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| The Passion of Joan of Arc (1928) |
| La passion de Jeanne d’Arc |
| With its highly innovative reductionist style, the silent film *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), produced at the beginning of the era of sound film, was hailed for demonstrating the artistic possibilities of film. Carl Theodor Dreyer’s use of close-ups and editing was unique in its time. References to transcendental power, found here in the figure of Joan of Arc, are a recurrent topos in Dreyer’s œuvre. The historical Joan of Arc (1412–1431), a French national heroine, led the French army during the Hundred Years War and was condemned to be burned at the stake. The plot of the film considers only her trial, conviction, and death. Dreyer’s confined decoupage focuses on Joan’s reactions to her prosecutors. Her face is mostly framed in close-ups and those of her opponents are shot from a low angle, rendering them more sinister. The mise-en-scène involves minimalistic and abstract decors (composed by set designer Hermann Warm) and the montage is impressionistic. Renée Maria Falconetti’s intense interpretation of Joan of Arc staged in the close-ups became an iconic image. The tension between concrete representation, on the one hand, and stylistic and formal abstraction, on the other, moves the story away from historical fact and into an indefinite time and space, which has enabled the film to be read as a work of religious art transgressing the human limitations of this world in the search for a spiritual existence. |
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| Further reading:  (Bordwell)  (Grace)  (Schrader)  (Dreyer) |