretic because I try to escape from prison?"⁴² Speaking without the direct refer-

³⁹ Murray, *Jeanne D'Arc*. Based on Quicherat, *Procès de condamnation et de réhabilitation*.

⁴⁰ Silver, *Saint Joan*. See 44-9 for information about Shaw's modification of Joan's words during her trials, including the four examples below, which were identified by Silver, relying on Murray's edition of Quicherat. For additional information about Shaw's alteration of history, see Chapter 9 for "The Playwright as Historian," which will be referenced later in this article.

⁴¹ Silver, *Saint Joan*, 44-5.

⁴² Shaw, *Saint Joan*, 126 (Scene 6). All quotations from the play will be drawn from this edition and will be identified by page number and by scene.

ence to God's will, Shaw's Joan expresses herself here, and in many places in the play, with common sense. The will she expresses, moreover, is her own: she thinks and speaks independently. The question/answer format illustrates the play's dramatic pace and Joan's quickness of thought.

Another example of Shaw's modification of the historical Joan's statements is related to her belief that she knew, in advance, that she would be captured. The historical Joan stated, during the trial, that her voices warned her she would be taken, but had not told her when.⁴³ Shaw's Joan voices this belief not during the trial, but much earlier, before her capture: "I shall last only a year from the beginning." She adds: "I know it somehow."⁴⁴ The theatrical Joan is shown as having a premonition that her leadership would be cut short and as knowing the approximate timeframe. She stated this premonition before the fact. Shaw's Joan, moreover, believes that she knew what she knew only "somehow," rather than through the medium of the voices she typically cited as the sources for her special knowledge.

Shaw's version of one of Joan's most famous and eloquent statements shows his gift for retaining, condensing, and enhancing what is dramatic in Joan. When she was asked if she believed she was in a state of grace, the historical Joan responded: "If I am not, may God place me there; if I am, may God so keep me. I should be the saddest in all the world if I knew that I were not in the grace of God. But if I were in a state of sin, do you think the Voice would come to me?"⁴⁵ Compare these words of the historical Joan with the words of Shaw's Joan: "If I am not, may God bring me to it; if I am, may God keep me in it!"⁴⁶ Her words are true to the thought of the historical Joan, with a more elegant parallelism and contrast.

The historical Joan continued with an expression of her emotion regarding the need for grace and the incompatibility of her supernatural voices with the state of sin. Shaw's Joan's statement, by contrast, is complete in itself, and is followed by comedy. Canon Courcelles, unable to resist mentioning an action of Joan's with which he is obsessed, but which he has been instructed to ignore, inquires: "Were you in a state of grace when you stole the Bishop's horse?"⁴⁷

The words of Shaw's Joan at trial, ultimately, are coherent with his desire to emphasize Joan's personal dignity and independence by contrast with the tyranny of institutions. When the historical Joan was asked about her obedience to the Church, she said that she adhered to her voices, even if (as the question implied) this adherence was in conflict with

⁴³ Silver, *Saint Joan*, 45-6.

⁴⁴ Shaw, *Saint Joan*, 104 (Scene 5).

⁴⁵ Silver, *Saint Joan*, 46.

⁴⁶ Shaw, *Saint Joan*, 130 (Scene 6).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

the Church. The historical Joan said: “in case the Church should wish me to do anything contrary to the command which has been given me of God, I will not consent to it, whatever it may be. God must be served first.”⁴⁸ She did, in other words, claim private authority (supported by her voices) and followed it even when it disagreed with the authority of the Church. The historical Joan was openly willing to choose her voices over the Church but did not claim that resolving the conflict was a matter of her own choice and deliberation. When she was accused of assuming the authority of God, the historical Joan said: “I answer nothing from my own head; what I answer is by command of my Voices.” Joan insisted that her answers did not originate in her own thinking.

Shaw’s theatrical Joan, like the historical Joan, insists that God must be served first, and that she herself has been serving God’s command and intends to follow nothing else. When she is asked, though, if she herself, rather than the Church, is to be the judge if the commands of the voices conflict with the dictates of the Church, she replies to the question with her own question, a rhetorical question: “What other judgment can I judge by but my own?”⁴⁹ Shaw’s Joan, in a dramatic riposte, explicitly upholds independent thought. She does not, at this point, even mention her voices, nor does she say she answers nothing from her own head. What other head, says Joan, would she use? Her reference to her own judgment emphasizes the element of common sense to which Joan frequently appeals and which is a key to her character in the play.

Regarding the overall background and context of Joan’s story, Shaw’s play and preface retained, as Silver points out, a number of facts more characteristic of her time than of Shaw’s:

Yet in every scene Shaw does include touches that convincingly situate the play in its period. We are reminded right from the outset of the hierarchical social structure, as Baudricourt assesses the exact social class of farmers that Joan’s father represents and then talks of his own responsibility as the father’s lord to see that Joan does not get into trouble. Throughout the play we are made aware of the feudal aristocracy’s conflict with royalty and also of the pervasive power of the Catholic church. The characters discuss medieval fighting techniques and the practice of ransom; they enjoy looking at illuminated manuscripts; they make slighting remarks about Jews and Muslims. Pilgrimages to the Holy Land are mentioned, and we are shown several instances of the people’s credulity, their appetite for miracles, and their total acceptance of witchcraft.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Silver, *Saint Joan*, 47.

⁴⁹ Shaw, *Saint Joan*, 130 (Scene 6).

⁵⁰ Silver, *Saint Joan*, 81-2.

Regardless of Shaw's emphases in the Preface (and at times in the play) on such issues as Protestantism and nationalism, he placed his heroine in a recognizably medieval environment. Shaw's Joan was not a time traveler. But Shaw's version of the historical background and religious proceedings contained a number of inaccuracies.⁵¹ Consider Joan's recantation. The historical Joan, as Silver points out, said she would renounce male dress if she were permitted to attend Mass, to be free of irons, and to have with her a female companion. Under these circumstances, she was willing to recant. But when she was not given what she wanted, and when the soldiers stole her female clothing, she had nothing to gain by recantation. The historical Joan had asked for a better imprisonment, an option Shaw does not offer.⁵² For Shaw's Joan, there is only bitter prison or the stake. The prospect of prison being intolerable, Joan tears up the paper of recantation and asks for the fires to be lit.

Shaw made numerous other changes and subtractions. His omissions included Joan's early life, her family relationships, several battles, her actual capture, and long months of imprisonment in addition to those encompassed by the play. His condensations included the following: three trips to Robert de Baudricourt become one; two trips to the Dauphin become one; the play's Scene 6 combines two separate trials.⁵³ We do not, moreover, see Shaw's Joan on the battlefield. Shaw "wanted to keep Joan before us purely as the victim of violence rather than surrounded by it."⁵⁴

Shaw invented or extrapolated some of the religious personnel involved in Joan's history. The historical foundation for the characterization of the Archbishop of Rheims is a single letter that he wrote, stating that Joan's capture was a punishment for her pride, for wearing gold raiment, and for following her own will instead of God's.⁵⁵ The historical basis for John de Stogumber, the English chaplain, was an English assistant to the Bishop of Winchester, who was said to have called a French Bishop a traitor when it appeared that Joan would escape the stake.⁵⁶ Both the Archbishop and Stogumber are important antagonists regarding Joan; they know why they oppose her, but, in the course of the play, they are not consistently unsympathetic.

Johan Huizinga considers Shaw's portrayal of Joan's confidence and courage to be authentic and true to history. He sees Joan's report of hear-

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 112-3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 77-8.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 73-4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁵ Huizinga, "Bernard Shaw's Saint" 231.

⁵⁶ Silver, *Saint Joan*, 74.

ing voices as not unusual in Joan's time: "It was just as natural for a person of the fifteenth century to associate a notion with a saint as for our contemporaries to use the words 'mentality' and 'intuition.'"⁵⁷ Huizinga, however, questions Shaw's presentation of Joan, especially in the Preface, as a precursor of Protestantism and nationalism. Huizinga has a list of specific inaccuracies. For example, the clergyman who deplored Joan's burning was not the chaplain Stogumber, but Tressard, the royal secretary. The cleric who held the cross before Joan at the stake was Brother Isambard de la Pierre, not Brother Martin Ladvenu. Huizinga points out that the historical Joan did not specifically mention Michael, Saint Catherine, and Saint Margaret until much later, in the course of events, than she does in the play. Huizinga sees these discrepancies as minor; Shaw's Joan, all things considered, is not far from history's Joan.

J. Van Kan also sees the play as close to the historical facts, though divergent in some ways. He objects to Joan's belligerence and to her disrespectful informality in addressing the Dauphin as "Charlie" and in commenting on his clothing. There was, says Van Kan, no trap to condemn Joan, no negotiation between Warwick and Cauchon, and no foreshadowing, before Joan's capture at Compiègne, of the fact that the King, the Archbishop, or Dunois would abandon her.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, Van Kan finds Shaw's Joan to be plausible in essence.

We need, in exploring *Saint Joan*, to acknowledge that Shaw altered the known facts in a more significant way than all of the changes so far identified: Shaw added and subtracted from the historical facts about Pierre Cauchon, Bishop of Beauvais. Shaw presents Cauchon as a man of principle, dedicated to the Church, which he sees imperiled by independent thinkers such as Joan:

What will the world be like when The Church's accumulated wisdom and knowledge and experience, its councils of learned, venerable pious men, are thrust into the kennel by every ignorant laborer or dairymaid whom the devil can puff up with the monstrous self-conceit of being directly inspired from heaven? It will be a world of blood, of fury, of devastation, of each man striving for his own hand: in the end a world wrecked back into barbarism. For now you have only Mahomet and his dupes, and the Maid and her dupes; but what will it be when every girl thinks herself a Joan and every man a Mahomet? I shudder to the very marrow of my bones when I think of it. I have fought it all my life, and I will fight it to the end.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Huizinga, "Bernard Shaw's Saint," 223.

⁵⁸ Van Kan, "Bernard Shaw's 'Saint Joan,'" 36-46.

⁵⁹ Shaw, *Saint Joan*, 95-6 (Scene 4).

Shaw's Cauchon, as he tells the Earl of Warwick, is explicitly concerned with Joan's spiritual salvation: "I am no mere political bishop: my faith is to me what your honor is to you; and if there be a loophole through which this baptized child of God can creep to her salvation, I shall guide her to it."⁶⁰ In seeking to combat the threat Joan embodies, Cauchon has no animus against Joan herself.

The historical Cauchon had blocked Joan's appeal to the Pope. This fact, which supported the Church's later case against Cauchon, is omitted from the narrative. Shaw similarly omits Cauchon's refusal to let the court know Joan was a virgin (and that, therefore, the accusations of promiscuity were unfounded); his planting a spy-priest as Joan's confessor to entrap her; his breaking his promise to remove her irons and allow her to attend mass if she confessed her sins; his arranging for harassing interrogations; and his keeping Joan in a lay prison guarded by English soldiers (rather than guarded by clerics or women, as she requested and was entitled to have).⁶¹

Shaw even shielded Cauchon from being the butt of humour. The historical Joan, when asked if the angel Michael appeared to her in the nude, posed another of her rhetorical questions: "Do you think God cannot afford clothes for him?" In history, her joke was directed against Cauchon. In Shaw's play, the joke is directed against Canon Courcelles.⁶² Shaw preserves the comedy but saves Cauchon from humiliation.

The historical Cauchon had English friends, and his fellow clerics at the University of Paris received benefices from the English. Yet Shaw's Cauchon denigrates the English, saying "What scoundrels these English nobles are," thus showing that, contrary to his denials, he really is a political bishop.⁶³ Shaw shows Cauchon saying "Amen" in support of Ladvenu's exclamation of thanks to God for Joan's salvation through her recantation. This did not happen; it is Shaw's invention. Similarly, Shaw shows Cauchon protesting against Joan's being handed over summarily to English soldiers for burning. This is another invention. Shaw, moreover, wrote the Inquisitor's speech, which supports and endorses Cauchon.⁶⁴

Shaw whitewashed Cauchon, as Anna Rita Gabbellone has stated, in spite of facts well known to him and to everyone. Shaw knew that Cauchon had said, "We shall get her yet!" as the Church advanced the charge of heresy. He knew that Cauchon had said, at the end, "Farewell, farewell, it is done! Have good cheer!" He knew that Cauchon had been granted a

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 93 (Scene 4).

⁶¹ Silver, *Saint Joan*, 85, is the source for all of the points in this paragraph.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 84.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 84-5.

bishopric for services in the treaty that disinherited Charles and that Cauchon had been a middleman in buying Joan from the Burgundians. He was familiar, as previously noted, with T. Douglas Murray's translation of Jules Quicherat's multivolume *Procès de Jeanne d'Arc* (1841-1849).

What, then, is behind what A. M. Cohen termed the "Shavianization" of Cauchon?⁶⁵ Why, without ever casting any aspersions on Joan, did Shaw hide some of Cauchon's flaws and attribute to him non-historical virtues?

One possible explanation is his own statement, in the Preface. As Anna Rita Gabellone states in her section, Shaw wanted to portray Cauchon not as a demon, a monster, or a special case, but rather to show that a person can commit, without wicked intention and without a profoundly wicked essence, an act we now deem to be wicked. "There are no villains in this piece. [...] It is, I repeat, what normally innocent people do that concerns us, and if Joan had not been burnt by normally innocent people in the energy of their righteousness her death at their hands would have no more significance than the Tokyo earthquake, which burnt a great many maidens."⁶⁶ From Shaw's perspective, Cauchon and Joan's other opponents are not motivated by personal enmity.

Another possible explanation is that Shaw wanted to call into question the commonplace view that Protestants are invariably tolerant, whereas Catholics are invariably intolerant. As he wrote to Father Joseph Leonard (in a letter composed months before the composition of the play), he wanted to present Catholicism as more tolerant of private judgment than "the Protestant persuasion," which favours freedom of thought only if the thinker freely agrees with its conclusion.⁶⁷ "The Protestant persuasion," as a stand-in for independent thought, thus both is and is not opposed to Catholicism. As A. M. Cohen points out, for Cauchon to take his place in Shaw's staging of the conflict between prejudice and the genuine judgment that is independent thought, he had to be "utterly without political and personal feelings against the Maid."⁶⁸

Shaw's treatment of Cauchon is consistent with his view of what is in the balance. As Silver sums up Shaw's position:

The true conflict, he maintains—and arranges his play to illustrate it—is not between a cruel judge and an innocent victim but between opposing historic forces; the feudal nobility and the universal Church on one side, incipient nationalism and Protestantism on the other, the latter pair embodied in Joan. To attend to the petty detail of a prejudiced judge is, for Shaw, to

⁶⁵ Cohen, "The 'Shavianization' of Cauchon," 63-70.

⁶⁶ Shaw, Preface to *Saint Joan*, 43.

⁶⁷ Silver, *Saint Joan*, 88.

⁶⁸ Cohen, "The 'Shavianization' of Cauchon," 67.

blur the remorseless processes of history that the play is unfolding for our enlightenment.⁶⁹

Along with these opposing historic forces, Shaw has in mind another sort of force. In the Preface, Shaw comments on Joan herself and on her fate as expressions of “superpersonal forces.” In the section of the Preface about “The Evolutionary Appetite,” he states that “there are forces at work which use individuals for purposes far transcending the purpose of keeping these individuals alive and prosperous and respectable and safe and happy in the middle station of life [...]” People endure ordeals “in the pursuit of knowledge and of social readjustment for which they will not be a penny the better.” How does he explain this pursuit? Not as a personal choice, but as “an appetite for evolution, and therefore a superpersonal need.” Joan’s voices, from this perspective, constituted “the dramatization by Joan’s imagination of that pressure upon her of the driving force that is behind evolution,” or one of the superpersonal forces.⁷⁰ Shaw’s ideas here are part of a network of his intellectual concerns regarding “creative evolution,” as Anna Rita Gabellone explains in her section.

In exploring what Shaw did to and with the story of Joan, we recognize the sweep of history and the course of Shaw’s own experience. Joan was burned in 1431. In 1456, the verdict was reversed, and in 1920 she was canonized. Joan was not only exonerated of wrongdoing but also acknowledged as a saint. Shaw himself, two years after the 1923 play, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, an award that amounts to the literary equivalent of beatification. The controversy surrounding his treatment of Joan was not a new experience for him. As an outspoken Fabian socialist, a critic of both sides in the First World War, and a polemicist who appeared to delight in equal-opportunity insults, he liked taking both sides of a dispute – and neither.

Here he chose to praise a new saint, but for reasons of his own. Historically, Joan’s religious canonization was based on conventional religious virtues, such as her commitment to taking the sacraments, and conventional female virtues, such as her charity to the poor. Shaw, by contrast, praises Joan for virtues that are secular and conventionally masculine, such as her ability to inspire courage in men and her skill in leading them to military victory.⁷¹

Shaw and his audience, in the theatre and on the page, must ultimately come to terms with the question he addresses in both the play and the

⁶⁹ Silver, *Saint Joan*, 90.

⁷⁰ Shaw, Preface to *Saint Joan*, 15.

⁷¹ Silver, *Saint Joan*, 113.

Preface. Here, too, he takes more than one side at once. What, in fact, is the role of the voices? Are Joan's alleged miracles to be dismissed as coincidence or fantasy, or even a hoax? Joan, in Shaw's account, was capable of miracles yet also an advocate and practitioner of common sense. In a sense, he wanted to have his (miraculous) cake and eat it too. Shaw's play provides abundant evidence of Joan's thinking of her voices as supporting her own judgment and as being virtually inseparable from her independence of thought.

When Joan tells Robert de Baudricourt: "I hear voices telling me what to do. They come from God," he comments, intending to contradict her: "They come from her imagination." She is unfazed: "Of course. That is how the messages of God come to us."⁷²

Dunois, a comrade in arms who is far from a religious man, refers to Joan as a child of God, but expresses doubts about her voices. "You make me uneasy when you talk about your voices: I should think you were a bit cracked if I hadn't noticed that you give me very sensible reasons for what you do." Joan replies: "Well, I have to find reasons for you, because you do not believe in my voices. But the voices come first; and I find the reasons after."⁷³ Saying that she has to "find" the reasons does not mean that she invents them; for Joan, her plans and her resolve are experienced as voices, for which she subsequently recognizes and articulates the reasons.

She does not view her voices as her exclusive privilege. She remarks to the King: "[The voices] do come to you; but you do not hear them. [...] But what voices do you need to tell you what the blacksmith can tell you: that you must strike while the iron is hot?"⁷⁴ The advice of the voices coincides with the straightforward advice of common sense: Strike while the iron is hot.

She continues, when speaking with the Archbishop of Rheims, to assert her reliance on common sense. When the Archbishop tells her, "Pride will have a fall, Joan," she rejoins with regard to the fact that the common people will fight to win: "Oh, never mind whether it is pride or not: is it true? is it commonsense?"⁷⁵ She is dedicated to the truth and common sense, and this dedication is linked to the inspiration from her voices, which are (somehow) part of her practice of common sense. As she says to the Archbishop: "When have they [my voices] ever lied: If you will not believe in them: even if they are only the echoes of my common-sense, are they not always right? and are not your earthly counsels always wrong?"⁷⁶

⁷² Shaw, *Saint Joan*, 59 (Scene 1).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 102-3 (Scene 5).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 106 (Scene 5).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 108 (Scene 5).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 110-1 (Scene 5).

Joan repeatedly insists that she speaks sense and her opponents do not. During her trial, when D'Estivet, the Promoter, tells her that it is heresy to take herself out of the Church's hands when the Church is confining her, she declares: "It is great nonsense. Nobody could be such a fool as to think that."⁷⁷

Shaw's Cauchon appears to be trying to protect her from the consequences of this sort of plain-speaking, saying: "I have warned you before, Joan, that you are doing yourself no good by these pert answers." She replies: "But you will not talk sense to me. I am reasonable if you will be reasonable."⁷⁸

Again and again, she cites as justification her common sense and her voices, as if they are the same thing – and it appears to her that they are. Brother Martin Ladvenu asks her why an angel of God would give her the "shameless advice" of donning male clothing. She replies: "Why, yes: what can be plainer commonsense? I was a soldier living among soldiers, I am a prisoner guarded by soldiers. If I were to dress as a woman they would think of me as a woman; and then what would become of me? If I dress as a soldier they think of me as a soldier, and I can live with them as I do at home with my brothers. That is why St. Catherine tells me I must not dress as a woman until she gives me leave."⁷⁹

To the extent that her voices are in fact her own thoughts (as Shaw suggested in the Preface in the section "Joan a Galtonic Visualizer"), Joan "saw imaginary saints just as some other people see imaginary diagrams and landscapes with numbers dotted about them, and are thereby able to perform feats of memory and arithmetic impossible to non-visualizers."⁸⁰ How, though, can the description of Joan as what Francis Galton described as a "visualizer" be reconciled with the view that larger "superpersonal forces" are at work in Joan? To what extent is she an individual making active use of gifts within the privacy of her mind? To what extent is she the passive object of some collective forces or powers beyond her control?

The play itself does not mention, much less emphasize, the "superpersonal forces." The voices, within the play, are deemed by Joan to be equivalent to her common sense, and not as a metaphor for any sort of evolutionary appetite. The spectator at the play sees one Joan; the reader of the Preface sees another, and one at odds with the image of Joan, the independent thinker. To the extent that there is a contradiction within Shaw – and

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 126 (Scene 6).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 132 (Scene 6).

⁸⁰ Shaw, Preface to *Saint Joan*, 18.

there is a contradiction – it is played out most saliently in the discrepancy between the play itself and the Preface that accompanies it. But Shaw wrote them both.

He also wrote the Epilogue – and may have conceived of it even before he wrote the play.⁸¹ In the Epilogue, a dream-like scene, Joan is seen, acknowledged, and praised by all, including Cauchon, Warwick, the King, and Dunois. When she offers to return from the dead and to live among them, “they all spring to their feet in consternation.”⁸² Her offer is rejected, and, one by one, they desert her. Shaw’s stage direction specifies “a white radiance descending on Joan.” She stands on the stage alone, asking: “O God that madest this beautiful earth, when will it be ready to receive Thy saints? How long, O Lord, how long?”⁸³ The world she desires is not actual or even imminent, and she has known that for a long time.

Her solitude at the end was foreshadowed, as was her abandonment, in Scene 5, the last scene in which we see Joan before her capture. On that occasion, she frankly confronted the people she had believed to be her allies, people who she now knows would not stand by her:

There is no help, no counsel, in any of you. Yes, I am alone on earth: I have always been alone. [...] Do not think you can frighten me by telling me that I am alone. France is alone; and God is alone; and what is my loneliness before the loneliness of my country and my God? I see now that the loneliness of God is His strength: what would He be if He listened to your jealous little counsels? Well, my loneliness will be my strength too...⁸⁴

Her aloneness appears in both the Epilogue and the play itself. Joan’s lonely independence is part of her strength, although Shaw’s Preface, in assessing her achievement, assigns some credit to forces beyond her. Shaw wishes to celebrate Joan’s common sense, personal power, and courage. Yet he also sees her as the fulfilment of an “evolutionary appetite” and of a will beyond herself. What Shaw has termed “creative evolution” is relevant not only to Shaw’s treatment of history, Anna Rita Gabellone shows, but to the complexity of his portrayal of Joan, saint and heroine. Shaw’s theatrical Joan was a figure of her time and for all time, an ideal, an idealist, and a woman. Would it be irreverent to propose that the play’s independent woman is immortal, and that the Preface that compromises her power is what properly should have been burned?

⁸¹ Silver, *Saint Joan*, 70-1.

⁸² Shaw, *Saint Joan*, 158 (Epilogue).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 159 (Epilogue).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 112 (Scene 5).

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