

## Divine Right: Mark Twain's *Joan of Arc*

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**Abstract:** Most readers have not agreed with Mark Twain in liking *Joan of Arc* best of all his novels, particularly because his hand is almost invisible in it. He presents the story as a translation by “Jean Francois Alden” of the remembrances of “Sieur Louis de Conte.” He did not think readers would take a work by “Mark Twain” seriously. Only the initials S. L. C. indicate the connection between the actual and the presumed author. Twain considered Joan to be “the most extraordinary person the human race has ever produced.” She was a woman—and a general. She genuinely believed that she was acting on the basis of commands from God. In relating her story, Twain nevertheless shows that nothing human, and certainly no government and no ruler, is entitled to divine honors or right.

Joan of Arc was the “Riddle of the Ages,” Mark Twain said, and his *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*<sup>1</sup> adds its own mysteries.<sup>2</sup> Most critics have found it puzzling, if not infuriating, since the tone of the book—idealistic, uplifting, and at least vaguely reverential—is at odds with the Twain they know.<sup>3</sup> And in fact, although Twain liked *Joan of Arc* the best of all his books, or so he said, he is almost invisible in it.<sup>4</sup> In his other books, “Mark Twain” is

<sup>1</sup>Citations to *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* in the text refer to *The Writings of Mark Twain*, definitive edition, vol. 17, 18 (New York: Gabriel Wells, 1923).

<sup>2</sup>Mark Twain, “Saint Joan of Arc” in *The Complete Essays of Mark Twain*, ed. Charles Neider (Garden City: Doubleday, 1963), 320.

<sup>3</sup>Maxwell Geismar wrote that *Joan* embraces “every idea, every value, every emotion, every social institution that he despised . . .” In Maxwell Geismar, *Mark Twain, American Prophet* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), 148, 152. For similar comments, see Bernard de Voto, *Mark Twain's America* (Boston: Little Brown, 1932), 280; James Cox, *Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 264; Guy Camfield, *Sentimental Twain: Mark Twain in the Maze of Moral Philosophy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 201. Even Howells, Twain's best critic, did not much like it (William Dean Howells, *My Mark Twain: Reminiscences and Criticisms*, ed. Marilyn Austin Baldwin [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967, 129–35]), and it says a good deal that the only readily available edition of the book is published by Ignatius Press (Mark Twain, *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989]).

<sup>4</sup>Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain: A Bibliography* (New York: Harper and Bros, 1912), 2: 1034; see also Twain's letter to Henry Huttleson Rogers, January 29, 1895

not only visibly identified as the author, quite often, he figures in the text.<sup>5</sup> Here, by contrast, he originally intended to keep his authorship secret because he was convinced that readers would discount or even resent a “serious” book from “Mark Twain.”<sup>6</sup> Financial pressures eventually changed his mind, but even so, the book is presented as a “translation” by “Jean François Alden” of the remembrances of “Sieur Louis de Conte” — Sieur de Conte, the lord of the story — with only the similarity of initials, S. L. C., hinting at the master storyteller who really tells the tale.<sup>7</sup>

Reading Mark Twain is easy, as smooth as oil and just as slippery; deciphering Twain is difficult and calls for a special sort of cryptography. A grand rhetorician, whether on the platform or the page, Twain referred to teaching as “my natural art,”<sup>8</sup> and like any great teacher, he was constantly aware of his audience, more concerned with what it heard than with what he said.<sup>9</sup> He was an intellectual seducer who sought ways around his audience’s

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(Mark Twain, *Mark Twain’s Correspondence with Henry Huttleson Rogers, 1893–1909*, ed. Lewis Leary [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969], 125).

<sup>5</sup>For example, Huck Finn acknowledges “Mr. Mark Twain” from the outset (Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, ed. Walter Blair and Victor Fischer [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986]); in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, Twain “whispers” to the reader (Mark Twain, *Pudd’nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins* [New York: Norton, 1980]); in *Connecticut Yankee*, he is a character who finds and edits the Stranger’s manuscript (Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, ed. Bernard Stein [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984]).

<sup>6</sup>De Lancey Ferguson, *Mark Twain: Man and Legend* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1943), 260. Twain asked for a penalty clause in the book contract protecting the secret of this authorship (Letter to Rogers, August 17, 1895, in *Correspondence with Huttleson*, 132). On Twain’s assessment of his readers’ probable reactions, see his Autobiographical Dictations of December 28, 1906, and May 22, 1908 (in the collection of the Mark Twain Project, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley); in the latter, Twain remarked that the public seems oblivious to the fact that any real humorist must have “deep seriousness and a rather unusually profound sympathy for the sorrows and sufferings of mankind.”

<sup>7</sup>On Twain’s change of mind, see Everett Emerson, *The Authentic Mark Twain: A Literary Biography of Samuel L. Clemens* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 196–97.

<sup>8</sup>Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Lighting out for the Territory: Reflections on Mark Twain and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 11, 106–7.

<sup>9</sup>On Twain’s view of himself as a teacher, see Louis Budd, *Our Mark Twain: The Making of a Public Personality* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 60, 171; on his sense of audience, see Budd 5, 20, 21, 57, and Richard S. Lowry, “Littery Man”: *Mark Twain and Modern Authorship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 29–37. This sensibility of the author as performer and impostor, Michelson argues, lies behind Twain’s notorious “mistake” in this speech in honor of Whittier’s birthday in 1977 (Bruce Michelson, *Mark Twain on the Loose* [Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995], 18–25).

defenses, sly and devious and indirect, proceeding by clues and whispers.<sup>10</sup> And if he sought to camouflage humor's serious, subversive purposes, he was equally adroit at concealing the ludicrous in the apparently lyrical and high-minded.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, since his audience reached from the general public to the intellectually sophisticated, Twain consciously wrote on many levels, reaching across the boundaries of class and culture.<sup>12</sup> A Twain text involves a special order of rank, a community of insiders who see through his devices and follow his allusions.<sup>13</sup> Twain's aim, however, is inclusive: uniting the gentleman and the vulgarian. Leland Krauth points out that Twain's art seeks to "elevate the common beyond itself."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup>The "listener must be alert" he said in "How to Tell a Story," because the teller "will divert attention" from the point "by dropping it in a casual or indifferent way" (Twain, *The Complete Essays of Mark Twain*, 156, 158, 160). In any autobiographical writing, Twain said—and surely all writing is at least somewhat autobiographical—it is necessary to "read between the lines." (In a letter to Howells, March 14, 1904, Mark Twain, *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, ed. Henry Nash Smith and William Gibson [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960], 2:782). On the general point, see Don Florence, *Persona and Humor in Mark Twain's Early Writings* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1995), 4, 13, 14, 16, 20.

<sup>11</sup>"Humor must not *professedly* teach and it must not *professedly* preach, but it must do both if it would live forever," Twain said in an autobiographical comment; "I have always preached" (Mark Twain, *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*, ed. Charles Neider [New York: Harper and Row, 1959], 298; on the emphasis in the remark, see Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African American Voices* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993], 68). He hoped, Twain wrote Howells in 1898, to "carry the reader a long way before he suspects I am laying a tragedy trap" (Twain, *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, 675–76). On the ridiculous in seemingly serious writing, see Twain's letter to *The Springfield Republican*, April 12, 1902, in response to comments on "A Double-Barrelled Detective Story" (Mark Twain, *The Complete Short Stories of Mark Twain*, ed. Charles Neider [New York: Hanover House, 1957], 436–38), a story which itself is designed to satirize the "extraordinary man" in the person of Sherlock Holmes (E. Emerson, *The Authentic Mark Twain*, 239).

<sup>12</sup>The *Springfield Republican* letter openly acknowledged this; through a mastery of "cultural codes," Lowry remarks, Twain "moved remarkably well up and down the pyramid" (Lowry, 21–22).

<sup>13</sup>A great many of the pleasures of *Huckleberry Finn*, Everett Emerson comments, "come through understanding what Huck does not comprehend" (E. Emerson, *The Authentic Mark Twain*, 142). See also Forrest Robinson, *In Bad Faith: The Dynamic of Deception in Mark Twain's America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986); Henry Wonham, *Mark Twain and the Art of the Tall Tale* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Dennis Eddings, "The Frog and the Ram Redux," *Studies in American Humor* 3, no. 2 (1995): 98–101.

<sup>14</sup>Leland Krauth, "The Victorian of Southwestern Humor," *American Literature* 54 (1982): 378; see also John Bryant, "Melville, Twain and Quixote: Variations on the Comic Debate," *Studies in American Humor* 3:1 (1994): 1–27.

Twain was playing for big stakes, knowing the long odds: his writing, Shelley Fisher Fishkin observes, involves “an entreaty to rethink, reevaluate and reformulate the terms in which one defines both personal and national identity.”<sup>15</sup> Twain hoped to coax us out of our “timid and suspicious privacy” and into recognition of human equality and of the dignity of self-governing citizenship.<sup>16</sup> Evidently at odds with so much of established opinion, this high aim was only another reason for Twain’s artfulness in writing.<sup>17</sup> And in *Joan of Arc*, he was at special pains: no other work, he wrote, had “cost so much thinking and weighing and measuring and planning or so much cautious and painstaking execution.”<sup>18</sup>

As for Joan, that Twain admired and even revered her as a person there is no doubt at all: she was, he declared, the “most extraordinary person the human race has ever produced.” She stands alone, Twain said,

by reason of the fact that in the things wherein she was great she was so without shade or suggestion of help from preparatory teaching, practice, environment, or experience. There is no one to compare her with, none to measure her by; for all others among the illustrious *grew* toward their high place in an atmosphere and surroundings which discovered their gift to them and nourished it and promoted it, intentionally or unconsciously.<sup>19</sup>

Joan testifies to the possibilities and qualities of human nature—of nature simply, unaccounted for by circumstance, an indication that there is a dimension of humanity outside the chains of determinism and relativity.<sup>20</sup>

His view of Joan as a human exemplar made Twain contemptuous of efforts to explain her by reference to her context, and especially the tendency to treat her—following the nationalist current in the nineteenth-century theorizing—as reflecting specifically French characteristics. When Michelet, the source Twain respected most, says that no German or English woman could have endured the *indélicatesse* of a journey among men, Twain wrote in the

<sup>15</sup>Fishkin, *Lighting out for the Territory*, 203.

<sup>16</sup>Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, 300; Kenneth Lynn, *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor* (Boston: Little Brown, 1959), 206–7. On Twain’s egalitarianism, see Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, 297, and “A Family Sketch” (1906), and Notebook #42 (June 1897–March 1900), 49, both in the collection of the Mark Twain Project.

<sup>17</sup>Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952). It strengthens the point that Twain may have learned much of his craft from African-Americans (Fishkin, *Was Huck Black?*; compare Henry Louis Gates, “Criticism in the Jungle,” in *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Henry Louis Gates [New York: Methuen, 1984], 6).

<sup>18</sup>Letter to Rogers, January 29, 1895, in Twain, *Correspondence with Huttleson*, 124.

<sup>19</sup>Twain, *Complete Essays*, 323, 321.

<sup>20</sup>Michelson, 204, 206; James Wilson, “In Quest of Redemptive Vision: Mark Twain’s *Joan of Arc*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 20 (1978): 181–98.

margin, "How stupid! A *Joan of Arc* would do it no matter what her nationality might be. That spirit knows no nationality."<sup>21</sup>

However, if Twain thought it was relatively unimportant that Joan was French, that she was a girl mattered a good deal to him.<sup>22</sup> Writing *Joan*, Twain was thinking of the women in his life—particularly Olivia, to whom he dedicated the book; his daughter, Susy, who Twain later claimed was the inspiration for his portrait of Joan; and his mother, whom he praised for her "soldierly qualities" on behalf of the oppressed.<sup>23</sup> The "serious" readership at which he aimed was largely female, and—especially since he was engrossed with the role of mothers as moral educators—he offered *Joan of Arc*, in one sense, as an appropriate "feminist heroine," part tribute to women and part example.<sup>24</sup>

At least since 1873, Twain had been thinking of women as "voiceless" and "politically fettered," entitled to act disruptively by "the natural right of the

<sup>21</sup>Jules Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc* (Paris: Hachette, 1873), 20 MTP. It helped, of course, that by the time he wrote *Joan*, Twain had already developed his distaste for French society. France, he wrote in his Notebook, was "not born to create civilizations" and must find glory in *individuals* like Joan and Napoleon (Mark Twain, *Mark Twain's Notebook*, ed. Albert B. Paine [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935], 241). In the same spirit, he praised Msgr. Ricard, not much esteemed otherwise, by writing "how fine" in the margin opposite Ricard's comment that Joan reflected unequalled glory on France and humanity (my italics.) (Monseigneur Ricard, *Jeanne d'Arc La Venerable* [Paris: Dentu, 1894], v MTP).

<sup>22</sup>Twain, *Complete Essays*, 322.

<sup>23</sup>Mark Twain, "Jane Lampton Clemens" in *Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians, and Other Unfinished Stories*, ed. Robert Pack Browning, et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 84; and Mark Twain, *Mark Twain's Letters*, ed. Victor Fischer and Michael Frank, vol. 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 63; Laura Skandera-Trombley, "'I am Women's Rights': Olivia Langdon Clemens and her Feminist Circle," *Mark Twain Journal* 34, no. 2 (1996): 17–21; Geismar, *Prophet*, 152; Justin Kaplan, *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), 270. Susy had loved Schiller's *Die Jüngfrau von Orleans* (Albert Stone, "Mark Twain's *Joan of Arc*: The Child as Goddess," *On Mark Twain: The Best from American Literature*, ed. Louis Budd and Edwin Cady [Durham: Duke University Press, 1987], 74–75). On the general point, see Laura Skandera-Trombley, *Mark Twain in the Company of Women* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

<sup>24</sup>Laura Skandera-Trombley, "Mark Twain's Mother of Invention," *Mark Twain Journal* 31, no. 2 (1993): 2–9; Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc and the Image of Female Heroism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). It underlines this aspect of the story that Twain originally did not want to write a tragedy: he first ended his account with Joan triumphant after the relief of Orleans (at what became chapter 22). In taking DeConte's recollections through Joan's trial and death, Twain was responding—without much resistance—to the prodding of his editors (Thomas Maik, *A Reexamination of Mark Twain's Joan of Arc* [Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1992], 7–8).

oppressed to rebel."<sup>25</sup> Back then, however, he hesitated to express such sentiments in public; the essay in question went unpublished. By the time he wrote *Joan*, however, he was saying such things openly, and he wrote in his Notebook that "no civiliz[ation] can be perfect until exact equality between men and women is included."<sup>26</sup>

Twain observed the proprieties, and he regarded gender distinctions as to some extent natural, but he was acutely aware of the degree to which gender is a convention, a role assigning to half of humanity qualities which rightly belong to the whole.<sup>27</sup> There were ways in which Twain identified with Joan and more in which he learned from her: beyond her inspiration to women, in Joan's testimony to the possibilities of human nature, Twain saw vital lessons for male humanity.<sup>28</sup>

Twain praised Joan's considerable aptitude for war, her even greater talent for the "subtle welfare of the forum," and "perhaps greatest of all," her "patient endurance, her steadfastness, her granite fortitude."<sup>29</sup> He lauded her, in other words, for two excellences women conventionally were not thought to possess—the military virtues and the gift for political speech—but also for virtues that Twain's narrator spoke of as specifically feminine: steadfastness, patience, and the courage to endure (17:109–10). For men and boys, Twain observed, what passes for courage is ordinarily bravado and boasting and concern for rank; men are content, even after a display of cowardice, if they can talk themselves back into self-esteem.<sup>30</sup> He presents Joan, by contrast, as someone who, confronted with danger, would do what needs to be done without concern for glory or mastery (17:42–48). In her combination of qualities, Twain said, she had no equal: even Napoleon, to whom he sometimes compared her, made only a strange and curious

<sup>25</sup>Twain, *Complete Essays*, 666, 668. Early in life, he had criticized women's suffrage, but his marriage to Olivia played a major—if not decisive—role in changing that view (Skandera-Trombley, "Mother of Invention").

<sup>26</sup>Notebook, November 6, 1895, Mark Twain Project collection; Mark Twain, *Mark Twain's Speeches* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1910), 103; Budd, *Our Mark Twain*, 188. European feminists were impressed, and even a little startled, by Twain's militancy (Anna Katona, "Mark Twain's Reception in Hungary," *American Literary Realism*, 16 [1983]: 107–20, 114).

<sup>27</sup>Myra Jehlen, "Gender," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) 263–73; Susan Gillman, *Dark Twins: Imposture and Identity in Mark Twain's America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 99, 101, 103, 124; Twain, *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, 1:10–11; E. Emerson, *Authentic*, 251.

<sup>28</sup>Lynn, *Southwestern Humor*, 206; Maik, *Reexamination*, 137.

<sup>29</sup>Twain, *Complete Essays*, 318.

<sup>30</sup>Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad* (Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1869), 588, 591.

contrast," a "captive eagle" unable to accept limits and fate, "beating his broken wings on the Rock of St. Helena."<sup>31</sup>

Yet Twain's celebration of Joan's personal qualities did not translate into regard for her statecraft, not the least because if Joan owed nothing to circumstance, she was undeniably affected by it, in her beliefs as well as her conduct. For her faith, he had no respect at all, although his narrator treats it more or less delicately: in the margin of his copy of the Comtesse de Chabannes' *La Vierge Lorraine*, Twain referred to Joan as an "heroic soul" lifted up only by "this base superstition," and when Msgr. Ricard remarks that the voices of her saints "left her consoled and comforted," Twain—who had already called her saints "a poor lot"—responds that they are "merely idiots" who "remind her of nothing that is valuable."<sup>32</sup>

As for her politics, when Albert Paine—Twain's devoted but superficial Boswell—linked Twain's encounter with Joan to his "scorn for the divine right of kings," he overlooked the fact that Joan saw to the crowning of a king by divine right.<sup>33</sup> Revealingly, Twain said that an artist able to paint Joan's spirit would show her as

a vision to win us, not repel: a lithe, slender figure, instinct with "the unbought grace of youth," dear and bonny and lovable, the face beautiful and transfigured with the light of that lustrous intellect and the fires of that unquenchable spirit.<sup>34</sup>

The quotation marks are a decisive clue: Twain wanted us to recognize that he was adapting Burke's lament, in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, for chivalry's "unbought grace of life."<sup>35</sup> Joan, Twain was intimating, incarnated the moral basis of the Old Regime in its youthful and most attractive form. The romance of aristocracy retained what Twain regarded as a pernicious hold on American imaginations, and *Joan* had a special place in Twain's effort to separate the politics of the old order, desperately flawed at its most appealing, from the nobler human virtues that Burke had hoped to save from total

<sup>31</sup>Twain, *Complete Essays*, 318; in his Notebook, Twain said that Joan and Napoleon "dwarf all the human race," but even there, his preference for the "sublime girl" is reasonable clear (Twain, *Notebook*, 241).

<sup>32</sup>Mme. La Comtesse Armand de Chabannes, *La Vierge Lorraine: Jeanne d'Arc* (Son Histoire, Paris: Plon., 1890), 25 MTP; Ricard, 226, 228.

<sup>33</sup>A. Paine, *Biography*, 1:82.

<sup>34</sup>Twain, *Complete Essays*, 323.

<sup>35</sup>Edmund Burke, *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke* (Boston: Little Brown, 1884), 331; it was a phrase Twain had borrowed and adapted once before (Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, 598). Twain spoke of Burke's "mighty shade" and his "unsmirched great name" (Alan Gribben, ed., *Mark Twain's Library*, vol. 1 [Boston, G.K. Hall, 1980], 13), and he enlisted Burke as an ally in a campaign against Tammany (Mark Twain, "Edmund Burke, Croker and Tammany," *Harper's Weekly* [1901], Supplement, October 19, 1602).

extinction and that Twain had thought vital to the balance of American democracy.<sup>36</sup>

In the preface to *A Connecticut Yankee*, Twain had noted ironically that “the question of whether there is a divine right of kings is not settled in this book.” He had, Twain said, reserved it for “another book,” especially since “I am not going to have anything particular to do next winter anyway.”<sup>37</sup> That was, in fact, about the time he began to work on *Joan of Arc*. Vernon Parrington noted the connection: in the “noble drama” of Joan’s life, Parrington thought, Twain discerned “the romance he had not found at Arthur’s court.”<sup>38</sup> Actually, Twain settled for a question somewhat less ambitious than the one raised in *A Connecticut Yankee*, suspending disbelief just enough to let him address a more this-worldly problem: assuming for the moment that Joan acts on the basis of a commission from God, is a divine right desirable, let alone the best form of rule?<sup>39</sup> Twain, in other words, was engaged in a critique of charismatic authority on its own terms, and with it, as *Connecticut Yankee* implies, of all the more prosaic forms of executive governance.

At the grandest level, this involves the hope for political transformation. In *A Connecticut Yankee*, Hank Morgan observes that when the imagination of a nation is dead, it can be revived only by blood and terror, and those—reluctantly—are the ultimate foundations of his essentially Machiavellian regime.<sup>40</sup> Joan is no unarmed prophet and in her story is violence aplenty, but as Twain’s translator remarks, she roused an essentially dead nation, not by fear and force, but by hope and adoration (17: xxiii). Those graces, however, involve their own cruelty and tragedy, and the broadest political teaching of *Joan of Arc* is that nothing human, and certainly no government and no ruler, is entitled to divine honors or right.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup>On the aristocratic temptation in America, see J. Harold Smith, “Mark Twain’s Basic Political Concepts: Man, Parties and Democracy,” *Missouri Historical Review* 9 (1965): 350; and E. Emerson, *Authentic*, 169. In *Huckleberry Finn*, for example, Huck obtains the stories and histories of aristocracy that he will eventually read to Jim from the wreck of the *Walter Scott* (Twain, *Adventures*, 89, 93). In the *Reflections*, Burke remarks that the older excellences are not yet “totally extinguished” (Burke, *Works*, 1:454, 3: 265–66).

<sup>37</sup>Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, xxi.

<sup>38</sup>Vernon L. Parrington, *The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1930), 99.

<sup>39</sup>Michelson, 204; Searle observes that Twain treats Joan’s powers as “uncanny” by an act of will (William Searle, *The Saint and the Skeptics: Joan of Arc in the Works of Mark Twain*, Anatole France and Bernard Shaw [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1976], 36–37).

<sup>40</sup>Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee*, 182–83.

<sup>41</sup>It helped, of course, that Twain was already fascinated and horrified by Mary Baker Eddy’s *Christian Science* [(Michelson, *Loose*, 206); see Mark Twain, *Christian Science* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1907)].



The name of Twain's translator—"John Alden" in English—points to the lover in "The Courtship of Miles Standish" who took on the job of speaking for another and had to be prodded into speaking for himself.<sup>42</sup> Like his namesake, Jean François speaks for another, and he strives to make the best case for Louis de Conte's work, pointing to the fact that so much of Joan's history "comes to us under oath" (17: xxv).<sup>43</sup> But also like John Alden, when he does "speak for himself," he undermines the case: by the time he tells us that Joan's official history is oath-attested, he has already told us that lying was the "common speech of the time" and that the age was "false to the core" (17: xxii). Sworn testimony, evidently, is not so reliable after all.<sup>44</sup> And Jean François also says that while De Conte is "unimpeachable" insofar as he relies on "official history," the "added particulars" in his story rest only on his word (17: xxv). The translator is inviting us to hold De Conte to the measure of history, and not only to history as recorded and conceived in De Conte's time: Joan of Arc, Alden says, must be judged "by the standards of all times," not merely her own, and so with her story (17: xxi).<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Michelson, *Loose*, 205; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Courtship of Miles Standish* (Boston: Osgood, 1876); it also was certainly suggested by Twain's editor at Harper's, Henry M. Alden, who urged him to tell all of Joan's story (Maik, *Reexamination*, 7). Twain said that he himself, after six false starts, was essentially bidden to begin *Joan* when Olivia broke her previous silence and voiced emphatic approval of the seventh draft (Twain, *Autobiography*, 266–67). Paine said that Twain made five false starts (A. Paine, *Biography*, 2:959), which makes me suspect that, in preferring to make a total of seven starts, Twain may have been hinting at a reversal of *Revelations*, where the breaking of the first six seals is followed by a voice (6:1, 3, 6, 7, 10, 16–17), and the breaking of the seventh seal is initially followed by silence (8:1).

<sup>43</sup>Twain made the same argument: Twain, *Complete Essays*, 313.

<sup>44</sup>This is particularly true since De Conte explains that both in Joan's trial and in her Rehabilitation, testimony was shaped by political considerations (18:285–86).

<sup>45</sup>In his own reading, Twain followed a similar procedure. He told Rogers that, for Joan's career up to her trial, he relied on one French and one English source—Michelet and Gower, and if we follow the translator's notes and the evidence of Paine's biography (Twain, *Correspondence with Huttleson*, 125; A. Paine, *Biography* 2: 958). Yet as already indicated, the translator's remarks give Michelet clear preeminence, and Twain's marginalia in the other works he consulted suggest he tested them against Michelet, whose account he had read carefully, occasionally quarreled with, and copiously marked and responded to, in the margins (Michelet, 1873); see also Stone, "Child as Goddess," 78, n. 30. For example, when Chabannes said that the mere passage of the Maid was sufficient to terrify the English garrisons at Orleans (Chabannes, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 85), Twain's response was to write "Oh come!" in the margin. But two pages later, he notes "Michelet says it" (his emphasis) and accepts the account, partly because Michelet gave Twain a more or less secular explanation, that the garrison thought her to be a witch (Chabannes, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 87; compare 17:196).

As for his other sources, Twain seems to have regarded Chabannes as inclined to make Joan "too good" and too pious, especially in her deference to Catholic orthodoxy and her willingness to accept miracles, and generally too sentimental (see his marginal comments

In fact, of the six notes added by the translator, one confirms De Conte's fidelity to the records of Joan's trial; three refer to events after Joan's death (the continued celebration of Joan's day at Orleans [17:269], and the destruction of Joan's relics and much of her legacy during the French Revolution [18:50,108]), and two cite the writings of nineteenth-century historians (Jules Michelet [17:119–91] and Lord Ronald Gower, who himself relies on Michelet's authority [18:18]). Alden suggests, in other words, that we hold De Conte to the mirror of the historical record in his own time, but also to subsequent events, and especially, to Michelet's relatively authoritative version of Joan's story.

The Sieur de Conte was a real life figure, reshaped by Twain into Joan's companion from childhood to martyrdom, a voice from time past, writing as an old man in 1492, the year of the discovery of America and the expulsion of the Moors. The only literate person in Joan's circle, De Conte is nicknamed "the Scholar" by his friends, and early on he sounds rationalistic and even skeptical, disdaining—in relation to dragons—mere opinions without a foundation in evidence. But while rejecting the idea that dragons are blue, he goes on to assert, based on the authority of those "who know about dragons," that they have always been gold (17:8, 56–57). His reasoning, in other words, is vaguely scholastic: accepting that "one gets most things" in the world at second hand, De Conte relies on the "bedded rock" of authority, certified by tradition, and is apt to be "dizzied" by anything too far outside "the common order" (17:12, 171).<sup>46</sup>

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in Chabannes, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 25, 44, 54, 57, 58, 154, 167): when Chabannes described Joan as "blushing and timid" in the society of men, Twain called her comments "Rot" (Chabannes, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 22–23). He did admire and draw on Chabannes for various striking descriptions and stories (Chabannes, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 40, 46, 58, 60, 64, 66) and much the same can be said of Janet Tuckey's *Joan of Arc, the Maid*, a book whose influence on *Joan I* originally overestimated (Wilson Carey McWilliams, *The Idea of Fraternity in America* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973], 456–57). Paine says that Twain "did not speak of this volume in later years. He may have forgotten it" (A. Paine, *Biography*, 2:958). Twain drew on some of Tuckey's images and anecdotes, but his marginalia suggest he came to her work with his own subplot relatively clear in his mind, and at one point corrects her history (for example, Janet Tuckey, *Joan of Arc, "The Maid"* [London: Marcus Ward, 1880], 55, 64, 65. MPT). Msgr. Ricard gets a few good marks, but is deprecated for his orthodoxy: when he says that there is nothing more beautiful than Joan, "after the Virgin Mary," Twain comments "how flat," and he dismisses Ricard's account of Joan's abjuration as "only some twaddle of this priest" (Ricard, *Jeanne d'Arc*, v, 228). Many of the later pages in the book remain uncut in Twain's copy. And most of these comments, including the uncut pages, apply to Marius Sepet's *Jeanne d'Arc* (Marius Sepet, *Jeanne d'Arc* [Tours: Alfred Mame et Fils, 1887] MTP).

<sup>46</sup>It says a lot about Albert Paine's qualities as a critic that he could write that "our faith in the Sieur de Conté (sic) never for an instant wavers" (A. Paine, *Biography*, 2:1071). De Conte's natural history is more than suspect, since he refers to Joan's ability to charm "rabbits, birds, squirrels, cats and other reptiles" (17:27). He also

His intellectual limits aside, De Conte necessarily sees Joan from the outside, forced to rely on signs of what is, for her, an inward experience. De Conte does witness an encounter between Joan and “something not of this world”—Twain, Howells said, willfully left open the possibility that Joan’s mission had a divine source—but notably, De Conte *sees* a shadowy apparition; he does not *hear* what Joan referred to as her “Voices” (17:68,73,76–77).<sup>47</sup> Similarly, De Conte says that he “knows” that when the Children of the Fairy Tree are about to die in foreign parts, they receive a vision of the Tree, because he has seen the transfigured faces of those who have perceived it: he takes effects, in other words, as a sufficient basis for knowledge (17:11).<sup>48</sup>

And in any case, De Conte takes his bearings from things as they appear in everyday life, and above all, from things that get results (17:82). He follows Joan and reveres her, but he endorses her vision only in limited and very particular ways. His religion has a decidedly pragmatic dimension: in a passage Twain eventually eliminated from the book, De Conte says that Joan’s voices were truly those of saints, but were limited by “a saint’s natural incapacity for business”; their morals were pure, but in practice things would often have been better “if they’d left her alone.” De Conte went on to urge his readers to keep these comments private: “I have no more desire to be damned than another.”<sup>49</sup> De Conte affirms the moral basis of Joan’s authority (and hence, of the regime she founds), but he takes a very secular pragmatism as his rule of conduct: the damnation he fears does not derive from sins of the spirit, but from being discovered, a position that at least hints at what would soon be called Machiavellianism.<sup>50</sup>

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speaks of a squirrel sitting on Joan’s shoulder looking for the softer places in a “piece of prehistoric chestnut cake” (17:27). The story suggests that the squirrel is seeking the palatable parts of an ancient “chestnut,” the tale of the Miraculous Child. Twain had already used a similar image in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, where he refers to the chestnut cake that Beatrice allegedly used to defend herself against Ghibellines (and that was still being sold in Florence, Twain said, in his own time). The cake in that story is a weapon of Guelphs, partisans of Papal authority and hence, as in De Conte’s tale, a support for the claims of faith (Mark Twain, *Pudd’nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins* [New York: Norton, 1980], 1).

<sup>47</sup>Howells, *My Mark Twain*, 155. In another context, De Conte comments that human beings often see something—in this case, women’s strength—without appreciating its nature (17:109–10).

<sup>48</sup>Other legends about the Tree, De Conte says he only thinks are true: he favors keeping to what one knows and ignoring things one cannot be certain about because there is “profit” in a steadier mind (17:11).

<sup>49</sup>Holographic mss., cited in E. Emerson, 198–99.

<sup>50</sup>The prince, Machiavelli taught, needs only to appear to have admired qualities, among which “nothing is more important” than that he should seem to be “all religion” (Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985], 70). On Twain’s knowledge of Machiavelli, see

De Conte also rejects Joan's reverence for Charles VII, whom he calls "a frivolous animal," "foolish," a "sceptred ass" and a "treacherous dog" (17:274, 18:7, 247). In a fundamental sense, love of country is his religion, so that it is not hard to imagine him saying, with Machiavelli, that he loves his country more than his soul.<sup>51</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that De Conte takes a few pains to conceal Joan's departures from religious orthodoxy. On this telling, she defended the Fairies of the Tree even though they had been condemned as the kin of Satan a century earlier, contending that even a "devil's child" deserves pity and that "kinsmen of the Fiend" have rights (17:22–23). This line of argument anticipates an Emersonian critique of moral forms and conventions: "[I]f I am the devil's child," Emerson proclaimed, "then I will live from the devil."<sup>52</sup> And tellingly, when De Conte describes Joan wishing a Burgundian priest dead for endorsing the English claim to the throne, he said it was "the only harsh speech Joan ever uttered in her life" (17:51). Actually, Joan gave at least two other such speeches, one of a French general—mentioned in "the histories," De Conte concedes, half denying and half trying to explain it away—and one to the French court (17:228, 18:75–78). De Conte, in other words, underplays or elides any hostility Joan expressed toward Frenchmen (she would, he says, tolerate no criticism of French leaders or generals); by contrast, he makes patriotism override the respect due to the clergy and to the universal church (17:55, 18:247). In De Conte's story of Joan's childhood, the critical moment is probably her successful advocacy of compassion for a bedraggled stranger, a straggler from the wars who proves to be an accomplished storyteller, recounting patriotic epics and eventually singing the Song of Roland. His performance moves the villagers, but Joan is enraptured, rushing to the singer and covering his face "with idolatrous kisses." (17:32–35) Joan's faith, in De Conte's telling, is at bottom in France, something very close to a civil religion.

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my entry in J.R. LeMaster and James Wilson, eds. *The Mark Twain Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland, 1993), 479–480.

<sup>51</sup>Letter to Francesco Vettori, April 16, 1527; Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Letters of Machiavelli*, ed. Alan Gilbert (New York: Capricorn, 1961), 249; by contrast, Twain was inclined to regard patriotism as a "base instinct" (Mark Twain, *Mark Twain's Autobiography*, ed. Albert B. Paine [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1924], 1: 147).

<sup>52</sup>Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," *Selected Essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Larzer Ziff (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), 179. Twain often said that we should pray for Satan because he is most in need of it, a very different position; moreover, he had no doubt that nature needs to be supplemented by "habits and principles," making conventions necessary even if "more or less idiotic" by purely natural standards (Mark Twain, with Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age* [Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1890], 366; Twain, *Autobiography*, 386; Catherine Zuckert, *Natural Right and the American Imagination: Political Philosophy in Novel Form* [Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1990], 135, 150–51).

De Conte molds history, moreover, on the anvil of his own interpretive agenda.<sup>53</sup> De Conte holds that the office of history is to furnish “serious and important facts that *teach* . . .” (18:63), not merely to record the past but to instruct the present. In principle, Twain did not disagree; his view of the substance of De Conte’s teaching is quite another matter.

In a diversion from the strictly historical account of Joan’s career, De Conte tells a tale in which he and his friends are called on to identify and calm the “ghosts of the past” who have been troubling their host and their host’s ancestors “for generations” (17:232–33). They hear sounds of sorrow from a sealed room and break into it, finding only a rusty sword and a rotting fan. “Take the pathetic relics,” De Conte tells us, “and weave about them the romance of the dungeon’s long-vanished inmates as best you can” (17:245). As basis for narration, De Conte relies on evidences that can be seen, the decayed remnants of aristocracy; he ignores the sounds of suffering. And in that, he merits Paine’s famous rebuke to Burke, that Burke was moved by “showy resemblance” and not the “reality of distress”: Burke, Paine said, “pities the plumage and forgets the dying bird.”<sup>54</sup>

In relation to human beings, Joan was instinctively egalitarian, or at least, no respecter of persons. De Conte learns something of this from his years with her, but not much. He says, wonderingly, that “some day it will be found out that peasants are people,” and he is happy for the “better light” that lets him recognize that commoners are beings like nobles “in a great many ways” — an illumination that stops a good way short of saying that they are created equal (18:65). He appreciates tragedy, as Joan’s example, with its noble aspiration and its distinction from the common lot, but he regards humor — and especially, egalitarian humor — as “not in any way valuable to anyone” (18:63).

Joan’s Uncle Laxart tells a tale of going to a funeral, dressed in his best, and — worried that he would be late — trying to ride a bull. The bull charged off in mad career, knocking over a beehive; bull, bees, and the elegantly costumed Laxart eventually scatter the funeral procession, with Laxart, many times stung, ending up in the river. De Conte concedes the story is amusing, even ridiculous, but he says that it “teaches nothing” (18:63).

But the story does have lessons, since it emphasizes the folly of pride, and especially of the belief that one can harness nature: even apparently domesticated nature can overthrow, not only human designs, but pious assemblies. It matters, too, that the most painful rebuke is delivered by bees, small creatures whose strength lies in collectivity. Laxart’s story embodies an egalitarian, even

<sup>53</sup>At the time he was writing *Joan*, Twain wrote an essay “In Defense of Harriet Shelley,” in which he spoke of the ways in which “careful and methodical misinterpretation” by a historian could take the “naked facts” and transform their “moral meaning” (Twain, *Complete Essays*, 122).

<sup>54</sup>*The Rights of Man* in Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*, in *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Philip Foner (New York: Citadel, 1969), 1:260; on Twain’s regard for Paine, see Wesley Britton’s entry in LeMaster and Wilson, *Encyclopedia*, 562–63.

democratic moral. Joan finds it hilarious, although she hides her face to spare Laxart's feelings; De Conte admits he might have laughed "if she had not been there." His conviction of Joan's more-than-human status, in other words, obscures both her humanity—she is entertained, after all, by an incident in which Laxart suffered pain and humiliation—and humor's egalitarian teaching.<sup>55</sup>

Beyond his aristocratic sympathies, De Conte openly challenges rival histories on the basis of his experience and knowledge of Joan's character. They record that Joan threatened to behead Dunois if he failed to inform her when Falstaff arrived, but De Conte insists that she would not threaten a comrade's life; he argues that if she said it—and he does not concede the point—she meant only that she would remove Dunois from command (17:228). (Michelet, by contrast, makes her sound pretty unambiguous: "*je te ferai couper la tête.*"<sup>56</sup>) And De Conte admits to adding stories that the histories "didn't mention and don't know about" (17:228). His unacknowledged revisions, however, are even more significant.

For example, De Conte tells us that Joan "made La Hire pray," an "incredible victory" since that commander was famous for brutality and irreverence. This triumph, De Conte says, showed "that nothing was impossible for Joan of Arc." In his account, moreover, La Hire made his prayer up on the spot ("I pray you do by La Hire as he would do by you if you were La Hire and he were God.") The translator supports all this, pointedly appealing to Michelet (17:191–92). In fact, however, Michelet indicates that the prayer was a commonplace for La Hire, one he regularly offered when he went in pursuit of loot.<sup>57</sup> In Michelet's version, Joan seems less able to perform impossibilities than De Conte lets on.

In general, De Conte plays down any explanations that do not derive from Joan's native genius.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, he does not appear to be decisively affected by his glimpse of Joan's undefined "something," although she says it

<sup>55</sup>For a somewhat fuller discussion of the story, see Wilson Carey McWilliams, "Poetry, Politics and the Comic Spirit," *PS* 28 (1995): 197–200.

<sup>56</sup>Jules Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc*, ed. Régine Pernoud (Paris: Livre Club de Libraire, 1962), 58.

<sup>57</sup>Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 49.

<sup>58</sup>One instance: the King's mother-in-law, for her own reasons, supported Joan when she first came to court, even contriving Joan's costume for her, all of which De Conte acknowledges (17:129, 137–38). But this status as a member of what Michelet calls the "party of the queen and her mother" makes it a good deal less astonishing that Joan could subsequently pick the King out of a crowd of courtiers, and even less inexplicable that she discerned the King's "secret trouble," his doubts about his legitimacy, which she assured him were groundless (17:140–41, 144; Michelet 1962, 36–37). In fact, his worries were an open secret, since the King's own mother—who Louis XI was to call a "great whore"—raised doubts about his paternity (Charles T. Wood, *Joan of Arc and Richard III: Sex, Saints and Government in the Middle Ages* [New York:

was a special sign for him (17:73).<sup>59</sup> His patriotic heart played a far greater role in moving him to believe in Joan's mission (17:63–64, 75). It helped, of course, that she was lovely and sincere, but De Conte, and Joan's devotees generally, found support for their conviction in more substantial political virtues: Joan had a sagacity that did not derive from her Voices, as De Conte originally assumed, but from native shrewdness (although it helped, to be sure, that the Voice gave her, at a critical moment, the basis for an accurate prediction) (17:90, 93, 95–98, 117–18). She was also instinctively a great political actress who knew her role, carrying herself in public with calm certitude and assured authority, keeping her doubts and disconsolate moments off-stage (17:76, 82). And she had, De Conte tells us, a princely sense of *raison d'état*, willing to use deceit or other suspect means to advance her cause, which she would never use to benefit herself (17:107). Above all, Joan had a special gift of rhetoric. De Conte implicitly contrasts her with the Paladin (a mocking nickname for Edmond Aubrey), a quasicomic figure among Joan's friends, who tells splendid, self-vaunting stories, partly because he is able to persuade himself of the truth of his yarns. His audience, however, is entertained but unconvinced, even though they recognize his self-induced sincerity (17:148–52).<sup>60</sup>

Joan, on the other hand, has an exceptional ability to persuade. The chief knight of the French says that she has a "seeing eye"—the ability to read the heart and soul, to discern inner quality: for example, she sees the potential for courage behind Paladin's bombast and turns him from a braggart into a heroic standard-bearer (17:166, 178–90). De Conte, however, observes that her "creating mouth" is as important as her insight, since what she sees would be ineffective, lacking the ability to make others believe by speech—and in fact, since "believing is enough," at least in relation to bravery, Joan's "creating mouth" might be sufficient even if her "eye" were sometimes deficient (17:182, 206–7).

De Conte's position, however, does turn on faith, albeit of a pragmatic sort. His view makes Joan like God in the ability to create through speech, and it points to the temptation of followers to apotheosize the leader, exaggerating, in this case, even Joan's formidable qualities and powers. Joan claimed to be divinely inspired; De Conte writes that, "To us, she was divine," separated from her fellows by a "bridgeless abyss," not subject to judgment by any who "had never known any people but human beings" (18:60).<sup>61</sup>

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Oxford University Press, 1988], 27). De Conte, however, treats all of Joan's perceptions as miraculous.

<sup>59</sup>Camfield, *Sentimental*, 200–201.

<sup>60</sup>This is one of a long line of comments by Twain on the adequacy of sincerity or honesty as political or human virtues.

<sup>61</sup>Michelet says, to the contrary, that Joan was human and fallible, "though some may strive to conceal these things" (Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 148). For example,

Nevertheless, as I have already indicated, De Conte often mutes any specifically Christian aspects to her leadership and, especially, any reliance on the Church. After the Battle of St. Loup, according to Michelet, Joan felt guilt and a yearning to confess after seeing so many die unshriven, and she determined to take communion, observe the Feast of the Ascension, and spend the day in prayer.<sup>62</sup> De Conte omits all this: he has Joan's generals insist on observing the feast day, portraying Joan as eager to attack (17:246–48). Similarly, in what he describes as the pivotal attack on the Tourelles bastion, De Conte makes the battle fought for possession of the wounded Joan decisive for the fate of the nation. For hours, he says, she lay on the ground, protected by the Dwarf (a titanic soldier, about whom I will have more to say later), but when she heard that Dunois was about to retreat, she instantly forgot her injury and ordered an assault, telling her standard-bearer, Paladin, to carry her banner to the fortress and inspiring him to heroism (1: 266–67). In this drama, what is missing is the religious dimension present in Michelet's version. There, Joan is roused by her Voices, who bid her get to her feet. She refuses to have her wound treated by charms and spells, relying on the "will of God," and she makes her confession. Moreover, she persuades Dunois to delay his attack while she prays, and during the assault—this is the sort of small but telling detail that Twain loved—a Basque soldier took her flag out of the hands of her standard-bearer and carried it to the fort. De Conte transforms the moment into a triumph of secular, French heroism, rather than a victory for faith in which foreign courage played an important role.<sup>63</sup>

Similarly, De Conte describes Joan, late in her military career, as eager to march on Paris, and he calls her letter to the Duke of Burgundy a "state paper," making somewhat pacific gestures as a cover for her conviction that the only way to negotiate was "at the point of the lance" (18:77–79). Michelet treats the letter as "beautiful," an effort at conciliation: Joan, he says, did not counsel an advance on Paris, sensing that that more rationalistic city would be less responsive to her authority. Her Voices, at any rate, told her to remain at St. Denis.<sup>64</sup>

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De Conte asserts that, facing the fire, no thought of recantation crossed her mind (18:280). Michelet insists that it did, given her human nature, although she resisted it in the end (Michelet [1962], 194–95, 198). "Man," Nietzsche wrote, "is a rope stretched between the animal and the Superman—a rope over an abyss . . . what is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra, The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, trans. Thomas Common, [New York: Modern Library, 1954], 8–9). De Conte, by Nietzsche's standard, rejects Joan's humanity; Twain, by contrast, rejected the Superman.

<sup>62</sup>Michelet *Jeanne d'Arc*, 59.

<sup>63</sup>Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 63.

<sup>64</sup>Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 74, 82–83. The Voices were apparently right: the attack on Paris, ordered on the Feast of the Nativity, was an ignominious failure, and the mere



Much earlier, De Conte had ridiculed the theological inquiry into Joan's Voices by the University of Poitiers: the issue, he argued, was her fitness to command, not her piety or orthodoxy (17:160). Yet, evidently, religion was at the heart of her ability to command. Michelet observes that the English position at Orleans was militarily weak; the French army, however, had been made brutish and undisciplined by war, lowered below the standard of humanity and nature. It was not, however, lost to religion, and given the beliefs of the time, it needed the inspiration of a "Virgin descended to earth, a popular virgin."<sup>65</sup> De Conte agrees with a good deal of this: the army, he says, needed unified command, a supreme leader "rightly clothed in authority" (17:290). For De Conte, however, what seems to have mattered was the belief in Joan's religious authority, not the truth of that belief; the rightness of her claim to command lay in its ability to get results, in its power and not its grounding. That position is one that Joan and the theologians would both reject, and it marks the distance between Joan and her memorialist, just as it points to a perennial problem for charismatic authority.

As already indicated, De Conte consistently emphasizes Joan's military virtues, portraying her as eager for battle and possessed of an intuitive mastery of strategy and tactics, in ways that often counter Michelet's descriptions of the same events.<sup>66</sup> For example, De Conte invokes Alençon's testimony (at the Rehabilitation, a proceeding arranged by the now-successful monarchy to restore Joan's standing) to Joan's skill in the use of artillery, prompting De Conte to muse about her innate powers and her unerring intuition (17:304). A few pages later, however, De Conte tells us that at a critical point during the assault in question, an English champion was killed by France's ace cannoneer, acting under the orders of Alençon himself (17:307). The suspicion that Alençon—a "notorious Machiavel," according to Shakespeare—may have been giving Joan, in the celebratory context of the Rehabilitation, the credit for his own skill is reinforced by the fact that

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belief that she had ordered it shook her reputation (85). De Conte blames the defeat on "treachery" (18:90).

<sup>65</sup>Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 48–49.

<sup>66</sup>For example, compare 17:238 with Michelet, 58; 17:249 with Michelet 60; 17:260 with Michelet 61 or 18:87 with Michelet 83. De Conte highlights one council of war "not set down in the histories," offering it on his authority as one not given to "beguiling you with lies." In this discussion, De Conte says, the generals acknowledged Joan's military gifts, and her proposals were supported, among others by Alençon and the Bastard of Orleans (17:295–97). Michelet says, by contrast, that the "House of Orleans"—presumably including the Bastard—urged delay, opposing Joan, while Alençon supported her out of self-interest, hoping to recover his ancestral estates (Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 68).

during a somewhat earlier attack, Joan blundered, Michelet says, by failing to bring up artillery (a datum De Conte suppresses) (17:207).<sup>67</sup>

Any doubts about Joan's powers are underlined by De Conte's story of her trance before the Battle of Patay, in which she foresees her own death (18:3–4). When she wakes, she asks De Conte the reason for his distraught appearance and—seeking to spare her from dread—he tells her that he has received a letter saying that the Fairy Tree had been chopped down. Illiterate Joan seizes the pretended letter and, shown the place where the sad words are supposedly written, says that the letters there “have the very look of it” (18:15). Apparently, she is deceived despite her fabulous intuition. At least where writing is concerned, De Conte, the master of the written page, also has command of her story.

Nowhere is this clearer than in chapter 29 of book 2, the central chapter of the *Recollections*, in which De Conte relates Joan's dealings with the Constable, Richemont, offering details he describes as “important” in exhibiting Joan's “new gift,” her exceptional statecraft (18:7).<sup>68</sup> According to De Conte, as Joan and her army besieged the castle at Beaugency, Richemont approached with “much needed” aid. For some time, Richemont had been “in disgrace” with the King, due chiefly to the “evil machinations” of a faction of the King's advisors, and Charles had issued “absolute orders” to Alençon to turn Richemont away. Joan, however, persuaded Alençon to disobey the King “in the interest of the nation” and to be reconciled with Richemont, who was left to watch the castle while Joan marched to deal with a relieving force. This, De Conte says, was statesmanship “of the highest and soundest sort,” by which he seems to mean *raison d'état* trumping merely personal royal authority (18:6–7). Michelet, however, says that Richemont arrived despite both the King and the Maid (“*malgré le roi, malgré la Pucelle*”), that his help was not immediately needed and that he arrived after the fall of Beaugency, coming to the assistance of an already victorious army.<sup>69</sup>

De Conte's startling revision, by which Joan is made to engineer what she opposes in fact, takes on added significance when De Conte makes her reconciliation with Richemont central among Joan's five “great deeds.” Richemont, he explains, was the “ablest man in France,” a master of “scientific warfare” and of statecraft, suited to “finish and perfect her work and establish it in

<sup>67</sup>Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 62. Shakespeare's comment is York's, on that paternity of Joan's putative unborn child (*Henry VI, Part I*, Act V, scene iv); on Twain's command of Shakespeare, see A. Berret's entry in LeMaster and Wilson, 675–76. De Conte's version of the Battle of Patay similarly credits Joan's leadership, where Michelet assigns a large role to fortune (18:8–15; Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 69).

<sup>68</sup>There are eight chapters in book 1, forty-one in book 2, and twenty-four in book 3, making a total of seventy-three dealing with Joan's life, plus a “conclusion”—not a chapter—which follows her death.

<sup>69</sup>Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 68.

perpetuity" — going beyond Joan, among other things, in making the King "a man" and a tolerable soldier (18:26–27).

In his estimation of Richemont, De Conte is no neutral observer: he enlisted with Richemont when he became the King's chief advisor and stayed with him to the end of his mission (18:284). As a Richemont partisan, and to that extent a man of state, De Conte recognized the limits of Joan's achievement.

Undeniably, Joan laid the moral foundations of the regime, particularly in discerning the centrality of the coronation to the sanctity and the legitimacy of the kingship.<sup>70</sup> The "whole story," De Conte says, lay in the fact that Joan, a peasant, understood the people, that "mighty underlying force" on which all regimes rest (18:28). And the French people, in Joan's time, were most deeply influenced in their opinions by parish priests. Since formal consecration was fundamental to priestly ordination, by analogy, priests—and with them, the people—were inclined to see it as the basis of all authority, identifying secular and spiritual office, the monarchy and the priesthood.<sup>71</sup> Accepting that view, Joan—a woman and a peasant—also defied and stood outside feudal hierarchies: she perfected divine right by separating the monarchy from feudal intermediaries, reinforcing the belief, Wood says, that in France, "only God could create a king."<sup>72</sup> But Joan, able to bring a regime into being, did not have the time—or very probably, the skills and the temperament—necessary to give it institutional form.

Through De Conte, Twain was indicating the great limit of charisma: that the source of a regime's authority matters less, in the long term, than what is done with that authority in establishing institutions and patterns of life, a people's habits of mind and memory.<sup>73</sup> If Joan founded a national monarchy

<sup>70</sup>France, Wood observes, had developed an idea of royalty sanctified by descent, the blood royal linked to the holy. By the coronation, Joan proved that Charles was truly king, "for surely God would have struck him dead at the triumphant moment had his title been in any way tainted or suspect" (Wood, 141). In England, by contrast, the king's title (and even his descent) was increasingly regarded as a matter to be settled by law and public investiture (Wood, *Sex, Saints*, v, 17–21, 120, 125–51).

<sup>71</sup>De Conte testifies to the political importance of the priesthood and of sanctified form: he knows, he says, that the holy oil used in the coronation was brought from heaven by a dove because he was told so by the parish priest at Domremy, and more to the immediate purpose, "A coronation without that oil would not have been a coronation at all . . ." (18:43).

<sup>72</sup>Wood, *Sex, Saints*, 145. Michelet notes that Joan's family were royal subjects directly, without a seigneur; Twain's marginal note adds that they had "no protector but God," making the connection between the absence of intermediaries and divine right (Michelet, 1873, 7). See also Bertrand de Jouvenel, *On Power* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1993), 195–205, though contrast this to earlier ideas of divine right, 33–34.

<sup>73</sup>Wood, *Sex, Saints*, 140; Bertrand de Jouvenel, *Sovereignty: An Inquiry into the Political Good* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957). Notably, Charles VII acquired the right of permanent taxation and was empowered to raise infantry from

with divine guidance—and Twain allows us to believe that she did, if we choose—it was Richemont who framed it and writers like De Conte who gave it enduring form as law and as story. And ultimately those who “routinize” charisma have the power to define it: Joan, Twain’s spirit-intoxicated child, absorbed by the “higher life,” becomes in De Conte’s shaping of her legacy, a “dynastic nationalist,” as Albert Guérard termed her, a kind of forerunner of Bismarck and Cavour.<sup>74</sup>

Moreover, while a visionary politics like Joan’s is stirring and can be liberating, it is undeniably dangerous. The ability to do great works is no guarantee that the works will be good, especially since a divinized leader is likely to be exempted from the ordinary rules of morality. Chapter 15, which closely follows Joan’s entry into Orleans, introduces Catherine Boucher, Joan’s roommate at the house of Catherine’s father, the city treasurer.<sup>75</sup> Catherine is not Joan—she lacks Joan’s ability to conquer “by a single glance”—but she is almost as beautiful, free from taboo, and certainly able to inspire love (17:206). The young men in Joan’s retinue fall for her, and De Conte’s love moves him to produce an “exquisite” poem in sixteen stanzas, full of romantic excesses and mixed metaphors (17:209–10). (In the delivery, it “goes to smash” because Paladin is so affected that his weeping drowns out the recitation, the effect of the work overriding the words (17:214–16). De Conte comments about his poetic talent, that hidden qualities in us may be drawn out of us by circumstance or the right person—in this, Catherine parallels Joan—but startlingly, he compares these unrecognized qualities to his grandfather’s cancer: we conceal, he says, both “gifts and diseases.” Love, and with it, charismatic authority, can shatter conventions and forms, revealing our nature, but that nature is not unambiguously admirable: love, De Conte says, made writing a poem “no more trouble to me . . . than it is to stone a dog” (17:211).

The spirit is resisted by matter; divine revelation and theoretical principle can illumine practice, but they do not immediately transform it. Every revolution bears the marks of its past. Despite Joan’s example and enchantment, the French remained full of distrust for their leaders and for each other

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the commons; Joan had nothing to do with establishing these features of the national state (Jouvenel, *On Power*, 182, 198).

<sup>74</sup>Guérard in Jules Michelet, *Joan of Arc*, ed. Albert Guérard (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957), 131. Contemporary social scientists are sure to associate the “routinization of charisma” with Max Weber (for example, Hans Gerth, and C. Wright Mills, eds. *Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1946], 297). If Twain had a source for these reflections, however, it was probably W. E. H. Lecky (*A History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe* [New York: Appleton, 1867], 1:310).

<sup>75</sup>Boucher was a real historical personage; his daughter, however, was actually named Charlotte (Michelet 1962, 54).

(18:107–8), and Joan's leadership clearly had little effect on the inhumanities of the time. At the end of the Battle of Patay, De Conte remembers, Joan—seeing a prisoner mortally wounded by French soldiers because he could pay no ransom, rushed to his side and comforted him in his last moments, her face bathed in tears. The story certainly illustrates Joan's compassion, and the translator reinforces its credibility by citing Lord Gower to the effect that De Conte was probably an eyewitness (18:18). As has already been noted, however, Gower himself is citing Michelet, and the translator's otherwise curious preference for Gower is explained by the fact that, in Michelet's account, the incident is less isolated than De Conte and Gower allow us to believe: there, the carnage is described as general, brutality is the rule. If Joan weeps, it is because the cruelty is beyond her control.<sup>76</sup>

A little later, in a chapter ironically titled "The Bloodless March," De Conte sets down an occurrence in which a Burgundian soldier, kept from carrying off his French captive, is about to kill him. The Dwarf attempts to talk him out of it; the Burgundian interrupts with an insult to Joan; outraged, the Dwarf crushes the life out of him. Now freed, the French prisoner begins to abuse the corpse of his former captor and is slain by another Burgundian soldier to "a great burst of jolly laughter . . . from friend and foe alike." It was, De Conte says, "one of the pleasantest incidents" in his military career (18:36–37). Joan's very name, in other words, became the occasion for savagery, so that it seems almost natural that the villagers at Domremy hang a man who threw a stone at Joan's cat (18:71).<sup>77</sup>

Nothing epitomizes this aspect of Joan's difficulties more than her relationship with the Dwarf. When she meets him, he has returned to the army, having deserted the colors in order to comfort and bury his dying wife, making him liable for a death sentence. Joan suspends the law. As an exercise of discretion, her decision accords with humanity, but it is also shrewd: Joan recognizes that the Dwarf came back to the army, knowing it meant death, because he had "nothing left to love," and Joan offers him patriotism, the love of France, as a reason for living (17:222–23). The Dwarf, however, resists abstractions. "You are my France," he tells Joan, "and I will have no other." (Facing his adamant insistence, Joan eventually yields, partly because, human, she is "touched and pleased" [17:226].) The Dwarf's personal stance, De Conte observes, points to a more general rule: peoples are not content with an idea; loving anything "great and noble," they will seek to "embody" it, making the spirit flesh. For instance, he remarks in a pointed

<sup>76</sup>Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 70.

<sup>77</sup>Worse, Joan herself showed signs of adapting to the viciousness around her. Michelet depicts her as increasingly intoxicated with combat—De Conte has her moving armies in fantasy (18:92)—and more apt to be ruthless: she surrendered a captive (admittedly a brigand) to be hanged, dimming her "halo of saintliness." Michelet even argues that her trial and martyrdom were partly fortunate, dispelling some of the lengthening "shadows" on her reputation (Michelet, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 87–90).

aside, “[N]ot content with the cloudy abstract idea, they make a beautiful statue of [Liberty]” as an object for worship (17:226). Yet with Joan, who lives by sublimation in the interest of the higher life, this tendency is incongruous. In practice, idealism is distorted and often perverted; making too little allowance for the low, it can lose whatever possibilities there are for the high; edification must begin at the foundation. And in De Conte’s anachronistic allusion to the Statue of Liberty, Twain was thinking of the danger he saw in America: worshipful idolatry—especially the devotion to liberty of body—is at odds with freedom of spirit, just as identifying the republics with its leaders undermines the possibility of self-government.<sup>78</sup>

Joan relied on the faith and power of ordinary people, yet beguiled by the stories of her time, she never challenged monarchy or hierarchy or even hinted at democracy. She made France territorially more or less intact, but politically incomplete, a “nation” still confined to kings and nobles.<sup>79</sup> And Joan’s status as an icon of the Old Regime explains, if it does not justify, the violence done to her memory during the French Revolution.

As a young man, Twain had embraced the critics of the Revolution, but by the late 1880s, he was referring to it as noble and holy.<sup>80</sup> He still regarded it as overambitious in practice, especially in the belief that laws and doctrines could transform the French past, but he held that the Revolution’s Reign of Terror was passionate and relatively brief while the cruelties and terrors of the Old Regime—some of them committed and more overlooked under Joan’s authority—were calculated and lasted for centuries.<sup>81</sup> Most important, unlike the regime Joan helped to create, the Revolution—like its American inspiration—appealed to relatively accurate principles: it told truer stories, opening the door to human possibilities.

A century after the great revolutions, however, Twain was hinting broadly that Liberty, in its individualistic forms, was becoming as much an idol for the American regime as Joan had been for the old order.<sup>82</sup> The republic needed

<sup>78</sup>Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, 260, 245, 249. Theodore Roosevelt’s presidency made Twain fear, a few years after he finished *Joan*, that “monarchy is here to stay” (*De Voto, America*, 18, 24–25, 34, 49).

<sup>79</sup>Her followers were certainly no better, although De Conte did foresee a sort of democratizing upheaval (18:65). At Joan’s trial, when Joan’s lively defense of her king briefly won support from the English-leaning mob, De Conte called it a “law of nature” to “enjoy and applaud a spirited and promptly delivered retort,” but he did not recognize in this love of speech any evidence of humanity’s natural politicality, much less of its natural frights (18:247).

<sup>80</sup>See his letter to Howells, August 22, 1887 (Twain, *Mark Twain-Howells Letters*, 2:595); on his early, antirevolutionary views, see Howard Baetzhold, *Mark Twain and John Bull: The British Connection* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970).

<sup>81</sup>Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee*, 111–12.

<sup>82</sup>See Burke’s comments in the *Reflections* on liberty as the object of idolatry (Burke, *Works*, 3:241–42).

the higher virtues Twain saw in Joan of Arc, and, great storyteller that he was, he sought to charm us with her chanson.<sup>83</sup>

Still, Joan was not a perfect model. Twain told Albert Paine that, during his time as a printer's apprentice, he ran across a leaf, blown by the wind, from "some history of Joan of Arc." Earlier, Twain said, he would have paid it no attention, but at that moment, given his work, "any printed matter had acquired a professional interest for him." He read the page, and this first encounter with Joan aroused his interest in history—previously, Paine asserts, Twain "had never read any history"—and it crystallized "his sympathy for the oppressed, rebellion against tyranny and scorn for the divine right of kings." This chance event, consequently, was a "turning point" in Twain's life.<sup>84</sup>

It would be generous to call this story implausible, especially since, as Paine noted with some puzzlement, Twain did not mention the incident in his own valedictory essay, "The Turning Point of My Life."<sup>85</sup> It was not that he had forgotten Joan. She appears in "The Turning Point of My Life," paired with Martin Luther: both are said to have souls made of asbestos, proof against temptation had they been born in Eden, admirable perhaps but not quite human.<sup>86</sup> Twain offered Eden, along with Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon, as more or less fundamental "turning points" of his life, one sacred and one secular, symbols of a metaphysical determinism in which human choice and conduct are understood as the results of prior causation,

<sup>83</sup>Writing, becoming part of a language and a culture, can modify "circumstance," offering a small, but potentially potent, opening for autonomy (Fishkin, *Lighting out for the Territory*, 7; Jennifer Rafferty, "Mark Twain, "Labor and Technology," *Over Here* 15:1–2 [1995] 20–33). The musical image is intentional: at about the time Twain was composing *Joan*, Katharine Lee Bates, in one of the stanzas of "America, the Beautiful," was praying "America, America, may God thy gold refine/Till all success be nobleness/ And every gain, divine/" It is telling that, just as Twain's book is not often read, that verse is rarely sung.

<sup>84</sup>A. Paine, *Biography*, 1:81–82.

<sup>85</sup>Paine, *Biography*, 1:82; for "The Turning Point of My Life," see Twain, *Complete Essays*, 477–84. Cox calls the story of the wind-blown page "a fabrication" (Cox, 248; on the other side, see Dixon Wecter, *Sam Clemens of Hannibal* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952], 211, 309 n). Despite what he told Paine, the pretensions of Twain's family, if nothing else, gave him something of an early interest in aristocratic history (Earl Briden, "'Too Public a Fornicator': A Clemens Ancestor as Mark Twain Found Him," *Mark Twain Journal* 32, no.2 [1994]: 3–4).

<sup>86</sup>"We could be made better," Twain wrote in *Three Thousand Years Among the Microbes*, "but we wouldn't be interesting then" (Mark Twain, *Mark Twain's Which Was the Dream? And Other Symbolic Writings of the Later Years*, ed. John Tuckey [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968], 551). De Conte also links Joan to Luther: during her trial, he has her saying, implicitly, "here I take my stand and will abide" (18:229).

the present and future defined by the past, “circumstance” overriding agency.<sup>87</sup>

However, Twain indicated that the turning point of his life, in an existential sense, had been that “I had the measles when I was twelve years old.” Revolting against the dreary isolation then thought to offer the best protection against the disease, the young Clemens decided that “life on these miserable terms was not worth living” and escaped to the house of a friend who had the illness and from whom he contracted it.<sup>88</sup> It was this incident, Twain said, that decided his mother to apprentice him to a printer: consequently, it preceded and made possible the supposed encounter with the wind-blown page about Joan and—note the seemingly minor detail in the story he told Paine—made him inclined to examine it at all.<sup>89</sup>

Twain’s youthful “turning point” indicates that he shared with Joan a conviction that the value of life is contingent, that mere life must be held to the measure of the good life—a proposition that, once accepted, affords human beings a measure of autonomy.<sup>90</sup> Yet Twain, at least in his twelve-year-old incarnation, preferred death to being deprived of human friendship and society; Joan chose death rather than be untrue to her Voices (18:128). Twain’s story indicated that his choice had priority over and framed whatever admiration he felt for Joan’s subordination of the human to the superhuman. In fact, Twain saw human beings as middling creatures, not suited to live completely in the spirit any more than to give themselves wholly over to sensuality.<sup>91</sup> Joan’s radical sublimation came at the cost of much of what Twain once called “the tender grace of life,” almost certainly too high a price in Twain’s view, since he was confident that the comradeship of honorable love is the clearest human instance of what is divinely right.<sup>92</sup> Love, particularly when it is linked to the rearing of children, can nurture and sustain the spirit, even in a gilded age, just as a great storyteller can help us to hear the republican music in our souls.

<sup>87</sup>For a fine critical study of “The Turning Point of my Life,” see Robert Rees and Richard Dilworth Ruff, “Mark Twain’s ‘The Turning Point of My Life,’” *American Literature* 40 (1969): 524–35.

<sup>88</sup>Twain, *Complete Essays*, 481, 483.

<sup>89</sup>That Twain actually had the measles earlier in his life, changing the time in “The Turning Point of My Life” to make the incident lead to his apprenticeship, only emphasizes his intention to link it to—and to make it controlling of—his alleged finding of the page about Joan (Rees and Ruff, “Turning Point,” 526, 533 n.).

<sup>90</sup>Mark Twain, *Letters from the Earth*, ed. Bernard de Voto (New York: Harpers, 1962), 190.

<sup>91</sup>Twain, *Letters from the Earth*, 229. Twain knew that the extreme suppression of the body he attributed to Joan (see his marginal note in Michelet, 1873, 10) is associated with forms of madness far more often than with enlightenment (compare the reference to W. E. H. Lecky, *A History of European Morals* [New York: Braziller, 1955], 2:119 in Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee*, 214 n.).

<sup>92</sup>Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, 598; Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee*, 407.