Joan of Arc, or rather Jeanne Rommée, because in my country girls take their mother's name.

by Monique Wittig

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Photo : Colette Geoffrey Monique Wittig in 1985.

After Schiller, Dumas, Michelet, Péguy, Dreyer, Bernanos, Bresson, Rossellini, and previously Rivette, Besson, and Dumont, Monique Wittig wrote her Jeanne d'Arc. She lesbianizes her—Joan is now the lover of the voices she hears—in a screenplay she plans to direct with André Téchiné as artistic director, before financing difficulties hinder the project. This text, completed in 1988 and unpublished until now, is part of a series of Wittigian rewritings of figures from the canon, from a radical lesbian perspective that perceives heterosexuality not as a state of nature but as a political regime set up by men to serve their domination over the group, created from scratch, of "women." However, in the mid-1980s, Wittig, who now lived in the United States, was disappointed by what she identified as the anti-

lesbianism of French feminism. Consequently, rather than indulging in the epic, collective gesture at work in Les Guérillères (1969), she now isolated heroic trajectories. In 1985, she first wrote her (or rather her) Quixote with Le Voyage sans fin, a play staged for her partner Sande Zeig, then her own Divine Comedy with Virgile, non, a story in which she is led by a guide named Manastabal through the meanders of heterosexual hell.

With Jeanne, who was also to be played by Sande Zeig, the aim was to embrace a figure of Catholicism who was then being co-opted by Jean-Marie Le Pen. At the end of the 1980s, the aim was also to finally make films. Wittig believed that she had been “influenced” by cinema “in all [her] writings” (Dans l'arène ennemie). In 1966, she praised Godard's incomplete aesthetic as an instrument of emancipation (“Des films lacunaires”). In 1994, she described the writing process for Les Guérillères as “ruthless editing” (“Quelques remarques sur Les Guérillères”). In 1985, for Le Voyage sans fin, she accompanied Zeig's silent performance on stage with a dialogue-filled, post-synchronized soundtrac.

Quichotte and Jeanne hear voices because both have their share of madness. Jeanne's madness is expressed in the haughty arrogance inherited from the Guérillères. Jeanne is trained for war by her voices (Saint Margaret and Saint Catherine), who were to be played by Delphine Seyrig and Julie Christie, and spied on by the monks of her future trial. Present and future merge in a script that evokes certain choices made by Duras, particularly in terms of the desynchronization of dialogue and image. The brief statement of intent, a work in itself, cites Cocteau's Beauty and the Beast, Jarmusch's Down by Law, Rossellini's The Taking of Power by Louis XIV, and Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's Macunaíma.

Wittig proceeds in the same way as Péguy in the dramatic works he devoted to Joan: she bases her work almost exclusively, even in the title itself, on the exchanges at the trial in Rouen. One might be tempted to contrast the materialistic lesbian with this socialist Catholic who was so suspicious of modernity. But in Clio, a theoretical text much loved by Godard, Péguy calls for history to be made into an embodied, subjective, and painful memory. So, even if their Jeannes differ, we see that “the girl with the stiff bodice” still serves those who refuse to believe in the dominant way of writing history.

Hélène Boons

[1] Charles Péguy, *La Tapisserie de sainte Geneviève et de Jeanne d’Arc* (1912).