

0. TRIAL: A MOCKERY OF JUSTICE - Story Preface

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Trial began on Wednesday, February 21, 1431.

After three weeks of cross examination, Cauchon began to worry about his lack of evidence against Joan:

- She did not confess to any wrongdoing.
- She seemed honest in her testimony.

Cauchon needed a few tricks to accomplish his ultimate objective: Joan of Arc's death by burning at the stake.

After pouring through the lengthy transcript of Joan's answers, Cauchon and his helpers fashioned twelve separate charges against her. Cauchon claimed that those charges were based on answers from Joan's own mouth. That was proven - 25 years later - to be untrue.

Joan, who could neither read nor write, could only respond to questions that were verbally put to her. One can only imagine the enormous strain on this young woman of nineteen.

After all the evidence was presented against her, Joan was asked to sign a "statement of faults." We would call that a "confession." Exhausted, ill and threatened with torture, Joan stood firm.

On May 9, 1431, Joan was taken to a torture chamber in the castle. She saw the terrible instruments of pain. Her captors described what they would do to her. Still, she did not break.

On May 23rd, Joan was taken to the cemetery at the Abbey. She heard a sermon by Guillaume Erard. Not far away - and in her sight - was the stake. Next to it was the executioner.

Everything seemed in place for her execution. But it was just an act. It was just a way to frighten Joan - who was terrified of being burned alive - into a confession.

At the end of Erard's sermon, Cauchon tried to get a confession again. A short version, barely eight lines long, was read to Joan. If she signed it, she would agree never to carry arms, wear soldier's clothes, or cut her hair short. Joan remained silent.

Cauchon then read the sentence of the court: Death by burning at the stake. Joan agreed to an "Abjuration" (she signed the eight-line confession). Follow this link to see both the place where Joan recanted and the awesome architecture of the church and town.

Cauchon was close to achieving his objectives, but now he needed his most devious trick of all. Taking advantage of Joan's inability to read and verify the eight-line confession before she signed it, Cauchon substituted it with a much more damaging statement.

Had Joan been able to read, or had she been represented by counsel, she would have discovered Cauchon's treachery and would never have signed the substituted statement. She did not have those advantages.

Once he had Joan's mark on the false confession, Cauchon showed "mercy." Because she agreed to confess, Cauchon would spare Joan's life. She would do penance, in prison, for the rest of her life. But she would not be burned alive at the stake.

At least ... that's what she thought.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/TRIAL-A-MOCKERY-OF-JUSTICE-Joan-of-Arc>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/TRIAL-A-MOCKERY-OF-JUSTICE-Joan-of-Arc>