

The Erotics of Government: Hysteria and *Fin-de-Siècle* Joan of Arc

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Joan of Arc gained enormous force as a figure of woman's power in the U.S. at the end of the 19th century and well into the first decade of the twentieth. As Lisa Tickner has noted in her *Spectacle of Women*, Joan of Arc embodied both militant New Woman ideals and the "Evangelical ideal of femininity"; she was subversive and not: "Everyone could have their own Joan" (Tickner 211). Mark Twain, joining a trans-Atlantic chorus of historians and biographers of Joan of Arch, each having their own Joan, wrote what he deemed his finest novel and certainly his most favorite on the virgin warrior, *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896).¹

Despite calling Joan the "most extraordinary person the human race has ever produced," and despite his repeated use of the Maid to personify martial and national virtue, the novel is hardly an unapologetic celebration of woman's (subversive) strength. It is not a novel endorsing feminism. Rather, instead of a woman who is sexually knowledgeable and independent, who actually leads the way to the alteration of the status of women—a New Woman--Twain's Joan of Arc "reinscribes," as Shelley Fisher Fishkin and Susan K. Harris have noted, "conventional gender ideology in fresh ways: while she leaves the traditional 'woman's sphere' of the home behind, she does so not out of 'self-interest' or 'personal ambition' but as an act of self-abnegation, fulfilling in a different context women's role of sacrificing herself 'for her appointed dependent'—in this case 'France'" which is envisioned as pathetically helpless father and child (Fishkin 61; quoting Harris 1995, 165).²

This paper is not simply an account of how Twain got it wrong. Rather, it is an examination of the linkages between Twain's hagiography and his equal commitment to anti-imperialism and the restitution of a legitimate governmentality. *Recollections*, like the earlier *The Prince and the Pauper* (1886), ties together the restitution of a just legitimized government with an kind of innocent erotics. The connection between governmentality and erotism in *The Prince and the Pauper* is clear, and has to do with the young Prince's tramping with his guardian tramp knight, who unknowingly helps him return to his throne. The tramp indulges the Prince and also teaches him the lessons of experience; he makes him a man. But if becoming a man enables an erotic trope to inform *The Prince and the Pauper*, in *Recollections*, that trope takes a back seat to simply becoming a man. Thus, the force of Joan's character and divine mandate on the one hand serves as the principle for engenderment: She unmans her enemies, castrates them, as it were. On the other, she almost literally gives manhood to her fellow compatriots. Yet, for all her force and power, she is a reluctant soldier, a misfit country maid who "would rather spin with [her] poor mother" (*Recollections* 74); Joan does not subvert the status of women, she subverts the illegitimate, imperialist rule of the English in France. *Recollections* paints Joan as the iconic figure of manhood.

The narrative style of Joan's life furthers the iconic effect. As critics have noted, unlike other Twain characters both in this novel and in others, Joan is remotely represented; we receive no privileged insight into her thoughts and all her actions are reported by her "page and secretary," Sieur Louis de Conte, who later becomes, fortuitously enough, a recorder of the trials and who, supposedly, is the author of the

work.³ (Twain published the work anonymously, as Sieur Louis de Conte (SLC), in part because he felt that this serious work needed serious attention and as a humorist he felt he was incapable of being taken seriously.) De Conte's tale is further "freely translated" by "Jean François Alden." To a degree, this layering mimics the actual situation of the archive of Joan's trial and rehabilitation: the French scholar J. E. J. Quicherat discovered the archive comprising the trials, rehabilitation, and ancillary material and published the account in five volumes between 1841 and 1849. Michelet, using the same archive, wrote a popular version (1841), which was translated into English (1849). Most subsequent writers on Joan of Arc wrote biographies or histories; Twain's novelization is a little unusual, but what makes it more anomalous and hagiographical is the narratorial isolation of Joan of Arc.

Characterized as a parody (Zwarg, Horn), and as "undermining ... textual authority" (Horn), the narrative would seemingly thus position the reader as having to work for his meaning, and recuperate the logic of the inquisitorial trials.⁴ But the result of pinning so much on the narrator, as Harris argues, is to focus attention away from the woman in question and on to the male narrator, SLC. And it also casts the Maid into the position of never quite being affected by others, however she might affect others by making them better subjects to a better system of government.

Both national and personal, "government" here a means of effecting subjection. Thus, Joan of Arc makes the "swashbuckling" and "swearing" La Hire, who is described by the soldiers as "Satan," for "his bondage to sin," abide by her strictures of no swearing; instead, she makes him pray (*Recollections* 147). If the effect of this genteel

stroke is comic, it is also representative of the crossing between the personal and national of *fin-de-siècle* governmentality. La Hire's reform is a gesture of personal government; Joan of Arc's reform of France of national government; both converge on the figure of Joan and both follow the same governmental logic. I would like to touch briefly on the most visible instances of the problem of *personal* governmentality before concluding with the force of Joan of Arc's governmental effect.

As recent scholars have argued, late-nineteenth-century hysteria may have dramatized the ills of Victorian repression but it even more showed the problems of not being sufficiently repressed. That is, if hysteria evidenced to the prurient (and who wasn't?) sex by other means, it also suggested a certain failure of self-government. Possessed of sufficient governmental force, the argument went, the hysteric would be able to control the wild impulses and nomadic urges that so contorted her body, as if they had wills of their own. "Will" or "self-government" preserved an otherwise vulnerable personal identity: Without the cohering barrier offered by a functional will (which enabled day-to-day consciousness), the self of the subject was open to the influence of other wills and mysterious impulses arising from within the person of the hysteric. In effect, the hysteric resembled the hypnotic subject, whose will and therefore conscious, rational mind was disabled by the hypnotist, who consequently controlled the ductile subject. The influential psychologist, writer and former Civil War physician S. Weir Mitchell described hysterics as "automatons," lacking the ability to act on their own behalf (Mitchell *Lectures*). But where the hypnotic subject was clearly at the mercy of the willing hypnotist, the case of the hysteric was more uncertain. The English

psychologist F. W. H. Myers asserted in 1891 that, “The essential character of hysteria is an unreasonable autosuggestion in regions of the mind which are below the power of normal consciousness, *beyond the powers of the waking will. . . .*” (qtd. in Taylor 59). And if by 1896 William James could agree with Freud and Breuer and describe hysteria as a disease of the memory, a condition in which the mind has disintegrated into islets of memory, his description did not deviate very significantly from his 1890 reading of hysteria as a condition of mental dis-integration (Taylor 59).

In his influential 1890 review of Pierre Janet’s thesis on the developmental structure of hysteria, and the role of “automatism” in its symptomatology (“The Hidden Self,” in *Scribner’s Magazine*),⁵ William praises the research as shedding light on the “Unclassified Residuum” of the human mind, especially on the related phenomena of hysteria and multiple personality.⁶ Psychologists had long noted the relation between the two, and the presence of alter egos was characteristic of those states of suspended will, but Janet’s argument, filtered through William, provided an account of identity formation that foregrounds the constant work and constant uncertainty of being a person. For the exhausted or traumatized person, which is to say the incautious (or intrinsically weak) individual, “the abandoned part . . . may solidify into a secondary or sub-conscious self” (“Hidden” 371). That is, a kind of mutiny can be initiated in the body and mind of the hysteric, with various “parts” gaining a sort of autonomy. But “[i]n a perfectly sound subject . . . what is dropped out of mind at one moment keeps coming back at the next. The whole fund of experiences and knowledge remains integrated, and no split-off portions of it can get organized stably enough to form subordinate selves” (371). A

normal self, in short, integrates the embryonic identities and thus cuts short their influence. Left to their own devices, in the weak and abnormal self, these virtually autonomous parts grow to identity and take control over parts of the body: they mutiny, and in James's rhetoric, the strange element of representing psychology as politics is present. Moreover, in a fashion that rehearses the contemporary anxiety over the health of the nation and which continues James's exhortation that we should be cautious about our will, the logic that William relates in his review allows that we are all susceptible, to a greater or lesser degree, to psychological or cerebral dysfunction (either brought about through exhaustion or trauma). Indeed, William goes on to wonder just that: "How far this splitting up of the mind into separate consciousness may obtain in each one of us is a problem" (371). It's a problem because it's never quite clear, in this logic, when we are being only ourselves. After all, what keeps us us, rests on the strength of our "unifying or coordinating power" (371). Hysteria, as a disease of the will, therefore relies on a conception of the subject as a subjugating agent. The disease indicates a failure of the subject because it is a failure of subjugation, albeit of the self.

Joan of Arc is of course not hysterical, despite the ambiguous provenance of her voices, despite the fact that in many ways she resembles a puppet. But Twain carefully presents her as in full possession of her own indomitable will.⁷ She is rather an anti-hysteric, and it is the *men* who are weak-willed and effectively "hysteric," if by that term we mean colonized and disorganized subjects. And if the French are disorganized subjects, and are not able to subjugate themselves, that is because they are suffering the ignominy of imperialist occupation. As the narrator expresses it, the English rule France

and have since the “prodigious disaster of Agincourt fell upon France” (*Recollections* 6). In the aftermath of that disaster, the French masculine element has been rendered ineffectual and homeless; and, of course, effeminate, too.

Thus, as a signal act of masculine redemption, Joan of Arc “rescues the King” from his “vagabondage,” and she does so, de Conte informs us, by giving him a sign both of her mandate and of his:

“Thou art the lawful heir to the King thy father, and true heir to France. God has spoken it. Now lift up thy head, an doubt no more, but give me men-at-arms and let me get about my work.”

(*Recollections* 113)

Joan’s sign of the legitimacy of her Voices is the sign of the King’s and the catalyst for manly action. Joan’s “five great deeds”⁸ are in effect one deed: the restoration of the manhood of France, a manhood lost by the fact of the English occupation.

Twain’s *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* seems to be more about men than women is not surprising, given Twain’s past work; that it seems in then end articulate a nativist anti-imperialism whose logic includes both the personal and the governmental is perhaps more interesting. But it should come as no surprise. In the years following the demise of Radical Reconstruction, nativist anti-imperialism held sway.⁹ A few years later, Twain would embark upon his great anti-imperialist writings and in 1905 Thomas Dixon’s racist *The Clansman* would be published with the apparent figure of Joan of Arc on the cover.

¹ Future references to this text will be as *Recollections*.

² For the argument that presents Twain's Joan of Arc as feminist, see Zwarg.

³ See, for instance, Fishkin 61 and Harris 10.

⁴ As Horn phrases it, "His juggling of fact and fiction in the frontmatter demands a participatory and hence critical role for the reader, whose own process of sifting truth and fact mirrors the very nature of truth-as-process that Twain then embodies in his plot." *Recollections'* frontmatter claims resemble, of course, those of *Huckleberry Finn's*, where the narrator is intent on presenting a seemingly verifiable real. Even more, it points to the problem of the vagabond charlatan that fascinated Twain throughout his life.

⁵ Rather belatedly, modern critics are reading Janet. See Hacking (*Rewriting the Soul*) and Leys, "Traumatic Cures" for two exceptionally able accounts of Janet and his relations to memory and identity.

⁶ It influenced, for instance, not just the subtitle but a little of the excitement in Pauline Hopkins's *Of One Blood Or, the Hidden Self* (serialized 1902-1903). James's story was published next to Stanley's accounts in Africa (Stanley, it should be recalled, essentially mapped and helped sell the Congo to Leopold; his activities were quintessentially imperialistic, framed as the exciting imposition of order over disorder). In a sense, then, the discovery of unconscious and automatic activities represented in James's article trades on the excitement of African imperialism.

⁷ Thus, he has her, when still a young child, arguing vigorously against masculine symbols of authority: a priest, her father. Again, she argues not because she is against male authority but because she is for the oppressed.

⁸ “The great deeds of Joan of Arc are five:

1. The Raising of the Siege.
2. The Victory of Patay.
3. The Reconciliation of Sully-sur-Loire.
4. The Coronation of the King.
5. The Bloodless March.

(*Recollections* 259)

⁹ The standard work on nativism is John Higham’s, *Strangers in the Land*.

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