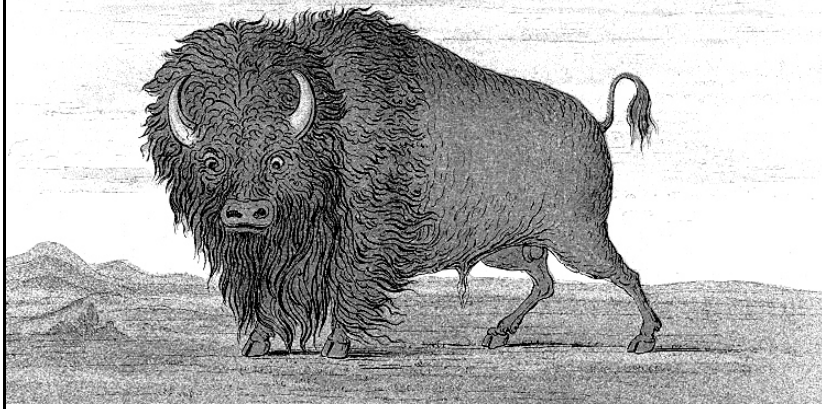


# The Buffalo Film Seminars



Conversations about great films  
with Diane Christian & Bruce Jackson

**CARL THEODOR DREYER** (3 February 1889, Copenhagen, Denmark—20 March 1968, Copenhagen, Denmark) directed 23 films and wrote 49 screenplays. His last film was *Gertrud* 1964. He is best known for *Vredens dag/Day of Wrath* 1943, *Vampyr - Der Traum des Allan Grey/Vampyr* 1932, and *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* 1928.

**RUDOLPH MATÉ** (21 January 1898, Kraków, Poland—27 October 1964, Hollywood, heart attack) shot 56 films and also directed 31. Some of the films he shot were *The Lady from Shanghai* 1947 (uncredited), *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.

**RICHARD EINHORN** has “been composing full-time since 1982. His works have been heard at Lincoln Center, Saratoga Performing Arts Center and other major venues throughout the world. *Red Angels*, a ballet to Einhorn's music with choreography by Ulysses Dove, is in the repertory of the New York City Ballet. Einhorn's credits as a film composer include scores for the 1992 Academy Award-winning documentary short *Educating Peter*, Arthur Penn's thriller *Dead of Winter*, John Cole's *Darrow* (for the PBS series *American Playhouse*), starring Kevin Spacey, and Radha Bharadwaj's political drama *Closet Land*. Einhorn also scored *Wild by Law*, a 1991 Academy Award nominee for *Best Documentary Feature*.” (Sony Classics)

**MARIA FALCONETTI** (1893, Sermano, Corsica—1946, Buenos Aires, Argentina) appeared in only 2 films, *La Comtesse de Smerive* (1917) and this one.

**ANTONIN ARTAUD** (4 September 1896, Marseille, Bouches-du-Rhône, France—4 March 1948, Ivry-sur-Seine, Val-de-Marne, France) is best known as a theater and film critic. He also acted in nearly two dozen films, among them *Lucrece Borgia* 1935, *Napoléon Bonaparte* 1934, *Mater dolorosa* 1932, *L'Argent* 1928, *Napoléon* 1927, *Le Juif errant* 1926, and *Mater dolorosa* 1917.

from entry on Dreyer in *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 Bernhardt Nilsson. His father, Jens Christian Trop, owned a farm near Kjrastianstad 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



**LA PASSION DE JEANNE D'ARC**  
(1928). 114 min.

Directed by Carl Theodor Dreyer  
Written by Joseph Delteil and Carl Theodor Dreyer  
Original Music by Ole Schmidt  
(new score 1982)  
Non-Original Music by Richard Einhorn  
(1985 score "Voices of Light")  
Cinematography by Rudolph Maté  
Film Editing by Marguerite Beaugé and Carl Theodor Dreyer  
Costume Design by Valentine Hugo

Maria Falconetti...Jeanne d'Arc  
Eugene Silvain...Évêque Pierre Cauchon  
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  
Armand Lurville...Juge  
Jacques Arnna...Juge  
Alexandre Mihalesco...Juge

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.

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" wing 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 Kean 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.

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.”

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.

**Filmguide to La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc. David Bordwell. Indiana U Press 1973**

Five hundred years after an illiterate peasant girl died at the stake, she continues to haunt our lives. Generally ignored before 1800,

officially commemorated by Napoleon, and sporadically celebrated in the nineteenth century, Jeanne d’Arc has become a living presence in the art of our time. Her story has been dramatized by Shaw, Brecht, Anouilh, Claudel, and Maxwell Anderson, set to music by Honnegger, Dell Joao, Joliet, and Paray, choreographed by Martha Graham, and filmed by Méliès, Rossellini, Otto Preminger, Victor Fleming, Bresson, and Dreyer. As we would expect, such diverse modern artists have interpreted Jeanne’s story from various, highly personal angles. Compare, for example, Anatole France’s Jeanne, a hardy country girl, with Shaw’s extraordinarily sophisticated soldier-heretic. In opposition to Mark Twain’s pious maid (what Shaw called “an unimpeachable American school teacher in armour”) stands Brecht’s grotesquely parodied evangelist, Joan Dark, who comes to learn that saintly suffering is foolish and only violence will change the world. Likewise, Ingrid Bergman’s passionate, vital heroine in Rossellini’s *Giovanna d’Arco al rogo* seems a world away from Florence Carey’s ascetic, numb victim in Bresson’s *Procès de Jeanne d’Arc*. In the light of such diversity, it is not surprising that Carl Dreyer’s film *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc* strikes us as absolutely unique. Like most artists drawn to Jeanne, Dreyer has taken what interested him, using her story to define his own recurring artistic preoccupations. In the process, he has created one of the most significant and beautiful works in film history and one of the noblest Jeanne’s art.

Only Dreyer’s integrity and force of will sustained him during these decades of inactivity. Although cinema was what he called “my only great passion,” he refused to make films on any terms but his own: he turned down an invitation from Hollywood because he disliked the script and declined a directing job in Nazi Germany because of the government’s anti-Semitism.

He argued vehemently that the director must always write his own scripts (“Allowing others to prepare a scenario for a director is like giving a finished drawing to a painter and asking him to put in colors”) and must exhaustively research his subject (Dreyer compiled his material, one collaborator recalled, “as if in preparation for a thesis”).

His art itself sought the spiritual. Regardless of locale or time, a Dreyer film is almost invariably about powers beyond ourselves: the cyclical power of nature (*The Parson’s Widow*, *The Bride of Glomdal*), the remorseless powers of time (*The President*) and fate (*Gertrud*), the awesome power of death (*Vampyr*), the ambiguous power of love (*Love One Another*, *Mikael*, *The Master of the House*, *Day of Wrath*, *Ordet*), and the affirmative power of grace (*La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc*). Dreyer’s recurring subjects—communal intolerance, martyrdom, witchcraft, miracles, and sainthood—are metaphors for the confinement of the spirit by earthly restraints and the liberation of the spirit by insight into unearthly powers....

But how can one make what seems a steadfastly concrete medium like the cinema reveal such spirituality? By stylistic and formal abstraction. “Abstraction,” Dreyer wrote, “allows the director to get outside the fence with which naturalism has surrounded his medium, It allows his films not to be merely visual but spiritual.” First, he argued, the director must *simplify*. The process of concentration, stripping down, intensification, is basic to Dreyer’s work. His scripts, usually adapted from plays, radically compress time and space: a few days and a few locales (*Day of Wrath*, *Gertrud*), a single night in one area (*Vampyr*), two days in one basic locale (*Ordet*, *The Master of the House*), two

hours in one apartment (*Two People*). Likewise, the text is pared down to the absolute minimum—little local color or flamboyant dialogue and almost no subplots. “In the cinema,” Dreyer remarked, “the words are very quickly relegated to a background which absorbs them, and that is why you may retain only what words are absolutely necessary. The essential is sufficient.” Similarly, where von Sternberg wraps his actors in a cocoon of veils and smoke, Dreyer purifies his sets starkly. While making *Ordet*, for example, Dreyer had his crew fill a set with the normal equipment of a rural kitchen, then he systematically removed objects one by one until he had reduced the decor to a few basic elements. The same principle controls the films’ rhythm: regardless of whether Dreyer uses very short shots (an average of one every five seconds in *Jeanne d’Arc*) or very lengthy shots (one every minute and a half in *Gertrud*), he rarely complicates his films with the elaborate tempi of Renoir or Truffaut. Amédée Ayfre puts it well:

The temporal rhythm of Dreyer’s films is not that active and practical rhythm of everyday life. The minutes which pass are not those of a chronometer or the speaking clock [of the Paris Observatory]. Here is the time of the soul which seems to have undergone a great magnification.... A bit of time is set apart from History, stretched out, enlarged, and brought before us in the present.

In Dreyer’s world, no action is casual, so each must be carefully scrutinized; like Mizoguchi, Dreyer suggests that if the camera gazes at the action long enough, the essential will prove sufficient.

Such simplification pushes the film sharply toward abstraction and prepares for the second stage of the process: symbolism. Dreyer’s mis-en-scène gives objects and characters symbolic overtones by their isolation and position....Light, combined with Dreyer’s characteristic slow rhythm, gives the action a certain grandeur, an unearthly monumentality; but also it can signify a spiritual clarity, an acknowledgment of a radiant order beyond normal experience. In such ways, simplification and symbolism give Dreyer’s style a timeless autonomy which is admirably suited for suggesting the spirituality his principal characters seek.

As a result of Dreyer’s intense force of will, his rigorous control of every artistic element, and his unique forms, styles, and themes, his films have a contemplative density—their own “holy seriousness”—which makes few concessions to what Hollywood vacuously calls “entertainment values.” “The public, Dreyer once confessed, “never enters my thoughts for a moment.”

Perhaps only in the Paris of the late 1920s could Carl Dreyer’s vision of Jeanne d’Arc have taken exactly the form it did. Between 1926 and 1928, Paris teemed with avant-garde experiments and antics....Appropriately, amid all this avant-garde activity, Dreyer was for once given complete autonomy (“I had a free hand, I did absolutely what I wanted”) and he was permitted to experiment as never before. Moreover, he drew many of his collaborators from the artistic world of contemporary Paris, so that by the time *La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc* was finished, the production had yielded not only a great film but an extraordinary example of how artists can cooperate when coordinated by a single powerful creative vision.

That vision was ruled by one fiercely enforced principle: intensity at all costs.

Dreyer—like Bernard Shaw—had become interested in Jeanne after her canonization in 1920....Dreyer wrote his own

screenplay based on Pierre Champion’s authoritative edition of the trial text, (Champion later became historical consultant for the film.) Dreyer’s script compressed the several months of Jeanne’s trial into a single day—a daring experiment in unity and the first step toward the intensity which he would seek at every stage of production.

When Dreyer began preparing the film in 1926, he decided that it would be a talking picture, But he discovered that as yet European studios were not equipped for sound and *Jeanne d’Arc* would have to be shot silent. Nevertheless, his script retained a great deal of dialogue which, contrary to standard silent film procedure, the actors were to speak *in toto*. Jeanne’s numerous dialogue titles were later to become a bone of critical contention, but Dreyer insisted on focusing on the intimate spoken drama.

Unlike technological development, casting was totally under Dreyer’s control. Some players were passers-by recruited from streets and bistros; the English general Warwick, for example, was played by a café-keeper. Other parts were filled by professionals of the most diverse sorts. Eugène Silvain, then in his seventies, had a lifetime of performances at the Comédie Française behind him when he was selected for the role of Bishop Cauchon. Michel Simon, who took a small part, was a successful stage actor and would later become famous in films by Renoir and Vigo. Antonin Artaud, current *enfant terrible* of avant-garde theatre and the Marat of Gance’s *Napoleon*, took the role of sympathetic Brother Massieu. But whether nonactor or professional, each player was chosen by one principle: how well could he or she incarnate the essence of the character? The question became especially acute when Dreyer considered who was to play his heroine. Lillian Gish was discussed as a possibility, but Dreyer was drawn to a young Comédie Française actress, Renée Jeanne Falconetti.

Dreyer’s technical collaborators were likewise carefully selected, representing a range of international avant-garde talent that fully justifies Léon Moussinac’s calling *Jeanne* a “Franco-German-Danish film.” The Polish cameraman Rudolf Maté had assisted Karl Freund on several UFA films, notably Dreyer’s own *Mikael* (1924). From France came the costumier Valentine Hugo, then allied with the Surrealists, and her husband Jean Hugo, whose stylized decors for *Romeo et Juliette* (1924) made him one of the leading young stage designers of the day. Hermann Warm, who collaborated with Hugo on sets, had worked in the cinema since 1912 and had masterfully designed such classic German films as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Die Spinnen*, *Der Müde Tod*, and *The Student of Prague*. If for nothing else, *La Passion of Jeanne d’Arc* would be memorable for having assembled one of the most artistically prestigious casts and crews of any film in history.

After eight months of preparation, shooting began in May 1927. Now Dreyer’s absolute will became most demanding. Anticipating a long period of filming, he had shrewdly cut costs by renting a Billancourt auto factory as a studio and using the equipment of an adjoining film company. Given sufficient time, his strategy was to involve the entire cast and crew in the film as profoundly as possible. During shooting, Warm, Maté, and Dreyer took rooms together and constantly discussed production: “We lived only for this film,” Warm recalled. At a still deeper level, Dreyer plunged the cast and crew into Jeanne’s story itself by shooting the film in chronological order. Although this created some technical problems (Warm had to design portable sets that would quickly slide away on overhead tracks), the psychological pressures were much more critical. Valentine Hugo watched the

tension of the story invade the cast:

We submitted to this oppressive atmosphere of terror, of an iniquitous trial, of an eternal judicial mistake, all the time. . . . I saw the most cautious actors, carried away by the will of the director, continue to play their roles unconsciously after filming. For example, after a scene in which a judge appeared touched by Jeanne's sadness, he muttered, "At bottom, she was a witch!"—living this drama as if it was real. Likewise, another judge, foaming with rage, running out of invective, shot at the accused a reprimand smacking of court-martial: "You are a disgrace to the army!"

Thus Dreyer's holy seriousness, intensified in the script, characterizations, decors, and costumes, infected the entire production as, day by day, scene by scene, Jeanne's death drew near. "We were not making a film," an assistant director recalled, "we were living Jeanne's drama, and we often wanted to intervene to save her."

Dreyer had other ways of driving the cast and crew to live Jeanne's drama. All items of makeup, even wigs and false whiskers, were forbidden, so that actors confronted each other as men, not as masks. Falconetti's hairdo was so short that she had to wear a wig off the set, while actors playing judges and priests shaved their heads in Dominican fashion. (Dreyer recalled with amusement that Artaud had a hard time explaining his tonsure to his Surrealist friends.) Moreover, Dreyer ordered sets that would make the players feel as if they were living in them. Warm constructed a miniature town, complete with gate, moat, drawbridge, surrounding walls, watch towers, and main street. The producers were outraged to learn that in the finished film this expensive set was never seen in its entirety, but it admirably served Dreyer's purpose of giving his players a tangible sense of milieu. Dreyer's will power elicited a comparable dedication from the camera crew, who dug deep holes around the set for low-angle filming and built a hanging camera stand to get upside-down overhead crowd shots. Even the extras were caught up in Dreyer's zeal as he drove them to weep frantically at Jeanne's immolation.

But above all Dreyer's energy focused on Falconetti, the heart of the film. In living Jeanne's drama, she underwent great physical and psychological hardships—kneeling on stone floors for hours, contorting her body in awkward positions, submitting to the shouts and spit and torture of her accusers; only the bloodletting scene was performed by another actress, Dreyer worked on her relentlessly, playing scenes over and over, with screens set up around her or with all personnel banished from the set.

Valentine Hugo has left the most vivid account of the final days of shooting. Here the production's intensity and intimacy, the crew's profound identification with both heroine and actress, Falconetti's incredible dedication, and Dreyer's compelling energy and humility culminated in one of the most memorable moments in film history.

In the silence of an operating room, in the pale light of the morning of the execution, Dreyer had Falconetti's head shaved. Although we had lost old prejudices [against short hair on women], we were as moved as if the infamous mark were being made there, in reality. The electricians and technicians held their breaths and their eyes filled with tears. Falconetti wept real tears. Then the

director slowly approached her, gathered up some of her tears in his fingers, and carried them to his lips.

The film's power, I believe, proceeds in large part from its tension between concreteness and abstraction. The unforgettable faces, the tactility of the objects, and the immediacy of the action yield an impression of vivid specificity. At the same time, Dreyer strives to transcend the concreteness of his images by means of an abstract form and style. By compression and stylization, the film charges reality with a unique significance. *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* perfectly illustrates Dreyer's dictum that "Abstraction allows the director to get outside the fence with which naturalism has surrounded his medium. It allows his films to be not merely visual but spiritual."

This abstraction begins with Dreyer's radical transformation of the story of the historical Jeanne. Unlike Shaw, Dreyer ignores Jeanne's military and political accomplishments and focuses entirely on her trial and execution. From the questions and testimony Dreyer takes nearly all the film's dialogue, but he alters the time scheme drastically: the five months and twenty-nine sessions of Jeanne's trial are in the film concentrated into one day and five interrogations. Many of the issues in the trial—Jeanne's alleged witchcraft, the magical powers of her ring, the question of her virginity—are eliminated from the film, so that Dreyer focuses on the principal charge leveled against her: that her persistent belief in the sanctity of her visions and the holiness of her mission constituted a refusal to submit to the authority of the Church. In addition to the religious issue, Dreyer emphasized the historical fact that Jeanne's trial was a political one, carried out by the clergy but rigged by the English.

One mark of a film's visual style will be the way it accommodates itself to the inevitable tension between the shot as reality (representation) and the shot as image (abstraction). In *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, Dreyer's shots are pushed toward the abstract pole, but never so far that they lose concrete reference. A unique dialectic of specificity and generality, of concrete and abstract, informs Dreyer's visual style.

These walls are at once of the Middle Ages and outside time; these judges are at once historical personages and personifications of the variety of evil; this is both Rouen prison in 1431 and an abstract sign of Prison itself.

The action also occupies a kind of abstract space. Contrary to many critics' claims, what the film generally lacks are not *long* shots (of which it has several) but rather *establishing* shots: images, distant or close, which place characters in space by reference to other characters, to settings and to objects in the same frame. Some scenes have only a single establishing shot, at the very beginning; others (e.g., scenes two and five) have no establishing shots at all. As a result, Jeanne is almost never seen in a shot with other characters, but is instead isolated in her own frame.

So continuously fluid is the film that only with some arbitrariness can one break it into parts. I have chosen to demarcate changes of scene by shifts of locale because it does the least damage to the film's coherence. The reader should nevertheless remember that the film contains no fades, dissolves, or other conventional transitions, so that the actual effect is of one long uninterrupted "scene."

The opening has sketched the basic situation. Jeanne is a prisoner, caught between the corrupt Church and the occupying army; but she is also a visionary who has pledged herself to God. Consequently, in the remainder of the first scene, two dramas are played in counterpoint: the political drama of a rigged trial and the spiritual drama of Jeanne's commitment to her vision. Both dramas are revealed by Dreyer's consummate dramatic sense, camerawork, compositions, editing, and point-of-view techniques.

From the start the political and spiritual dramas begin to interweave.

*La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* is not only aesthetically rich but historically significant. Widely and vigorously praised on its first appearance, it has since been regarded as outstandingly important: the 1958 Brussels critics' poll voted it one of the twelve best films ever made, and a *Sight and Sound* poll of critics from around the world reaffirmed the verdict.

In retrospect, we can see that *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* was a crucial film in changing people's attitudes about cinema, particularly because of its decisive demonstration that film could be an art in its own right. Many observers immediately recognized that *Jeanne d'Arc*'s sustained emotional crescendo had no equal in previous moviemaking. "As a film work of art," noted Mordaunt Hall in *The New York Times*, "this takes precedence over anything that has so far been produced. It makes worthy pictures of the past look like tinsel shams." As a result, *Jeanne d'Arc* seemed to demand comparison not with ordinary films but with works in what were generally still regarded as the *real* arts. Abel Gance considered the film "worthy of the great sculptors of the Middle Ages.

The abstraction and stylization which seals off *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* from much film history since 1928 also makes it easier for us to watch today. There are some silent films whose virtues need defending before a contemporary audience: what seem to us the excesses of *Way Down East* or *Metropolis* or

*Greed* must be seen as conventions of the period or style. But certain silent films, by sheer creative force, transcend their historical context and impose their will on the audience as direct, immediate artistic experience. Their identities belong less to a time than to unique creative visions. Like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Nosferatu*, and *Potemkin*, *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* requires no apology; its aesthetic power is timeless.

In the longer view, it is this uncompromising authority which gives *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* its lasting importance. The film is, in the first place, a great work of religious art—not in the narrowly doctrinal sense but in the sense that it depicts, as a vital possibility, man's transcendence of material limitations in search of spiritual order. Jeanne's overpowering faith superbly incarnates the human need to believe in a higher moral realm than one can objectively ascertain. Not only does the drama set Jeanne's transcendent faith against the transitory demands of this world, but the film's very style and form *embody* religious experience. It's one thing for a director to make his characters talk about religious faith (e.g., Bergman's handling of Antonius Blok's crisis of belief in *The Seventh Seal*); it's quite another to present concretely, in the very texture of the film experience, such a dynamic mixture of awe, frenzy stubbornness, contemplation and resignation that we feel engaged in the process of achieving faith. Thus Henri Agel can without overstatement compare the image of Jeanne's face in Dreyer's film with the galvanizing touch that God bestows on man in Michelangelo's Sistine ceiling. Both artists have succeeded in transforming the diffuse, elusive shimmer of religious ecstasy into the purified, intense luminescence of aesthetic experience.

Yet the other-worldly dimension of *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* should not seduce our feet too far off the ground, for the film's ultimate center of gravity is humanity. Despite all its stylization, the film escapes the trap of Expressionism by its respect for vital spontaneity. The time and space are never so abstract, the drama never so spiritual, the we forget the concrete physical immediacy of this world.

#### COMING UP IN THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS:

- January 25 Robert Donat & Madeline Carroll in Alfred Hitchcock's *The 39 Steps* 1935
- February 1 Howard Hawks, *His Girl Friday* 1940
- February 8 Henri-Georges Clouzot *Le Corbeau* 1943
- February 15 John Huston, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* 1948
- February 22 Vincente Minelli *An American in Paris* 1951
- March 1 Ingmar Bergman *Wild Strawberries* 1957
- March 8 Andrzej Wajda *Ashes and Diamonds* 1958
- March 22 David Lean *Lawrence of Arabia* 1962
- March 29 John Frankenheimer *The Manchurian Candidate* 1962
- April 5 Sergio Leone *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* 1966
- April 12 Robert Bresson *Lancelot of the Lake* 1974
- April 19 Larisa Shepitko *The Ascent* 1976
- April 26 Akira Kurosawa *Ran* 1985

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