Bruce Jackson & Diane Christian video introduction to this week's film

Carl Theodor Dreyer website

DIRECTOR Carl Theodor Dreyer
WRITING Joseph Delteil wrote the novel adapted by Carl Theodor Dreyer for film.
CINEMATOGRAPHER Rudolph Maté
EDITOR Marguerite Beaugé and Carl Theodor Dreyer
COMPOSER (for Criterion edition): Richard Einhorn

CAST
Maria Falconetti...Jeanne d'Arc (as Melle Falconetti)
Eugene Silvain... Évêque Pierre Cauchon (Bishop Pierre Cauchon) (as Eugène Silvain)
André Berley...Jean d'Estivet
Maurice Schutz...Nicolas Loyseleur
Antonin Artaud...Jean Massieu
Michel Simon...Jean Lemaître
Jean d'Yd...Guillaume Evrard
Louis Ravet...Jean Beaupère (as Ravet)
Armand Lurville...Juge (Judge) (as André Lurville)
Jacques Arnna ...Juge (Judge)
Alexandre Mihalesco...Juge (Judge)
Léon Larive...Juge (Judge)

CARL THEODOR DREYER (3 February 1889, Copenhagen, Denmark—20 March 1968, Copenhagen, Denmark) directed 23 films and wrote 49 screenplays. As a young man, Dreyer worked as a journalist, but he eventually joined the film industry as a writer of title cards for silent films and subsequently of screenplays. His first attempts at film direction had limited success, and he left Denmark to work in the French film industry. While living in France he met Jean Cocteau, Jean Hugo, and other members of the French artistic scene. In 1928 he made his first classic film, *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. Working from the transcripts of Joan's trial, he created a masterpiece of emotion that drew equally on realism and expressionism. His last film was *Gertrud* (1964). He is also known for *Vredens dag/Day of Wrath* (1943), and *Vampyr - Der Traum des Allan Grey/Vampyr* (1932).

RUDOLPH MATÉ (21 January 1898, Kraków, Poland—27 October 1964, Hollywood, CA) shot 56 films and also directed 31. Some of the films he shot were *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947), *It Had to Be You* (1947), *Gilda* (1946), *Cover Girl* (1944), *Sahara*

(1943), *The Pride of the Yankees* (1942), *To Be or Not to Be* (1942), *Stella Dallas* (1937), *Come and Get It* (1936), *Dodsworth* (1936), *Dante's Inferno* (1935), *Vampyr - Der Traum des Allan Grey* (1932), *Prix de beauté* (1930). Some of his directing credits are *The Barbarians* (1960), *Miracle in the Rain* (1956), *When Worlds Collide* (1951), *Union Station* (1950), *D.O.A.* (1950), and *It Had to Be You* (1947). He was nominated for 5 best cinematography Oscars: *Cover Girl* (1944), *Sahara* (1943), *The Pride of the Yankees* (1942), *That Hamilton Woman* (1941) and *Foreign Correspondent* (1940).

MARIA FALCONETTI (1892-1946). "Born in Pantin, Seine-Saint-Denis, Falconetti became a stage actress in Paris in 1918. By the time Dreyer watched her act in an amateur theatre and selected her as his leading lady in his upcoming production *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, she already was a celebrated stage artiste, and had appeared in one film, *La Comtesse de Somerive* (1917), directed by Georges Denola and Jean Kemm. Falconetti was 35 years old when she played the role of 19-year-old Joan of Arc in *La Passion*. Her portrayal is widely considered one of the more astonishing performances committed to film, and it remained her final cinematic role.

ANTONIN ARTAUD (4 September 1896, Marseille, Bouches-du-Rhône, France—4 March 1948, Ivry-sur-Seine, Val-de-Marne, France) "was a French dramatist, poet, essayist, actor, and theatre director, widely recognized as one of the major figures of twentieth-century theatre and the European avant-garde He is best known for conceptualizing a 'Theatre of Cruelty'. His ideas were adopted by such playwrights as Orton and Genet and were vividly seen in Barrault's adaptation of Kafka's *The Trial* (1947) (*Wikipedia).* He also acted in nearly two dozen films, among them *Lucrèce Borgia* (1935), *Napoléon Bonaparte* (1934), *Mater dolorosa* (1932), *L'Argent* (1928), *Napoléon* (1927), *Le Juif errant* (19 26), and *Mater dolorosa* (1917)." (Wikipedia)

RICHARD EINHORN (*Wikipedia*) (born 1952) is an American composer of contemporary classical music. Einhorn graduated summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Columbia University in 1975, and studied composition and electronic music with Jack Beeson, Vladimir Ussachevsky, and Mario Davidovsky. His best-known work, Voices of Light (1994) is an oratorio scored for soloists, chorus, orchestra and a bell. It was inspired by Carl Theodor Dreyer's silent film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928). He has also composed many horror and thriller film scores, including *Shock Waves* (1977), *Don't Go in the House* (1980), *Eyes of a Stranger* (1981), *The Prowler* (1981), *Dead of Winter* (1987), *Blood Rage* (1987), *Sister, Sister* (1987) and *Dark Tower* (1989). He also contributed to the soundtrack of *Liberty! The American Revolution* (1997).

from *World Film Directors V. I.* Ed John Wakeman. The H.W. Wilson Co NY 1987, entry by Philip Kemp

Danish director and scenarist, born in Copenhagen. According to recent research by Maurice Drouzy, he was the illegitimate son of a Swedish woman, Josefin Bernhardin Nilsson. His father, Jens Christian Trop, owned a farm near Kjristianstad in southern Sweden, where Josefin Nilsson worked as a housekeeper. To avoid scandal, she went to Copenhagen to have her

baby in anonymous seclusion. For the first two years of his life, the child lived in a succession of foster homes, before his mother succeeded in having him adopted early in 1891. A few weeks later she died, poisoned by phosphorus, which she had taken in a misinformed attempt to abort a second pregnancy.

The boy's adoptive parents were a young Danish couple. The family was not well off and often had to move in search of cheaper lodging. Perhaps partly as a result of this poverty, Dreyer's childhood he described to his friend Ebbe Neergaard, was unhappy and emotionally deprived; his adopted family "never ceased to let him feel that he ought to be grateful for the food he was given, and that he really had no claim to anything, considering that his mother had managed to escape for paying for him by departing this world. As soon as possible he was encouraged to start earning his keep.

Dreyer, always a reserved and reticent man, rarely discussed his personal life, but his marriage was to all appearances a happy one, lasting until his death fifty-seven years.

In 1913 he joined Nordisk Films Kompagni as a part-time screenwriter, becoming a full-time employee two years later. At the time the Danish film industry was at the height of its brief Golden Age, producing a spate of movies that rivaled those of Hollywood for international popularity. Between 1910 and 1916 Nordisk alone turned out over a hundred films a year. Dreyer's first task was to devise dialogue for intertitles, but soon he was writing complete scripts, editing films, and acting as literary consultant on potential properties. From 1913 to 1918 he was credited with scripts for more than twenty films and worked uncredited on many more. It served him, he later said, as "a marvelous school."

In 1918, having worked a five-year apprenticeship, Dreyer suggested that Nordisk should let him direct. The studio agreed readily enough, and Dreyer began work on *Praesidenten* (*The President*, 1919), to his own script from a novel by Karl Franzos. The film proved a creaky, old-fashioned melodrama, full of seductions, illegitimacies, improbable coincidences, and impossibly stagy acting, all strung around a complicated flashback structure that betrayed the ill-digested influence of D.W. Griffith. Dreyer subsequently attributed the hammy gesticulations to his directorial inexperience: "I let the actors do what they liked. Later I saw my mistakes on the screen."

More characteristic of Dreyer's later work was his handling of some of the smaller roles, where he cast nonprofessionals in the interests of authenticity, and his treatment of the décor, which was clean and uncluttered, contrasting black and white in starkly dramatic compositions. *Praesidenten* also marks the first appearance of Dreyer's perennial theme: an isolated suffering woman victimized by intolerant society….

The German film industry, led by the mighty UFA studios in Berlin, was now at the height of its influence and prestige, and it was for Decla-Bioscop, the "artistic" of UFA, that Dreyer directed *Mikael* (1924), with Erich Pommer producing….

"*Mikael*," in Tom Milne's opinion, "is perhaps Dreyer's first masterpiece, assured , reticent, and radiant with subtle inner connections." Certainly it enabled Dreyer to explore, more fully than in any of his previous films, his technique of expressing his characters' inner moral condition through the décor that surrounds them….

Master of the House (1925) also displays Dreyer's increasingly assured use of facial closeups as a key element in the construction of his films. "Nothing in the world," he once wrote, "can be compared to the human face. It is a land one can never tire of exploring. There is no greater experience in a studio than to witness the expression of a sensitive

face under the mysterious power of inspiration. To see it animated from inside, and turning into poetry."

Master of the House enjoyed considerable success, especially in France, prompting the Société Générale des Films to offer Dreyer a contract for the film that would soon make him famous.. . .Dreyer had now directed eight films in seven years. In the remaining forty-two years of his life he was to make only six more features—although they include all the five films on which his reputation now rests….

Throughout these [earlier] films, too, Dreyer can be seen striving for truth and sincerity on the screen, pressing for naturalistic settings and performances in the hope of achieving emotional truth. "What interests me," he explained, "—and this comes before technique—is to reproduce the feelings of the characters in my films: to reproduce as sincerely as possible feelings which are as sincere as possible. For me, the important thing is not only to seize the words they say, but also the thoughts behind those words." Also increasingly evident is what Tom Milne described as "Dreyer's preoccupation with texture, with the way the material world impinges on the human beings who live apparently detached from it, and with the tangibility of a gesture or a glance and with the equal tangibility of objects."

All these elements coalesce in Dreyer's next, and still his most famous, film. Invited to Paris, he proposed a choice of three subjects to the Société Générale—Marie Antoinette, Catherine de Medici, and Joan of Arc—and finally (by drawing matches, Dreyer later claimed) settled on Joan. Given ample time and a generous budget of seven millions francs, he spent several months in research and preparation before starting production on an unhurried schedule. To represent Rouen Castle, a huge concrete complex was constructed of interconnecting walls, towers, houses, a drawbridge, and a church, designed by Herman Warm (set designer on *Caligari*) and Jean Hugo. Warm drew his inspiration from medieval miniatures, with their disconcerting angles and naive perspective. Dreyer's script was based largely on the original transcripts of Joan's trial, though the twenty-nine separate interrogations were telescoped into one single, harrowing sequence.

It is virtually impossible today, even on a first viewing, to come to *La Passion of Jeanne d'Arc* (*The Passion of Joan of Arc,* 1927) with a wholly fresh eye, so familiar have stills from it become. This may partly explain why some critics have tended to dismiss the film as no more than "an extension of still photography." Certainly few films, before or since, can have contained such a high proportion of facial close-ups—dictated, according to Dreyer, by the inherent nature of the material. "There were the questions, there were the answers—very short, very crisp.... Each question, each answer, quite naturally called for a close-up....In addition, the result of the close-ups was that the spectator was as shocked as Joan was, receiving the questions, tortured by them," There was also a notable lack of establishing situation-shots: deprived of any clear sense of geographical layout of the various settings, we are left as helplessly disoriented as Joan herself.

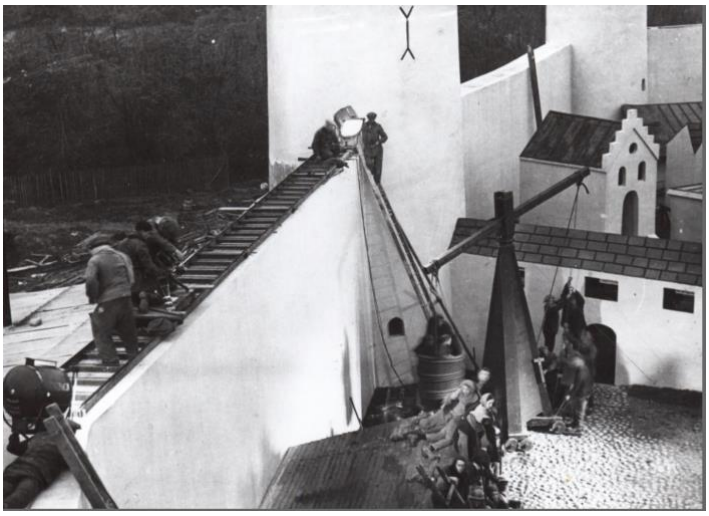
Jeanne d'Arc comes across, in Jean Sémolué's term, as "a film of confrontation"—a sustained assault on the heroine (and the viewer) full of unsettling camera angles and off-center framings. "The architecture of Joan's world," wrote Paul Schrader, "literally conspires against her; like the faces of her inquisitors, the halls doorways, furniture are on the offensive, striking, swooping at her with oblique angles, attacking her with hard-edged chunks of black and white." In the title role, Maria Falconetti gave one of the most intense performances of mental and physical anguish in the history of cinema. (Astonishingly, it was the first and only film she ever made.)

Her suffering face has achieved iconographic status as the classic cinematic depiction of martyrdom. "That shaven head," observed Jean Renoir, "was and remains the abstraction of the whole epic of Joan of Arc."

Along with the rest of the cast, Falconetti acted completely without make-up; Rudolph Maté's

high-contrast lighting brought out every detail of the actors' features with stark clarity. Antonin Artaud was at his most gauntly beautiful as the sympathetic Massieu, while the faces of Joan's accusers, all lumps and warts and fleshly pouches, frequently recall the onlookers in crucifixions by Breughel or Bosch. These hostile figures are repeatedly shot from ground-level, to make them appear huge and intimidating; to this end, Dreyer had numerous holes dug all over the set, causing the film crew to nickname him "Carl Gruyère."

From this film, and especially from his allegedly harsh treatment of Falconetti, dates Dreyer's reputation as an exacting and tyrannical director. He himself, while conceding that he made considerable demands on his actors, rejected any suggestion of tyranny, stressing instead the importance of mutual cooperation. A director, he maintained, must be "careful never to force his own interpretation on an actor, because an actor cannot create truth and pure emotions on command. One cannot push feelings out. They have to arise from themselves, and it is the director's and actor's work in unison to bring them to that point."



Jeanne d'Arc was a huge world-wide critical success but a commercial flop. Almost instantly hailed as a classic, it has consistently maintained its position as one of the enshrined masterpieces of the cinema. Godard paid homage to it when, in *Vivre sa vie*, he showed Anna Karina watching it in a movie theatre, moved to tears.

The Société Générale had intended Dreyer to make a second film for them, but the financial failure of *Jeanne d'Arc* and of the even more catastrophic *Napoléon* of Abel Gance (which the Société had also backed) made this impossible. Dreyer, already irritated because his film—or so he claimed—had been mutilated to avoid offending Catholic sensibilities, sued for breach of contract.The lawsuit dragged on, and not until the autumn of 1931 as Dreyer, having won his case, at last free to make another film.

A wealthy young film enthusiast, Baron Nicholas de Gunzberg now approached Dreyer with a proposal that they form an independent production company. The film that they produced was *Vampyr* (1932)—one of the strangest, most idiosyncratic horror films ever made. Shot largely in a derelict chateau, with a cast composed almost entirely of nonprofessionals, it conjures up a pale, drifting, drowned world, in which events glide with the hallucinatory slowness of dreams and menace resides in the intangible reverberations of sights and sounds that seem to hover just beyond the reach of consciousness. Without gore or Grand Guignol, or the harsh gothic chiaroscuro of Murnau or James Whale, *Vampyr* creates an uncannily convincing universe of fantastic reality.

Dreyer's script was adapted, very freely, from two stories by the nineteenth-century Irish writer, Sheridan Le Fanu. The plot, such as it is, tells of a young man, David Gray, who comes to a remote village where a vampire, the un-dead Marguerite Chopin, preys on the living bodies of young women, abetted by the village doctor. Eventually Gary succeeds in destroying the vampire, and the curse is lifted. But plot in *Vampyr* is totally subordinated to mood and atmosphere. A grey, floating mist, as if everything were in a state of dissolution, pervades the film—an effect that Dreyer and his photographer, Rudolph Maté, hit on by lucky accident when a light shone on the camera lens during the first day's shooting. The general incompetence of the acting also contributes to the dissociated mood: the film's producer, Baron de Gunzberg, himself playing the hero under the pseudonym of Julian West, shambles somnambulistically through the action, seeming (in Paul Schrader's words) "not an individual personality. but the fluid, human component of a distorted, expressionistic universe." The film was post-dubbed by the actors themselves into English, French and German versions, thus further heightening the sense of unreality, since few of them were fluent in all three languages.

Vampyr, wrote Robin Wood in *Film Comment* (March 1974), "is one of the most dreamlike movies ever made, and one of the few to capture successfully the *elusiveness* of dream ….Dreyer has here created a visual style unlike any other film. including many of his own." David Thomson, though, pointed out that "its intensity reflects back on all Dreyer's other films, showing how entirely they are creations of light, shade, and camera position." Most critics would now agree with Tom Milne in seeing *Vampyr* as "one of the key works in his career...quintessentially Dreyer."; but when released it was a critical—as well as financial—disaster, and for years afterward could be dismissed as "a puerile story about phantoms." (Georges Sadoul)

Dreyer had now acquired the reputation of being a difficult and demanding director, averse to compromise, given to disputes and recriminations, and one moreover whose films lost money. Refusing to submit himself to the discipline of any of the major studios, Dreyer found himself unemployable. For the next ten years, at the height of his powers, he made no films. Various projects came to nothing: discussion in Britain with John Grierson; a version of *Madame Bovary* which eventually went to Renoir (1934) ; an idea for a film about Mary Queen of Scots. In 1936 he traveled to Somalia to make a semi-documentary film, *Mudundu*, with French and Italian backing. Several thousand meters of film were shot before Dreyer clashed with the producers and eventually withdrew, leaving the picture to be completed by Ernesto Quadrone.

After this fiasco, Dreyer returned to Denmark and once more took up journalism under his old pseudonym of "Tommen," writing film reviews and law reports. His chance to direct again came in 1942. With imported films blocked under the German occupation, the Danish film industry had reclaimed a greater share of the market and needed products. To prove that he could work on commission and within a budget, Dreyer directed a government documentary short, *Modrehjaelpen* (*Good Mothers*, 1942), about social care for unmarried mothers. On the strength of this, Palladium (for whom he had made *Master of the House*) offered him a contract for a feature film.

Vredens Dag (*Day of Wrath*, 1943) is, according to Robin Wood, "Dreyer's richest work...because it expresses most fully the ambiguities inherent in his vision of the world." It also unites all those elements that are held, perhaps unfairly, to be most typical of Dreyer' s films. Its prevailing mood is somber, lowering, intense; the narrative pace is steady and deliberate, presenting horrific events with chilling restraint, and it deals with religious faith, the supernatural, social intolerance, innocence and and guilt, and the suffering of women. In its visual texture *Day of Wrath* arguably presents, even more than *Jeanne d'Arc,* the most complete example of Dreyer's use of light and darkness to express moral and emotional concerns….

"The interest in Dreyer's films," suggested Jean Sémolue, "resides not in the depiction of events, nor of predetermined characters, but in the depiction of the changes wrought on characters by events."

In considering Dreyer's work as a whole, most critics, without disparaging his considerable skills as a screenwriter, have stressed the visual aspects of the films as his most distinctive achievement. "Dreyer's style is wholly pictorial," asserted Richard Rowland, "it is visual images that we remember. . .faces, lights, and shadows."

...During the next ten years, Dreyer worked on a number of film projects: an adaptation of Euripides' *Medea*, a version of Faulkner's *Light in August*, treatments of Ibsen's *Brand*, Strindberg's *Damascus*, and O'Neill's *Mourning Becomes Electra*-as well as his most cherished project, a life of Christ to be filmed in Israel. But he completed only one more film: *Gertrud* (1964), based on the play by Hjalmar Söderberg.

In *Gertrud* can be seen the culmination of a process of increasing simplification and austerity in

Dreyer's shooting style. From the multiple cutting and dramatized angles of *Jeanne d'Arc*, the endlessly fluid, gliding tracking shots of *Vampyr*, Dreyer progressively, through *Day of Wrath* and *Ordet*, slowed down his camera, restricted his angles, and increased the length of takes until he arrived, with *Gertrud*, at something perilously close to stasis. The film consists of a relatively small number of mostly long takes, generally two-shots during which both camera and actors often remain still for minutes at a time.Almost deliberately, it seems, in thus taking the principle of *Kammerspiel* to the extreme, Dreyer invited charges of visual monotony.

Gertrud is about a woman who demands love on her own unconditional terms or not at all, and the three men—one husband, two lovers—who fail to live up to her exacting standards. Finally she leaves all three, for a solitary life in Paris; in an epilogue, grown old and still alone, she speaks her epitaph: "I have known love." "Of all Dreyer's works," Jean Sémolué wrote, "it is the most inward, and thus the culmination, if not the crown, of his aesthetic." Penelope Houston thought it "an enigmatically modern film with the deceptive air of a staidly old-fashioned one….It is a kind of distillation, at once contemplative and compulsive." The consensus of critical opinion has come to regard *Gertrud* as Dreyer's final tranquil testament—"the kind of majestic, necromantic masterpiece," as Tom Milne put it, "that few artists achieve even once in their lifetimes."

On its first appearance, though, *Gertrud* aroused an extraordinary degree of anger and hostility. Premiered in Paris, as part of an elaborate homage to Dreyer, it was greeted with catcalls by the audience and uncomprehending vituperation by the French press. In a typical review, *Cinéma 65* commented: "Dreyer has gone from serenity to senility….Not film, but a two-hour study of sofas and pianos." The film was booed at Cannes, and in America the critics were equally unappreciative. In *Esquire* (December 1965) Dwight Macdonald wrote: *Gertrud* is a further reach, beyond mannerism into cinematic poverty and straightforward tedium. He just sets up his camera and photographs people talking to each other." Dreyer reacted with dignity in the face of these attacks, calmly explaining: "What I seek in my films...is a penetration to my actors' profound thoughts by means of their most subtle expressions….This is what interests me above all, not the technique of the cinema. *Gertrud* is a film that I made with my heart."

In considering Dreyer's work as a whole, most critics, without disparaging his considerable skills as a screenwriter, have stressed the visual aspect of the films as his most distinctive achievement. "Dreyer's style is wholly pictorial," asserted Richard Rowland (*Hollywood Quarterly*, Fall 1950), "it is visual images that we remember...faces, lights and shadows." Equally remarkable, though, is how utterly different one Dreyer film can look from another, while still remaining unmistakably his in theme and style. Dreyer himself, when this was suggested to him, was delighted, "for that is something I really tried to do: to find a style that has value or only a single film, for *this* milieu, *this* action, *this* character, *this* subject." "The characteristic of a good style," he remarked on another occasion, "must be that it enters into such intimate contact with the material that it forms a synthesis."

"There is nothing decorative about Dreyer's work," André Bazin stated. "Each nuance contributes to the organization of a mental universe whose rigor and necessity dazzle one's mind." Most writers would concur that Dreyer's films, especially the latter ones, are characterized by an intense deliberateness, pared of inessential detail, and some have found this oppressive. Robin wood, contrasting Dreyer's work with Renoir's "sense of superfluous life...a world existing beyond the confines of the frame," found in Dreywer "a progressive stylistic tightening and rigidifying, a movement away from freedom and fluency...into an increasingly arid world where it becomes harder and harder to breathe." Certainly

those films for which Dreyer is best known—*Jeanne d'Arc, Day of Wrath, Ordet*—have tended to reinforce his image as a purveyor of metaphysical gloom and anguish, a daunting Great Director better written about than seen.

This accepted view of Dreyer was fairly accurately summarized by Eileen Bowser: "his martyrs, his vampires, his witches and his holy madmen are different facets of the same theme: the power of evil, the suffering of the innocent, the inevitability of fate, the certainty of death." But this doomladen resumé is not all of Dreyer and with his earlier silent films—especially *The Parson's Widow, Mikael*, and *Master of the House*—gaining wider circulation and with *Vampyr* growing steadily in critical regard, there are signs that the conventional picture of the director may be changing, and that the lighter, often even cheerful, aspects of his work are achieving recognition.

After *Gertrud*, Dreyer continued to work on preparations for *Jesus*, completing the script (which was later published), learning Hebrew, and visiting Israel to hunt for locations. His age and exacting reputation, though, made potential backers wary. Finally, in November 1967, the Danish government offered three million kroner. In February 1968 the Italian state company, RAI, announced that it was prepared to back the film. Dreyer's dream of twenty years seemed at last about to be realized. The next month he died, of heart failure, aged seventy-nine.

Michael Koller: "*La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*" (Senses of Cinema, *May 2008*):

In *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, Carl Dreyer directed one of the great performances of the cinema and in the process created one of its greatest icons. Maria (Renée) Falconetti is remarkable. On stage from the age of eighteen, she starred in her only film, at the age of thirty-five, playing a nineteen year old virgin. The strength of Falconetti's performance is such that her name is listed in most standard encyclopedias of the cinema and her performance has inspired artists as diverse as Patti Smith ("You got Balls") and Jean-Luc Godard (from *Vivre sa vie* [1962] through to *Histoire(s) du Cinéma* [1988-97]).

Dreyer's film is austere and economic. Based on the original trial records, the film begins with the opening moments of the trial and concludes with Joan burnt at the stake. There are no details about who Joan is or what she has done, nor are there any details of her interrogators or their political alignment. The film consists mainly of closeups of Joan and her inquisitors' faces against a white backdrop. The judges bully Joan with their questions and Joan answers. Yet this is not lazy filmmaking, not the shot-reverse-shot system commonly seen on television. Dreyer finds exhilaratingly original ways to frame the actors, frequently showing only a small part of their faces, and often not even showing their eyes. Many shots have the actors cowering at the bottom or the side of the frame, anticipating what Dreyer would do in his next film *Vampyr* (1931). The effect is claustrophobic and disorientating. There are never any establishing shots so the viewer never knows where the characters are in relationship to each other. But we know that the all-powerful judges are up and that the all-enduring Joan is down.

Yet it is not the trial which is the central preoccupation of the film, rather, as the title of the film explicitly states, it is Joan's sufferings (and Dreyer is well known for making his female characters, and the women who portrayed them, suffer). Joan's pain is palpable and it is said that Dreyer had Falconetti kneel on stone floors until her discomfort was unbearable and that he repeatedly reshot footage (in an act akin to the psychological torture displayed by the clergy in the film) to refine the nuances of an expression. One could see this as victimisation of a performer or as part of the process of creating a great work of art. Certainly Falconetti allowed Dreyer to shave her head, so she must have

been a willing subject to some aspects of the creative process. However, many years later, Falconetti's daughter stated that the reason her mother hadn't made other films was because she believed the arduous physical conditions she had to endure in the making of *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* were typical of filmmaking. Another anecdote that illustrates Dreyer's determination to obtain realistic expressions of suffering involves the making of *Day of Wrath* (1943). Just as Dreyer was about to film the burning of the elderly witch, portrayed by the veteran Anna Svierkier and who had already been tied to the stake for the scene, a meal break was called. The cast and crew left and somebody asked "What about Anna?", Dreyer's replied, "Leave her bound where she is until we return." When the crew returned Svierkier was suitably distressed to play a woman about to be burned.

Dreyer made his actresses suffer so they could better portray their characters. Most of his films deal with the manner in which authoritarian figures, always male, wreak terrible vengeance upon women who dare to come into conflict with the dominant patriarchal system.

Yet, it would be wrong to completely attribute the power of Falconetti's performance to her acting or the conditions she had to endure. From the opening tracking shot through the court gallery, Dreyer sets the lone Joan against her multiple, sly interrogators. The camera frequently moves when framing the judges, with the men often moving into or out of the frame, disrupting any harmony which may have existed. None of the performers wear make-up and the harsh black-and-white photography gives a sinister edge to the judges' faces. Rudolph Maté filmed the actors from below, allowing them to tower over Joan and making their gestures seem even more arrogant.

This contrasts with the still, innocent face of Joan, framed from above so that she appears as the hapless victim, her cracked lips accentuating her state of being. Her features are never in shadow. While Falconetti cries, a judge spits. Falconetti's performance is realistic if anguished, as opposed to the outraged, mannered performances of the remainder of the trial cast. There is however, one exception. It is the sympathetic priest, portrayed by film theorist, scriptwriter and actor Antonin Artaud. He warns Joan and informs the audience of the significance of the judges' questions. His handsome, soft features contrast with those of the other clerics and he is the only actor filmed without exaggerated camera angles.

The turning point occurs in the film when Joan has her head shaved. It is at this moment that she attains transcendence. She recants the confession that was extracted by the threat of torture and the use of some cheap treachery. This confession had unbalanced the natural order in Dreyer's universe and just like in *Vampyr*, the grotesque seem to rule momentarily, even if only as a side-show carnival. Joan becomes empowered and this victim becomes strong, a moral figure demanding great respect as her truth will condemn her. Artaud's priest appears to look up to Joan and she appears to look down to him although spatially she is positioned on the floor in front of and below him. This reversal is also maintained briefly with the other clerics, until it is announced that Joan will burn. With this declaration, the world literally turns up-side down, crowds riot and women weep. Once again the natural order has been disrupted, but this time, Joan can only be subdued by being destroyed.

Roger Ebert: "The Passion of Joan of Arc" (1997)

You cannot know the history of silent film unless you know the face of Renee Maria Falconetti. In a medium without words, where the filmmakers believed that the camera captured the essence of characters through their faces, to see Falconetti in Dreyer's "The Passion of Joan of Arc" (1928) is to look into eyes that will never leave you.

Falconetti (as she is always called) made only this single movie. "It may be the finest performance ever recorded on film," wrote Pauline Kael. She was an actress in Paris when she was seen on the stage of a

little boulevard theater by Carl Theodor Dreyer (1889-1968), the Dane who was one of the greatest early directors. It was a light comedy, he recalled, but there was something in her face that struck him: "There was a soul behind that facade." He did screen tests without makeup, and found what he sought, a woman who embodied simplicity, character and suffering.

Dreyer had been given a large budget and a screenplay by his French producers, but he threw out the screenplay and turned instead to the transcripts of Joan's trial. They told the story that has become a legend: of how a simple country maid from Orleans, dressed as a boy, led the French troops in their defeat of the British occupation forces. How she was captured by French loyal to the British and brought before a church court, where her belief that she had been inspired by heavenly visions led to charges of heresy. There were 29 cross-examinations, combined with torture, before Joan was burned at the stake in 1431. Dreyer combined them into one inquisition, in which the judges, their faces twisted with their fear of her courage, loomed over her with shouts and accusations.

If you go to the Danish Film Museum in Copenhagen you can see Dreyer's model for the extraordinary set he built for the film. He wanted it all in one piece (with movable walls for the cameras), and he began with towers at four corners, linked with concrete walls so thick they could support the actors and equipment. Inside the enclosure were chapels, houses and the ecclesiastical court, built according to a weird geometry that put windows and doors out of plumb with one another and created discordant visual harmonies (the film was made at the height of German Expressionism and the French avant-garde movement in art).

It is helpful to see the model in Copenhagen, because you will never see the whole set in the movie. There is not one single establishing shot in all of "The Passion of Joan of Arc," which is filmed entirely in closeups and medium shots, creating fearful intimacy between Joan and her tormentors. Nor are there easily read visual links between shots. In his brilliant shot-by-shot analysis of the film, David Bordwell of the University of Wisconsin concludes: "Of the film's over 1,500 cuts, fewer than 30 carry a figure or object over from one shot to another; and fewer than 15 constitute genuine matches on action."

What does this mean to the viewer? There is a language of shooting and editing that we subconsciously expect at the movies. We assume that if two people are talking, the cuts will make it seem that they are looking at one another. We assume that if a judge is questioning a defendant, the camera placement and editing will make it clear where they stand in relation to one another. If we see three people in a room, we expect to be able to say how they are arranged and which is closest to the camera. Almost all such visual cues are missing from "The Passion of Joan of Arc."

Instead Dreyer cuts the film into a series of startling images. The prison guards and the ecclesiastics on the court are seen in high contrast, often from a low angle, and although there are often sharp architectural angles behind them, we are not sure exactly what the scale is (are the windows and walls near or far?). Bordwell's book reproduces a shot of three priests, presumably lined up from front to back, but shot in such a way that their heads seem stacked on top of one another. All of the faces of the inquisitors are shot in bright light, without makeup, so that the crevices and flaws of the skin seem to reflect a diseased inner life.

Falconetti, by contrast, is shot in softer grays, rather than blacks and whites. Also without makeup, she seems solemn and consumed by inner conviction. Consider an exchange where a judge asks her whether St. Michael actually spoke to her. Her impassive face seems to suggest that whatever happened between Michael and herself was so far beyond the scope of the question that no answer is conceivable.

Why did Dreyer fragment his space, disorient the visual sense and shoot in closeup? I think he wanted to avoid the picturesque temptations of a

historical drama. There is no scenery here, aside from walls and arches. Nothing was put in to look pretty. You do not leave discussing the costumes (although they are all authentic). The emphasis on the faces insists that these very people did what they did. Dreyer strips the church court of its ritual and righteousness and betrays its members as fleshy hypocrites in the pay of the British; their narrow eyes and mean mouths assault Joan's sanctity.

For Falconetti, the performance was an ordeal. Legends from the set tell of Dreyer forcing her to kneel painfully on stone and then wipe all expression from her face--so that the viewer would read suppressed or inner pain. He filmed the same shots again and again, hoping that in the editing room he could find exactly the right nuance in her facial expression. There is an echo in the famous methods of the French director Robert Bresson, who in his own 1962 "The Trial of Joan of Arc" put actors through the same shots again and again, until all apparent emotion was stripped from their performances. In his book on Dreyer, Tom Milne quotes the director: "When a child suddenly sees an onrushing train in front of him, the expression on his face is spontaneous. By this I don't mean the feeling in it (which in this case is sudden fear), but the fact that the face is completely uninhibited." That is the impression he wanted from Falconetti.

That he got it is generally agreed. Perhaps it helps that Falconetti never made another movie (she died in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1946). We do not have her face in other roles to compare with her face here, and the movie seems to exist outside time (the French director Jean Cocteau famously said it played like "an historical document from an era in which the cinema didn't exist").

To modern audiences, raised on films where emotion is conveyed by dialogue and action more than by faces, a film like "The Passion of Joan of Arc" is an unsettling experience--so intimate we fear we will discover more secrets than we desire. Our sympathy is engaged so powerfully with Joan that Dreyer's visual methods--his angles, his cutting, his closeups--don't play like stylistic choices, but like the fragments of Joan's experience. Exhausted, starving, cold, in constant fear, only 19 when she died, she lives in a nightmare where the faces of her tormentors rise up like spectral demons. Perhaps the secret of Dreyer's success is that he asked himself, "What is this story really about?" And after he answered that question he made a movie about absolutely nothing else.

Joan of Arc (*History.com*)

Joan of Arc, a peasant girl living in medieval France, believed that God had chosen her to lead France to victory in its long-running war with England. With no military training, Joan convinced the embattled crown prince Charles of Valois to allow her to lead a French army to the besieged city of Orléans, where it achieved a momentous victory over the English and their French allies, the Burgundians. After seeing the prince crowned King Charles VII, Joan was captured by Anglo-Burgundian forces, tried for witchcraft and heresy and burned at the stake in 1431, at the age of 19. By the time she was officially canonized in 1920, the Maid of Orléans (as she was known) had long been considered one of history's greatest saints, and an enduring symbol of French unity and nationalism.

Joan of Arc's Early Life

Born around 1412, Jeanne d'Arc (or in English, Joan of Arc) was the daughter of a tenant farmer, Jacques d'Arc, from the village of Domrémy, in northeastern France. She was not taught to read or write, but her pious mother, Isabelle Romée, instilled in her a deep love for the Catholic Church and its teachings. At the time, France had long been torn

apart by a bitter conflict with England (later known as the Hundred Years' War), in which England had gained the upper hand. A peace treaty in 1420 disinherited the French crown prince, Charles of Valois, amid accusations of his illegitimacy, and King Henry V was made ruler of both England and France. His son, Henry VI, succeeded him in 1422. Along with its French allies (led by Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy), England occupied much of northern France, and many in Joan's village, Domrémy, were forced to abandon their homes under threat of invasion.

At the age of 13, Joan began to hear voices, which she determined had been sent by God to give her a mission of overwhelming importance: to save France by expelling its enemies, and to install Charles as its rightful king. As part of this divine mission, Joan took a vow of chastity. At the age of 16, after her father attempted to arrange a marriage for her, she successfully convinced a local court that she should not be forced to accept the match.

Joan of Arc and the Siege of Orléans

In May 1428, Joan made her way to Vaucouleurs, a nearby stronghold of those loyal to Charles. Initially rejected by the local magistrate, Robert de Baudricourt, she persisted, attracting a small band of followers who believed her claims to be the virgin who (according to a popular prophecy) was destined to save France. When Baudricort relented, Joan cropped her hair and dressed in men's clothes to make the 11-day journey across enemy territory to Chinon, site of the crown prince's palace.

Joan promised Charles she would see him crowned king at Reims, the traditional site of French royal investiture, and asked him to give her an army to lead to Orléans, then under siege from the English. Against the advice of most of his counselors and generals, Charles granted her request, and Joan set off to fend off the Siege of Orléans in March of 1429 dressed in white armor and riding a white horse. After sending off a defiant letter to the enemy, Joan led several French assaults against them, driving the Anglo-Burgundians from their bastion and forcing their retreat across the Loire River.

Downfall of Joan of Arc

After such a miraculous victory, Joan's reputation spread far and wide among French forces. She and her followers escorted Charles across enemy territory to Reims, taking towns that resisted by force and enabling his coronation as King Charles VII in July 1429. Joan argued that the French should press their advantage with an attempt to retake Paris, but Charles wavered, even as his favorite at court, Georges de La Trémoille, warned him that Joan was becoming too powerful. The Anglo-Burgundians were able to fortify their positions in Paris and turned back an attack led by Joan in September.

In the spring of 1430, the king ordered Joan to confront a Burgundian assault on Compiégne. In her effort to defend the town and its inhabitants, she was thrown from her horse and was left outside the town's gates as they closed. The Burgundians took her captive and brought her amid much fanfare to the castle of Bouvreuil, occupied by the English commander at Rouen.

Joan of Arc Burned at the Stake

In the trial that followed, Joan was ordered to answer to some 70 charges against her, including witchcraft, heresy and dressing like a man. The Anglo-Burgundians were aiming to get rid of the young leader as well as discredit Charles, who owed his coronation to her. In attempting to distance himself from an accused heretic and witch, the French king made no attempt to negotiate Joan's release.

In May 1431, after a year in captivity and under threat of death, Joan relented and signed a confession denying that she had ever received divine guidance. Several days later, however, she defied orders by again donning men's clothes, and authorities pronounced her death sentence. On the morning of

May 30, 1431, at the age of 19, Joan was taken to the old marketplace of Rouen and burned at the stake.

Joan of Arc: From Witch to Saint

Her fame only increased after her death, however, and 20 years later a new trial ordered by Charles VII cleared her name. Long before Pope Benedict XV canonized her in 1920, Joan of Arc had attained mythic stature, inspiring numerous works of art and literature over the centuries and becoming the patron saint of France. In 1909 Joan of Arc was beatified in the famous Notre Dame cathedral in Paris by Pope Pius X. A statue inside the cathedral pays tribute to her legacy.

COMING UP IN THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS, FALL 2020, SERIES 41:

Sept 8: Fritz Lang, *M/ M—Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder* (1931)
Sept 15: Akira Kurosawa, *Throne of Blood* (1957)
Sept 22: Ingmar Bergman, *The Seventh Seal/Det sjunde inseglet* (1957)
Sept 29: Marcel Camus, *Black Orpheus/Orfeo Negro* (1959)
Oct 6: Luis Buñuel, *The Exterminating Angel/El ángel exterminador* (1962)
Oct 13: Jean-Pierre Melville, *Le Samuraï* (1967)
Oct 20: Sergio Leone, *Once Upon a Time in the West/C'era una volta il West*, (1968)
Oct 27: Andrei Tarkovsky, *Solaris/ Солярис* (1972)
Nov 3: Werner Herzog, *Aguirre, the Wrath of God/Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* (1972)
Nov 10: Richard Rush, *The Stunt Man* (1980)
Nov 17: Wim Wenders, *Wings of Desire/Der Himmel über Berlin* (1987)
Nov 24: Krzystof Kieślowski, *Three Colors; Red/ Trois coleurs: Rouge/ Trzy kolory. Czerwony* (1994)
Dec 1: Charlie Chaplin, *The Great Dictator* (1940)

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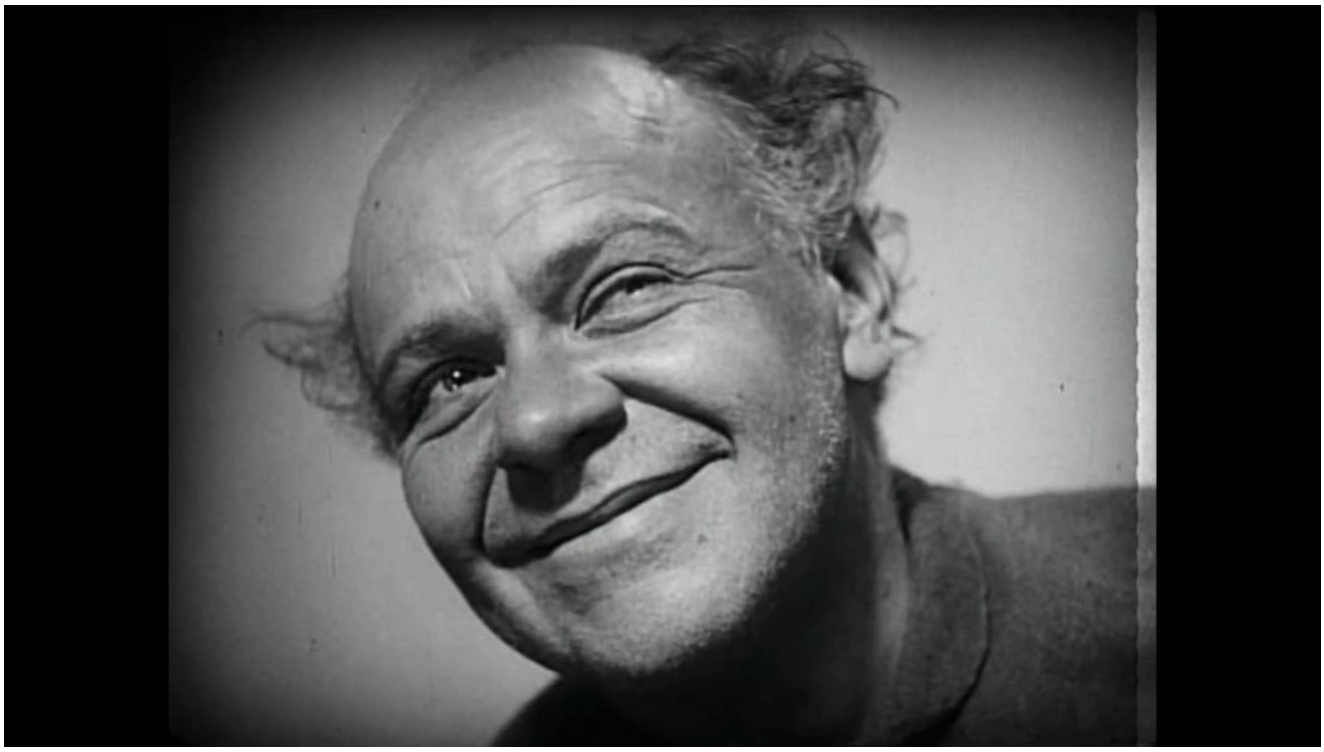

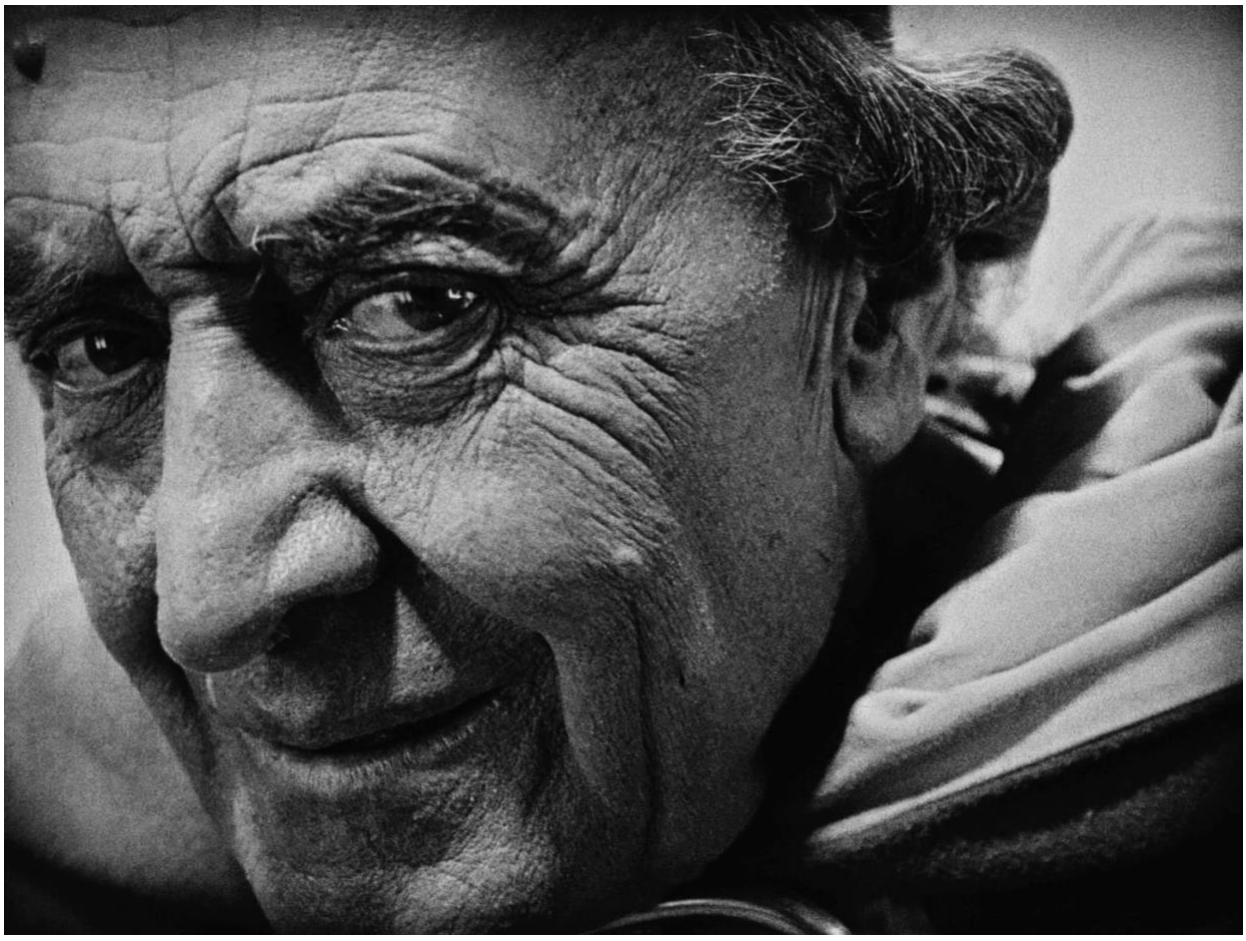


L'Alliance Cinématographique Européenne
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