

Pope Joan Study Guide

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Plot Summary

The infant Joan of Ingleheim is born in the year 814 to a Saxon woman named Gudrun and her English husband, the Canon of Ingleheim. The village midwife Hrotrud delivers baby Joan after a dangerous, complicated labor. The cold and hateful canon is severely disappointed to have a daughter, believing that, in addition to being worthless, women are the source of sin.

Pope Joan is the story of a medieval-era young woman who is intellectually brilliant and motivated in her desire to learn all she can about religion and medicine. Over time Joan, disguised as John Anglicus, is eventually afforded opportunities at levels of power that most men never reach. Her secret, the fact that she is a woman, is known to only one man, the knight, Gerold. This gifted woman's only opportunities to contribute to her changing world are dependent upon her façade of manhood.

Tutored as a child by the forward thinking Greek, Aesculapius, Joan finds an opportunity to attend the palace school in Dorstadt with her brother, John. When she survives a brutal attack by Norseman on the day of her dreaded arranged wedding, fifteen year old Joan escapes in her dead brother's hooded cape, and joins the monastery of Fulda using the name of John Anglicus. She lives and studies as a monk at the abbey, and learns to practice medicine under the abbey's resident physician.

Joan travels to Rome, still in disguise as a man, and proceeds to prove herself a remarkable healer and the voice of reason among men whose restrictive religious beliefs cripple them to common sense. After a momentous series of events, Joan is elected Pope of Rome, and serves fairly and honorably in that capacity until her death. Her story is virtually written out of history due to the bizarre discovery of her sexuality, and the fact that she is able to accomplish so much under the noses of the powerful men of that time. Although Joan lives as a man, the one love in her life is for Count Gerold, whom she encounters many times over the course of her life. When Gerold is killed, Pope John Anglicus, or Joan, miscarries a child and dies, leaving Rome with an embarrassing and disgraceful piece of history to deal with.

Only as John Anglicus, is Joan able to live the remarkable life of a scholar, physician, Catholic priest and finally, Pope, during a time when are considered valuable only for child-bearing.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

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Only as John Anglicus, is Joan able to live the remarkable life of a scholar, physician, Catholic priest and finally, Pope, during a time when women are considered valuable only for child-bearing.

Joan is the youngest of three children and the only female child in her family. She is very close to her Saxon mother, who teaches her mythical songs and poems forbidden by her rigid, abusive Christian father. Joan's other source of strength and comfort is her older brother Matthew. Joan's younger brother John is very slow for his age, and not particularly smart. Joan learns that as a child, her mother worshipped false gods, and because she was not a Christian, she is considered a heathen by Joan's father.



Chapter 1 Analysis

The reader is introduced to what seems to be a depressing, poverty-stricken household in which the two parents are vastly different in their backgrounds and belief systems.

Gudrun's life is tainted by the soldiers who pillaged her childhood home and killed her family, and her need for Joan's friendship and confidence is beyond what normally exists between a mother and child. Gudrun clings tightly to the pagan mythology of her childhood, and teaches Joan that wisdom is always bought with pain, which warns the reader that Joan's learning will not come easily.

Another vast difference within the family involves the status of the women and the men. Gudrun is physically punished for telling her heathen stories to her daughter, the canon being not only the cruel head of the family but a dictator and dangerous enemy, as well. All of the power in this family belongs to men.



Chapters 2 - 3

Chapters 2 - 3 Summary

Fascinated with Matthew's studies, Joan begs him to teach her to read and write at six years old. They both know that their father will be furious if he knows Joan is learning, so they carefully keep her lessons a secret.

Joan is interested in St. Catherine, who is greatly admired for her learning. Matthew, who is impressed by Joan's quick intellect, gives her a wooden St. Catherine's medallion to wear in acknowledgment of her abilities.

When Matthew dies of illness, Joan is devastated. She and John are blamed by their father for bringing sin into the family, and are cruelly forced to fast and pray. John realizes that his father will expect him to pick up Matthew's studies. Knowing John is not mentally capable, Joan wants to go with him to school, and proves to her father she can read. He reacts by calling her unnatural, a changeling, and blames her for Matthew's death.

Joan meets the Greek scholar, Aesculapius, who stops by to visit her father. He is widely traveled and educated in religion and logic. The canon feels Plato's study of logic and reason is only appropriate as trivia, but Aesculapius argues that reason does not threaten faith and is a God-given ability. Joan is fascinated.

Headed for the cathedral schola to accept a new position, Aesculapius agrees to quiz John on his studies. When John falters, Joan helps him out. Aesculapius learns of Joan's extraordinary intelligence and offers to tutor her, but their father insists he take both children, or neither. Aesculapius reluctantly agrees to tutor John, as well.

Chapters 2 - 3 Analysis

Cruelty, superstition, religion and fear introduce us to the Dark Ages. As a girl child, Joan is worthless to her father. Since women are at fault for all of the universe's woes, it follows that Joan is blamed for her brother, Matthew's death, especially when Matthew has been teaching her forbidden knowledge. Joan's Latin is fluent and she is eager to learn more. Young John will be unable to act as a substitute for his brother, academically or emotionally. His intellect is below the norm.

It is outrageous that a girl be educated by someone like Aesculapius. Although Joan is hurt by her father's accusation that she murdered Matthew, her burning urge to learn is a stronger force than her emotions.

John's lack of academic talent is an embarrassment to his father, but the trait is innate. By giving up his worthless daughter, the canon sees an opportunity for his son John, as well.



Chapters 4-5

Chapters 4-5 Summary

In the Roman Lateran Palace, the residence of Pope Paschal, twelve year old Anastasius waits with his parents to see his uncle Theodorus. There is palpable tension in the palace. When Theodorus approaches to greet them, he is violently murdered by the papal militia. Anastasius is horrified, but his father says he must watch and learn, explaining that Theodorus is paying the price for his open loyalty to the Emperor. Anastasius is shocked when he realizes that the murder is ordered by the Pope.

Her studies with Aesculapius are an insult to Joan's relationship with her mother, since Gudrun has taught her about Saxon Gods and their secrets, a tradition considered Paganism by Catholics.

Hrotrud, the herbalist midwife who delivered Gudrun's children, is being tried in the village for sorcery. The canon forces Joan and John to observe the trial. The charges consist of senseless coincidences that are made to look like Hrotrud was involved in peoples' afflictions. Guilty if she swims, innocent if she does not, Hrotrud drowns and is acquitted. Joan tries to apply her studies of logic to the incident and realizes that it could have been handled differently; she becomes excited by the concept of applying logic to divine revelation.

Aesculapius is fired from the schola due to his beliefs, which do not belong in a cathedral. Aesculapius promises Joan he will send someone to continue her studies, and gives her a book of Homer, which she treasures, but has to read secretly at night. Her father is furious when he catches her with a book other than the Bible. Rather than burn it, he decides to make Joan scrape the writing from the pages so he can sell the parchment. When she refuses, he lashes her into unconsciousness.

Chapters 4-5 Analysis

This is certainly not an era of coddled children. Anastasius watches the grim spectacle of decapitation and his father will not let him hide from it. The Papacy obviously has military power during this time and apparently demands loyalty. The issues between the Emperor and Pope are not made clear in this chapter, but a serious battle for loyalty is exposed. We do not know yet how Anastasius is connected to the story.

The canon is obviously afraid of any knowledge not from the Bible, and perhaps even more afraid of witchcraft. For a man of the cloth, he is extremely violent. Aesculapius is a new age thinker and is willing to pay the price for it, suggesting to Joan that she defend her own thinking at all costs. Poor Hrotrud has cured many villagers with her remedies, but now even her cures are suspect. Clearly, knowledge is the enemy of ignorance, and during this time it is feared and punished.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Joan's beating leaves her ill with infection. Her father has scraped the pages of her book, and she is depressed, but her mother wants to nurse her back to their former world of Saxon secrets and stories. Gudrun explains that when she was young, the invading Christian soldiers burned everything and she was beginning to starve. When the canon and missionaries arrived unarmed, offering food in exchange for listening to them preach, Gudrun left with them. Gudrun cautions Joan to never give herself to a man.

An emissary from the Bishop of Dorstadt arrives to take the canon's child to the school in Dorstadt. Joan's parents allow the messenger to think that it is John who has been summoned. John goes reluctantly, having stolen his father's knife. He resents Joan for her intelligence and for being their mother's favorite child. Joan is not a regular girl and John is humiliated by her. John is fascinated with battle and weapons, and dreams of being a warrior. On their trip through the woods, John and the emissary are attacked by a brigand who kills the emissary. John manages to stab the attacker with his father's knife. When Joan finds him, the two walk toward the cella [temple] where the bishop's men are waiting to escort her to the palace.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The villagers are shocked by the canon's rage, since he is supposedly a holy man. Joan's mother wants things to return to the way they were before Aesculapius came. She wants so much to keep her daughter for herself that she betrays her when the emissary comes to take her to school.

The siblings are thrown together again, Joan realizing that her only opportunities lie in the presence of her brother.

This chapter, although Joan's life is almost extinguished, sets up the inevitabilities that Joan will get her education, she will not give herself to a man and she will abandon her relationship with her mother in exchange for an education.



Chapters 7-8

Chapters 7-8 Summary

Joan lies that her father has insisted on having her brother John accompany her. The two begin the ten-day trip to Dorstadt. Joan is curious and fascinated by the sights, and John is hungry, tired and irritable. At the palace the children are luxuriously bathed and dressed to attend an extravagant dinner with the bishop. Joan is surprised at the mixture of pagan languages with proper Latin, and the casual atmosphere of approval of the careless bishop's paramour.

Tested on her knowledge of orthodox theology at the dinner table, Joan boldly proceeds to challenge the school master, Odo, as to why women are considered inferior. Using her well-honed logic, Joan outwits him.

A red-haired knight, Count Gerold, offers Joan a home with his family in Villaris, and John is left with the other boys at the palace. At Villaris, Joan meets Gerold's cold and contemptuous wife, Richild, and goes to bed missing her beloved Mama.

The stern and serious attitude of the instructor, Odo, is a reflection of his insecurity about his own status and intelligence, in addition to his generally unpleasant disposition. He cannot acknowledge the excellence in Joan's work and punishes her with more. Joan is an outcast because she is a girl, and her brother John joins his new friends in humiliating her. Gerold rescues Joan from a particularly cruel prank, telling the boys that she is braver and smarter than any of them. Almost thirteen years old, Joan believes she loves Gerold.

Chapters 7-8 Analysis

The departure from the strict traditions of Catholicism at Dorstadt is shocking to Joan, having lived with the most rigid form of the religion. She finds herself in a luxurious setting compared with her childhood, but separation from her mother became a finality when she runs away from home, knowing her father will kill her if she dares to return. It is ironic that Joan knows that her father, a religious icon in his community, is likely to murder her if she returns home. Her perceptions of religion will be influenced by this for the rest of her life.

This chapter sets the stage for the scholarly phase of Joan's life, as she and her brother begin their studies at the bishop's school in Dorstadt. Clearly, Odo is not going to be a supportive character for her, but Gerold's appearance in her life, although he is married and has a family, offers Joan some stability and kindness, which she sorely lacks.

Joan's strength is fortuitous since she is in an untenable position—female and intellectually gifted. She has already experienced hardship as a child and, if this chapter is any indication, she will continue to suffer for her obsession with learning. Odo is an

egotistical and hateful man, wielding power and authority over a student of whom he is not worthy.



Chapters 9-10

Chapters 9-10 Summary

Joan is asking some dangerous truth-seeking questions, such as how we could know if the holy resurrection was real, since no one actually saw it. Gerold warns her of the danger in asking questions one should not ask. He tells her the story of a stoning incident of innocents whose similar ideas appeared heretical.

In the classroom, Odo is physically abusive to the stoic Joan, infuriating Gerold.

Joan detests her passage into womanhood and all of its inconveniences, and begins to bind her breasts to avoid comments from the male students. There is no peer group Joan fits into, and she is reliant on her relationship with Gerold, who gives her the first precious book she has read that is not a sacred text. "Lucretius" in her book says one has only to observe the natural world to know the truth. She and Gerold together witness a white wolf giving birth to live pups, which dispels the myth that white wolf puppies are dead until their fathers lick life into them.

Fairs have not been held in this kingdom for many years for fear of attacks by Norsemen, but a fair is organized in the town of St-Denis which will bring merchants from far away places selling exotic wares and providing exciting entertainment. Count Gerold and his heavily equipped, well-armed entourage proceed to the fair, Joan riding with Richild, as well as her kind, but shallow daughter, Gisla and younger daughter Dhuoda. Gerold lets Joan mount her horse and ride along with the men.

Richild forces Bertha to walk next to the wagons in penance for a remark about Gisla's wedding night. Bertha, having walked many miles, eventually drowns trying to cross the Meuse River on a rotting bridge. Joan and Gerold are unable to save her, and Joan is forced to return to the wagon for safety. Richild says Bertha's drowning was God's will.

At the raucous fair, Gerold buys Joan a set of old blueprints for a hydraulic device, written in Greek. Joan watches a competition between blind men, and exposes a cheating vendor selling milk from the Virgin Mary. A fortune teller tells Joan she will have greatness beyond her dreams and grief beyond imagining.

After they have returned home and Gisla has been married, Gerold builds the hydraulic device and magically is able to open and shut the door of an old shack out in the country. Joan and Gerold hug and kiss, not knowing that Odo is watching them. Odo quickly goes to Richild with this scandalous information.

Chapters 9-10 Analysis

Joan's hunger for the truth, as always, has her on shaky ground, since during this time all truths are explained away with stories and illogical superstitions, and those stories



are to be believed at the risk of punishment or death. These are the Dark Ages, and Joan is peeking beyond the web of old fearful thinking, trying to rationally reason out the reality of the world. We are given a hint in this chapter that Gerold's wife, Richild, is not fond of Joan and resents the bond between Joan and her husband.

There is quite a lot of activity in this chapter, as Joan is approaching fifteen years of age. Her relationship with Gerold ripens into romance, but her hunger for truth and schooling also remains strong. Richild's abuse of authority with Bertha and her indifference about it foreshadows the possibility that she will create trouble for Joan upon learning the news from Odo. We learn that in the upper echelons of society, women do have power, but in different matters. Richild's power is over those who are considered inferior to her, and she uses that power injudiciously.

Although Joan lives with Gerold's family, she is certainly not an equal to Richild's daughters except through Gerold's eyes, who appreciates her intellect and her willingness to be different from the women of her time. The attraction between Joan and Gerold is primarily their shared enthusiasm for learning and their strong intellects.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

While Gerold is away on Emperor's business in Westphalia, Richild arranges a marriage for Joan to the son of a farrier, who shoes horses, and also gets the bishop to release Joan from school. When the bishop insists on waiting for Gerold's return, Richild threatens to expose his practice of keeping paramours to the upcoming church council.

Richild tells Joan her marriage is arranged and that Gerold has had many flirtations, of which she is only just one. She tells Joan that the marriage was Gerold's idea. Joan pleads with the bishop, but he has no choice. John will be forced to leave Dorstadt, as well.

Joan plans to escape from Villaris with John, but Richild intercepts her letter to her brother, drugs her, poisons her pet wolf, and drags Joan the next day to the cathedral for her wedding. Crowds of people have gathered for mass, including Joan's brother, John, and Odo. The huge mass of people is entirely wiped out by invading Norsemen, John finally having one chance to try his skill as a warrior. Joan hides herself behind the altar screen, while the devastation is completed. She takes her dead brother's knife and cuts off her hair on the altar, puts on his cloak and escapes to the monastery of Fulda, where John was to be sent if he failed school. Villaris has burned to the ground.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Through these bloody, unjust, and devastating events Joan's life is, again, abruptly and violently altered forever. Living in a time when women are not allowed to make their own decisions or even think for themselves, Joan is a danger to herself by her very nature. The brutality of the dark ages comes alive in the description of the wasteful devastation of lives and property.

Joan's ability to speak several languages, including Greek, at a time when most ordinary people could not read or write any language, indicates she is a child prodigy. Gerold's hydraulic door opener reflects early Greek ingenuity and could explain, historically, a certain amount of the superstitious belief in magic and witchcraft of this era. If early Greeks could build a hydraulic pump, and these folks in later times cannot even write their names, a Greek pump might very well seem mystical and suspicious, being so far beyond their understanding.



Chapters 12-13

Chapters 12-13 Summary

Serving as a district judge, or "missus," Gerold renders lawful judgment for hundreds of complainants in the name of the Emperor. He deals out punishments like boiling water torture, fines and other bizarre penalties. Finally finished with his job, Gerold heads home, deciding that he wants Joan to be his wife. He finds Villairis a pile of ashes with intermingled dead bodies. At the cathedral he finds the bodies of almost everyone he has known, including his family members, but he is unable to find Joan. Gerold leads his men in an attack against the departing Norsemen and sees his screaming daughter, Gisla, being abducted on their ship. Gerald concludes the Vikings have taken Joan, as well, and after hacking a young Viking corpse in his rage, he weeps.

Anastasius visits the tent of Pope Gregory who has been sent by Emperor Louis to Frankland to mediate a crisis threatening to turn into war. Anastasius plans to betray the Pope. The ambitious Anastasius has already attained the rank of vestiarius and hopes to be Pope some day himself. Deeply affected by having watched his Uncle Theodorus' murder as a child, he is manipulative and deceitful, but pretends to be pious and humble, having lost his innocence. Anastasius flatters Gregory, telling him he will be remembered as a peacemaker, and leads him to his fate. However, there is a plan that all of the Emperors troops will desert him in the night and in the morning he will be defenseless before the armies of his sons.

Chapters 12-13 Analysis

Only the reader knows what has become of Joan. Gerold's family, property and life have been destroyed while he is away serving his government, leaving him enraged and grief stricken. It is ironic that Gerold has finally decided to marry Joan, only to come back and find everything gone.

The story mentions that the craft of shipbuilding had long since been forgotten in Frankland. This comment, as well as the earlier reference to the old Greek blueprints by a hydraulic pump, makes it seem as though this era of humanity stepped backward in time in their thinking, their technology and their general way of life.

This chapter takes place in Colmar on June 24, 833 in The Field of Lies. Clearly Anastasius has the potential to be a pious, devoted man of God, but his childhood experience taints and hardens him, and he is more politically savvy than pious at this point, ascending the hierarchy of the church through his loyalty to the Emperor, working both ends for his own gain. Knowing he cannot attain the papacy by piety alone, he plays the game however it needs to be played to win favor from those with the authority to promote him.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Joan, using the identity of John of Anglicus, has lived as a monk at Fulda for four years. Through her studies she has been granted access to the monastery library, and is called upon to translate Greek treatises on medicine, including books by Hippocrates. The community doctor, Brother Benjamin, takes her as his apprentice and teaches her the use of medicinal herbs for healing. Joan has worked diligently upon her masculine disguise, knowing her life depends upon it.

When the educated Judith, wife of Viscount Waifar, comes to the church to pray for her stillborn child, she is told since the child was a girl she needs to wait sixty days instead of the usual thirty days before she can enter the church. Angry that this woman is considered unclean, Joan offers to light Judith's candle at the altar for her, for which Joan is punished.

Joan decides she would never have been happy living as a woman and, since Gerold deceived her, she sees her love as only a form of illness and feels lucky to have escaped giving herself to a man.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Four years is a long time to live cloistered with men and not be discovered. The book has mentioned several times that, with the exception of her gray eyes and blond hair, Joan is not beautiful, so, with practice, her passage as a man makes sense. Certainly, her intelligence and voracious appetite for knowledge places her beyond suspicion, since women are not considered capable or cut out for such things.

Joan's complete adaptation to life as a man may be resignation to her fate of never having what she wants as a woman—mostly Gerold, but also her freedom. The trade of her sexuality is worth it to her, since she now is able to read and excel in her studies in peace. The treatment of Judith, as well as Joan's other life experiences, assure her that the world is not a kind place for women.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

The Fulda monks gather to confess their faults and report any faults in each other, receiving rather harsh punishment from Abbot Raban for relatively minor infractions. A fellow thinker in the monastery, Brother Gottschalk, wants to leave the abbey even though his father has dedicated him to God. He is lashed until his rib breaks through. Joan remembers Hippocrates' treatise saying that warming the body helps it heal, and, in addition to treating him with herbal salves and medicines, Joan and Benjamin surround Gottschalk with warmed stones, encouraging his body to start healing. Joan is a natural, adept healer.

Joan has read the law and found a passage that might get Gottschalk released from the abbey by the church council, which can legally overrule the abbot. Her letter to the council works, and Gottschalk goes free, unsure what he will do with his future. Joan prays for him.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Joan walks on the edge of trouble, doing and saying things that could jeopardize her position and her secret. However, she is smart enough to manage to make her plans come out correctly, and tactful enough not to be too challenging to those around her. Brother John Anglicus has gained the great respect of the doctor and her fellow monks.

Even at the most pious levels of religious structure, brutality is commonplace and somehow justified by the Bible.

There is some indication in this chapter that Brother Thomas will give her some trouble, but only a foreshadowing or an indication of her need to be constantly vigilant and protective of her true identity.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

The ceremony of Fulda to separate lepers from the general population is to take place. Lepers are considered sinners and must become dead to the living world. Joan recognizes that one woman, Madalgis, has only a simple skin infection and declares her not to be a leper. With Benjamin's support and the Abbott's strong disapproval, Joan and Benjamin travel to her home. Madalgis, once married to a landowner, has lost her husband and property, and has been left with her children to starve. Joan and Benjamin thoroughly clean her hut and force her to bathe, giving her clean clothing. Her skin heals and when they return to the abbey with her, her cure is regarded as a miracle.

Madalgis's son Arn serves Joan some cheese with blue mold, which she finds delicious. Working with Arn on mathematics, Joan realizes he is a quick learner and arranges for him to go to the abbey school.

Joan is named as a priest by the abbot, raising the bitter ire of Brother Thomas, who expected to be chosen. Thomas is jealous of Joan's wit and intelligence. He practices his pious logistics perfectly and is persistent.

Joan's elderly father arrives at the abbey to visit who he thinks is his son, John. He has lost his job as canon of Ingleheim because Joan's mother died in childbirth, raising the issue of his non-celibate lifestyle. He has come for a job at the abbey, but realizing that John is dead and this is actually his daughter Joan, he becomes so incensed that he dies on the spot from a heart attack, sputtering the word "Mulier" [woman] as he dies, but not before managing to accuse her now of murdering both her brothers. With her family all gone, Joan's past is dead, as well.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Joan's miracle healing of Madalgis, although it was purely common sense, has brought her great respect, as well as a promotion, but has stirred up evil intentions in Thomas.

The appearance of Joan's father prompts great suspense, since, if there is anyone who can betray her secret, it is him. He is not a good man and the reader is glad to see him go, in spite of Joan's melancholy over her final break with her childhood.

Perhaps Arn's blue cheese is the prototype for France's famous bleu cheese.



Chapters 17-18

Chapters 17-18 Summary

The three sons of the deceased Emperor Louis are in battle for the empire. Gerold's loyalty is to the youngest of the three, who has the most volatile and despotic temper, Lothar. Lothar does not care for Gerold and does not listen when he offers help in strategizing the battle. During their long wait for the enemy, Lothar's soldiers drink too much wine and charge too fast into the enemy, riding into the creek when the enemy is on the bank. During the gruesome battle, Gerold is hit by a swinging mace as well as an arrow, and wakes up among twenty thousand dead soldiers. Lothar has been defeated, the brothers Charles and Ludwig are celebrating with their troops. Gerold escapes quietly into the woods.

In the northern area of Fulda, the battle has little effect. After a period of unprecedented abundance, the area suffers disastrous rain, drought and famine, which results in a siege of the plague. Many of the monks are stricken, including Benjamin. Losing in Benjamin the only father figure she has ever had, Joan is deeply grieved, but as a priest she has a lot of work to do, giving mass and passing out the sacrament to the congregation. She decides to dip the host into the wine, rather than pass the already used cup among the people, some of whom are ill. The practice, called *Intinctio*, is adopted by other abbeys and the spread of plague slows, however, the abbot relieves Joan of her priesthood for her disobedience. When Joan realizes she has caught the plague, she escapes the abbey in a small boat and is rescued by her old friend, Arn, Madilgas's son, who is now prosperous and has a family of his own. Arn offers her a life in his home, but Joan decides to go to Rome, feeling that she will find her destiny there. She agrees to stay three months, teaching Arn's daughter, Arnalda, while she waits to depart with the traveling spice merchants. Joan gives Arnalda the St. Catherine's medallion Matthew gave her as a child.

Chapters 17-18 Analysis

Gerold backs Lothar because he can hold Frankland together, but the two brothers' forces are stronger. As with the other gruesome scenes, this one graphically details the human gore that transpires in war. Although Gerold is an officer, it is interesting that he is fighting a battle, since in earlier times his vassals would have fought for him. However, he has lost everything.

It is significant that the bishop is fighting alongside the soldiers, since it is against their religion to draw the blood of another. However, as with the bishop's paramour, the canon's married status and Joan's logic, religious rules and superstitions are not always heeded.



Although most people do not survive the plague once it is contracted, Joan seems destined to something greater.

Joan's kindness toward Arn's mother and his family is repaid with the offer to her of a permanent home. There is a new relationship with Arn's daughter that mimics Joan's relationship with her mother, and Joan may be having some regret in this chapter over choosing a life without children. She treats Arn's baby tenderly, as her mother treated her and we can detect a wistfulness in this chapter.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Anastasius is writing a history of the papacies of his time. He still hopes to be Pope to justify his father's faith in him. His current position is not one from which he can move to Pope, but he feels the upcoming Pope, Sergius, will reward him as Louis's son Lothar did when he betrayed Louis on the Field of Lies. Pope Gregory is taking a long time to die after reigning for seventeen years. The signal finally comes summoning Anastasius to Gregory's deathbed, and he manages to shed tears to give an appearance of grief.

Joan loves the mixture of art, knowledge, filth and decay contained in Rome. Again disguised as John of Anglicus, she is at the Schola Anglorum, and has a reputation as a brilliant scholar. She assists at mass and attends the sick in the infirmary, where the Romans are pitifully behind in their knowledge.

The new Pope, Sergius, has fallen ill with unendurable pain. The Romans are concerned that Lothar may assert his authority over them if they are without a Pope, and it has not been a long time since Gregory passed.. Benedict, Sergius's younger brother, has managed to assume great power in his position as papal missus, and is the power behind Sergius's papacy. Benedict encourages Sergius's greatest weakness—excesses of wine and food.

Chapter 19 Analysis

At this time in history, the pope is the highest ranking, holiest patient a doctor can treat. Although Joan has common sense about Christianity, this is certainly a leap upward in status for her, given that the Pope's other physicians are unable to heal him. It can also mean trouble for her, since she is an outsider and does not belong to the physician's association.

We are left in this chapter in suspense, knowing that Sergius is now aware of the time John Anglicus spent at Fulda, and wondering whether the evil Abbot Raban will find out where she is and ruin her.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Joan now understands that Sergius has a split personality, or divided spirit, brought on largely by drinking too much wine. She adjusts his diet, makes him exercise and prods him into returning to his papal duties, much to Benedict's distress. Sergius handles business without resorting to corruption, upsetting the flow of Benedict's powerful business dealings.

Joan is sent to treat the famous courtesan, Marioza, who attempts to seduce her, knowing her as John of Anglicus, but the visit is a trap set to incriminate John. When Marioza pulls her to the bed, a dozen guards seize Joan and take her to face Benedict, who plans to prove her unchaste to his brother, Sergius. Benedict accuses Joan of harming Sergius and sends her to the dungeon.

In the wet, slimy dungeon, which contains the remains of prisoners, courageous Joan finds a dry spot and uses her herbs to protect her from vermin and fortify herself while she waits.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Treachery abounds in the world of the Pope, with his brother usurping his authority and keeping him ill, and others coveting his position from a distance. Sergius is a good, fair man and values abstinence in holy men, which is why Benedict sets Joan up to look like she is having sex with a courtesan. Still, unable to reveal the secret which would acquit her of these charges, she is strong enough to take care of herself and bide her time while trapped in unthinkable conditions. The dungeon may not even be the lowest point in her life, given what she has been through, but it implies that things are going to change. The severity of punishment during this time is likely not exaggerated by Woolfolk-Cross, since sexual activity other than that between married men and women is considered sinful and unlawful.

Joan's healing powers come from her knowledge of the properties of herbs and of the human body. Again, it is her intellect and common sense, and not faith or superstition, that enable her healings. To others, however, they seem miraculous.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

The Day of the Ascension brings out every level of religious official, including Pope Sergius, in a gravely formal procession through Rome to the church. Sergius is sick again, having gone back to indulging in his bad diet and wine.

A messenger rushes in, interrupting the formalities, to tell them that the emperor Lothar is coming to avenge the fact that Sergius was consecrated as Pope without Lothar's approval. The messenger describes Lothar's army as savage, killing, plundering and ransacking farms and villages as they travel toward Rome.

At this news, Sergius faints with illness and dreams of being a child. He awakens and asks for his brother, but Benedict has taken money from the papal treasury, supposedly to pay Lothar in hopes of smoothing over the disagreement between them. However, Sergius knows Benedict has betrayed him.

To treat Sergius for his condition, Joan is released from the dungeon and explains how Benedict lied to him about her meeting with the courtesan. Knowing it will take a miracle to fend off Lothar's approaching attack, Joan tells Sergius they will make a miracle.

Lothar and his army finally arrive. As the huge basilica doors magically close by themselves, Sergius tells Lothar that the hand of God has barred the holy altar against anyone who does not come with a pure mind and goodwill toward the republic. The Pope and the emperor then kiss each other in peace, and the huge doors mysteriously jolt open again. With Lothar's men on the ground praying, Lothar and Sergius enter the basilica together.

The hydraulic trick Joan and Gerold had figured out has brought temporary peace to Rome, but Joan's emotional pain over Gerold resurfaces.

Chapter 21 Analysis

This is a sweeping and tension filled chapter. Joan suffers in the dungeon. Benedict flees with the Papacy's treasury. Lothar arrives ready to wipe out Rome. Sergius is healed and draws on his moral strength to help his people. Joan uses her great knowledge to make peace and she is sad, once again, over the loss of Gerold.

We get the sense of the rapid chain of events, all of which are monumental, which lead Joan back again to her feelings for Gerold. The events of war are based on historical fact, which makes them more fascinating. Joan's expertise and her knowledge of hydraulic engineering, learned with Gerold, saves thousands of lives.



Chapters 22-23

Chapters 22-23 Summary

Traveling in bad weather with his small rear division of Lothar's army, Gerold and his men reach the ancient road, Via Francigena, on which they will travel to Rome. Along the way they see the remains of villages, pillaged, burned and robbed of their men, the people having suffered atrocities at the hands of Lothar's army. Gerold resolves to end his service to Lothar after reaching Rome with his men. Gerold comes upon Benedict, who is riding away with the papal treasury. He binds Benedict and his men with the intention of taking them to Rome.

During a huge feast for Lothar's army, Benedict is brought before Sergius, who has overindulged in food and wine. He orders that Benedict be treated as a thief, and goes into a seizure. Exhausted and not wanting to face the Pope's physicians, Joan is shown by Arighis, Sergius's assistant, a secret passage from Sergius's chambers to his private chapel.

In the chapel, Joan hears Anastasius take an oath of allegiance to Lothar, in exchange for the position of Pope after Sergius is gone. Gerold enters the chapel.

Benedict's hands are severed for thievery and he dies. Sergius is distraught, and makes his guilty confessions to Joan, who is still a priest. John of Anglicus gives Sergius the penance of abstaining from wine and four-footed animals until his death.

Gerold and Joan are reunited, their misunderstandings over her arranged wedding resolved. They are still totally in love at a very deep level. Gerold, in exchange for Villarais, has his freedom from Lothar's army and wants Joan to marry him. She is torn, still wary of giving herself to a man and devoted to Sergius's welfare. She rejects Gerold and he leaves.

Chapters 22-23 Analysis

Lothar's power has overtaken any sense of morality, as evidenced by his brutality toward anyone who will not take an oath of loyalty to him. His opportunity to swing the people's allegiance toward him, and away from the Pope, may come through the cloying Anastasius, who wants the papacy at all costs. Gerold, a kind and strong leader, has decided to end his allegiance to Lothar, whose immoral behavior has increased with his reign as Emperor.

Deceitful Benedict, now incarcerated, has seen the end of his brother's compassion.

Joan is confused. Now that her true nature is being called upon, she is loathe to give up the life she has built for herself as a man and cannot imagine living the boring and

stifled life as a wife. However, she is deeply in love with Gerold and is so ambiguous in her decision, the reader knows this is not the end of it.

Never one to abuse her authority, Joan's sentence of abstinence for Sergius is harsh but beneficial to him, physically and spiritually. Joan knows that when Sergius is gone, Anastasius will take his place, making Sergius's health even more important. The elevation of her duties to being his private priest is also significant.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Lothar leaves Rome to avoid the pestilence brought on by summer heat. Sergius is high in the peoples' favor and is healthy and stronger. The orphanage is being rebuilt and Romans are more prosperous. The news that a fleet of Saracen [ancient Islamic or Arab] ships is on the way to Rome startles Joan, who knows they do not fear Christian gods, but Sergius's faith has grown so strong, he rejects her advice to move the holy relics to a safer place, and tells his people that God will protect Rome. Joan is more realistic.

Gerold is now serving in the army of the Prince of Benevento. Prince Siconulf grants Gerold three divisions of troops to go and protect the holy city from the Saracen invasion.

Slaughtering the Roman troops, the Saracen plunder the basilica, taking the holy cross of Constantine. Sergius collapses, asking Joan to help the people get through this. Joan and Leo, a Cardinal, try to keep the people praying, but Gerold's army arrives and overtakes the marauders, saving Rome. However, St. Peter's and all its holy relics have been plundered. Sergius, blamed by the people and himself for the ruination of the relics, finally drinks himself to death.

The attitude in Rome has turned against Lothar for not saving Rome from the Saracens. Anastasius's father, Arsenius, tells him to denounce Lothar, but to tell Lothar in private that, in spite of what he might be forced to say politically, Anastasius will support him after he becomes Pope.

The entire city is required to attend the election of the new Pope. Anastasius publicly speaks out against Lothar, but Joan exposes the secret deal she overheard him make with Lothar in the Chapel. The people proceed to elect Cardinal Leo, who in turn appoints Anastasius the Cardinal of St. Marcellus. Leo gives Gerold the highest military honor, naming him *superista*, and appoints Joan as *nomenclator*. Joan and Gerold realize they will work together, but still will not marry.

Chapter 24 Analysis

We meet Leo in this chapter, who quickly becomes the new Pope. Just when Joan is relieved of her duty to Sergius and thinks she might live a normal life with Gerold, Leo is elected instead, diverting their paths again. The devious Anastasius has failed in his clever plan to be Pope, and all seems well. Joan and Gerold are both high level heroes in their own areas, Gerold having saved Rome and Joan having saved the pope, but their deepest personal needs continue to go unfulfilled.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

Pope Leo is a busy, constructive leader, repairing and fortifying the city. Joan suggests they extend the city wall around the basilica to protect it, and the huge project is undertaken. Unskilled workers pour into Rome and the wall becomes an issue among the people. Anastasius is still plotting to become Pope and return the people's loyalty to the Frankish throne of Lothar, and sabotages the wall building project with fire, which spreads to the school building where Gerold is staying. Leo himself goes to help fight the fire and Joan is determined to find Gerold. Holding two children on his back, Gerold finds his way through the smoke by hearing Joan's voice. Gerold takes control of the firefighting effort and manages to save the basilica, which the people consider a miracle of Leo's. Leo learns Anastasius is responsible for the fire.

Vicedominus Arighis is killed protecting the Pope from burning debris. Arsenius conspires with the new vicedominus, Waldipert, who informs him of the Pope's knowledge of the arson. Arsenius makes Anastasius flee to Frankland in order to bribe Lothar's supporters. Pope Leo excommunicates Anastasius, charitably only terminating his priestly authority.

Chapter 25 Analysis

It is important to remember that certain events in this story, including the building of the Leonine wall and the descent of Frankish forces on Rome, are historical fact. The author has listed a chronology of events at the end of the book to help the reader keep track of what is factual.

Pope Leo is a fair and charitable Pope and a strong leader, especially compared to Sergius. Unfortunately, his new vicedominus is up to no good and, although Anastasius is banned from Rome, his father Arsenius, the force behind his actions, remains in Rome, still determined that his son will assume the papacy.



Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

The building of the wall is proceeding, but another Saracen fleet is preparing to attack Rome. Pope Leo requests a fleet of armed ships be sent from Naples and is relieved when they comply. Sudden rough weather forces the flimsy Saracen ships to break apart, and Joan wonders if Leo might really have been touched by a divine presence.

Hundreds of the captured Saracens who survive the Romans' wrath are put to work on the wall. Leo is restoring all of the saintly places of Rome, including St. Peter's. Since he is very busy, John Anglicus (Joan) has undertaken some of Leo's charitable duties and is being called "Little Pope."

Having lost his second son, Arsenius is more determined than ever that Anastasius must be Pope, but Leo is strong and vital, not likely to die any time soon. But, Leo now becomes mysteriously ill and nothing Joan does helps him. Joan realizes Leo is being poisoned and knows that Waldipert is the culprit. Waldipert is found dead, floating in the river. Leo dies and Rome is again without a Pope.

Anastasius has succeeded in winning Lothar's support and is coming back to Rome to claim his title. Joan agrees with Gerold and makes the decision to go away with him. She prays for guidance, and is told she has been elected Lord Pope, a decision supported by the papal party. Arsenius and Anastasius, with all their meticulous and treacherous scheming, are foiled again.

Joan, the new Pope John, accepts this new destiny and vows to serve Rome all her life.

Chapter 26 Analysis

Each time Joan and Gerold come close to binding themselves together, her service to her fellow humans takes priority. In this case, she is now in the highest level of service and cannot deny that this is the correct path. They both know that this election is too huge and meaningful for human emotions to take priority and they both understand the passion of public service. This repeating pattern between them seems to signal they might never succeed in having a normal life together, since Joan has become so indispensable.



Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

As one of her first directives, Joan wants Rome's Marcian aqueduct rebuilt. All engineering information about their construction was lost in history, and Joan challenges Gerold to lead the project.

Joan's position keeps her extremely busy with religious rituals, holidays, masses and feasts. The practice of intinction, which she introduced at Fulda, has been widely discussed and mostly accepted. She is concerned about Gottschalk, whom she helped liberate from the abbey, and whose heresy case has come before the synod. She agrees to refute Gottschalk's pessimistic theories, but condemns Archbishop Raban, formerly the abbot at Fulda, for his harsh treatment of him. Forty two canons are passed that reform ecclesiastical education and discipline, earning Joan the respect of her colleagues. However, when she opens a school for women, their shock is palpable. But Joan soothes them with diplomacy and continues to have their support.

A freak rainstorm inundates the Martius area of Rome, and Joan asks Gerold how they can save the poverty-stricken people from drowning. Considering the ragged beggars her equals in God's eyes, Joan accompanies Gerold to help rescue the people. As she and Gerold try to rescue a small boy, the northernmost gate of the Aurelian Wall gives way and the Tiber river bursts into Rome in a tidal wave.

The boat she and Gerold are in is forced through a window and comes to rest in a room. Gerold is unconscious, but Joan saves him by warming him with her bare skin. They finally have physical intimacy after so many years, twin souls linked forever.

The men at the patriarchium are afraid that Pope John has been lost in the flood and Arsenius is gleeful. Gerold sees this as Joan's opportunity to escape with him, but she cannot abandon her responsibilities. They are rescued, and separated again, but Gerald tells her she is his true wife.

Chapter 27 Analysis

Joan's passion is to help those less fortunate, not to pray for them or build more churches for them. She is finally at the top of her power, making decisions and being shown great respect by the highest ranking men in Rome. Once again, and finally, she chooses service over her personal happiness and rejects Gerold's pleas for a normal life with her. As a pope, Joan is humane and perhaps the most rational of any so far, but her decision to rescue people in a boat may not have been the smartest thing she could have done.



Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

While the people of Rome love Joan for being one of them, the optimates and high clergy are scandalized by her behavior and disagree with her progressive thinking. Arsenius sees an opportunity to discredit her when she circumvents the bureaucracy's red tape to get funds for Gerold's project on the aqueduct. Further, Joan angers Magister Militum Daniel by appointing a Greek priest Bishop instead of his son, and Joan knows Daniel will go to Arsenius to make trouble.

In the meantime, Anastasius has won the respect and favor of Lothar with his knowledge and wit and, learning of Daniel's situation, sends for him.

Joan is pregnant and using her herbs to try to abort the fetus, wrestling with her Hippocratic oath, but the ergot does not work. Once again Gerold tries to convince her to escape with him, but she says she must wait one month, until Easter. Joan has decided, finally, to go with Gerold. However, word arrives that Lothar and Anastasius are on their way to Rome, so she puts Gerold off for another few days. Lothar has restored Anastasius's cardinal status to him.

When Joan sees Lothar, she sees Gerold tied up with rope, arrested for treason against the Emperor, charged with conspiring to return Rome to Greek control. Daniel has brought the charge. Joan is determined to rectify the situation.

Chapter 28 Analysis

How many times can Joan reject Gerold before he finally gives up on her? Now they have created a child, and she still finds reasons to wait until she can leave with him.

Joan is on shaky ground not being a Roman and having such controversial ideas and viewpoints. Although she is kind to the general population, the upper echelon around her sees her election to Pope as a mistake.

As we are approaching the end of this story, Joan is pregnant, Gerold is imprisoned, Lothar is back, and Anastasius has renewed status and ammunition. It is clear that Joan's story is about to end, not to mention the saga of Joan and Gerold.



Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

At Gerold's trial, Pope John speaks out of turn, denying Anastasius's claim that Gerold suggested an alliance with Greece to rid the city of Frankish domination. She swears her truth on the Bible. However, Anastasius invokes the law of conjuration, which says that whomever can amass the greatest number of oath helpers to support his word, wins. Soon, Gerold's side amasses a group, as well, but it is not as large as Daniel's. Joan asks Cicero's six evidentiary questions she learned as a girl, which are who, what, when, where, how and why, and proves Daniel is lying because his son was passed over as bishop in favor of a Greek. Joan strips Daniel of his title and banishes him from Rome.

Totally frustrated, Anastasius plans to take the patriarchium by storm and let Lothar come to his support.

In a religious procession designed to fend off frost from the crops, Joan rides with her huge entourage toward the corn fields, with Gerold by her side. Joan recognizes Marioza the courtesan, who asks for, and receives her holy forgiveness.

A group of ruffians distracts the procession, and as Gerold tries to follow them, a small group of men turns on him, stabbing him. Joan dismounts and rushes toward Gerold's body and they see each other momentarily before he dies. She lays him down and stands up to walk away, but goes into the throes of miscarriage. The holy men immediately think she is possessed by the devil when a premature, dead infant is expelled from her body. In a pool of her own blood, Joan understands the oneness of God, and dies.

Chapter 29 Analysis

Anastasius is relieved of the job of killing Joan, since she dies from her own "witchcraft." Joan's education and intellect, in the end, enable her political demise, and her true nature as a woman brings her death. Although she advanced the culture in medicine, religion, philosophy and law, her love for Gerold finally breaks down her well-kept façade but, fortunately, she never has to live with the consequences.



Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

Anastasius never does achieve the throne of the papacy, since Lothar withdraws his support of him and sends him to a monastery. Anastasius finally is appointed by Pope Nicholas as papal librarian, an office he holds for thirty years. Anastasius, now eight-seven, is respected around the world for his learning, his *Liber Pontificalis*, the history of popes, being his legacy. Since he is the one who wrote the history, he obliterated Joan's name from the official record of Popes and her story is lost and forgotten.

However, Archbishop Arnaldo, who copies the book years later, restores Joan's name to the list. Arnaldo, actually Arnalda, is the daughter of Arn, still wears the St. Catherine medallion given to her by Joan when she was a girl, and like Joan, disguises herself as a man to pursue her ambitions.

The author feels that the disappearance of Joan from the Church's records is due to a concerted effort to destroy manuscripts in the seventeenth century, when Protestantism is looming. Also, the people surrounding Joan would have had reason to protect history from the truth, since a deposed Pope's appointed cardinals, bishops, deacons and priests would all be deposed also. In other countries, Joan's reign as pope is recorded in ancient manuscripts, but is scarce in Rome. Apparently Napoleon's rule is deleted from France's history, but, like Joan's, is so well documented in other parts of the world that it is undeniably true.

Cross further offers the information that each newly elected Pope after Joan is forced to sit for a chair exam so that the examiner could declare him to be a man as a condition of consecration. Further, the "shunned street" in Rome had formerly been the sacred road, but afterward, papal processions avoid it, quoting John Burcardt in 1486 who noted the road where "...John Anglicus gave birth to a child..."

Epilogue Analysis

Donna Woolfolk Cross provides an abundance of evidence for Pope Joan's existence, and reveals substantial room for doubt, as well. The epilogue sheds further light on her research and lends it more credibility. Finally, however, Joan's story must be presented as fiction because the truth is buried in history.



Characters

Joan of Ingleheim

Joan of Ingleheim is daughter of the Canon of Ingleheim and his wife, Gudrun, a Saxon heathen he rescues when he is a missionary. Joan is their youngest child, and outlives her two older brothers, as well as her parents. Being an extremely bright and resourceful person, Joan manages to save herself from a Viking attack by disguising herself as a man. Giving up her feminine identity, Joan finds it easier to attain the learning she craves and becomes involved in the world. After serving time as a monk, a priest, physician to the Pope and nomenclator, Joan, as John Anglicus, is elected to the seat of Pope, where she reigns in Rome until her death. Joan's longterm love affair with Count Gerold lives in Joan's heart throughout her life, but they are able to be together as man and woman only once, resulting in Joan's pregnancy, which, as John Anglicus, she is forced to hide beneath her papal robes. Joan's death comes quickly as she watches Gerold's murder and proceeds to miscarry in the street, bleeding to death. There is historical evidence that at least some of Joan's story is factual, but was perhaps removed from Rome's history books out of shame and in an effort to protect the Catholic church.

Count Gerold of Villarais

Gerold is a red-haired knight who first sees Joan when she meets the bishop of Dorstadt, arriving to attend school. Although there is a considerable age difference between them, Gerold falls in love with her, and is her best friend as she grows up. Gerold is a smart man, a soldier and also a civil engineer, directing huge building projects in Rome, including the Leonine Wall, as well as the restoration of the aqueduct. Having lost his entire family and his estate, Gerold returns to his military career, fighting battles for Lothar, the emperor of Europe. He is not aware that Joan is alive until years later, when he discovers her in Rome disguised as the male physician to the pope. He begins an unsuccessful quest to convince Joan to shed her disguise and leave Rome with him to live a normal, married life. Gerold is eventually betrayed and killed by Anastasius's men, as loyalties and power shifted between religious and political factions continuously during this period of history.

Canon of Ingleheim

The Canon of Ingleheim is a cruel and depraved man who is mentally and physically abusive to his wife and his children. He lives a life of cold, sparse poverty in service to his village as their religious leader. As a young missionary, the Canon rescues his wife, Gudrun, from the Saxon area of Germany where the devastation and destruction from the Vikings forced her into starvation. Her only payment in exchange is to listen to him preach.



As an old man, the Canon arrives at the monastery at Fulda to visit his long lost son, John. He discovers John is really his daughter, Joan and that John has been killed. In his rage, he dies of a heart attack, trying desperately to reveal to the monks that John is a woman. He is a cold, rigid man who does not belong in the profession of a clergyman. His view of women is that they are basically worthless for anything besides breeding, and this attitude extends particularly toward his bright, intelligent daughter, Joan. Hiding behind his religious status, he justifies his cruelty and rigidity and is eventually fired from his job as Canon.

Gudrun and Matthew of Ingleheim

Gudrun, Joan's mother, a blond Saxon, is rescued from hunger after an attack on her village by Karolus by the missionary John, who later becomes Canon of Ingleheim. She loves the mythical fairy tales and stories of her youth, and shares them privately with her one daughter, Joan, against the wishes of her husband. Her childhood beliefs are considered pagan and evil in the culture she is forced to adopt, but she never forgets the songs, stories and characters.

Matthew, Joan's eldest brother, is her best friend and mentor in childhood, but dies from a disease when Joan is still young. Matthew secretly teaches Joan to read and write, since she is prohibited from learning anything due to her sex. Matthew is a kind and loving figure whose life is cut short, and whose death leaves Joan seeking more and more knowledge beyond the confines of Ingleheim.

Aesculapius

A Greek scholar, Aesculapius stops by the Canon's home for a visit and discovers Joan's talents, taking her under his wing and teaching her the wisdom of reason and logic, as well as religion. He is a huge influence in Joan's life. Although his beliefs are considered radical, his scholarly talents land him a job in the Bishop's school. However, the same talents eventually lead to his being fired, since he is not superstitious and will not subscribe to religious doctrines which cannot be reasoned out to a logical conclusion.

John of Ingleheim

Joan's brother, John, is a slow child much more intrigued by warfare and bravery than scholastic matters. John has a learning disability of some kind, and is a disappointment to his father, who expects him to take his brother's place as the family scholar. Stealing his father's knife, John goes to Dorstadt to attend school with his sister, Joan. At school, John shuns Joan in embarrassment., since girls are not supposed to be smart or educated. When Vikings raid Dorstadt, John is killed doing what he loves most, battling the enemy, using his father's knife.



Arsenius

The father of Anastasius, Arsenius is the head of a very old and very wealthy Roman family with genetic ties to Caesar. He forces his young son to witness an assassination, telling him to watch and learn what happens when one speaks out against the emperor. Extremely ambitious, Arsenius plots and schemes from his mansion in Rome to position his son, Anastasius, as Pope but is ultimately unsuccessful.

Anastasius

The treacherous son of Arsenius who tries for years to become Pope. Anastasius is forced to watch his uncle's assassination as a child, which affects him for the rest of his life. Anastasius is responsible for the fire that burns the Borgo and other deceptions, including the deaths of Gerold and Joan. He never becomes Pope but becomes known for his written history of the papacy which, interestingly, does not include the papacy of John Anglicus until it is modified much later.

Gregory, Sergius and Leo

Gregory, Sergius and Leo are the three respective Popes prior to Joan's reign as Pope. Joan is medical and spiritual attendant to both Sergius and Leo. Leo is responsible for the building of the Leonine wall around Rome. Of the three, Leo is the strongest and kindest leader.

Benedict

Pope Sergius's brother, who controls the papacy and eventually steals its treasury. He is put to death by his brother, Sergius by having his hands severed, when he tries to steal the papal treasury.

Lothar

The Emperor of Europe who resides in Frankland and invades Rome with the intention of sacking it. Lothar witnesses what he thinks is a miracle, and declares peace between himself and Pope Sergius. The miracle is the self-opening door of the basilica, which is implemented by Joan, having been designed years earlier by Count Gerold.

Arighis

The loyal vicedominus, or majordomo of the papal palace, who saves Pope Leo from burning debris and, in the process, burns to death. He becomes a close friend to John Anglicus (Joan), who tends Leo and helps him with his papal duties.

Waldipert

The disloyal vicedominus who replaces Arighis, and who betrays Pope Leo to Anastasius.



Objects/Places

Grubenhau

The house of the canon of Ingleheim.

Lateran Palace

The papal residence in Rome.

Dorstadt

Joan's first school, outside of her home, where she and her brother John attend the bishops schola.

Villar

The estate of Count Gerold.

cella

A cella is a chapel.

Reredos

A screen behind the open back of a church altar.

St. Peter's Basilica

The Roman cathedral built in the honor of St. Peter, apostle of Jesus.

Frankland

The territory dominated by the Franks which, when divided in half later, became France and Germany.

Borgo

The district in Rome bordering Vatican City, on the western banks of the Tiber River.



Schola Anglorum

The school in Rome for those of English descent, where Joan is admitted in Rome because of her father's English heritage.

Via Francegina

This is an ancient road built specifically for Europeans to make the pilgrimage to Rome.

Liber Pontificalis

The book of papal history written by Anastasius.



Themes

Knowledge over superstition

Joan's early ability to reason through problems and questions reflects the dawning of a new age. She is not willing to settle for the accepted stories which people concoct to try to explain their world, but chooses to look underneath for the real truth. The author presents the Dark Ages as a time during which people locked themselves into a fearful belief system so rigid that it prevented them from looking beyond it. Without the means to determine the truth of natural phenomena, such as the weather, they resort to stories and, once a story is accepted, it becomes sinful, or unlawful, to think otherwise. Subversive thinkers are those who attempt to apply logic to their surroundings, and they are often persecuted. An example in this story is the scholar, Aesculapius. Although he is acknowledged to be a brilliant thinker and teacher, his partiality to logic finally ousts him from his teaching job. The factor that generates this conflict between superstition and reason is the confusing mixture of religion and politics during this period of history. Religion is primarily based on superstition and, since the papacy wields great power over Europe in every respect, people are expected to believe in the stories. However, educated scholars, whose ideas make more sense, questioned the use of stories to explain natural phenomenon, causing conflict and jeopardizing themselves. Early in the story, the midwife Hrotrud is executed for being a witch due to her knowledge of herbal medicine. In spite of the fact that she has actually cured people, she is suspected of witchcraft since her cures cannot be explained with stories.

Evolution of humanity

In a time when disputes are settled through sheer barbarism, the rich are gluttonous and the poor are devastated, a small percentage of the population is becoming educated and more realistic. It is no longer acceptable in our times to conduct the slaughter of an entire village because we see ourselves as being more civilized. In the dark ages, it was a regular event to gather in the town square to see someone tortured, beheaded, hanged or dismembered for violation of a rule or for wrong thinking. We now view those punishments as barbaric, and see ourselves as having grown beyond them as tools of social control. Even third world countries whose tribes formerly slaughtered and maimed one another are gradually developing rules of conduct that we might call more civilized. As the Renaissance dawns, subsequent to this story, literature and the arts become accepted and desirable, and education is more highly valued. However, it takes a tremendous amount of bloodshed on European soil before invasion and pillaging became less popular. Of course, one can argue that we are as uncivilized today as we were in the dark ages, but we go about it differently. However, our advances in medicine, education and general tolerance are remarkable compared with the middle ages.



Love heals

Throughout this story, Joan finds people who offer her love and support, and these relationships enrich her life in a way that her learning does not. Gerold, her mother, Madilgis and Arn, and Pope Leo provide an emotional balance in Joan's bizarre life. Young Joan's love for her brother Matthew and her teacher, Aescalapius, provides the inspiration which pushes her forward in her pursuit of knowledge. Since she is not allowed romantic relationships in her role as a male priest, Joan would live strictly within her intellect and logic, had she not had love in her life. A strong determined woman, we only see Joan's softer side when it comes to her mother, Gudrun, Arn's baby, and Gerold. The religion of her time does not emphasize love as a spiritual salve, but it clearly provides healing for Joan's spirit throughout this story. It is interesting that this author chooses to weave the idea of Joan's love for Gerold through Joan's story, since her mark in history is not related to love, but to Joan's courage and bravery and achievements while pretending she was a man.

The inferior role of women

Sadly, in order to effect the incredible accomplishments described in this story, Joan is forced to deny and disguise her sex, but in the end, she is proven to be just as bright, capable and brave as any male character in the story, and goes on to career levels that most men could only dream of. This theme of women's struggle for equal recognition is ongoing, even to this day. The underlying idea that women are not as capable as men has affected the status of women for throughout time. The logical reason for this must surely lie in the fact that women are the ones who give birth and suckle children, a fact which could be seen as a handicap in a busy, productive society. Certainly, childbirth signifies the end of Joan's life of achievements in a very final way. In this story, giving in to her womanhood eventually results in death, which supports the underlying concept that women, finally, really are the weaker sex. It is not the author's intention to imply this idea, since she is simply reconstructing history, but it clearly comes through in the story of Pope Joan. Unfortunately, there is a mixed message for young women who read this story, but primarily, it is a history lesson to remind us of how far we have come, and how far we have to go.

Style

Point of View

Pope Joan is told from the omnipotent viewpoint of the author, which often allows the reader to know things the characters themselves do not know. Woolfolk-Cross begins the story with the birth of Joan, and jumps in the next chapter to Joan's childhood, later bringing back the midwife who delivered the infant Joan. She also takes us abruptly to Anastasius at different events in his life that do not weave and connect with Joan's life until much later in the story. As readers, we observe the unfolding of this story from all angles, including the individual emotions and thinking of the characters.

Occasionally, as when Joan is studying at Fulda, a few years pass in between chapters. Joan and Gerold grow into middle age over the course of this story. Joan is in her early forties when she dies, but meets Gerold when she is fifteen.

Setting

The setting is medieval Europe, primarily the old "Frankland," which many years later divides into east and west, becoming Germany and France. Later, the story takes place primarily in Rome, Italy, in the papal palace and surrounding areas. There is much journeying by the characters, but they are mostly located in that one area of the world. We experience the harsh cold winters of the Alps and Germany, as well as the heat, rain and flooding in Rome. The countryside is rough and transportation is rough and cumbersome. The times are violent and brutal with conflicts commonly solved through war, including the pillaging and plundering of small villages. Death from murder and disease is commonplace. A vast contrast between the rich and poor is noticeable in the story, as Joan leaves the poverty of her home, arrives at the elaborate home of the wealthy bishop, goes on to the starkness of the monastery and later to the luxury of the papal palace.

Language and Meaning

Donna Woolfolk Cross writes in a style that flows conversationally, giving the impression of a person telling a story, occasionally interspersing dialogue and monologue. She very smoothly uses an abundance of Latin in her writing, but rarely leaves the reader wondering its meaning. Without being intrusive, she manages to slip in the meanings and definitions of most of the obscure words and places that surface from her knowledge of history, so the story moves along fairly quickly.

Cross manages to turn what is occasionally dry data, for example, political or medicinal facts, into readable and non-tedious prose, exposing the reader to a time that few people know much about. Since feudalism has not developed yet in the 9th century, this



medieval history is a refreshing change from the jousting and castle life of many medieval stories, and is focused primarily on the dominance of religion during that time.

Many of the events in the book are based on historical fact, and the author does a seamless job of weaving the fictional aspect with the historical aspects. For instance, reference is made to the competition between the decaying Rome and increasingly beautiful city of Constantinople, and while fact that does not necessarily make any difference to the story, it sets the tone of the feelings and values of the people at that time.

That there really was a Pope Joan is debatable, but Woolfolk Cross does a credible job of presenting the historical data which might substantiate her existence and the circumstances of her death, as well as the possible reasons she is not clearly noted in historical records.

Structure

This historical novel is divided into 29 chapters, with a prologue and epilogue and is 422 pages long. Included are author's notes in the back, which make the novel even more fascinating , since many of the events are based on historical fact.

Chronologically, the story begins with Joan's difficult birth and ends with her terrible death. Her experiences in between, although not defined year by year, flow in segments of time, such as her first lessons with Matthew, her departure from home, her residence with Gerold, her departure from the abbey, and her journey to Rome. Interspersed in the chapters about Joan's life are chapters involving Arsenius and his son Anastasius, whose lives do not cross Joan's until she is involved in the papacy later, as well as Gerold's battles as an officer in Lothar's army.

The Latin and foreign phrases and names may cause the reader some initial intimidation, but once one understands the author's style of revealing their meanings, the story becomes smooth and easy to read.



Quotes

"A girl," he said. "so it was all for nothing." "Do not say so, sir." Hrotrud was suddenly fearful that the canon's disappointment might mean less for her to eat. "The child is healthy and strong. God grant that she live to do credit to your name." The canon shook his head. "She is a punishment from God. A punishment for my sins — and hers." He motioned toward Gudrun, who lay motionless. "Will she live?" (p.8)

The men released Theodorus, and he fell forward onto his knees. Then he raised his head and Anastasius screamed in terror. The face was dreadful. Blood poured from the black and empty holes where Theodorus's eyes had been, streaming from his chin onto his shoulders and chest. Anastasius buried his face in his father's side. He felt his father's large hands on his shoulders and heard his voice, strong and unwavering. "No," his father said. "You cannot hide, my son." The hands impelled him, pushing him away, turning him back toward the grisly scene before him. "Watch," the voice commanded, "and learn. This is the price exacted for lack of subtlety and art. Theodorus pays now for wearing his loyalty to the Emperor so openly." (p.43)

The truth was that Joan worked mostly with pre-Christian, classical texts. Aesculapius revered the "pagan" texts of Cicero, Seneca, Lucan and Ovid, regarded as anathema by most scholars of the day. He was teaching Joan to read Greek using the ancient texts of Menander and Homer, whose poetry the canon regarded as nothing less than pagan blasphemy. Taught by Aesculapius to appreciate clarity and style, Joan never considered the question of whether Homer's poetry was acceptable in terms of Christian doctrine; God was in it, because it was beautiful. (p.46)

"We watched the white wolf give birth to her pups! They are not born dead, despite what people say, " she announced jubilantly. "Lucretius was right!" Richild stared at her as if she were mad. "All things in nature are explainable," Joan continued. "Don't you see? The pups were born alive, with no reliance on the supernatural, just like Lucretius said!" "What godless speech is this? Child, are you feverish?" (p. 107)

The world is not as we would have it, she thought, no matter how skillfully we may conjure it. (p. 310)

"Changeling child, you are what you will not be; what you will become is other than you are." This made little sense, unless it meant simply that she would soon be a woman grown. But then why had the old woman called her a "changeling?" Balthild continued, "You aspire to that which is forbidden." Joan started with surprise, and the old woman tightened her clasp. "Yes, changeling. I see your secret heart. You will not be disappointed. Greatness will be yours, beyond your dreams, and grief, beyond your imaginings." (p. 126)

She went to the altar. Loosening her cap, she placed a mass of her hair upon the altar. It curled thickly over the smooth stone surface, almost white in the dimming light. She lifted the knife. Slowly, deliberately, she began to cut. (p. 157)



"My lord, he is a scourge upon the earth"—the man's tongue was loosed now that he had caught his breath—"his soldiers plunder all before them, ransacking the farms, carrying off the livestock, pulling up the vines by their roots. They take what they want, and what they do not want, they burn. Those who get in their way they kill without mercy—women, old men, babes in arms—none are spared. The horror"—his voice cracked—"the horror of it cannot be imagined." (p. 273)

Like most pagan monuments in Rome, the temple had been stripped of its precious metals: the gilt rosettes that had once adorned the coffers of the dome were gone, as were the golden bas-reliefs ornamenting the pediment of the pronaos. The niches lining the walls were empty, their marble statues having been carted off to the lime kilns to be turned into building material for the walls of Christian churches. (p. 301)

"...John Anglicus gave birth to a child." (p. 422)



Topics for Discussion

In Pope Joan's time, the practice of feudalism has not yet begun. How can we account for the barbarism and brutality that dominates Europe in these early centuries, when higher learning has already been taking place in countries like Greece? What effects, if any, does structure of feudalism have on the marauding and pillaging of villages and innocent people?

What basis of the Catholic religion makes it such a dominant force in Rome?

Is the separation of religious and political power in the 9th century in Europe distinct, such as the Pope vs. Lothar? How do the two factions differ and how are they the same?

Where do the fairy tales and stories come from that Gudrun tell Joan as a child? Why are they considered sinful?

Joan's talent for logic is one considered available only to men during her time. In the last 1100 years, on average, have women gained equal respect for scholarship and knowledge?

What are the personal characteristics possessed by Joan that make her different from other women of her time? In what way does her environment contribute to her later successes?

Discuss Joan's relationship with her mother. Would Gudrun be considered a good mother in our age?

Discuss the verdicts and sentences handed down by Gerold in Chapter 12. What role might illiteracy and ignorance have played in the troubles of that era?