

Sample

Jeanne d'Arc avait l'oeil vif et perçant d'un bleu azur, le cheveu blond et la joue ronde. Elle était vêtue d'une simple robe de sage paysanne lorraine et en gardait la pose puisque, sous la bergère, déjà, perçait la sainte.

Ne plaisantons point avec ces choses-là. Il se pourrait fort bien que l'on ait retrouvé l'authentique, le seul portrait de Jeanne jeune, peu avant que l'Anglais ne lui fasse subir le sort que l'on sait. Dans une chapelle des bois, Notre-Dame de Bermont, à proximité de Domrémy, des ouvriers procédant il y a un an, à des travaux de réfection ont découvert une fresque masquée par un enduit de chaux.

La chose fut tenue secrète. Le temps de découvrir soigneusement la peinture, une fresque ocre, représentant la bergère en honorable compagnie, celle de Saint Thiaut de Provins et de tenter de la dater. Ce serait fait. La peinture remonterait bien à la première moitié du XVe siècle et n'aurait dû sa conservation qu'à une providentielle (?) épidémie de peste qui, au siècle suivant, fit qu'on passa les murs de la chapelle à la chaux.

La fresque serait d'époque donc et parfaitement contemporaine de la Pucelle, née en 1412 et morte au bûcher en 1431. Bien plus, elle aurait été peinte durant la vie, ou immédiatement après la mort de la sainte patronne des Français. Reste donc à établir si cela est bien Jehanne, notre Jehanne à nous, enfin telle qu'elle était vraiment.

Aucune femme, aucune sainte, aucune star d'aujourd'hui ne fut jamais aussi représentée qu'a pu l'être Jeanne d'Arc. A genoux dans la campagne. A cheval en son fier équipage. En armure. Au sacre du roi à Reims. A Orléans, boutant l'Anglais hors de France. A son procès face à l'infâme Cauchon. Au bûcher enfin. Jeanne dans tous ses états donc et partout présente. Pas une église de France, pas une chapelle, pas une maison ou une ville honorable qui n'eût sa Jeanne, en médaille, en peinture, en livre saint, en statue de procession, en images pieuses, Jeanne coiffée à la Jeanne, comme le cinéma l'aima, ou Jeanne échevelée comme les romantiques la firent.

Jeanne était, est encore partout en France, puisqu'elle était la France, bien avant que le 1er mai, le Front National n'annexe la Jeanne d'or équestre de la place des Pyramides, comme bien de famille et protectrice des parades douteuses. Mais le plus grand paradoxe reste cette incertitude sur le vrai visage de la femme la plus représentée du pays. Oeuvres de mémoire, d'imagination, ou de révérence, aucune de ses représentations, aucun de ses portraits ne fut jamais estimé comme d'époque.. comme authentique, comme peint sur le vif.

On imagine donc bien l'ampleur possible de la découverte. La vraie Jeanne enfin, telle qu'elle était vraiment. Entre 16 et 19 ans. Entre sa «mission divine» et le bûcher. L'emplacement de la chapelle, à quelques centaines de mètres de sa maison natale et en un endroit où elle priait chaque samedi selon les livres d'époque, tout cela et la sagesse des hommes d'Eglise qui ont soigneusement tu et analysé la découverte avant que de l'annoncer, plaident plutôt pour l'authenticité, Auquel cas il conviendrait au plus vite de diffuser une représentation photographiée de la fresque avant que les foules pélerines n'investissent ces lieux inspirés, chers à Péguy.

Pierre Georges
Le Monde

Suggested translation

Joan of Arc had keen, piercing heavenly blue eyes, fair hair and chubby cheeks. She wore a simple dress, like all good Lorraine peasant-girls, and held herself modestly as, from within the shepherdess, the first signs of the saint were already beginning to emerge.

All this needs to be taken seriously. It seems very likely that the one and only authentic portrait of Joan when she was young has been found. It apparently shows her as she was shortly before the English made her suffer the fate that everyone knows about. In Notre-Dame de Bermont, a chapel in the woods close to Domrémy, workmen carrying out restoration work a year ago brought to light a fresco under a coating of whitewash.

The event was kept secret long enough to carry out the delicate task of uncovering the painting, an ochre fresco, showing the shepherdess in honourable company with Saint Thiau de Provins, and to attempt to date it. There is good reason to think that this has been done. The painting apparently really does go back to the first half of the 15th century, and owes its preservation solely to a 'providential' outbreak of plague during the following century, which explains why the walls of the chapel were whitewashed.

Everything thus points to the fresco being authentic, and exactly contemporaneous with the Maid of Orleans, who was born in 1412 and burnt at the stake in 1431. Moreover, it appears to have been painted during the life, or just after the death of the Patron Saint of the French. Thus it remains to be established if it is really Jehanne, our very own Jehanne, as she really was in real life.

There can be no other woman, no saint, no star of today who has been portrayed as much as Joan of Arc. She is shown kneeling in prayer in the countryside, on horseback in her proud accoutrement, in armour, at the king's coronation at Rheims, at Orleans, driving the English out of France, at her trial before the infamous Bishop Cauchon, and, finally, at the stake - Joan, therefore, in all situations, and present everywhere. There is not a church or a chapel in France, there is not a decent town or household that did not possess a medallion, a painting; a pious book, a processional statue, or holy pictures of its Joan, Joan with her hair cut pageboy style, as the cinema liked her, or tousle-haired Joan, as the romantics saw her.

Joan was, and still is everywhere in France, because she symbolized France long before the National Front took over the gilt equestrian statue of Joan in the Place des Pyramides as a family heirloom and protector of dubious parades. But the greatest paradox remains our uncertainty about what the most portrayed woman in the country really looked like. Paintings from memory, out of the imagination, or inspired by reverence, no portrait of her has ever been considered as original, authentic or painted from life.

It is easy to imagine the possible consequences, of the discovery. The real Joan, at long last, just as she really was, between the age of 16 and 19, between her divine mission and the stake! The site of the chapel, a few hundred yards from the house in which she was born, and in a spot where she prayed every Saturday, according to contemporary books, all that and the wisdom of the Churchmen who carefully hushed up and examined the discovery before announcing it seem good arguments in favour of its authenticity. If that is the case, it would be a good idea to publish photographs of the fresco as quickly as possible, before crowds of pilgrims flood into this inspired place, dear to Péguy.

Notes

The style of this text, somewhere between the literary and that of a piece of journalistic reporting, has to be respected, so as not to distort the author's ideas. This is a 'chronique' that usually expresses an opinion. However the author's intention is not expressed overtly, and in translating the text we must not clarify what we think he may be implying, especially in the concluding sentence.

SAGE PAYSANNE LORRAINE. 'Chaste' is acceptable, but it does not have the more earthy, healthy quality (la joue ronde) implied in 'good', rather like 'bon' when used with its full meaning. Most of you described her as being 'from Lorraine', which suggests that she was somewhere else.

EN GARDAIT LA POSE. 'Pose' is not possible as it refers to an artificial or unnatural attitude out of keeping with her saintliness.

NE PLAISANTONS POINT. The serious tone of the beginning of the article makes expressions like 'This in no laughing matter' seem rather inappropriate. It is better to adopt a positive note.

AUTHENTIQUE. I hesitate to improvise definitions that are not confirmed by dictionaries, but 'authentic' seems to me better than 'genuine' here, because 'genuine' is a concrete adjective usually associated with an object, and 'authentic' is more associated with style. Thus 'a genuine Turner' is a painting proved to be by Turner, while 'an authentic Turner' is a painting whose style authenticates the artist.

SORT. It is worthwhile knowing that, while 'lot', 'destiny' are neutral concepts allowing a happy or an unhappy end, 'fate' is always associated with an unhappy or tragic conclusion.

LA CHOSE. Variant: 'the matter'.

SAINT THIAUT DE PROVINS. We are not specialists in the matter, and do not know this gentleman. Be as plausible as possible. Is this his name, or is he 'from Provins'? I would suggest that 'from Provins' would be irrelevant, but you have to decide for yourselves.

TENTER. Here the word 'attempt' is far better than 'try', which sounds amateurish.

CE SERAIT FAIT. The use of 'would' to translate suppositions is out of the question. The use of 'it is reported that' is frequent in giving information impersonally and neutrally, but it seems too formal for the personal style of this article. Some of you used 'it is alleged that' or 'allegedly', which immediately evoke suspicion, and are very close to a form of accusation. 'Allege' or 'allegation' are words often used by lawyers in courts of law, but they are not used in a normal context as they, deliberately or otherwise, cause an instinctive negative reaction; here, they are incompatible with a discovery that is described as being of positive interest; 'It seems that' is very impersonal and detached, and easily gives the impression that the user is not really convinced about the truth of the information; 'It is said that' is far too weak to have any impact on the reader (= selon un bruit qui court), and no journalist could hope to attract the attention of his readers by using it.

XVe SIECLE. Note that 'fifteenth' is written '15th', and never XVth. For practical purposes, Roman numbers are most often used with monarchs: Henry VIII, Louis XIV, Louis XV (spoken as Henry the eighth, Louis the fourteenth, Louis the fifteenth).

UNE EPIDEMIE DE PESTE QUI, AU SIECLE SUIVANT... The order of words has to be changed otherwise it is not clear that the epidemic occurred in the following century: QUI must be placed after 'century'. This is a case of ambiguity that the translator has to clarify.

LA PUCELLE. Joan is also known to the English as 'the Maid of Orleans', and the use of the full expression is necessary to identify her.

A GENOUX DANS LA CAMPAGNE. 'Kneeling' or 'on her knees' are purely physical attitudes that have no other implication. That is why I have added 'in prayer'. For CAMPAGNE, 'country' and 'countryside' are both possible; 'country' makes a mental contrast with 'town', while 'countryside' evokes picturesque scenery.

REIMS. The English spelling is 'Rheims', but in recent years there has been a marked tendency to standardize European names by leaving them in their original form.

L'INFAME CAUCHON. Again, to identify him for the reader, his title of 'Bishop' has been added.

DANS TOUS SES ETATS DONC. This expression clearly has to be understood with reference to the details of her life that have just been enumerated, and DONC makes this very clear. The danger was to translate the expression in its familiar connotation, and several of you succumbed to this disastrous temptation.

JEANNE COIFFEE A LA JEANNE. Perhaps the difficulty was trying to reproduce the style of the French. The English equivalents are, as far as I know: 'with her hair cut pageboy style', or with her hair bobbed and cut with a fringe'.

LA JEANNE D'OR EQUESTRE DE LA PLACE DES PYRAMIDES. No one can criticize you for not knowing what this statue looks like, but you must look for a plausible solution. 'Joan on horseback' is a good idea, though it leaves the notion of 'gold' untranslated. Note the use of 'gilt', which means 'covered with a thin layer of gold or a substance which is intended to look like it:' 'Gold' or 'golden' suggest that the entire statue is made of the metal.

Names of streets are like names on a map that enable you to find your way, and translating them can only create confusion. My advice to you is not to translate them, but to respect the use or not of the article. For example, 'the Champs-Élysées', 'the Place de la Bastille', '(the) rue Monge', '(the) Boulevard Saint-Germain'. Usage concerning articles with French street names may vary with British English and American English speakers.

REPRESENTATIONS. As your dictionary should show you, 'represent' and derived words are more restricted in meaning than their French homonyms. That is why I have limited myself to the basic 'painting' or 'portrait'.

MAISON NATALE. Variant. 'birth place'.

DIFFUSER. 'Publish' (in the press) seems the simplest and most satisfying choice; 'broadcast' is almost exclusively by radio and television: 'distribute' suggests 'by hand'.

LES FOULES PELERINES. It is important to distinguish between 'crowds of pilgrims' and 'pilgrim crowds'; structurally they are both possible. However, a phonetic rule should help you to make the wiser choice. According to the rule, the final stressed word of a group of words indicates its focus. Thus in 'crowds of pilgrims', the focus is 'pilgrims', while in 'pilgrim crowds' it is 'crowds'.

Placed in the elevated context of 'ces lieux inspirés, chers à Péguy', 'pilgrims' seems far more appropriate than 'crowds'.

CES LIEUX. The use of the plural would cause confusion and not be idiomatic in this context.