

# Interpretation

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## Mark Twain's *Joan of Arc*: An American Woman?

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### LOVE'S LABOR

"Possibly the book may not sell, but that is nothing—it was written for love."<sup>1</sup> Thus spoke Mark Twain of what he described as his best and most thoroughly researched novel.<sup>2</sup> And perhaps he was right, not only about the book's worth but also its popularity.<sup>3</sup> For the text to which he referred was

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Twain to H. H. Rogers, April 29, 1895, in *Mark Twain's Letters*, ed. A. B. Paine (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1917), 2:624.

<sup>2</sup> "I like the *Joan of Arc* best of all my books; & it is the best; I know it perfectly well. And besides, it furnished me seven times the pleasure afforded me by any of the others; 12 years of preparation & 2 years of writing. The others needed no preparation, & got none" (quoted in James M. Cox, *The Fate of Humor* [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002], 250).

<sup>3</sup> The novel's tone and content are evidently so different from those of Twain's previous novels that many scholars dismiss the text as the sloppy sentimentality of an aging man whose reverence for Joan undermines his typically acerbic wit and sharp insight. David Foster helpfully documents the wide range of Twain scholars who dismiss the work in this way in "On the Theme of Mark Twain's *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*," *Mark Twain Annual*, no. 13 (2015): 43–62, esp. 44–46.

not *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, or *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*—expressly American classics even now read in high schools throughout the United States—but rather a book about a small French peasant girl, Joan of Arc.

Joan of Arc? Impressive though she may be, a seventeen-year-old girl, almost single-handedly responsible for the revival of the spirit of the French soldiers and people on the brink of despair and capitulation during the Hundred Years' War between England and France, is hardly Twain's typical hero. Other abnormalities about the text might immediately strike the thoughtful reader, not least the title of the work. What could Twain mean by calling his self-proclaimed masterpiece, "written for love," *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*? How could a preeminent American novelist presume such intimacy with, much less dare to recreate, another era, another nation, the child of medieval times, and a medieval church? What could he intend his audience, primed by the reading of works such as *Huckleberry Finn*, stories of ruddy American boys, to gain from this work about a small French girl?

To begin our inquiry, we might turn to the question immediately raised by the title of this perplexing work. *Who* is "personally recollecting" the life, speeches, and deeds of Joan of Arc, and why? Is it Twain? Not exactly. It is rather Sieur Louis de Conte, Joan's personal secretary and childhood companion, who goes to great lengths to establish his credibility as an eyewitness to her life. He not only attended Joan of Arc from their childhood in Domremy until her bitter end at the stake, but he also attended her rehabilitation hearings after her death.<sup>4</sup> But in answering the question of narration, de Conte's role raises another problem, for Twain fictionally aggrandizes de Conte's historical role in Joan's life. Furthermore, the novel contains the added qualification that it is "translated" out of "Ancient French" into "modern English" by a fictitious translator, Jean François Alden, who often takes anachronistic liberties (regularly calling Joan "the commander in chief," for example) in his translations.<sup>5</sup> Our translator reminds Twain's audience of his role when he leaves footnotes, throughout the book, that alert us to certain discrepancies between de Conte's predictions and historical events that occurred after his death.

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Twain, *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 27.

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Twain initially published the work in installments in *Harper's Magazine*. As Andrew Tadie observes, "the reading public did not realize that the work was written by Mark Twain," for the novel was "ostensibly a recent translation by Jean François Alden of the memoir of Sieur Louis de Conte, the one person who knew Joan and was with her during the three important stages of her life: as visionary village peasant, as a military genius, and as the defendant at her trial" (introduction to *Personal Recollections*, 9).

Twain is, then, twice removed from the telling of this tale. And yet this is a tale told by a teller (de Conte translates “tale”) who shares Twain’s christened initials, S. L. C. (Samuel Langhorne Clemens). Moreover, de Conte addresses his work to his “great-great grand nieces and nephews” in the year 1492 in order that his descendants (or at least his heirs) might hear, learn from, and cherish Joan’s story. Indeed, it would not be too much to say that this introductory letter makes it apparent that this is a novel written precisely for those who would inhabit the new world of America discovered in 1492.

We have moved, then, from one obvious answer to the question of who is personally recollecting Joan of Arc to the next. This is a book written by an author (Twain) for his modern (and largely American) audience in such a way as to make a lesson from the past (translated out of archaic French into *modern* English) available to these readers. Something old must be discovered anew. Perhaps America, the world conceived in 1492, must be sought anew. But by what means? By means of recollecting a peculiar figure, a woman, a *French* woman, Joan of Arc.

What is it that Twain desires us to recollect about Joan? In an essay written a few years after the novel was published, Twain claims that the artist’s task is to “paint the spirit” of one whose “childlike faith,” “loyal heart,” “lovable character,” and courage won not only the hearts of a cowering French nation but its freedom. It is precisely the character of this “forgiving, generous, unselfish, magnanimous,” mere slip of a seventeen-year-old “girl soldier” which we must learn to recollect.<sup>6</sup> But what could a modern American audience learn from this “child” and from an age innocent of the advancements of modern politics and modern science? Will not the stories and strife of the Hundred Years’ War—stories from an old world marked by overt concern for God, for king, and for country—strike modern readers as hopelessly quaint?

It might be useful, then, to consider a character study of Twain’s immediate American audience undertaken by one Alexis de Tocqueville not long before Twain composed *Personal Recollections*. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville warns of the dangerous effects that might be produced by a liberal democratic regime in which the love of equality would eventually outstrip devotion to (and ability to preserve) freedom, a particular form of the moral devotions (“mores” or “habits of the heart,” as Tocqueville calls them) that above all else culminates in a love of the noble and beautiful. Americans, Tocqueville warns, “will habitually prefer the useful to the beautiful,” and

<sup>6</sup> Mark Twain, “Saint Joan of Arc,” in *Personal Recollections*, 452.

for that reason might lose their capacity for the great virtue, devotion, and sacrifice necessary for the preservation of the regime.<sup>7</sup>

It is for the kind of audience against which Tocqueville warned—one concerned with utility rather than beauty—that Twain paints the soul of Joan of Arc, whose spirited faith, nobility, courage, and love of her own roused to victory a French nation on the brink of despair and utter capitulation. Perhaps Twain, like Tocqueville, supposed the hope for the success of the American experiment lay not simply in its practicality, abundance, or commercial success but rather in the ability of its citizens to maintain certain virtues necessary to the preservation of freedom. Yet for Tocqueville, and, as this essay will argue, Twain, the task of preserving and transmitting moral virtue in a democracy resides above all else with its women.<sup>8</sup>

Joan of Arc is, then, for Twain not just the past liberator of France; she is America's greatest hope. For in displaying her beauty and nobility—traits Americans are likely to overlook in pursuing what is useful—Twain warns America not to forget her noblest possibility, as though claiming, with Tocqueville, that America's success is due to “the superiority of its women,” who are the makers of mores.<sup>9</sup> This is especially evident when Twain's narrator recalls an ancient prophecy of Merlin that “in a far future time France would be lost by a woman and restored by a woman.” The narrator de Conte can hardly keep from applying this saying to Joan, observing that “France was now, for the first time, lost—and by a woman, Isabel of Bavaria, her base Queen; doubtless this fair and pure young girl was commissioned of Heaven to complete this prophecy.”<sup>10</sup> Isabel of Bavaria, the Dauphin's mother, was thought to have encouraged the Treaty of Troyes that effectively disinherited her son and transferred the rule of France to the issue of the English king Henry V, the infant Henry VI. If France had been lost by a woman unfaithful to the nation (and possibly to her husband), how much more might it be redeemed through a woman with the purity and fidelity of Joan of Arc?<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 439.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 279, 563, 576.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 576.

<sup>10</sup> Twain, *Personal Recollections*, 89.

<sup>11</sup> There is even some suggestion that Charles is through Isabel's infidelity an illegitimate son and not true heir to the crown. This doubt, felt deeply by Charles, is the primary source of the Dauphin's cowardice, which Joan ameliorates by speaking to him of this doubt, which he has shared with no one. See *ibid.*, 124–25. Moreover, the particular phrasing of Merlin's prophecy recollects the Christian image of a world lost through the sin of Eve and redeemed through the fidelity of Mary the mother of Jesus. The

Twain's hope for America at the dawn of the twentieth century was for one who would restore (or, rather, recollect) in the hearts of her people a notion of what is noble, and thereby restore the courage (or, as the Greeks say, the *andreia*, or "manliness") required to defend and preserve freedom. For if Joan could, as de Conte tells us, make a man of the cowering French king, with his "little soul like a raisin,"<sup>12</sup> could she not inspire a nation whose very strength, its commercial success, might become a weakness, enervating the moral courage necessary to the preservation of liberty?<sup>13</sup> If Twain's estimation of his work is accurate, his readers might see in the text that he loved so dearly the spirit of Joan as a model of and for an American woman.

Asserting that Joan of Arc, a French shepherdess, political martyr, and saint of the Catholic Church, embodies the virtues essential to the preservation of the United States of America may sound a bit far-fetched. We might begin more cautiously by investigating what, exactly, Twain took to be most remarkable about the character and virtue of Joan. The bulk of the work is divided into three parts—"In Domremy," "In Court and in Camp," and "Trial and Martyrdom"—each of which traces Joan's early education and youth, her rise from shepherdess to supreme commander of the French armies, and her betrayal, trial, and burning at the stake, respectively. In what follows, we trace Twain's treatment of Joan's virtue and her unique capacity to draw forth what is most noble from her men, particularly from Charles, the cowardly king of France, and from her childhood friend nicknamed "the Paladin." Probing Twain's understanding of Joan's virtue, the fundamental features of which are her utter willingness to sacrifice her own good for the good of her nation and her ability to embolden her men, sheds light on the author's teaching in the novel and offers implications for his hope for the possibility of maintaining the American regime.

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story of Joan might then be understood as a reenactment of a primordial story of fall and redemption and the way in which women might catalyze ruin or magnify what is good.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>13</sup> George Washington warns of this danger in a letter to James Warren, in which he wonders "whether foreign Commerce is of real advantage to any Country; that is, whether the luxury, effeminacy, and corruptions which are introduced along with it; are counterbalanced by the convenience and wealth which it brings with it" (Mount Vernon, October 7, 1785). Similarly, in an essay published in the *Maryland Gazette* in 1788, an anonymous Anti-Federalist warns of the danger of an "overgrown, luxurious and effeminate capital," which will soften the nation and invite foreign intrigue (*The Complete Anti-Federalist*, ed. Herbert Storing [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981], 5:31).

JOAN'S VIRTUE: "THE BEAUTIFUL," "THE BASHFUL,"  
"THE PATRIOT," AND "THE BRAVE"

Often the observations of one's friends concerning one's character are deeply revealing. And as we all know, character begins to develop from childhood.<sup>14</sup> Hence, by allowing de Conte to recollect so much of Joan's early childhood and interaction with her peers, Twain grants his audience some insight into the source of the consistent modesty, nobility, love of her own, and courage that Joan learned from her humble beginnings as a shepherdess from the hamlet of Domremy. De Conte showcases these essential virtues of Joan of Arc perhaps most vividly when he recollects the wealth of nicknames bestowed on her by her childhood playmates:

All children have nicknames, and we had ours. We got one apiece early, and they stuck to us; but Joan was richer in this matter, for as time went on she earned a second, and then a third, and so on, and we gave them to her. First and last she had as many as half a dozen. Several of these she never lost. Peasant girls are bashful naturally; but she surpassed the rule so far, and colored so easily, and was so easily embarrassed in the presence of strangers, that we nicknamed her the Bashful. We were all patriots, but she was called *the* Patriot, because our warmest feeling for our country was cold beside hers. Also she was called the Beautiful; and this was not merely because of the extraordinary beauty of her face and form, but because of the loveliness of her character. These names she kept, and one other—the Brave.<sup>15</sup>

Each of Joan's nicknames—the Bashful, *the* Patriot, the Beautiful, and the Brave—allows us to glimpse what Twain saw in the soul of one capable of rousing France and her cowering king from its slumber after their defeat at Agincourt by Henry V. The France of Joan's childhood is one that "had fallen low—so low!" ravaged as it was by "famine, pestilence, [and] slaughter," even to the point that the bodies of the dead were left in heaps in the streets of Paris without Christian burial, to be set upon by wolves. De Conte describes a France beset by the traitorous Burgundian party (Frenchmen in favor of English rule), housing a discouraged people and a ragged army under the reign of a cowardly king subject to treacherous advisors.

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<sup>14</sup> As Aristotle explains when discussing the relationship between character, moral virtue, and habit in Book II of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, "It makes no small difference...whether one is habituated in this or that way straight from childhood, but a very great difference—or rather the whole difference" (1103b23–25).

<sup>15</sup> Twain, *Personal Recollections*, 53.

It is into this bleak political landscape that Joan of Arc is born. Yet Joan's extraordinary political and moral virtue is all the more striking in that it develops amid rather ordinary peasant conditions. With one exception, Joan's early childhood is marked only by the distant rumor of war, and Domremy, "like any other humble little hamlet of that remote time and region," was a simple and picturesque world apart from the political ravages of the Hundred Years' War. When de Conte first speaks of the village of Domremy in which he and Joan grew up, he observes that "every human creature in the village was an Armagnac—a patriot—and if we children hotly hated nothing else in the world, we did certainly hate the English and Burgundian name and polity in that way."<sup>16</sup> Joan is *the* Patriot among patriots.

The village of Domremy is a world with a limited moral horizon marked "by the narrownesses and prejudices got at second hand" from elders and tradition, both religious and political. The very children whose nicknames for Joan reveal her remarkable character and qualities are described as being, while "not bright, of course," "all good children," "good-hearted and companionable, obedient to their parents and the priest." "Their religion was inherited, their politics the same." As they grew up these children "became properly stocked with narrownesses and prejudices without examination also—which goes without saying."<sup>17</sup>

While the peasants of Domremy remain unquestioningly loyal to the French king, "impotent as he was,"<sup>18</sup> Joan's love of her homeland, reflected in her well-earned title "*the* Patriot," is exceptional in that it is joined to a precocious political prudence evident in her rhetorical capacities. Joan, that is, never simply bows either to her parents or to her priest, as the other children do.<sup>19</sup> An early episode both reveals these remarkable qualities in Joan

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 33. Indeed, de Conte's narration reveals that for all his skepticism (a theme explored by David Foster), he too might be stocked with some of the same prejudices as the other children of Domremy, albeit with a certain amount of self-reflection. For example, de Conte tells us that many villagers supposed that a dragon of "a brilliant blue color, with gold mottlings" lived in the woods outside Domremy, though "no one had ever seen it." De Conte, in contrast, acknowledges that this was not an opinion he shared, for "I think there is no sense in forming an opinion when there is no evidence to form it on." Hence, regarding the color of the dragon, de Conte tells us confidently, "I always held the belief that its color was gold and without blue, for that has always been the color of dragons." The dragon was eventually exorcised, which is why de Conte never saw it for himself (34). See also Foster, "On the Theme," 51–53.

<sup>18</sup> Twain, *Personal Recollections*, 31.

<sup>19</sup> The following episode showcases Joan's refusal to simply bow to the priest. For an episode illustrating Joan's reasoned and well-mannered refusal to simply bow to her parents' authority, see chapter 3 of part 1, in which Joan gives her porridge to a ragged road-straggler, despite the ongoing debate about

and reflects Twain's portrayal of Joan as a heroine uniquely suited to the American regime. There stood in Domremy, de Conte recalls, "a most majestic beech-tree with wide-reaching arms," which the children of Domremy would flock to every summer and sing and dance around for hours together with the fairies of Domremy, "oh, every summer for more than five hundred years." The children often "made wreaths of flowers and hung them upon the tree and about the spring to please the fairies that lived there."<sup>20</sup> Yet one fateful day when Joan was ill and unable to defend them, these fairies, so beloved by the children, were banished from the tree by the village priest, for they had been warned nearly one hundred years prior that should they be seen by any of the peasants they would be exiled forever. Hence, though the children themselves had never seen the fairies they loved so dearly, when a peasant woman happened upon the fairies in private revelries, she reported her sighting to the priest, who subsequently banished them for their crime.<sup>21</sup>

Confined to bed with a fever during this occurrence, Joan awoke to find her beloved fairies exiled from the village, whereupon she "burst into a great storm of anger, for so little a creature," and rushed to the priest, Père Fronte, to plead their cause.<sup>22</sup> Joan's willingness to oppose the good father illustrates her natural pity alongside her admirable concern for justice. Unlike her companions, whose simple patriotism manifests itself as a simple "obedien[ce] to their parents and the priest," Joan stands up to Père Fronte when he has committed an injustice. Her cross-examination of the priest demonstrates more than her principled love of her own, however. It both showcases a capacity for rhetoric that would serve her throughout her short life and also allows Twain to put into her mouth, rather anachronistically, an odd embrace of a certain kind of piously suffused but unmistakably liberal democratic language.

"Who owns France?"

"God and the King."

"Not Satan?"

"Satan, my child? This is the footstool of the Most High—Satan owns no handful of its soil."

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the propriety of feeding the rascal's laziness, which her father is initially firmly against. "When she was asked why she had not waited until a decision was arrived at, she said the man's stomach was very hungry, and it would not have been wise to wait, since she could not tell what the decision would be. Now that was a good and thoughtful idea for a child" (*ibid.*, 51).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 39–40.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

“Then who gave those poor creatures their home? God. Who protected them in all those centuries? God. Who allowed them to dance and play there all those centuries and found no fault with it? God. Who disapproved of God’s approval and put a threat upon them? A man. Who caught them again in harmless sports that God allowed and a man forbade, and carried out that threat, and drove the poor things away from the home the good God gave them in His mercy and His pity, and sent down His rain and dew and sunshine upon it five hundred years in token of His peace? It was *their* home—theirs, by the grace of God and His good heart, and no man had a right to rob them of it. And they were the gentlest, truest friends that children ever had, and did them sweet and loving service all these five long centuries, and never any hurt or harm.... And what had the children done that they should suffer this cruel stroke? The poor fairies *could* have been dangerous company for the children? Yes, but never had been; and could is no argument. Kinsmen of the Fiend [as the fairies were called]? What of it? Kinsmen of the Fiend have *rights*, and these had; and children have rights, and these had; and if I had been here I would have spoken—I would have begged for the children and the fiends, and stayed your hand and saved them all.”<sup>23</sup>

The priest left this encounter ashamed of himself and amazed at Joan, fully persuaded by her argument, to the point that he admits, “Ah me, poor children, poor fiends, they *have* rights, and she said true—I never thought of that. God forgive me, I am to blame.”<sup>24</sup>

We might be surprised to find Joan defending justice and convincing the priest of his wrongs in the (modern) language of individual rights. Has something been added in Alden’s translation? After all, what would a young peasant girl in France in the early 1400s know about the doctrine of individual natural rights, advanced by seventeenth-century liberal thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke? As Alden is fictional, we must infer instead that it is Twain who infuses Joan’s passionate character and rhetorical gifts with an understanding of human beings, and even fairies, as creatures bearing unalienable, God-given rights. Her appeal is that the priest and the follies of men have arbitrarily deprived both the children and the fairies, though they be “Friends of the Fiend,” of certain unalienable rights to due process. Doing this is so contrary to justice that, having delivered her rebuke, the young Joan flies from the priest’s presence in angry tears. The priest has deprived the children of dear friends, but above all else, he has deprived the

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 44–45.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 45.

fairies of the home bestowed upon them by God. The fairies, though friends of the fiend, ought to be pitied, not banished. The anachronistic presence of the language of individual rights in Joan's speech signals Twain's attempt to combine Joan's virtue and love for God's creatures (even fiendish ones) with an understanding of justice that would serve to remove matters of temporal justice from priestly control, and hence would likely prevent the kind of unjust judgment exercised in this episode by Père Fronte.

Yet even while Joan's understanding of justice is phrased in "modern English," her moral disposition as a whole stands as a rebuke to the self-interested individualism that so often accompanies the language of individual rights. Joan manifests, in contrast, an impressive courage, marked by her unflinching willingness to sacrifice herself for others and for what is noble and just. Another episode de Conte relays from Joan's childhood, one that prompted some to bestow upon her the honorific "the Brave," highlights this courage. De Conte recalls a particular occasion in which he and the other children learn the "black news" that the queen of France (Isabel of Bavaria, the woman through whom France was lost, according to de Conte), the wife of the mad but reigning Charles VI, has, along with the treacherous Duke of Burgundy, orchestrated the humiliating Treaty of Troyes. The treaty effectively disinherited her son, the future King Charles VII, and entrusted the succession of the French nation to the infant son of Henry V, king of England.<sup>25</sup>

Upon hearing this news, the children grow despondent and, in order to distract themselves from their grief, engage in speculative dreams of the battles and heroic deeds they *would* have performed for the cause of France had they been just a few years older.<sup>26</sup> Even some of the little girls of the village (excepting Joan) begin to imagine how valiantly they would have fought had they been men. This speculation on the part of the girls leads one of Joan's peers and the most impressive boaster of the bunch, Edmond Aubrey,<sup>27</sup> nicknamed "the Paladin" "because of the armies he was always going to eat up some day," to speak dismissively of the girls, "Pooh!" For everyone knows that, much like the Paladin, "girls can brag, but that's all they are good for. Let a thousand of them come face to face with a handful of soldiers once, if you

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>27</sup> It was Edmond's mother who tattled on the fairies to the village priest. See *ibid.*, 39. Edmond's proclivity for exaggeration does not reflect kindly on his upbringing, and so his identity as that "foolish" and "thoughtless" woman's son emphasizes the fundamental injustice of the fairy tree incident and speaks to the importance of due process for fairies and friends of the fiend everywhere.

want to see what running is like. Here's little Joan—next *she'll* be threatening to go for a solider!”<sup>28</sup> But the Paladin's teasing hardly stops there:

The idea [of Joan as a soldier] was so funny, and got such a good laugh, that the Paladin gave it another trial, and said: “Why, you can just see her!—see her plunge into battle like any old veteran. Yes, indeed; and not a poor shabby common solider like us, but an officer—an officer, mind you, with armor on, and the bars of a steel helmet to blush behind and hide her embarrassment when she finds an army in front of her that she hasn't been introduced to.”...Well, he kept it up...till he made their sides ache with laughing, which was quite natural, for certainly it was a very funny idea—at that time—I mean, the idea of that gentle little creature, that wouldn't hurt a fly, and couldn't bear the sight of blood, and was so girlish and shrinking in all ways, rushing into battle with a gang of soldiers at her back. Poor thing, she sat there confused and ashamed to be so laughed at.<sup>29</sup>

Yet a sudden turn of events reveals not only the prophetic irony of these idle speculations but also their failure to take into account the strength of Joan's moral fiber. For even in the midst of their laughter, the children suddenly awake to the horrible realization that the “madman” of Domremy called “crazy Benoist” (a name meaning “blessed” in French) has escaped from his cell in the local prison and is rapidly approaching them, axe in hand, from behind the Fairy Tree where they have been holding counsel. “The thought that shot through us all was, crazy Benoist has gotten loose from his cage, and we are as good as dead!” de Conte recalls. At this point, “we all broke and fled, this way and that, the girls screaming and crying. No, not all; all but Joan.” Unlike the other children, Joan remains. De Conte turns around only to see the sickening sight of “Joan standing, and the maniac gliding stealthily toward her with his axe lifted.”<sup>30</sup>

This vision made the narrator so sick that he could not see, for a time, but, when he regains his sight, he sees Joan “walking by the man's side toward the village, holding him by his hand. The axe was in her other hand.”<sup>31</sup> What? Could “girlish” and “shrinking” Joan not only be safe but also be gently leading the madman to his cell, when any reasonable person would have either fled or frozen in fear at the sight of him? And this from the same child whose

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 56–57.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

association with valiant action in the face of death brought forth such peals of laughter from her peers? How could this be?

Joan is remarkable in that she is as patriotic, loyal, and pious as she is thoughtful and clever. Yet her unmatched wit is apparently surpassed by her indefatigable courage and compassion. When de Conte presses her for an explanation for her brave deed, she rather modestly accounts for her actions thus: "You make a great thing of it, but you mistake; it was not a great matter. It was not as if I had been a stranger to the man. I know him, and have known him long; and he knows me, and likes me." How has this acquaintance come to pass? Joan, we learn, has been feeding the madman through the bars of his cage in the village for some time. Moreover, the previous December, when two of the madman's fingers were chopped off "to remind him to stop seizing and wounding people passing by," Joan dressed his hand every day until it healed.<sup>32</sup> She was not afraid, then, because she knew the madman through her abundant generosity. But might a madman forget the debt of gratitude he owed to the small child, another companion inquires? Well, yes, Joan must admit that he did threaten to kill her with his axe. Why, then, did she resist running away with the other children? Joan's reply is telling: "Because it was necessary to get him to his cage; else he would kill some one. Then he would come to the like harm himself."<sup>33</sup>

Joan's humble remark, as de Conte observes, reveals just how "entirely forgetful of herself and her own danger" she is.<sup>34</sup> Yet all the more remarkable is that no one hearing her explanation thinks Joan's speech, revealing as it is of her generosity, bravery, and self-sacrifice, worthy of comment, challenge, or criticism. Rather, it was "taken by all as a matter of course and true." This silent acceptance of Joan's speech "shows how clearly her character was defined, and how well it was known and established" from so young an age.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 58–59. In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ foretells the judgment of the nations, saying, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. . . . Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me'" (Matt. 25:31–36 [New American Bible]). Joan, too, demonstrates her righteousness by feeding the hungry madman, welcoming him when he is lost, clothing his naked wounds, and visiting him in prison.

<sup>33</sup> Twain, *Personal Recollections*, 59.

<sup>34</sup> Similarly, David Foster takes Joan's self-forgetfulness to be the most astounding characteristic Twain sees in Joan. See Foster, "On the Theme," 56–58.

<sup>35</sup> Twain, *Personal Recollections*, 59.

Joan's remarkable bravery and willingness to sacrifice her own good for that of others—her nobility—distinguish her concern for individual rights from the individualism of liberal thinkers. Unlike modern liberalism, which proceeds from an understanding of human nature as inescapably self-interested, Joan's concern for individual rights is inseparable from her concern for the noble, or from her understanding that human beings are capable of sacrificing their self-interest for a higher good.

Joan's courage and nobility are again displayed in a later occurrence when, fully grown and leading troops behind enemy lines on her way to see the Dauphin, she encounters an English captain whose duty is to arrest "the witch" of Domremy in order to quash any remaining French hopes of reconquest. This later episode is as comical as it is anxiety inducing, for in the dead of night Joan's small group of Frenchmen are, like Joan herself for much of her life, not recognized for who they are. The English captain assumes that Joan and her troops are his own English scouts, and accordingly questions her as to the whereabouts and looks of Joan of Arc. Is she still behind us, the English captain asks? "She is still behind," Joan replies truthfully. Have you seen her, what she looks like, and where she is camped? "Yes, I have been in her camp," Joan again answers truthfully, "she is not more than seventeen." And so the dialogue continues, the English captain asking questions and Joan, even as she speaks the truth, misleading.<sup>36</sup> Eventually, the captain completes his line of questioning and commands his imagined scout to burn the bridge that would put a gulf between Joan and her English pursuers.

Once they are away from any threat of English pursuit, Joan's officers jokingly admire "how ingeniously she had deceived that man and yet had not told him anything that was not the truth."<sup>37</sup> Joan, however, is troubled by this and replies, "I thought he was deceiving himself. I forbore to tell him lies, for that would have been wrong; but if my truths deceived him, perhaps that made them lies, and I am to blame. I would God I knew if I have done wrong." While her men attempt to assure her that she has done no wrong, her brother, Jean, reminds her that she did something similar in telling her parents the truth (that she would go to her Uncle Laxart's house and would tend to his ill wife there) without telling them the whole truth (that she intended to go on to Vaucouleurs and eventually to lead the French to victory over the English).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 103–4.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

Joan is troubled by this and faces a struggle of conscience that displays the reflection and self-knowledge that accompanies her moral character. From her generals she is assured that she has done no wrong, for, they reason, “in the perils and necessities of war deceptions that help one’s own cause and hurt the enemy’s were always permissible.” In other words, necessity exculpates. Necessity turns what would in normal conditions be an evil into a good, or at least an excusable, action. This Machiavellian morality is unsatisfactory to Joan, however, who decidedly refuses to yield to it, as bowing to this understanding of morality (that necessity exculpates) so lowers the possibility of nobility (self-sacrifice) as to destroy it. Her response reveals both her self-understanding and her nobility:

“I see, now,” said Joan sorrowfully, “I told no lie, yet I deceived. I had tried all other ways first, but I could not get away, and I *had* to get away. My mission required it. I did wrong, I think, and am to blame.” She was silent a moment, turning the matter over in her mind, then she added, with quiet decision, “But the thing itself was right, and I would do it again.”<sup>39</sup>

What could Joan mean? She admits that she has or might have done wrong, and yet she affirms that she would do it all over again, for “the thing itself was right.” Joan refuses to claim that her actions were “necessary” evils, but rather assumes moral responsibility for wrongs she freely committed. To help his reader understand the significance of Joan’s statement, one that demonstrates the way in which her reason and self-knowledge are as crucial to her character as her other admirable virtues, Twain allows de Conte to reflect upon its significance:

It seemed an over-nice distinction, but nobody said anything. If we had known her as well as she knew herself, and as her later history revealed her to us, we should have perceived that she had a clear meaning there, and that her position was not identical with ours, as we were supposing, but occupied a higher plane. She would sacrifice herself—and her *best* self; that is, her truthfulness—to save her cause; but only that: she would not buy her *life* at that cost; whereas our war-ethics permitted the purchase of our lives, or any mere military advantage, small or great, by deception. *Her saying seemed a commonplace at that time, the essence of its meaning escaping us; but one sees, now, that it contained a principle which lifted it above that and made it great and fine.*<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Emphasis ours.

As in the episode with the madman, this reflection reveals the tremendous moral weight of Joan's action. Much like Twain's renowned character Huckleberry Finn, who famously decides to help Jim escape from slavery even at the cost of his eternal salvation ("All right, then, I'll go to hell"), Joan is willing to sacrifice even her prized virtue, her truthfulness, for the good of France, her divine mission.<sup>41</sup> Both of Twain's heroes exhibit a willingness to sacrifice their ultimate good—eternal salvation—for the good of another, be it a friend (as in the case of Huck) or a beloved nation (as in the case of Joan). Joan would do this not just for the sake of her cause, but for the sake of morality itself. Here she attains an almost unimaginable height of nobility in that she would willingly sacrifice her life and her "best self"—and so, by implication, her salvation—by assuming responsibility for the evil action of lying, rather than desecrate morality (and the possibility of noble action) by the alchemic claim that necessity turns evil into good and thus neutralizes good.

It is perhaps this mix of self-knowledge, nobility, an understanding of human rights, and a separating of religious piety from a direct relationship to secular authority that helps us to begin to understand Twain's admiration for the person of Joan and the way in which she might serve as a model for the American regime. Her very nobility stands as a rebuke to a regime that could allow its use of the language of individual rights to lower its goals to the pursuit of merely individualistic safety and comfort. Her courage, self-sacrifice, and self-understanding disclose that, while her use of the language of rights serves to curb the illegitimate use of church power in the political realm, it will not serve to banish the noble, to which the church might properly direct souls, from the political realm.

#### JOAN AND THE ART OF MANLINESS

While Joan's virtue is wondrous itself, one of the themes Twain allows his readers to reflect upon is not simply her modesty, nobility, love of her own, and courage, but also the way in which her virtue is bound to her womanliness, and the unique bearing her femininity has upon her men in the political sphere.<sup>42</sup> The preeminent example of this is the way in which de

<sup>41</sup> Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (New York: Norton, 1962), 168.

<sup>42</sup> That Joan's womanliness is a theme in throughout the novel is further supported by Twain's essay on Joan of Arc in which he emphasizes her femininity thus: "And always she was a girl; and dear and worshipful, as is meet for that estate. When she fell wounded the first time, she was frightened, and cried when she saw her blood gushing from her breast; but she was Joan of Arc! and when presently she found that her generals were sounding the retreat, she staggered to her feet and led the assault again and took the place by storm" ("Saint Joan of Arc," 451–52).

Conte describes Joan's interactions with the Dauphin (who, thanks to Joan, is eventually crowned king of France) himself.

The king is frequently described as "indolent" and surrounded by malicious and crafty advisors who successfully counsel inaction and render his rule impotent. When Joan, after innumerable delays contrived by these dubious counselors, finally meets the Dauphin, it is under false pretenses. In order to test the child's divine mission, the counselors have convinced Charles to dress one of his men-at-arms as king and the king himself as a pauper. If Joan should fail to recognize this trap, she will become the laughing stock of the "tinsel show" court, "with its small King and his butterfly dukelets," in such a way as to undermine her mission. Much to the shock of the court and to her own advisors, Joan sees through the trap and immediately identifies the true Dauphin and begs to speak with him privately.<sup>43</sup> De Conte describes the effect of that conversation as follows:

The talk between Joan and the King was long and earnest, and held in low voices. We could not hear, but we had our eyes and could note effects; and presently we and all the house noted one effect which was memorable and striking, and has been set down in memoirs and histories and in testimony at the Process of Rehabilitation by some who witnessed it; for all knew it was big with meaning, though none knew what that meaning was at the time, of course. *For suddenly we saw the King shake off his indolent attitude and straighten up like a man*, and at the same time look immeasurably astonished. It was as if Joan had told him something too wonderful for belief, and yet of a most uplifting and welcome nature.<sup>44</sup>

What had Joan told the dispirited Dauphin, the son of the crazed Charles VI and Isabel of Bavaria, who had effectively disinherited their own child? Years later, de Conte learned that Joan allayed the Dauphin's secret fear that he was Isabel's illegitimate son and therefore without rightful claim to the throne that the Treaty of Troyes, allegedly orchestrated by Isabel herself, surrendered to the son of Henry V. Joan spoke to the Dauphin of the "secret trouble" of his heart, a "doubt that wastes away [his] courage, and makes [him] dream of throwing all away and fleeing from [his] realm." Joan dismisses this doubt, this blot on his manhood, saying, "Thou art lawful heir to the King thy father, and true heir of France. God has spoken it. Now lift up thy head, and doubt no more, but give me men-at-arms and let me get about

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<sup>43</sup> Twain, *Personal Recollections*, 121–23.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 124–25. Emphasis ours.

my work.<sup>45</sup> It is this affirmation of his legitimacy that “straightened him up and *made a man of him* for a moment,” temporarily setting him free from his cowardly reliance upon deceitful counselors who reduced him to impotency and inaction.

What are we to make of this episode? What does Twain allow us to see through de Conte's narration? Moreover, what are we to make of Joan's ability to avoid the counselors' trap and, unflustered, pursue her mission? On one hand, Joan's bold confidence in pursuit of her mission and in addressing the fears of the king is reminiscent of de Conte's observation earlier in the novel that “prophecies boldly uttered never fall barren on superstitious ears.”<sup>46</sup> Joan's bold self-assuredness is enough to convince the Dauphin of his legitimacy in itself. But whence does Joan's conviction and unshakable confidence come? It is noteworthy that Twain never gives us reason to doubt the divine source of Joan's prophecies. The accuracy of her insights and predictions remains a mystery, perhaps even a miracle, throughout the text.

Further, Twain allows his narrator to see another dimension of the episode when de Conte describes the simple yet stunning dress Joan wore when she saw the Dauphin. Joan comes dressed in a “simple and witching costume...which I cannot think of even now in my dull age without being moved just as rhythmical and exquisite music moves one; for *that* was music, that dress—that is what it was—music that one saw with the eyes and felt in the heart.” It is as if, for de Conte, that clothing transfigures Joan, revealing her to be what he later calls “the spirit of France made flesh.”<sup>47</sup> “Yes,” de Conte reminisces, “she was a poem, she was a dream, she was a spirit when she was clothed in that.”<sup>48</sup>

In Twain's rendering, Joan of Arc makes a man out of nearly every cowering Frenchman she meets by becoming the embodiment of everything that is lovable and noble. She is the living Song of Roland, the physical expression

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 102. Early in the second part of the novel, Joan confronts certain men in her cohort who have conspired to take her life and informs them with a simple confidence, “Neither these men nor any others can take my life before my mission is accomplished... I will inform them of this, and also admonish them.” Once Joan informs these men of this, she also looks sorrowfully at the ringleader and observes that it is a pity that he should plot another's death when his own was so close. De Conte confirms that the man died that very night when his horse stumbled and fell crossing a ford. Neither Twain nor de Conte seems to suggest Joan had any part in orchestrating this conveniently timed death. See Foster, “On the Theme,” 50–53 on the role belief in the divine nature of Joan plays in the novel.

<sup>47</sup> Twain, *Personal Recollections*, 181.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 121.

of a love worthy of sacrificing their very lives in order to defend.<sup>49</sup> Even the most unseemly vices might be turned to virtues underneath the gaze of Joan of Arc, as when she forms an unlikely bond with the general La Hire, who is often likened to the devil himself. La Hire is a foil for Joan in every way: she is small, he is enormous; she is very light-skinned, he very dark; she a model of purity, he (and his camp of soldiers) a proverbial den of sin who can hardly speak without cursing. Yet he adores Joan and will do her bidding. And Joan's orders to La Hire suggest she has some insight (whether natural or supernatural) into the nature of men, for her first command is that the "loose women" be banished from the camp, then that "rough carousing" stop, that drinking and all other disorder be brought within strict limits, and that each man must be made to go to confession and daily prayers.<sup>50</sup>

Joan purifies La Hire's camp (and, to some extent, the old devil himself) by transforming their promiscuous longings into singular devotion to herself and to her cause, the cause of France and the cause of God. Indeed, this is evident when, during the battle to lift the seven-month English siege of Orleans, Joan successfully leads the French to an unlikely victory, though, in one of the more dramatic moments, she falls wounded. "Over her and about her, English and French fought with desperation—for she stood for France, indeed she *was* France to both sides—whichever won her won France, *and could keep it forever.*"<sup>51</sup> Joan of Arc becomes, for her men, the noble that they will sacrifice every longing to preserve. She becomes, for de Conte, the Dauphin, and her men, *more* than herself, for she *is* France to them. They will fight for her. And it is no accident that what inspires and ennobles these men to rise above their vices of cowardice (in the case of the king) and promiscuity (in the case of La Hire) is not an impressively large number of armed men or a powerful array of efficient weapons, but a small, beautiful, and courageous woman from Domremy. Twain, like Tocqueville, shows us the limits to the utilitarian thinking prized by Americans, and the heights to which beauty can lead men like the king and La Hire to ascend. Indeed, the beautiful Joan makes men of them.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> See *ibid.*, 46–52.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>52</sup> It is noteworthy that Twain apparently wrote the novel in part in order to rescue Joan of Arc from the salacious portrayal of her character in *Henry VI Part I*, in which Shakespeare makes Joan out to be a liar, a witch, and the king's bedfellow. That this is part of Twain's aim is evident when, in his essay on Joan of Arc, he observes that "three hundred years ago Shakespeare did not know the true story of Joan of Arc; in his day it was unknown even in France. For four hundred years it existed rather as a

Among these elevated examples of the Dauphin and La Hire a lower (but in no way humble) personage stands out: the Paladin. Throughout the text, the Paladin provides a source of comic relief and serves as another foil for Joan, “a kind of copy of Joan’s own [rise] in miniature,” as de Conte notes.<sup>53</sup> Whereas Joan is honest, direct, and admirable, the Paladin is a buffoon whose tales of his own imaginary grandeur in battle are filled with lies so large but so lovable that from time to time they bring his audience to tears. Indeed, the Paladin’s very nickname seems a mockery of any form of pretense to the courtly chivalry of the Paladin tradition, which calls to mind romances of knights in shining armor serving their lady and their king with valor and fidelity. The Paladin, as he first appears, is only a boaster, just as is (we might infer) any man who pretends to chivalry, a mere fairy tale to be chased out of modern men who would so much as hold a door for a lady. At least that is what de Conte’s initial portrayal of the Paladin would suggest. Yet no character undergoes so striking a transformation as the Paladin. In so doing, he becomes a vindication of the very form of manliness at which his name seems to poke fun, and it is none other than Joan who inspires this conversion.

Unlike Joan’s other childhood friends who accompanied her on her reconquest of France, the Paladin is crestfallen when the commission appointed by the Dauphin to investigate the sanctity of her mission clears Joan’s name and she is subsequently named “General-in-Chief of the Armies of France.”<sup>54</sup> His despair is largely due to the fact that prior to Joan’s embarking on her expedition the Paladin boasted himself into believing that she had promised to marry him. As a result of this, Joan was compelled to defend herself in an ecclesiastical court at Toul, where she cross-examined the Paladin, whose testimony “went rag by rag to ruin under her ingenious hands, until at last he stood bare, so to speak, he that had come so richly clothed in fraud and falsehood.”<sup>55</sup> How could one guilty of tarnishing the reputation of Joan of Arc and causing her such trouble hope to be anything other than an object of scorn and vengeance once she rose to high rank? Joan’s other childhood companions have hope of (and receive) formal appointments in Joan’s household, but the Paladin refrains from approaching Joan while she makes these

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vaguely defined romance than as a definite and authentic history” (“Saint Joan of Arc,” 441). Whereas Shakespeare’s *Henry VI* implies Joan “made a man” of the king in the lowest, most promiscuous sense, Twain sets out to clarify that Joan makes men out of her followers by lifting their gaze to what is noble and away from what is base.

<sup>53</sup> Twain, *Personal Recollections*, 149.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

installations—ashamed, for once, of his actions. Yet Joan calls him forth and speaks to him:

The Paladin entered humbly enough. He ventured no farther than just within the door. He stopped there, looking embarrassed and afraid. Then Joan spoke pleasantly, and said—"I watched you on the road. You began badly, but improved. Of old you were a fantastic talker, *but there is a man in you, and I will bring it out.*"<sup>56</sup>

How will Joan make a man of the Paladin? "Will you follow where I lead?" she asks him. "Into the fire!" he replies. "I believe you," says Joan. Following this exchange, Joan appoints the Paladin to a most preeminent and enviable position; she makes him her standard bearer, one who will stand alongside her, a visible point of encouragement for her own troops and a target of attack for her enemies. A more honorable position on the battlefield does not exist, according to de Conte. The Paladin and his peers are stunned. "If I ever disgrace this trust, my comrades here will know how to do a friend's office upon my body, and this charge I lay upon them as knowing they will not fail me," the Paladin says with emotion. "By the ring of that," observes de Conte, "she has turned this braggart into a hero. It is another of her miracles I make no doubt of it."<sup>57</sup>

While the Paladin never ceases to be a source of comic relief throughout the novel, this episode marks a change in him visible even to his friends. De Conte's conversation with Noël, another of Joan's childhood friends who often plays the straight man to the Paladin's buffoonery, bears this out. When Noël expresses his confusion at Joan's pick of the Paladin, de Conte defends her choice: "You have noticed that our chief knight says a good many wise things and has a thoughtful head on his shoulders. One day, riding along, we were talking about Joan's great talents, and he said, 'But, greatest of all her gifts is the seeing eye.'" Whereas "the common eye sees only the outside of things, and judges by that," Joan's seeing eye "pierces through and reads the heart and the soul, finding there capacities which the outside didn't indicate or promise, and which the other kind of eye couldn't detect." "Joan," de Conte says, defending her choice of standard bearer, "probably knows what is in him better than we do.... When a person in Joan of Arc's position tells a man he is brave, he *believes* it; and *believing* it is enough; in fact to believe yourself brave is to be brave." Noël agrees. "She's got a creating mouth as well as the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 147. Emphasis ours.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 147–48.

seeing eye! Ah yes, that is the thing. France was cowed and a coward; Joan of Arc has spoken, and France is marching, with her head up!"<sup>58</sup>

As much as Twain pokes fun at the romantic excesses of the chivalric tradition through the Paladin's character, how much more does he see in that once cowardly "lion"<sup>59</sup> a model of the manliness that might be drawn forth from men through a similar encounter with Joan of Arc's nobility. Indeed, the Paladin's final deed proclaims this more loudly than all his boasting. During Joan's final battle after which she is taken captive, it is the Paladin who remains defending her until the end.

The little personal guard around her thinned swiftly...When only the Dwarf and the Paladin were left, they would not give up, but stood their ground stoutly, a pair of steel towers streaked and splashed with blood; and where the axe of the one fell, and the sword of the other, an enemy gasped and died. And so fighting, and loyal to their duty to the last, good simple souls, they came to their honorable end. Peace to their memories!<sup>60</sup>

In his final moment memorialized by de Conte we see the man Joan has made of the Paladin. He remains true to his oath and true to his name, dying nobly in battle defending the lady to whom he has sworn to be true. And if this dynamic change can occur in this once hollow-chested boaster, how much more reason is there to hope that Twain's readers might themselves be ennobled by encountering Joan's story through de Conte's retelling?

#### CONCLUSION: MARTYRDOM AND MEMORY

Twain described his *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* as a work of love. And, indeed, as the novel draws to its close, it would be hard to see anything but what is lovable in the character and action of Joan of Arc. De Conte calls Joan the "spirit of France made flesh." For Twain, she seems above all to be the spirit of the noble and beautiful made flesh, embodying everything that is good and lovable in mankind.

And yet for all Joan's virtue, for all her inspiring nobility and ennobling of her men, at the end of her life she nevertheless falls into and remains in English hands, largely on account of the Dauphin's inaction. Unlike the Paladin, who rises to the heights of nobility under Joan's gaze, the Dauphin (now

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 149–51.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 98, 111.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 304–5.

King Charles VII), who owes his very monarchic legitimacy to the prophecy and valor of Joan of Arc, falls into his habitual cowardice, failing to act when Joan encourages him to do so, and eventually even omitting to send an offer of ransom on Joan's behalf. What are we to make of this? Does it not indicate that Joan is a failure? Has Twain simply told a tragic tale that stirs the souls of his audience but leaves us without hope? What indeed *is* Twain's teaching in the novel? Or has he merely told a story of ages past and times long ago to allow his audience a temporary distraction from whatever misery to which they may be subject?

One of the novel's more comic moments sheds light on Twain's intention in writing his novel. Just after Joan achieves the decisive French victory by winning the battle of Patay and the Dauphin finally allows himself to be crowned at her bidding, Joan's father and her uncle Laxart come to visit her. They are simple men whose experience of the world has not extended much beyond Domremy, and when they enter into the presence of noble lords and ladies and Joan herself, they have little notion of what propriety would require. Even after a day filled with feasts held in honor of their dear Joan, neither Laxart nor Papa D'Arc appear capable of grasping Joan's greatness. She remains in their eyes a child, and in many ways, she is. And so when Joan asks for news of her beloved Domremy, "that simple old Laxart," de Conte tells us, "sat up there and droned out the most tedious and empty tale one ever heard, and neither he nor Papa D'Arc ever gave a thought to the badness of the etiquette of it, or ever suspected that that foolish tale was anything but dignified and valuable history."<sup>61</sup>

What exactly were the contents of that tale? Three weeks prior, Uncle Laxart attempted to attend a funeral. But, realizing he was late for the event, Laxart decided to ride a young bull (Joan's previously) to the funeral to make up the time. On the way, the bull naturally lost its temper, bellowed into the village, knocked down some beehives, disrupted the funeral procession, and eventually broke loose from Laxart's control entirely, leaving the old man to suffer alone from an infuriated swarm of bees.<sup>62</sup> At the end of his woeful tale, Uncle Laxart can only scratch his head and wonder why Joan is laughing. At this point, de Conte interjects, expressing his indignation at Laxart's stupidity:

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 279–80.

Yes, both of those old people thought that that tale was pathetic; whereas to my mind it was purely ridiculous, and not in any way valuable to any one. It seemed so to me then, and it seems so to me yet. And as for history, it does not resemble history, for the office of history is to furnish serious and important facts that *teach*; whereas this strange and useless event teaches nothing; nothing that I can see, except not to ride a bull to a funeral; and surely no reflecting person needs to be taught that.<sup>63</sup>

While in some ways de Conte's unforgiving outrage is as laughable as Laxart's ridiculous tale, it is as if Twain allows his narrator to point to a deeper truth about the purpose of telling a story, particularly if that story is a history as is his *Personal Recollections*. The truth de Conte points us to is that history is a teacher, and the teller of a history ought not to tell a "pathetic" tale if it communicates only what a "reflecting person" would see clearly without much reflection.

What is it, then, that Twain desires to teach? In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle argues that there is a certain pleasure that accompanies the memory of painful events, for if what is noble or beautiful came from something painful, the memory itself becomes a source of sweetness (1379b1–3). In retelling the story of Joan through de Conte, Twain enshrines a vision of what is noble, the total self-sacrifice of a pure, lovely, virtuous child for the sake of her God and her country, in the memories of his own American readers. This is precisely the audience that de Tocqueville suggests is most likely to exchange what is most noble for what is useful or convenient, and thereby forget the possibility of noble virtue and self-sacrifice that could be the fruits of the very freedom their own regime is constructed to defend. Indeed, we learn through our translator's rare footnotes that even the progeny of de Conte's great-grand nieces and nephews have forgotten what they owe to Joan of Arc, as many of her patriotic relics were destroyed during the democratic excesses of the French Revolution. When the Paladin fell defending Joan in her final battle, the standard he carried so valiantly was eventually smuggled behind French lines and preserved, "safe for all time in the Treasury" of Orleans. Or so de Conte imagines at the time. The translator at this point interjects a footnote:

[Joan's standard] remained there three hundred and sixty years, and then was destroyed in a public bonfire, together with two swords, a plumed cap, several suits of state apparel, and other relics of the Maid, by a mob in the time of the Revolution. Nothing which the hand of Joan of Arc is known to have touched now remains in existence except

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 281.

a few preciously guarded military and state papers which she signed, her pen being guided by a clerk or her secretary Louis de Conte.<sup>64</sup>

The democratic excesses of the French Revolution led to the destruction of the physical memorials of Joan's short and noble life.

In observing Twain's evident love for Joan, the object of devotion in his work "written for love," one cannot but wonder about the consistency of his love for Joan with his reputation of dark humor and cynicism. Indeed, it may be that this reputation stands in the way of our appreciation of his seriousness as a thinker, a seriousness evident in the ending of another of his renowned American classics, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, which, like *Personal Recollections*, contains as much comedy as it does moral seriousness. In it, Hank Morgan, "a likeable young man from Connecticut, endowed with the defining sensibilities of late nineteenth-century America," wakes up in Arthurian England after an unfortunate encounter with a crowbar. Seeing the poverty, disease, slavery, and inequality present in the place of "mythic Arthurian charm," Hank sets out to modernize the kingdom by promoting education, industry, scientific innovation, and democratic rights.<sup>65</sup> Yet in the end, Hank's project fails, as his attempts to modernize medieval England meet with a counterrevolution of 25,000 knights attempting to defend their way of life. After a final battle of utter destruction, Hank and his victorious boys are sure to die, as they cannot leave the bunker they fight from (or else they will be killed by the people of Arthurian England), and they cannot stay without succumbing to the disease and pestilence of the bodies of thousands of knights that litter the field around them. Hank's modernizing project ends in ruins, and above all else the destruction of the very knights and their way of life the Paladin's nickname calls to mind in *Personal Recollections*. In the name of progress, Hank has razed the noblest aspirations of the medieval world.<sup>66</sup>

After this battle, Hank finds himself on his deathbed in America thirteen centuries later in the presence of Twain, to whom Hank has given the manuscript that records these events and who personally narrates this encounter with the dying Hank. Yet as he lays dying it is not the battle or his technological conquest that remains foremost in Hank's thoughts, but rather the memory of his beloved wife, Sandy, a maid of Arthurian England:

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>65</sup> Wayne Ambler, "Making Men Modern," *New Atlantis*, no. 23 (Winter 2009): 121.

<sup>66</sup> While many read Twain's *Connecticut Yankee* as a mockery of medieval chivalry and praise of modern progress, Ambler argues convincingly that it is in fact a satirical ballad of praise to modern progress. See "Making Men Modern," esp. 128–29.

Oh, Sandy, you are come at last—how I have longed for you! Sit by me—do not leave me—never leave me again, Sandy, never again.... Such strange and awful dreams, Sandy!...Yes, I seemed to have flown back out of that age into this of ours, and then forward to it again, and was set down, a stranger and forlorn in that strange England, with an abyss of thirteen centuries yawning between me and you! between me and my home and my friends! *between me and all that is dear to me, all that could make life worth living!* It was awful—awfuler than you can ever imagine, Sandy. Ah, watch by me, Sandy—stay by me every moment—*don't let me go out of my mind again.*<sup>67</sup>

Hank's dying hallucinations are as hauntingly beautiful as they are revealing of Twain's vision of the limits to the modern world's ability to fulfill human longing. Ironically, in Hank's very hallucinations, it becomes clear that his modern aspirations to build a world of progress and utility are what have driven him out of his mind, and his longings for Sandy and "all that could make life worth living"—preserved in the all too imperfect world of medieval England—are all that remain at death's door. In the end, the very progress that aimed to repair the ills inherent to Arthurian England pales in comparison to the way of life it destroys, a life of devotion to God, to king, to family, and to one's beloved.

In his *Personal Recollections*, the last and most obviously loving of his novels, Twain assumes Hank's posture at the end of *Connecticut Yankee*, reaching for Joan in much the same way that Hank reaches for Sandy. Twain and the Connecticut Yankee have switched places, and what is left in the end of both novels is longing for and the memory of what is beautiful. None of the progress and utility of the modern world can do away with that. Through his final novel, Twain attempts to recover the memory of what is noble for his own audience, and in recollecting Joan's words and deeds perhaps even to rekindle and preserve a glimpse of what is lovable, good, and worthy of defense no matter the utility, no matter the cost. Joan's ability to inspire the Paladin, that once faint-hearted coward, is something Twain hopes to preserve for his own audience. And perhaps, should he preserve the possibility of a woman so noble as to turn cowardice into courage, despair into hope, fear into active pursuit of the good, we, too, might remember his lesson.

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<sup>67</sup> Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (Norwalk, CT: Easton, 1983), 274–75. Emphasis ours. Huck's description of Tom Sawyer's excessively romanticized plans to free Jim might be aptly applied to the Yankee: "He had a dream...and it shot him" (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 214).