

SAINT JOAN

George Bernard Shaw

The Covid-19 pandemic is a real trial for the entire world. But do not despair, as there are many opportunities available that were previously not possible. For me, such an opportunity is to spend more time reading. I have recently read *Saint Joan* by George Bernard Shaw. I was so impressed by this magnificent play and I have been contemplating on it for several days, analyzing all its details. I would like to reveal my own concept of the symbolic image of Joan herself. My interpretation was a result of the lockdown experience when more time for reading formed my personal ideas about life and attitude to others.

Saint Joan is a historical play written by G.B. Shaw in 1923. It is about the endless wars in France which destroyed people's lives. The main character, Joan, is trying to save her land from enemies and wants people to believe in a better world but her intentions and desires lead to a tragic outcome – she is burnt at the stake as a witch. The play was first staged in New York and later ran in London. It is written to make the readers see the world as it is, but not to idealize it from one's point of view. In my opinion, people should appreciate their history in order not to repeat the mistakes of the past. The play is filled with expressive imagery that gives it colour. The changing scenes and the gradual development of the plot lines lead to a tense moment in the story – the climax.

In the play, *Saint Joan*, or *Joan of Arc*, is an exalted and remarkable person, as her character is not affected by the sins which otherwise affect all people. Despite all the cruelty and injustice this girl has faced, she perceives others as people who are not to blame for their stupidity and ignorance. I can clearly imagine the heavy burden that is put on her in the play, the burden to get rid of human misfortune. Her aim is to save France and the king's crown from any enemies who want to take it. The social conflicts between France and England give rise to disagreements and contradictions, causing wars which break the destinies of people and devastate their inner world; in the end, people cannot preserve their identity and remain themselves in such difficult conditions. Shaw emphasizes how power and fear, creating such "dirty" conflicts, destroy the world as a whole. Living among other people, her flesh is tormented by their sins, but her soul is full of holy voices and images that lead this girl to her true purpose – to protect her land from enemies and save this world from human sins.

The main conflict of the play is the great hero's role in this unknown world and its degradation. The very image of Joan conveys the power of the spirit, which performs its service in the conditions of earthly existence and overcomes the cruel and universal destruction of human nature. This irresistible symbol of freedom and faith directs us against these miserable people in power and their protest to accept some changes in life. Despite all

the banality and comedy of the plot, the author manages to drive home the long sought idea of equality.

The play symbolizes the heavenly creation which embodies human image and spiritual ideal. All the events and objects are created to convey a specific meaning: the crown represents power and vanity, the soldier is a symbol of protection and courage, the church is a place of deep contemplation, the court is a place for gossip and hatred of those people who are far from holy thoughts. Each part of the play is based on a number of conflicts, from which further events arise. For example, in one of the scenes, Joan together with the soldiers rushes to save Orleans. Dunois, ready to submit to her, liberates Orleans from the English with his army. However, this victory turns into a further conflict with England. In France, Joan is greeted as a saviour but the courtiers despise her, the same courtiers who were on the battlefield with Joan and worshipped the French king, among them the main figure of Dunois, who secretly hated her as well. From these events, we see that the main character is completely confused, she should decide: to return home or to continue her way as a soldier and liberate Paris. Such a consistent chain of events constructs the main plot of this story. The whole play consists of several scenes whose events contain the inner conviction of the protagonist to fulfill her purpose and get closer to God.

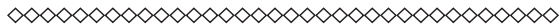
The characteristic of the play is how it logically describes the whole dynamics of the historical events and their comicality. Comparing it with the works of other writers, this work has a gradual disclosure of events, a logical transition from one conflict to another (since they are interconnected); there are no long descriptions of how strong the protagonist's faith is and her desire to overcome

existing obstacles. Shaw wants the readers to imagine the greatness and piety of Joan. The play presents the most vivid feature of religious tolerance to others, although the idea of this play is based on the historical aspect and it is close to our reality. The merit of Shaw is in his banal representation of reality, through which we notice the shades of new illusions.

This way, the atmosphere of the whole play is quite tense and exciting. Experiencing every moment with the protagonist, the reader delves more deeply into the story.

These historical events and their significance in the world make me think about the circumstances we are facing now, circumstances that no one would have imagined earlier. I do appreciate our efforts to stay strong and safe; after all, we can live without these "dirty" conflicts with others and continue to do the most impactful things which may change the system and our attitude to life. We should notice any spiritual glimpses in every sinful soul because I, like Joan, am convinced that everyone can be saved! I feel a strong urge to share the play with others, since the spiritual idea and overall mood of this work may affect people and change their vision of life. I do believe that it would help them to become better and live in peace and harmony in these trying times. The readers perceive the play through the dynamics of time, which is so fleeting that one can get lost in it immediately. I am convinced that the story of Saint Joan is a small but important part of our current reality, in which people suffer from external circumstances as well, and are victims of their own desires. This work exemplifies the greatness of human thought, where the heroine believes in a bright outcome of events despite all the obstacles and adversities. I also encourage people to seek

their salvation in the spiritual side of life, overcoming their vices.



Alexandra Bulganina was born in Kostroma, a small Russian town located on the banks of the Volga River. As a child, she was very creative and drew portraits of people and various landscapes. Her paintings have been exhibited in a few museums, one of them being Pavlov's Museum. However, she wanted to devote herself to another activity. She got deeply involved in studying two foreign languages - English and French, and tried to write her own small reviews of various writers' works in these languages. This became the very impetus for Alexandra to continue her creative work in writing short essays.