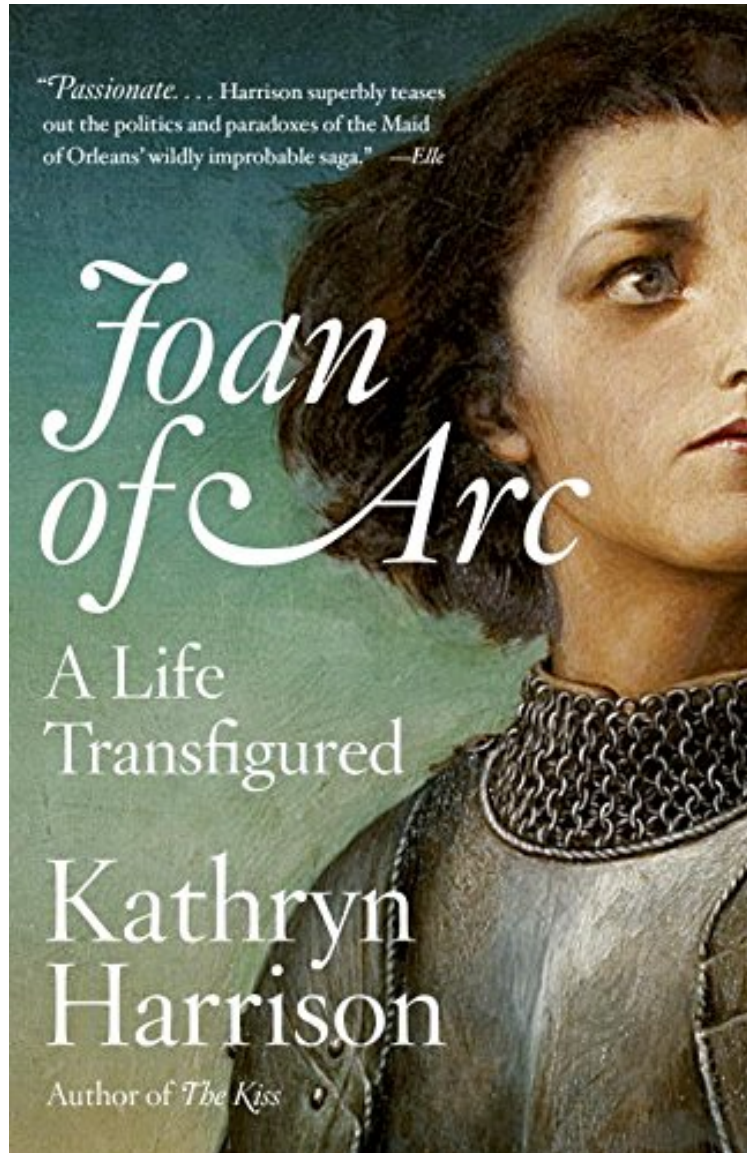


Joan of Arc: A Life Transfigured

Kathryn Harrison

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Kathryn Harrison : Joan of Arc: A Life Transfigured before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Joan of Arc: A Life Transfigured:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Brilliant biography of Joan of Arc By Carole P. Roman Lovingly documented biography of Joan of Arc. From the very first chapter Kathryn Harrison debunks myths and demystifies Joan's life by describing 15th century France and how external events shaped the Maid of Orleans's outlook. I was

surprised to learn of Joan's not so humble, but rather middle class background. Harrison weaves a intricate tapestry of her life, by blending in the religious, political, and social aspects. Each chapter builds the outline of a quiet girl until she matures into an extraordinary figure prepared to sacrifice anything for her calling. Harrison captures the astounding courage and determination of a teenager willing to risk everything, from her very life to her immortal soul by breaking every social and religious code. She also discusses the many ways Joan has been portrayed throughout history, her narrative exposing the difference between fiction and fantasy. Fascinating and compelling, it a stunning study of a extraordinary teenager who bucked authority and stayed true to her heart. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. I never realized the life of Joan of Arc was ...By Lnchl8yI never realized the life of Joan of Arc was so incredible, this book provided just the amount of history and commentary I was looking for. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good examination of Joan in myth and legendBy William LinsleyNot as good as Helen Castor's biography for the historical and political context of Joan's mission, but still well worth reading. The author does well in illuminating the mythology of Joan, that is, the views and beliefs that other people have had of Joan.

Kathryn Harrison gives us a Joan of Arc for our time a shining exemplar of unshakable faith, extraordinary courage, and self-confidence on the battlefield, in the royal court, during a brutally rigged inquisition and imprisonment, and in the face of her death. In this new take on Joans story, Harrison deftly weaves historical fact, myth, folklore, scripture, artistic representations, and centuries of scholarly and critical interpretation into a fascinating narrative, revitalizing our sense of Joan as one of the greatest heroines in all of human history.

Passionate. . . . Harrison superbly teases out the politics and paradoxes of the Maid of Orleans wildly improbable saga. ElleIt remains, after nearly 600 years, a story to break your heart It is Joans rambunctious humanity as much as her divinity that makes her powerful, both for modern audiences and historians. The New York Times Book Stunning. . . . A layered portrait not only of Joans life, but of her times. . . . [Harrison] awes us with her incisive intelligence, her fierce curiosity, her literary prowess. The Boston Globe Working from trial records and modern literature, the Bible and Bresson, Harrison marshals all the forces. The result is sumptuous, as rich and radiant as Joans (apocryphal) golden cloak. Stacy Schiff, Pulitzer Prizewinning author of CleopatraIt is impossible for Harrison to write an uninteresting book. She is too skilled a prose writer, too good a storyteller, too alert to passions and the human heart to produce a work that ever flags. But read Joan of Arc for what it tells you about the world in which the subject lived and the half-millennium of culture that has continued to mythologize her. In this striking volume, it is clear that Joan fell victim to more than an eras intolerance. She became a victim to other dreamers dreams." Marie Arana, The Washington Post If you arent already in thrall to the Maid of Orleans, you might be by the end of Kathryn Harrisons Joan of Arc. . . . [It] builds Joans story with such novelistic detail and grace that the authors rapture becomes ours. The Oregonian Vivid and compelling. . . . Suffused with a novelists imagination. . . . Creative flourishes enliven Harrisons book from its retelling of Joans spectacular anomalous career to the long and equally fascinating story of her afterlife in books, movies, and the popular imagination. Open Letters Monthly If you want a badass heroine like Hushpuppy in Beasts of the Southern Wild crossed with The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (only with angels and Jesus) read Kathryn Harrison's hair-raising bio of Joan of Arc the best of six I've read. She weaves a mesmerizing tale of this cross-dressing warrior who made her torturers weep, who plowed her way to the throne and led an army while never shedding a drop of blood. This year's cult book. Mary Karr, author of The Liars Club and Lit In Harrisons telling, Joan loses her mythic accessories, but the unadorned truth is more than enough. Minneapolis Star Tribune Im impressed by the way Kathryn Harrison so brilliantly blends narrative and scholarship in this gorgeous rendering of Joan of Arcs story. Harrison draws on her deep understanding of religion, feminism and literature to produce the biography of one of the most interesting women in history. She was a mystery, a virgin, visionary, soldier and martyr, and Harrison shows vividly how all these strands connect. If youve never quite managed to get around to reading a book about Joan of Arc (I hadnt), this is the one to read. If youve read all the others, youll need to read this one, too. Roxana Robinson, author of Georgia O'Keeffe: A Life Deeply researched and thoughtful. . . . In Harrisons hands, Joans confidence and intelligence come alive. BookPage Harrison joins the psychobiography school of life writing, doing so with memorable writing and an energetic approach. Kirkus s Compulsively readable. . . . In novelist Harrisons deft hands, the latest analysis is both vividly detailed and historically grounded. Casting a modern eye on a medieval legend, she is able to breathe new life into the girl, the warrior, the messenger from God, and the saint. Booklist About the Author KATHRYN HARRISON has written the novels Thicker Than Water, Exposure, Poison, The Binding Chair, The Seal Wife, and Envy and Enchantments. Her autobiographical work includes The Kiss, Seeking Rapture, The Road to Santiago, and The Mother Knot. She has also written a biography, St. Therese of Lisieux, and a book of true crime, While They Slept: An Inquiry Into the Murder of a Family. She lives in Brooklyn with her husband, the novelist Colin Harrison, and their three children. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. chapter i In the Beginning Was the Word Have you not heard the prophecy that France was to be ruined by a woman and restored by a virgin from the marshes of Lorraine? By the time Joan of Arc proclaimed herself La Pucelle, the virgin sent by God to deliver France from its enemies, the English, she had been obeying the counsel of angels for five years. The voices

Joan heard, speaking from over her right shoulder and accompanied by a great light, had been hers alone, a rapturous secret. But when, in 1429, they announced that the time had come for Joan to undertake the quest for which they had been preparing her, they transformed a seemingly undistinguished peasant girl into a visionary heroine who defied every limitation placed on a woman of the late Middle Ages. Expected by those who raised her to assume nothing more than the workaday cloak of a provincial female, Joan told her family nothing of what her voices asked, lest her parents try to prevent her from fulfilling what she embraced as her destiny: foretold, ordained, inescapable. Seventeen years old, Joan dressed herself in male attire at the command of her heavenly father. She sheared off her hair, put on armor, and took up the sword her angels provided. She was frightened of the enormity of what God had asked of her, and she was feverish in her determination to succeed at what was by anyones measure a preposterous mission. As Joan protested to her voices, she knew not how to ride or lead in war, and yet she roused an exhausted, under-equipped, and impotent army into a fervor that carried it from one unlikely victory to the next. In fact, outside her unshakable faith because of that faith Joan of Arc was characterized above all by paradox. An illiterate peasants daughter from the hinterlands, Joan moved purposefully among nobles, bishops, and royalty, unimpressed by mortal measures of authority. She had a battle cry that drove her legions forward into the fray; her voice was described as gentle, womanly. So intent on vanquishing the enemy that she threatened her own men with violence, promising to cut off the head of any who should fail to heed her command, she recoiled at the idea of taking a life, and to avoid having to use her sword, she led her army carrying a twelve-foot banner that depicted Christ sitting in judgment, holding the world in his right hand, and flanked by angels. In the aftermath of combat, Joan didnt celebrate victory but mourned the casualties; her men remembered her on her knees weeping as she held the head of a dying enemy soldier, urging him to confess his sins. A mortal whose blood flowed red and real from battle wounds, she had eyes that beheld angels, winged and crowned. When she fell to her knees to embrace their legs, she felt their flesh solid in her arms. Her courage outstripped that of seasoned men-at-arms; her tears flowed as readily as did any other teenage girls. Not only a virgin, but also an ascetic who held herself beyond the reach of sensual pleasure, she wept in shock and rage when an English captain called her a whore. Yet, living as a warrior among warriors, she betrayed no prudery when time came to bivouac, undressing and sleeping among lustful young knights who remembered the beauty of a body none dared approach not even after Joan chased off any prostitute foolish enough to tramp after an army whose leaders claim to power was indivisible from her chastity. Under the exigencies of warfare, she didnt allow her men the small sin of blasphemy; coveting victory above all else, she righteously seized an advantage falling on a holy day. She knew Gods wishes; she followed his direction; she questioned nothing. Her quest, revealed to her alone, allowed her privileges no pope would claim. On trial for her life and unfamiliar with the fine points of Catholic doctrine, she nimbly sidestepped the rhetorical traps of Sorbonne-trained doctors of the Church bent on proving her a witch and a heretic. The least likely of commanding officers, she changed the course of the Hundred Years War, and that of history. The life of Joan of Arc is as impossible as that of only one other, who also heard God speak: Jesus of Nazareth, prince of paradox as much as peace, a god who suffered and died a mortal, a prophet whose parables were intended to confound, that those who seeing may not see, and hearing may not understand, a messenger of forgiveness and love who came bearing a sword, inspiring millennia of judgment and violence the blood of his new and everlasting covenant extracted from those who refused his heavenly rule. More than that of any other Catholic martyr, Joan of Arcs career aligns with Christs, hers the most noble life that was ever born into this world save only One, Mark Twain wrote. Her birth was prophesied: a virgin warrior would arise to save her people. She had power over the natural world, not walking on water, but commanding the direction of the wind. She foretold the future. If she wasnt transfigured while preaching on a mount, she was, eyewitnesses said, luminous in battle, light not flaring off her armor so much as radiating from the girl within. The English spoke of a cloud of white butterflies unfurling from her bannerproof of sorcery, they called it. Her touch raised the dead. Her feats, which continue six centuries after her birth to frustrate ever more modern and enlightened efforts to rationalize and reduce to human proportions, won the allegiance of tens of wonder-struck thousands and made her as many ardent enemies. The single thing she feared, she said, was treachery. Captured, Joan was sold to the English and abandoned to her fate by the king to whom she had delivered the French crown. Her passion unfolded in a prison cell rather than a garden, but like Jesus she suffered lonely agonies. Tried by dozens of mostly corrupt clerics, Joan refused to satisfy the ultimatums of Church doctors who demanded she abjure the God she knew and renounce the voices that guided her as the devils deceit. When she would not, she was condemned to death and burned as a heretic, the stake to which she was bound raised above throngs of jeering onlookers curious to see what fire might do to a witch. She was only nineteen, and her charred body was displayed for anyone who cared to examine it. Had she been a man after all, and if she were, did it explain any of what shed accomplished? A sophisticated few of Joan of Arcs contemporaries might have understood the idea of salvation at the hands of a virgin from the marshes of Lorraine as a communal prayer more a wish for rescue than a prophecy. Probably, most took the idea at face value, some giving it credence, others dismissing it. But only one, a girl who claimed she knew little beyond what shed learned spinning and sewing and taking her turn to watch over the villagers livestock, heard it as a vocation. The self-proclaimed agent of Gods will, Joan of Arc wasnt immortalized so much as she entered the collective imagination as a living myth, exalted by the angelic company she kept and the powers with which it

endowed her.*The woman who ruined France was Isabeau of Bavaria, a ruination accomplished by disinheriting her son the dauphin Charles, to whom Joan would restore Frances throne, and allowing his paternity to be called into question. It was a credible doubt that might have been cast on any of Isabeaus eight children, as she was notoriously unfaithful to her husband, the mad (we would call him schizophrenic) Charles VI. Bastardy, though it invited dynastic squabbles among opposing crowns with shared ancestry, wasnt a cause for shame among the nobility but was announced if not advertised, a brisure, or bar sinister, added to the coat of arms worn by sons conceived outside a family patriarchs official marriage. In fact, it was an illustrious bastards invasion of England in 1066 that precipitated the centuries of turf wars between the French and the English. As Duke of Normandy, William the Conqueror claimed Englands throne for his own but remained a vassal of the French king, as did those who ruled after him. The arrangement guaranteed centuries of dynastic turmoil, and the house of Valois had the misfortune of presiding over the Hundred Years War, at the beginning of which France had everything to lose. Centuries of crusades following the Norman conquests had established the livre as the currency of international trade, and Frances wealth purchased its preeminence among nations. French was not used for purposes of haggling alone but was the lingua franca of Europe, the language in which Marco Polos Travels was published. Punctuated by periods of exhausted stalemates, occasional famine, and the arrival, in 1348, of the bubonic plague, the Hundred Years War ground on until the population of France was halved. When Joan set out on her divine mission, England had taken control of almost all of France north of the Loire River. By the time Isabeau revealed the dauphins questionable ancestry, effectively barring him from the French throne, portents of salvation by a virgin from the marshes of Lorraine had been circulating for decades, multiplying with the woes that inspired them, the putative historic reach of prophecies concerning Joans advent reaching ever further back in time as her fame spread. Joans contemporary the poet and historian Christine de Pizan reported that on the occasion of Joans first formal ecclesiastical examination a cautionary investigation the French ministers considered necessary before the dauphin placed his trust in an otherwise untested visionary she was embraced as a messiah whose coming had been predicted by Merlin, the Sibyl, and the Venerable Bede. The widowed Christine supported herself and her children by composing love poems for wealthy patrons, but the work for which she would be remembered is *The Book of the City of Ladies*, an allegorical gathering of historys most illustrious and influential women. As the daughter of the court astrologer and physician to Charles V, whose vast royal archives had provided her the education universities denied her sex, Christine made it her purpose to challenge the misogyny that characterized late medieval thought and literature, and she welcomed Joan as a citizen of her utopian vision. In preference to all the brave men of times past, this woman must wear the crown! the poet exclaimed. Her *Dit de Jehanne* (*Song of Joan*) was the first popular work about the girl who would be remembered as Frances savior, an epic ballad she composed at the height of Joans glory, about a young maiden, to whom God gives the strength and power to be the champion. If a prediction made by a magician who was himself a myth strikes the present-day reader as suspect if not worthless, the medieval mind, preoccupied with sorcery and tales of chivalry and untroubled by the future scholarly detective work that would exhume the sources of the Arthurian legend, gave Merlins presumed words credence, the Sibyl and the Bede joining him as remote mystical buttresses to the more precise predictions made around the time of Joans birth. Once Joan had announced herself as the vehicle of Gods salvation, her initial examiners turned to prophecy as a means of retroactively validating a declaration they desperately wanted to be true, and during the late Middle Ages, Merlin, the Sibyl, and the Bede were typically summoned as a trio, each associated with pronouncements at once mysterious and archetypal. A virgin ascends the backs of the archers / and hides the flower of her virginity, was Merlins contribution. Copied from Geoffrey of Monmouths twelfth-century *History of the Kings of Britain*, which introduced the Arthurian legend to continental Europe, it invited a broad spectrum of interpretations, as must any lasting prediction. Applied to Joan, it sanctioned her authority to lead men in war and underscored her celibacy, protected by male attire and armor. The Church, whose reflexive revisionism cannibalized any myth that might distract from its doctrine, had long ago consumed and rehabilitated the Sibyl, a legendary seer traced as far back as the fifth century bc and often referred to in the plural. Whether one or many, having left no recorded oracle, the Sibyl could be summoned to reinforce any appeal. The Venerable Bedes presentiment of Joans saving France was harvested from an Anglo-Saxon poem written six centuries after Bedes death and rested on a single sentence: Behold, battles resound, the maid carries banners. Jesuss advent was similarly legitimized. The evangelists applied messianic prophecies as generic as *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder to the coming of Christ* and revised what they knew of Jesuss life to fit specific predictions made by the prophets Isaiah, Daniel, and Hosea. More significant, Jesus consistently presented himself as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, for example, deliberately staging his Palm Sunday entrance to Jerusalem according to the six-hundred-year-old direction of Zechariah. Lo your king comes to you, the prophet wrote of the Messiah, triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass. This wasnt prophecy fulfilled so much as a public announcement resting on biblical scholarship, for Jesus was, if nothing else, a Jew who knew his Scripture, knew it as well as did the high priests who called for his death in response to the presumption of his claim of divinity. All this has taken place, he said to his disciples, that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. He was, Jesus told the temple elders, the Messiah whom Isaiah promised would come to set at liberty those who are oppressed. Like Jesus, Joan recognized herself in

Scripture, but from the New rather than the Old Testament. I was sent for the consolation of the poor and destitute, she proclaimed, borrowing her lines from Gospel accounts of a career that, like hers, convinced by means of miracle, spectacle, and prophecy fulfilled. Of the handful Joan would have heard growing up, the only prophecy she is known to have identified with her mission was particular to her place of birth: France was to be ruined by a woman and restored by a virgin from the marshes of Lorraine. As Old and New Testaments illustrate, prophecy has always been a political medium, broadcasts from a jealous god who distributes land grants to nations worthy of reward. In 1398, when France's national oracle, Marie Robine, foresaw the desolation of her homeland, she came directly to the court in Paris to describe it in full. A recluse of humble origins embraced by the poor and the exalted alike, Marie derived her authority from the attention popes paid her apocalyptic Book of Revelations. Refused an audience with Charles VI, who was likely in a state of mental confusion, the seer warned that great sufferings would arrive. One vision presented Marie with armor, which frightened her. But she was told to fear nothing, and that it was not she who would have to wear this armor, but that a Maid who would come after her would wear it and deliver the kingdom of France from its enemies. While witnesses remembered Joan speaking only of the prophecy specific to Lorraine, she undoubtedly knew the content of Marie's visions. Not only were they common lore, but they illustrated her vocation and validated her wearing armor. From the Hardcover edition.