

Book Reviews

JOAN OF ARC ON THE STAGE AND HER SISTERS IN SUBLIME SANCTITY (Bernard Shaw and His Contemporaries). By John Pendergast. Switzerland AG: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. 281 pp.

Joan of Arc remains a personality who constantly creates a feeling of enigma and intrigue among the literary historians and writers. It has been reported that when she was first admitted to examination before a body consisting of clergy and administrative officials before the Poitiers episode, she is said to have observed: "In the name of God, I have not come to Poitiers to give signs; but take me to Orleans, and I will show you signs" ("Pierre Duparc, trans., *Proces en nullite de la condamnation de Jeanne d'Arc* (Paris, 1986), IV: 15). Interestingly, Archbishop Jacques Gelu of Embrun endorsed to her point of view with a condition that Joan must wear men's clothing if she were to live among soldiers. This episode came to my mind while reading this book. The author has made a mention of how his sister (also named Joan) "found a natural hero in Joan of Arc. She dressed up as Joan of Arc when we were little, and I was very jealous of the sword, shield, and banner my mother made for her". (v)

The first chapter, 'The Palimpsest of Euripides, Shakespeare, and Voltaire', discusses Schiller's attempt to recreate a new perspective, reworking on the life of Joan. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a palimpsest as a manuscript or piece of writing on which later writing has superimposed or effaced earlier writing, or something reused or altered but still bearing visible traces of its earlier form (*OED*, 2010). It is clear that a palimpsest is the product of layering that results in something as new, whilst still bearing traces of the original. Palimpsest was originally "A paper or parchment on which the original text has been partly erased or effaced to allow a new text to be written, leaving fragments of the original still visible" (Macey 2000: 288). Gerard Genette uses the term to refer to Marcel Proust's modernist novel *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* as a form of intertextuality (Macey 2000:289). The palimpsestic technique of writing means the writing of a new text on the layers of the old, traditional (pre)text by the operation of which it acquires a new meaning. Here Pendergast sets out to create "a more powerful character who suffers at the hands of fate but changes history by sheer force of will" (2). The author finds the use of the concept of "sublime sanctity" in Schiller's depiction of Joan. Schiller must have been inspired by the characterization of Iphigenia made famous by Euripides in *Iphigenia among the Taurians* and *Iphigenia in Aulis*. To make things clear, Pendergast has given the list of the primary sources that are discussed in the subsequent sections, which include nine prominent authors who lived between 413 BCE to 1923 AD.

Referring to the historical evidences of Joan's trial, the author specifically points out the services of Quicherat to bring out the true story of Joan of Arc and the development of research material on her public life. The writer establishes that Joan of Arc has much

in common with Iphigeneia at a structural level similarity. 'A virgin is entrusted with a mission by a virginal supernatural personality to put to death unwanted foreign visitors. Regarding Shakespeare's Joan, she cannot be considered a tragic protagonist and her role is actually much more a stereotype, surviving from medieval miracle and mystery plays. Pendergast observes that Shakespeare's Joan is duplicitous and seems to contradict herself in ways which make her character not only unsympathetic but also unbelievable. The third part in this section deals with Voltaire's Pucelle. The vicious satire centering on virginity is also taken into consideration.

The second chapter, 'Sublime Sanctity: Schiller's New Tragic Joan', discusses how Schiller became well versed with the "Euripidean method" by learning the Classics and how each Act of his play evolved out of his diligent work and meticulous research. Pendergast has done a detailed analysis of each sequence with a specific focus on the idea of sublimity that is revealed in the play. The analysis concludes with the statement that "Johanna is not Joan, after all, nor does she need to be. Schiller created a character who thrilled his audience, even as she thrills the other characters in the play with her...Schiller is not trying to teach us history. He is, in fact, not trying to teach us at all. He is showing us that we can learn. What we can learn from Johanna is that she achieves her sanctity—and we perceive it—only after the sublime experience of her suffering." (75).

The third chapter, 'Lacuna and Enigma: Verdi's Giovanna d'Arco in Light', discusses about the opera Verdi wrote based on Schiller's *Jungfrau von Orleans*: Giovanna d'Arco. One interesting question that he discusses is that "what prevented Germans from making Schiller's plays into operas". He then moves on to the point raised by Wagner in this context. "In Oper und Drama, Wagner offers at least two compelling reasons for his avoidance of Schiller: He felt that Schiller tended to emphasize the details of history over their potential dramatic impact, and even when he seized the dramatic essence, tended to give greater priority to form than content" (86). The author adds, "Wagner seems to mean that Schiller tended to avoid plots drawn from modern life, preferring to set medieval histories in a form based on ancient tragedy, precisely because he believed, unlike Goethe, that the purity of form would bring his material closer to the ideal" (87). Pendergast provides us with the synopsis of Verdi's Giovanna d'Arco in pages 96 to 100. The musical aspect is given a detailed treatment and a comparison of the mode chosen for expression is also discussed: "Verdi's music for the angels, set as a soli of contraltos, is serene even as it conveys a message of admonition; it does not jar the spectator out of the action of the opera. The demons, on the other hand, sing their taunts with an involuntarily infectious glee and vibrant Italian coloration" (101). The 'beguiling' music for the demons in this portion of the Prologo "Tu sei bella" is attached along with the edition in page 102. The writer refers to three operatic conventions that Verdi employed successfully, which are all evident in Giovanna: (1) poetry in stanzas; (2) word-painting; and (3) the so-called *parola scenica* ("theatrical word"). Pendergast also documents the text, "T'arretti i palpiti," which successfully appropriates the theme of the opera wherein the music merges with the emotion. Further, the reference to the Soldiers' chorus for the scene in Act I in the English camp forbears the nationalistic sentiments engrained.

In chapter four, 'Patriotic Elegy and Epic Illusion: Schiller's Johanna in Russia', Pendergast gives prime importance to Vasily Andreevich Zhukovsky, who wrote the translation of Schiller's *Jungfrau von Orleans*, published in 1824 as "The Orleans Maid". Pendergast has brought out the quintessential classicist embedded within Zhukovsky, especially documenting the evolution of Zhukovsky the artist. The writer says there is a

clear change in the approach to the (re)presentation of Schiller's Jungfrau, when Zhukovsky handles the theme. "Arguably, in a play about a girl who believes herself to be heaven's emissary, such connotations should be appropriate, but the themes from ancient Greek tragedy, especially Euripides's *Iphigeneia* plays, with which Schiller imbued his play, become almost indiscernible in Zhukovsky's version". Further, the chapter also gives details of the policies of censorship followed in Russia. The Second part in the same chapter, 'The Genesis of Tchaikovsky's *Orleanskaya Deva* ("Maid of Orleans"), Pendergast refers to Tchaikovsky's notion of approaching the act of composing "in two distinct modes, which he referred to as compositional types (*vidy*) or categories (*razryady*)". A lot of details about his life, his failed marriage, his orientation toward homosexuality earn a mention in the chapter. *The*

Maid of Orleans, in 4 acts and 6 scenes (TH 6 ; EW 6), is Tchaikovsky's sixth completed opera, and it was composed between December 1878 and March 1879, and orchestrated between April and August 1879, with revisions in December 1880, and September-October 1882. Regarding the study of the music employed and the divergences from the original theme, Pendergast has made use of the incisive analysis made by David Brown, though the originality of the argument is very much visible. In the analysis of the musical composition from pages 202 to 215, Pendergast gives insightful comments on the sublime levels that Tchaikovsky attained with consummate ease.

The concluding section, 'The Skeptic Doth Protest Too Much, Methinks: Shaw's Saint Joan—Concluding Thoughts on Joan in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries', Pendergast takes on Shaw and his observations on the previous versions of Joan of Arc's story. To quote from the book, Shaw says "The pseudo-Shakespearean Joan ends in mere scurrility. Voltaire's mock-Homeric epic is an uproarious joke. Schiller's play is romantic flapdoodle. All the modern attempts known to me are second-rate opera books. I felt personally called on by Joan to do her dramatic justice; and I don't think I have botched the job" (237). Shaw had his own justifications about the way the play was to be staged and how people need to read the situation, be it the miracles presented, the idea of Life Force, the execution of Joan or the final part of revival of her stature. But Pendergast's insightful analysis of Shaw and his play tell us how the dramatist may not have achieved the sublime heights that the other versions had achieved in terms of their profundity and density. Just as the book has started with the biographical note, the culminating line also rings something wonderful and interesting about the writer's life: "Until that happens, readers who yearn for the memory of Jeanne may delight in her semblance and take pleasure in contemplating whether or not Iphigeneia, Johanna, Giovanna, Ioanna, and Joan are all her sisters in sublime sanctity"(265). This critical study has successfully delivered what it promised to offer at the beginning. This books surely deserves a place in the critical scholarship based on Joan of Arc.

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