

Sharon Curcio

CONTEMPLATING FIRE

A One Act Drama for stage or TV

Length: 28 minutes

Written entirely in verse, this play moves in Sound with Joan of Arc, Charles VII, and two choruses (one a street mob, the other Charles' advisors) in principal roles.

Working best in a sparse, starkly lit set, Joan's stream of consciousness monologue in the prison cell the night before her death intersects with the musings of Charles in his throne room as he agonizes over the death decision.

Harrowing choral echoes and powerful language intensify this drama and bring it to physical and visual life.

JOAN:
Yes, I'm Joan
And call Domremy my home
But here I am stayed
In this tiny cell
Full of decay
Spewing wet smells.
This night's alive with rats eyes
And on these walls are the clawings of men
Who now are not
And I wronged by so many
Accused of so much
No longer know
What I am not.

MOB: HERETIC!

Deep inside these Burgundian ties
My wrists writhe
First they wore fear's color –white
When my king and countrymen
Handed me over to Englishmen...

MOB: LIAR!

Then they turned bright, burning red
The color of those who turned me in

MOB: TRAITOR!

The color of those who bind me with their fears

MOB: WITCH!

The color of children dismembered, Charles, for the crown upon your head.

MOB: HERETIC, LIAR, TRAITOR, WITCH!

CHARLES: Caught in the body politic
Wedged between kingdom, counselors, and crown
Did not mean to do it, Joan
Did not mean to let you down
But constantly
They tortured me
Fought me round after round

CHARLES: Beat me
To the ground
In their nightmarish way
They haunted my nights
Riddled my days.

ROYAL
ADVISORS: "That girl, you fool
You don't know what she'll do
She's setting you up for sure

With the commoners behind her
And the tattered scores
She'll get you, Charles,
Oppose
Depose you in the end."

JOAN: Dauphin, dauphin
Today all France hails you as king,
Yet how does she know me?
Arms wave wildly in the street
Lips cheer you, greet you
Suck you in
Do you hear?
Do you hear?

ADVISORS: These voices that she hears
Isn't it
Rather weird
Hard to imagine
Difficult to concede
Totally absurd to believe
That she's
Divinely mused?

JOAN: Eyes were moist, Charles
When you took
The Royal Chair
Seated yourself there
Amid hesitant, expectant stares
Coolly you looked them back
Perused the Court up and down
And tossed France's scepter
Calmly, back and forth
Between your palms.

ADVISORS: Unseemly
Wouldn't you say
That Michael and Mary in privy
Pour great battleplans
Into her ear
Preposterous
That this

Unworthy illiterate
Sits
At God' fingertips?
What can her bloody voices say
To make the English go away?
WE'LL BARTER, WE'LL BEGGAR, WE'LL PUT HER AWAY!

JOAN: Dauphin, Dauphin
Do you ever answer?
Do you ever hear?
Yes, once
When I begged to lead France
Promised you Rheims, coronation as King
Remember Charles,
As you bloody well can
And help me now by God as I did you then.

ADVISORS: You're aware
You bloke
She's just a hoax
Most like in league with darker forces
Black sources
Who pump and prime and steal for her
The inside dope she needs
To so flawlessly lead?
Wouldn't you say that's true?
Look at what
A little logic
Will do.

JOAN: Today, today
All France know you.
But how does she know me?
Who does she smile upon now?
Who caresses her furrowed brow?
The cheers in the street,

JOAN: ...the gleam in mens' eyes
Tell me it is not Joan.

ADVISORS: But we mustn't wait
For her to make
That first

Fateful mistake
Before she
Invokes disaster on her own.
WE'LL BARTER, WE'LL BEGGAR, WE'LL PUT HER AWAY
Pick up your ears, you fool
Here's what
A real King would do.

JOAN: As for me
I'll lie awake with my Voices tonight
They'll sing me to sleep
In soft, soothing tones
Comfort me one final time
With all else gone
They are here
And I
Hear them still.

CHARLES: Unrelentingly
They besieged me
For you to be found out
Your sources
Uncovered
Examined
Scrutinized
For you to be undone...

ADVISORS: Charles, Charles
Don't be insane
They'll make her queen
When the land's regained...

JOAN: Who then?
Without closing my eyes I see
Battlefields ooze red
The unlidged yellow eyes of the soon to be dead
Looking wild
Eyes crushed under mad hooves
Hastening to Rheims

JOAN: Your horses tore through limb-clogged streams
Crushing the exposed bone

Of king-forsaken souls.

MOB: HERETIC, LIAR, TRAITORE, WITCH!

CHARLES: Joan, you couldn't possible conceive
How their
Incontinent tongues
Lashed me
Awake at night
Barely conscious by day
Their unceasing ridicule
Totally unnerved me.

JOAN: Are these the titles you bestow
For devotion, love and service my lord?
In return for France
You give these?
God keep
Your later officers
May he teach you to treat them better.

CHARLES: My head
Fever clogged
Throbbled
With their lies
Till I
One ashen spectre
Deliriously paced
Seeking any unused corridor for escape.

ADVISORS: WE'LL BARTER, WE'LL BEGGAR, WE'LL PUT HER AWAY!

JOAN: Memory drifts
And all that time unmercifully permits
Are tortured last questions
And deaf cries for help.
Besides what hope could live in so fetid a place
As I squirm among the vermin here?

CHARLES: Their cries
Left me shocked

CHARLES: Worn out inside
Their lies ulcerously ugly
Pulsed wide
Moment by moment
Larger and larger.

ADVISORS: WE'LL BARTER, WE'LL BEGGAR, WE'LL PUT HER AWAY!

CHARLES: Then split wide
Pus ripe
Open
Raw and running.

JOAN: Charles, Charles
All along you knew
What you would do
All along men followed me
Who wouldn't follow you
Why is it you won't believe there was no magic in what I did?

CHARLES: Oh Joan
When you were here
Michael and Mary
Were luminously clear
And when you went away
They faded into the light of day.
Joan
I never said I was free
Of this stinking doubter's disease
How the cankers
Fester me
In my hollow pride
And gaunt dreams.
Joan
Gladly would I
Have given you the royal chair
To have seen you there
And taken one breath of clean, sweet air
To have been freed
Finally relieved
Of these mad malcontents.