

The angel in Tony Kushner's play *Angels in America* is fearsome. She heralds her arrival with loud rumblings and dark, chilling undercurrents of doom. When she descends upon earth, it is not gentle. It is with a huge crash. This is no Precious Moments angel, no benign, smiling being, but an angel who is capable of wielding a sword of fire to quash the forces of evil with more power and majesty than a Jedi knight.

Joan, as written by George Bernard Shaw, did not descend quite as fiercely, despite having later earned the status of Warrior Saint. She was a flesh-and-blood girl, here on earth for a purpose: to turn the Hundred Years War to France's favor. At seventeen, Joan commanded the military forces of a nation. It took her just thirteen months to undo the victories of Poitiers, Crécy and Agincourt. Although the war would continue another 22 years, from the moment she raised her sword and charged into battle, the English cause was lost.

Yet, *Saint Joan* is not about war. It is about conviction that runs deeper than the bone, deeper than life itself. It is about nobility and foolishness, courage and foolhardiness: what it means to be human, superhuman, and even subhuman. It is about faith, about giving oneself fully to belief, but also about pitting one's set of ideals against a succession of intentions and obstacles. It is about the transformation that may or may not result and who or what is left standing.

Though solidly grounded in historical fact, Joan's story is also about the angels among us; about the mystery and radiance and miracles that Sylvia Plath describes at the end of her poem, *Black Rook in Rainy Weather*:

*Miracles occur,
If you care to call those spasmodic
Tricks of radiance miracles. The wait's begun again,
The long wait for the angel.
For that rare, random descent.*

Shaw had for many years a statue of Joan in his garden. Content to wait, he stipulated in his will that his ashes be scattered at her feet. With Shaw's masterwork, our wait for the angel is over, at least for now.

Susan Myer Silton
Director, *Saint Joan*

Black Rook in Rainy Weather

by Sylvia Plath

On the stiff twig up there
Hunches a wet black rook
Arranging and rearranging its feathers in the rain.
I do not expect a miracle
Or an accident

To set the sight on fire
In my eye, not seek
Any more in the desultory weather some design,
But let spotted leaves fall as they fall,
Without ceremony, or portent.

Although, I admit, I desire,
Occasionally, some backtalk
From the mute sky, I can't honestly complain:
A certain minor light may still
Leap incandescent

Out of the kitchen table or chair
As if a celestial burning took
Possession of the most obtuse objects now and then ---
Thus hallowing an interval
Otherwise inconsequent

By bestowing largesse, honor,
One might say love. At any rate, I now walk
Wary (for it could happen
Even in this dull, ruinous landscape); sceptical,
Yet politic; ignorant

Of whatever angel may choose to flare
Suddenly at my elbow. I only know that a rook
Ordering its black feathers can so shine
As to seize my senses, haul
My eyelids up, and grant

A brief respite from fear
Of total neutrality. With luck,
Trekking stubborn through this season
Of fatigue, I shall
Patch together a content

Of sorts. Miracles occur,
If you care to call those spasmodic
Tricks of radiance miracles. The wait's begun again,
The long wait for the angel.
For that rare, random descent.