The Radicalization of Joan of Arc Before and After the French Revolution

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Volume 17, numéro 2, 1990

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1073071ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/1073071ar

Résumé de l'article

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La Restauration bourbonne et la défaite de 1870-1871 ont favorisé les deux grandes vagues d'images traditionnelles de Jeanne d'Arc contre lesquelles nous devons opposer le développement d'une autre tradition. Dès la fin du xixe siècle, dans une atmosphère de polarisation autour de l'affaire Dreyfus, elle devint en fait la mascotte de l'aile d'extrême droite.

Le développement d'un concept différent de Jeanne d'Arc s'effectua à travers des œuvres littéraires de Southey, Schiller, Michelet, Dumas père, Twain, Anatole France et Shaw auxquelles s'associent des images. On ne parvint à une notion et une image de Jeanne d'Arc entièrement féministe qu'au moement où les femmes de la période edwardienne façonnèrent une Jeanne d'Arc à leur propre image.
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Résumé

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Joan of Arc did not always symbolize freedom, independence, and insuperable capability. In fact, the forging of a recognizably modern Joan of Arc of this design sprang from a dubious eighteenth-century tribute and took more than a century and a half to perfect. The concept also owes much to Ariosto’s profoundly admirable literary heroine Bradamante, a type of “Christian Virgin” that served both to shape and to fulfill expectations of who and what a dynamic heroine should be. More frequently, though, Joan of Arc has been claimed as a stalwart by much more patriarchal advocates.

The longest-lived stream of images emphasizes her importance to the Church and state as a paragon of obedience. This continues an older tradition, represented in literature by the late seventeenth-century poem of Jean Chapelain and in art by images which invariably suppressed her transvestism to depict her in a flowing dress and passive mien. The new interpretation of Joan as the symbol of freedom and independence, whether of her person, gender, or nation, emerged from complex and irregular origins. Jean Chapelain’s turgid poem, which was some thirty years in the making and first appeared in 1656, was well received by most, although Boileau consigned it to a dying style of prolix writing. An image in the first volume depicts Joan in a matronly gown, pointing heavenward as an angel descends to convince the Dauphin of his Destiny. No more conservative image of Joan of Arc exists: she is incorrectly garbed in women’s dress and her mission is devoted entirely and equally to Church and monarchy.

In 1730, Voltaire started La Pucelle d’Orléans as a private amusement and a parody of Chapelain. It lampooned not only the Church’s position on relics and saintly cults but the equally bizarre conventions of knightly chivalry that form the basis of his principal literary model—Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso. It became prudent for Voltaire to publish the poem in 1762 because even ruder pirated versions kept appearing in
print, although publication only intensified the Church's opprobrium against it. It remains a scandalously funny, rudely impudent burlesque, replete with an amorous winged ass, jealous Saints Denis and George waging war alongside Joan and the English-like Olympians at Troy, and Agnès Sorel as an ingénue whose pulchritude is so overwhelming that the author insists that neither she nor her partners can be faulted for her numerous infidelities. It is hard to say whose sacred cow is most offended by this torrent of abuse: the Church, chivalry and its literature, or women with minds of their own.

Curiously, few of the illustrators of Voltaire show his irreverent text much respect. Jean-Michel Moreau Le Jeune embroiders on Joan in her castle bedroom (Fig. 75), giving her a peignoir and frilly cap as well as a very up-to-date dix-huitième boudoir, as the winged ass's seduction of Joan is interrupted by the arrival of Dunois. The very idea of pride in chastity revolts Voltaire, and his Joan totters on the edge of losing hers in repeated predicaments.

Voltaire's Joan is no match for the genuine magnificence of his model, Bradamante. As Pamela Joseph Benson has demonstrated with unusual clarity in the thorny battleground of Ariosto studies, Ariosto's heroine, while not the first, was the most famous of many warrior heroines of later courtly literature, combining the best qualities of both sexes: strength and bravery, but also wisdom and mercy. This type of the 'Christian Virgin' originates with Boiardo, Ariosto's predecessor in the service of the Este house, and the virgin warrior theme which, Christian or otherwise, goes back to Virgil's Camila is most notably continued by Tasso's Clorinda in the Gerusalemme Liberata, Britomart in Spenser's The Faerie Queen, and more than one Penthesilia, queen of the Amazons. Ariosto's own heroine has every reason to be excellent, since she is descended from the 'princely race' of "ancient Troy" and she wed at the end to found the Este line. Voltaire takes the model and turns it upside down: his Joan is humourlessly earnest, physically robust, and subject to constant misadventures and indignities. Her alter-ego is Agnès Sorel, who, of course, was not an exact contemporary of the historical Joan. His Agnès is as sensuous and erotically beautiful as Voltaire's busy mind can make her. She possesses a mind uncluttered by the least serious thought. We do not know what the response of women readers was to either caricature, nor was there a manifest reaction from the living heirs to the aristocratic chivalric tradition. La Pucelle did, however, earn Voltaire the enduring enmity of the Church, and it took its place with 38 of his other works on the Index. The synthesis of the extremes of Chapelain's and Voltaire's images of Joan will take more than a century to emerge and, in this, the return of Bradamante's influence on the image of Joan will be an important corrective.

The underground success of Voltaire's still unpublished La Pucelle may have provided the impetus for the grandest monument erected in her name during the eighteenth century. In April of 1754, the Parlement of Normandy ordered the replacement of a venerable but dilapidated sixteenth-century statue of Joan that officials of Rouen had demolished the month before. The king's sculptor, Michel-Ange Slodtz, was sought through the contacts of painter J.-B. Deschamps, founder and director of the École de peinture et de dessin de Rouen. This effort secured the services of Michel-Ange's slightly older brother, Paul-Ambroise Slodtz, and he reworked an idea for an unsold Minerva into Joan of Arc as Bellona (Fig. 76). Uniquely pagan as this made her, the statue remained thoroughly conventional. She stood surmounting a towering pedestal, her figure swathed in a voluminous dress, complemented by the Roman war goddesses' attributes: helmet, shield, and lance. The great bronze piece was unveiled in 1755 and a few further ornaments were added to the base in 1757. Thus was her honour defended in Rouen. This piece predates monumental bronzes in her other cult centres (Orléans, 1804, by Gois, 1845-55 by Foyatier; and Reims, 1889-96, by Dubois) and shares with these a secular origin. The Slodtz was destroyed in 1944.

There was serious talk of destroying the Slodtz in 1793, at the height of revolutionary fervour. However, the clerical and monarchist associations with which Joan of Arc tended to be identified by the Third Estate were about to change.

The first writer to see Joan of Arc a symbol of secular liberation was the nineteen-year-old student-poet Robert Southey. His Joan of Arc: An Epic Poem was composed at Oxford in 1793 in the flush of ardour over events in revolutionary France. Southey's Joan represents national liberation, youthful optimism, and liberal intent (she makes a speech against oppression of her people). In Southey she also makes her first appearance as a romantic heroine with a shepherd sweetheart who is killed in battle. Southey bragged that he disdained to read Voltaire's poem, although he condemns Chapelain's as equally "worthless" and "unfortunately notorious."

After Southey came Schiller, whose Die Jungfrau von Orleans (1801) marks the nadir of fanci-
ful invention in her name. In *Die Jungfrau* she does not burn at the stake but dies on the battlefield; she falls in love with Lionel, Duke of Clarence, on the enemy side, and she wears a magic helmet whose power is vitiated when she falls in love. But despite these peculiarities, Schiller’s Joan is a “democratic revolutionist” like his Wilhelm Tell and his Don Carlos, and won the approval of Madame de Staël. Both Schiller and de Staël chastised the French for neglecting a figure whose national resonance was so clear. No one so far, though, had seen in her a special case for the liberty of her sex.

The Napoleonic era would realize this interpretation and reclaim her for the secular nation. A standing bronze statue of Joan was erected on the Place du Martroi in traditionally royalist Orléans in 1804 by Edmé Gois fils, when Napoleon consented to restore her cult. We see a curious hybrid. Part of Napoleon’s intent was to reconcile his government with the Church, yet the figure is pointedly nationalist. She is plumed, helmeted and partially armoured over a billowing dress. Looking like “a species of Marianne, spirit of the Republic” she captures an English flag. The style of her armour remains more Roman than medieval, attesting to her descent from the Slodtz *Bélone*; but several agenda addressed in her coded references add up to confusion. The rivers of fabric that swirl around her legs betray confusion about her feminine identification. One could hardly swordfight with such a long dress getting the way, as the historical Joan insisted in defence of her male attire. The sculptor is attempting to make Joan allegorically national (“Marianne”)-like, historically medieval (the jaunty feather plumes and heavy armaments), conceptually clerical (the cultic location), and literally female (the rambunctious dress). The ineffectiveness of such layering would result in the relocation of the Gois to Place Dauphine, a less central location, when Foyatier’s bronze, the first life-size equestrian Joan, was delivered to Orléans in the 1850’s.

The revolutionary and Napoleonic imagery of Joan of Arc concludes with her spirited appearance as an Amazon leader of republican warrior women. In a remarkable engraving of June 1815 called *Le Serment des Amazones Françaises au Pied de la Statue de Jeanne d’Arc*, Joan is the rallying figure for women of Alsace and Lorraine who “as 3 to 500 ‘Amazons’, formed a holy battalion to save their homes’ from invaders.” These “Amazones” sport revolutionary cockades on their male tricorns and are well armed and belligerent beneath their *tricoulors*. The scene of Joan’s execution at the stake on the base of the statue indicates their willingness to sacrifice their lives to save the nation. All this is more propaganda than art, but the image sticks out as an empowering exception to the many that imply Joan’s subservience to male power of one sort or another. It is an instantaneously radical image: nationalist, democratic, feminist.

The irony of its date, 1815, is that the art of the next régime will emphasize Joan of Arc but at the expense of most of her newly proclaimed powers. The Joan of Arc images of the Bourbon Restoration parallel attempts to turn back the clock on women’s issues. Joan appears more meek and childlike, her feminine attire is more conspicuous again, and she not infrequently takes direction from male characters.

We might expect a major shift in the royalist/republican distinction emerging in Joan’s imagery to coincide with the publication of the first accurate and comprehensive biographical material on Joan; however, this was not the case. The detailed biographical source was Jules Quicheret’s scholarly and comprehensive publication of the documents of the 1431 trial that condemned her, and then those of the posthumous retrial that exonerated her in 1455-56. But neither this fountainhead of accurate information nor the highly partisan popularization of her role as national saviour that Jules Michelet added in 1844 produced immediate visual progeny.

Before the national defeat of 1870-71, the political event that would produce the second and by far the greatest outbreak of conventional Joan of Arc images, came the Second Empire and, with it, the first equestrian Joan. Denis Foyatier’s towering statue for the Place du Martroi was paid for by a public lottery that began in 1845. The finished work was erected in 1855. The Foyatier shows an armoured Joan atop a cantering charger, with her outstretched sword lowered in thanks to God for the victory at Orléans. It reminded Gautier of “a new Clorinda,” absorbing as it does a pre-existing iconography of Bradamantes, Clorindas, Britomartis, Penthesilias, and others. The local bishop, Monsignor Dupanloup, dedicated the statue with a speech on 8 May 1855 after a special fast. Joan’s strongest advocate in the 1860s would be this bishop of Orléans who, in 1869, launched an appeal to the Vatican to have Joan recognized as a legitimate saint. The momentum for this application began in 1868 when local “anti-clerical opponents of Napoleon III’s régime” mooted the idea of a public monument to Voltaire. Monsignor Dupanloup hurriedly countered with a celebration to mark the 440th anniversary of Joan’s liberation of Orléans. This was so well attended—by seven bishops, two
archbishops, and the cardinal archbishop of Rouen among others—that Dupanloup conceived the grander scheme of applying for Joan's canonization. That the process would take 52 years to realize is a sign of the myth-building that remained to be done and would begin after the shock of defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. The years between Sedan and Dreyfus would be the golden age of Joan of Arc, redeeming and amplifying all of her earlier associations with the clergy and the nation while being swept up in the steady transformation of French nationalism from a force on the left to a force on the right.  

It was not as a purely political symbol that Joan of Arc ascended to her 1920 apogee, canonized and recognized as the new patron saint of France, supplanting St. Michael, her own inspiration. Foreign writers such as Mark Twain and Andrew Lang would see in her the uncorrupted child of perfection. Anti-clerical writers such as Anatole France and Bernard Shaw would admire the evidence of her singular character: brave, vigorous, clear-minded, and a master of strategy both military and political (the coronation at Reims was a painless and brilliant stroke—and we know that it was her idea). Political activists on the far right, such as Paul Deroulede and Maurice Barrès, adopted her as the model of the France they demanded: Christian, militarist, racially "pure," and, ironically given Joan's exploits, socially traditional in terms of the roles of women. All of these developments were precipitated by the national disaster of the Franco-Prussian War, which destroyed the Second Empire and created the dizzying structure known as the Third Republic. The means for women acting among themselves to create the first completely feminist Joan would also emerge during this period.

A flood of images swept through France in the 1880s and 1890s and spread abroad after the turn of the century. Again, many of these began as veiled war monuments—how does one celebrate a defeat?—but expanded into a symbolism that many people of conflicting loyalties could assimilate. In the process, new ideas about the rights and abilities of all women would contribute to the multiple meanings that the champion of female strength, wisdom and bravery could represent.

The loss of part of Lorraine and most of Alsace to Germany after the war heightened consciousness of Joan's Lorraine roots; and artists from the region, such as Jules Bastien-Lepage, were to find their greatest success in taking up her theme. Bastien-Lepage signed his huge Joan of Arc Listening to the Voices "[J. Bastien-Lepage, Damvillers, Meuse, 1879," 24 noting his birthplace near Joan's. The apple orchard at Domrémy is the setting for the apparition of Joan's three saints. Works of this sort emphasize her farmstead origins and her youth.

The dramatic image of Joan of Arc in armour on a fiery charger is the ironic accomplishment of the Third Republic—ironic since these served as disguised war memorials. 25 Carpeaux's project of 1872 and Carrier-Belleuse's of 1873 foundered; but Rude's nephew, Emmanuel Frémiet, was commissioned by the state in 1872, and in fifteen months his plaster was ready for the Salon of 1874. In the same year a gilt bronze version was unveiled on the Place des Pyramides, a widening of the Rue de Rivoli, just west of the Louvre. Magnificent as this work is, Frémiet eventually agreed with his critics that the figure of Joan herself was a bit too small. He produced a revised plaster for the Salon des Artistes Français of 1889 in which her figure, standing in the stirrups, is five inches taller. When roadwork led to the dismantling of the original, Frémiet himself paid to replace the effigy with the enlarged version, which was reinstalled in 1899. 26 No equestrian statue of Joan of Arc has been replicated more often or in more countries.

The exhibition of Frémiet's revised version in 1889 coincided with the exhibition of one by his rival Paul Duboise, designed for the Place du Parvis, Reims. "[A] happy coincidence of patriotic inspiration . . . a spontaneous competition," said Lafenestre in his Salon de 1889. 27 In fact, 1889 was the year of General Georges Boulanger's electoral success and later of his aborted coup d'etat. The year marked the first peak of right-wing reaction since the war and gave new purpose to the Ligue des Patriotes Françaises, one of the most militant reactionary organizations. 28 As industrial France suffered in the nineties, such organizations regrouped to be felt with force in the Dreyfus Affair at the end of the century. 29 The nineties saw a proliferation of equestrian Joans: French ones tending to emphasize her military associations, such as the three by Mathurin Moreau at national battle sites; foreign ones tending to hail her as a figure of democracy and freedom, such as the five after 1900 by Anna Hyatt Huntington.

In all this the left-wing, secular claim to Joan of Arc was by no means abandoned or eclipsed. A truly feminist image of Joan of Arc would emerge as well from this struggle over her allegiance. In the last decade of the nineteenth and the first decade of this century, the whole phenomenon of women's issues took on unprecedented currency. New research has shown that in the
nineties, a campaign of disinformation sought to trivialize and marginalize the concept of the “New Woman,” the single, independent, young middle-class woman living alone and working for wages.\textsuperscript{30} While the working-class heroine of Trilby, George Du Maurier’s popular 1894 novel, represented an extreme in female independence,\textsuperscript{31} Charles Dana Gibson’s “American Girl,” subsequently known as the Gibson Girl, presented her upper-class counterpart and worked to raise the expectations of the readership of the popular magazines in which she appeared. These expectations created an audience for the growing number of popular accounts of Joan’s life: Charles Péguy’s mystical poems of 1897 and 1912; Mark Twain’s all-American child of 1896;\textsuperscript{32} Anatole France’s two-volume biography of 1908, which was meant to deflate the stories of miracles but pleased devout as well as skeptical readers. The grassroots nature of Joan’s popularity rested well below the efforts of the social elite that led the struggle for women’s suffrage. Péguy’s Christian predisposition was tempered by his radical socialism, making his Joan closer to Twain’s and France’s. Far to the right we find Paul Deroulède, creating a Ligue des Femmes Françaises to parallel his earlier Ligue de Patriotes Françaises. Joan appears on a popular song sheet of the women’s league in 1902 trumpeting a “summons.” The words challenge women to imitate Joan as a model of humility, piety, chastity, "beauty," patriotism, and obedience.

While the socialist governments demonstrated their growing power after winning the Dreyfus showdown in 1900, adding the law of separation of Church and state in 1905 to their secularization of education, in 1904 the Vatican was at last responding to the French clergy’s calls to elevate Joan of Arc. In January 1904, Pius X declared her Venerable and on 18 April 1909 she was beatified by the same pope. Full canonization came two years after the war, when Benedict XV authorized the ceremony on 16 May 1920. The homily pronounced her “the bravest maiden within the recollection of men and the most innocent.”\textsuperscript{33} The text recognizes her particular meaning for France: “The noble nation’s lively devotion to Joan of Arc, the venerable saviour of her country, will be of great spiritual benefit to her.”\textsuperscript{34} She was soon honoured with a national holiday distinct from the Catholic feast day: 8 May for the government, 30 May for the Church.\textsuperscript{35} The existence of separate dates of commemoration confirms that the skirmishing to claim her allegiance continued.

The struggle to establish a new and secular Joan of Arc comes full circle from Voltaire in the early twentieth century. Voltaire had little personal interest in Joan of Arc. She provided a target for his invective against the beliefs advocated by the Church. Nor was he a feminist avant la lettre. But his parody of chivalry, miracles and saint-hood broke the link that had anchored Joan to the monarchy, the Church, and the role of women as obedient to the will of men. One hundred and eighty years after Voltaire started to write La Pucelle, a truly feminist Joan would be conceivable. In 1909 the Actresses’ Franchise League of Britain produced Cicely Hamilton’s “The Pageant of Great Women” at the Scala Theatre in London (Fig. 77).\textsuperscript{36} The parts of 52 capable women in history called attention to the cause of suffrage. When the play toured the country, the majority of parts were taken by amateur members of local women’s groups. One problem recurred: everyone wanted to play Joan of Arc. How could a character, at the same historical moment, be presented as the living mascot of the French radical right (Fig. 78)\textsuperscript{37} yet eclipse all others among English feminists?

Joan of Arc could do so in 1909 because the historical Joan did what Bradamante had done in literature. She combined the best qualities of both sexes to fight for what she believed in, inspired others to join her, and won a permanent place in the Western imagination. The role created and staged by women is not a belligerent image and she stands beside England’s warrior queen, Boadicea. The newspaper photograph shows that any image comprising strength and mercy in equal parts cannot be expropriated by any single philosophy or any narrow vision of women’s excellence.

\textbf{NOTES}

* A version of this paper was read at the Universities Art Association of Canada Annual Meeting on 3 November 1989 at the University of Manitoba in the session on “The Feminine Principle in \textit{XVIIIth Century Art}” chaired by George Knox. This article is offered as a tribute to George Knox, Professor Emeritus of the University of British Columbia: teacher, colleague, and friend.
1 Jean Chaplain, \textit{La Pucelle ou La France délivrée} (Paris, 1656). Many of the works cited in this paper are available in illustration in the extensive catalogue of the exhibition \textit{Image de Jeanne d’Arc}, held at the Hôtel de la Monnaie, Paris, in 1979, or in Marina Warner’s \textit{Joan of Arc}, \textit{The Image of Female Courage} (London and New York, 1981). Mention in these brief notes will be restricted to those that can be found in neither source.
3 “C’est plutôt dans le goût de l’Arioste, que dans celui du Tasse que j’ai travaillé. . . . Je veux que cet ouvrage serve quelquefois à divertir mes amis; mais je ne veux pas que mes ennemis puissent jamais en avoir la moindre connaissance” (Topazio, “Voltaire’s Pucelle,” 207).

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4. Voltaire was never excommunicated, although 39 of his works, including La Pucelle, were placed on the Index Librorum Prohibitorum.


6. For a contemporary image of Bradamante, see, for instance, the black chalk and wash drawings of Fragonard for an unpublished edition of the Orlando Furioso by D. F. Wakefield, "Fragonard's Drawings for Ariosto's Orlando Furioso," The Connoisseur, CC (February 1979), 131-34. Figure 2 on page 132 shows Atlantic Vanquished by Bradamante: Bavardo flies over, the sorcerer cries out, the armoured Bradamante seizes his rode from a sprawling ambush position across the foreground.


9. In the Essai sur les Mœurs (1756), Voltaire admired Joan's courage and determination, lamenting only that she had been used by the unscrupulous court to dupe a gullible public.

10. For the Slodtz, see François Souchal, Les Slodts, sculpteurs et décorateurs du roi (1685-1764) (Paris, 1967), 172-72, 650-51, no. 133, pls. 9c, 9d. The ensemble surmounted a public tap.


15. Warner, Joan of Arc, 256.


17. See Ziff, "French Restoration Art," 37-48. There were 17 paintings alone depicting Joan in the first restoration salon (1817).


20. Jules Michelet, Jeanne d'Arc (Paris, 1844). This originally appeared as three chapters in his monumental Histoire de France (1833-67) but proved so popular that it was reissued as an independent volume. For Michelet, the history of France was the history of the creation of modern egalitarian society. Its two critical victories were Joan's expulsion of the foreign invaders and the French Revolution, which consolidated this freedom and represented her destiny.


25. The equestrian monument has served most often as a war memorial and the proliferating equestrian Joans were disguised war memorials of the recent defeat. The point is made well by H. W. Janson, 19th-Century Sculpture (New York, 1985), 183.


28. For Boulanger and the Ligue's Paul Deroulede, see Rutkoff, Revanche and Revission, and Hutton, "Popular Boulangism," 85-106.


36. This contemporary photograph from the Daily Mirror shows, from left to right: Joan of Arc, Boadicea, The Rani of Jhansi, and Agnes Dunbar. See Antonia Fraser, Boadicea's Chariot: The Warrior Queens (London, 1988), 300-301.


FIGURE 76. Paul-Ambroise Slodtz, Joan of Arc as Bellona, Rouen, 1755-57 (destroyed 1944) (Photo: François Souchal).


FIGURE 78. Fête de Jeanne d’Arc à Compiègne, le 8 juin 1913. Joan of Arc and, at right, Maurice Barrès (Photo: Roger-Viollet).