

# Joan of Arc, a medieval Antigone and a (post-) modern myth?

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«The myth of Antigone spies and whispers to us that it is the alphabet of our new experience, that this one will be spontaneous and immediate and easier to live considering the presence of mythology, as a latent presence, silver vase which will become replete with thought and life».

George Steiner, 1999

## PORTUGAL

(...)

Portugal: questão que eu tenho comigo mesmo,  
golpe até ao osso, fome sem entretém,  
perdigueiro marrado e sem narizes, sem perdizes,  
rocim engraxado,  
feira cabisbaixa,  
meu remorso,  
meu remorso de todos nós...

Alexandre O'Neill, *Poesias Completas 1951/1986*

## 1- Introduction

In *Antigones* (1984) – with the title like this, in plural - George Steiner is peremptory on the creative vitality of the narrative material of Hellenistic myths and legends as tangible root and guide of our collective consciousness, of the European modern spirit. The author of *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation* maintains the opinion that:

It is in these “primordial” myths that our consciousness finds the always renewed return to the deepest comfort and terror of its own origins, a durable and forced return due to the formal accomplishment, the narrative coherence, the lyric and plastic seduction that the Greek spirit faced the unsettling strangeness and the evil» (STEINER, 2008:139).

And, throughout the Greek mythical themes, Steiner underlines «the myth of Antigone [that] runs intact more than two millennia»(STEINER, 2008:119) to conclude that «even today new “Antigones” are imagined, conceived, lived, and so it will be tomorrow» (STEINER, 2008:329).

Assumed «Master of reading» and eternal combatant for intimacy with the classics, Steiner gives absolute primacy to the Sophocles’ Antigone among the countless artistic figurations of this myth and enlightens- just from start- that, in his hermeneutical

montenian exercise – interpretation of interpretations – without the impossible ambition to exhaust the subject or systematic chronological<sup>1</sup> motives, it will search instead the answer for the question: «why are the “Antigones” so truly eternal and immediate in relation to the present?»(STEINER, 2008:13). Hence it comes the subtitle of the book that we are referring to: *How the Antigone Legende Has Endured in Western Literature, Art and Thought* and the motto for the reflections that support our speech.

In fact, this voyage on the theme of Antigone into the thought of the West has brought us an echo of another female figure – this one truly real, historical – closer to us in time and space, but equal and strangely (or not) holder of a singular aura. Young warrior for the people, victim of religious and political webs of her time, with an extraordinary destiny/career, we bring her here by the character of mythical figure that she always had for the French people. We talk about Joan of Arc, the most revered and legendary heroine of the Gaulish.

## 2- Joan of Arc: from History to myth

Let's admit, first of all, that it would certainly be, abusive to read the motive of Antigone *tout court* in the ambivalent character of Joan of Arc, although Steiner approaches the two figures by the “political and supernatural detectable character (in the true sense of term) in the *hybris* that establishes the heroic action of both (Cf. STEINER: 165)<sup>2</sup>.

Being not, therefore, even original this confrontation of the two figures – one mythical and dramatic and the other historical – such parallel is not, for us, more than a pretext for a set of reflections about some of the circumstances and possible causes so that Joan of Arc can remain unflinchingly in the intimate pantheon of the XXI's century France and can appear often associated to what, not without controversy, the French like to consider the “French national identity”.

Therefore, the aim of our conjectures is to respond the question about the mainstreaming of this historical figure in the French society, so that, using the myth of

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<sup>1</sup> The *démarche* of Steiner in his exam of the legacy of the classic myth of Antigone and specially of the tragedy of Sophocles in the Western art, literature and thinking is presented by Steiner as «a study of interactions between the original text and their interpretations over the times» (STEINER, 2008:13). It follows, therefore, the direction of a very special poetry reading in which, through philosophy, music, poetry, drama, prose, iconography, cinema..., Steiner gives distinctiveness to the readings of Hegel (which had the Sophocles' Antigone as the purest of the tragedies), Goethe and Heidegger, Anouilh and Brecht, among others, and to the fundamental translation that Hölderlin made of this Sophoclean text. Maintaining that Antigone – myth and tragic character – was instituted as a « kind of talisman for the European spirit» (STEINER, 2008:21), Steiner shows consistently how mainly this tragedy by Sophocles didn't impressed only the audience of Greek drama. On the contrary, throughout these twenty-four centuries, from ancient Rome to the surrealism of the twentieth century, countless readings were made, indicating the limitless fecundity of the myth that has inspired it.

<sup>2</sup> We do not think there is any “feminist” reading of this tragical character, but Steiner does not fail to point out other approaches to female figures of European history and culture, giving examples such as Madame Stäel, Madame Roland, Mary Wollstonecraft and, particularly, the willful Charlotte Corday, the assassin of Marat by the time of the French Revolution (cf. STEINER, 2008:24).

Antigone in subtext, we will try the exercise to which Steiner calls «the non official decoding of the myth»(STEINER, 2003:44).

And if *mythos* is primordially «word», «narration», let's restrain, for now, the essential facts of the stories of which these women of diverse existence but analogous «being» were the protagonists.

According to the Greek legend, Antigone, daughter of the incestuous marriage of Oedipus, king of Thebes, to Jocasta, accompanied her father in exile, serving as his guide, since he was blind because he had perforated his own eyes. After her father's death, Antigone returns to the city where she finds her two brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, fighting for the throne. They end up killing each other and their uncle, at the time king, Creon orders the burial of Eteocles (whom he had raised as a son) with all the honors, leaving Polynices to rot on the battlefield. Devastated, Antigone cries her brother and prepares him a symbolic burial that costs her the wrath of Creon, by order of whom she is locked in a cave to slowly die of starvation.

Initially, Creon, unrelenting, refuses to accede to the pleas of Hemon, his son and Antigone's fiancé, so that he could forgive the attitude of the young woman motivated by fraternal affection and in behalf of the law of the gods.

When, later, on the advice of Teiresias or fearing the confirmation of the terrible prophecies of the soothsayer, Creon condescends and orders Antigone's release, it is too late. She anticipated to the repentance of the King, hanging herself in the cave in which she was already buried alive. Her fiancé, Hemon, unable to save her, commits suicide in a disdainful response to the initial irreducibility of his father. And the tragedy continues with the suicide of Eurydice, Creon's wife, who accuses him of murdering his own son.

With the minor variations of these mythical reports – neither fixed nor dogmatic but fluid and interpretative, since, in essence, they adapt and change depending on who tells them and the context in which they are told – this is Antigone's story, a law-breaker, in *hybris*. In the heart of the tragedy, forced to choose between duty and affection, blood and law, the laws of the gods and of the men, she was the primordial protagonist of a conflict, by its nature and seriousness, impossible to separate from the human being's social condition. This is the report taken by the Western imagination for more than 2000 years in allegorical representation of fundamental *topoi* in any cultural and religious context: the interpenetration of the intimacy and of the public, individual existence and the historical life of a social and political community; the confrontation between State and individual issues; between a shy but conscious obedience, and the assumed transgression; between the transcendence and the immanence... values and terms of a conflict – often aporetic – to which not even the changing echo of contemporaneity removes the universal dimension.

Concerning the French heroine, the facts of her meteoric political and warrior adventure are known by all of us, seeing that they were largely told in the pages of the books that the public school and the French people of the XIX century turned into a patriotic report of the history or “histories” of France – because nonlinear and as a result of successive and temporary structures of the past. The fact is that Joan of Arc is part of that *roman national*<sup>3</sup> with the role of the key figure during the Hundred Years' War (1356-1452)

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<sup>3</sup> Pierre Nora's formula, French historian, director of the gigantic work *Les Lieux de Mémoire* (published in 1984 - 1992, dedicated to the collective memory of the French), to define the patriotic and centralizer report in which the historians contributed by the time of the Third Republic, to the ideological construction of the French “*nation*”. However, it's now a common expression referring to the memory that the French have of themselves – making them feel French – and which is, after all, their story.

and, thus, with invaluable and decisive contribution to the construction of the *Nation*, as an extraordinary example of how the individual action can change the course of history. We will try, therefore, not to detain ourselves on the details of the everyday life of the peasant girl born in the tiny village of Domremy (today, Domremy – la Pucelle), in Lorraine, who, extremely devout, sword to hear supernatural voices telling her to free France from the English invader. Let us not forget that Joan of Arc will perish at the stake at the age of 19 and thus no longer could be anonymous. Everything – the rise and fall – will happen during a short period of just two years. Time enough to let behind her the memory of the long path run from Domremy to Rouen with the audacity of those who, claiming to be guided by a divine inspiration, feel invested with a mission: in this particular case, to come in help of the fragile and hesitating King of France, Charles VII, whose kingdom is shaken by the English occupation.

Those episodes date back to the siege of Orleans in May 1429. Dressed as a man, on a horseback, Joan of Arc commands a small army, comes to speak with the king, whose legitimacy is radically contested by the *Bourguignons*, England's allies; identifies him without ever having seen him before and convinces him of her divine mission; obtains the release of Orleans and, from victory to victory, contributes to Charles VII's consecration in Reims Cathedral - a ceremony where she is present<sup>4</sup> - on 17th, the following July.

But these shining weapons achievements shall not continue: wounded, Joan of Arc is obliged by the king himself to renounce the plan to take Paris. Abandoned by everyone, betrayed - perhaps by her own people – she is captured at Compiègne, in May 1430. She falls into the Bourguignons's hands who sell her to the English in November. They intended her a process for witchcraft in order to discredit the coronation of Charles VII as the true king of France. Brought to trial by an ecclesiastical court, Joan of Arc defends herself with some skill, that's for sure, but with a simplicity and a courage that made her an easy target for a charge of being a witch, heretic and a reckless woman. That's why, therefore, she is condemned to be burned alive. She dies at the stake on the *Place du Vieux Marché* in that same city on November 30th, without denying «*ses voix*», but her ashes seem to have been the seed of an impulse, as, little by little, France can regain their territories and the English will soon be expelled. The participation of Joan of Arc in this military outcome is one of the few undeniable facts in a story certainly embellished by the tradition's imaginary and by the English perception as a hereditary enemy of France.

It is also documented that Charles VII, who would not have done anything to save her at the time of sentencing, triggered later, her rehabilitation from 1456. In that same year he

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<sup>4</sup> The popularity of Joan of Arc and her very strong presence in the French imaginary explain that, even today, are repeated and considered absolutely historical details like this, according to which the young illiterate, had left the home village at the age of 16 to achieve a mission, to all who asked her why had she taken to the church her banner when the king's coronation at Reims took place, she answered with conviction: «Il avait été à la peine, il était juste qu'il fût à L'honneur ! »/«It was in pain, it is fair that it is in honor! ». Her courage facing the death, which would lead the English themselves to say: «We burned a saint! »; The intrepid journey to Chinon, Charles VII's residence, where through a mysterious" sign "- whose nature she declined to reveal during the process of condemnation –the convincement of the divine worth of her project, in the famous first meeting when she identifies the king without ever having seen him before and many other concrete allusions to different specific features of her life are also familiar to the common French, making Joan of Arc one of the most well-known characters of the fifteenth century with a detail and a certainty justified by the documentation exceptional richness related to the two fundamental proceedings - condemnation in 1431; rehabilitation in 1456 (Cf. LE GOFF, 1989:416).

began to review the process and Joan of Arc came to be beatified in 1909 and canonized in 1920 by the same Catholic Church that has condemned her at the stake 500 years before.

And if, following George Steiner, we started this speech pointing out how the myth of Antigone has an indelible presence in the European spirit and it is a reason always taken up by Western art and thought, we would keep the analogy with the character of Joan of Arc, also multi portrayed in the literature, painting, cinema, theater, artistic representations of variable quality in which the peasant girl from Domremy is presented to us almost always oscillating between the status of a soldier girl and of a messenger of God.

In the work *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, directed by Pierre Nora, Michel Winock opens a long article devoted to Joan of Arc<sup>5</sup>, stating that there are few historical figures receiving such an artistic homage. For this author, it was due to the dramatic art that the image of a legendary Joan of Arc was created and he gives examples: the tragedy of Schiller's *Jungfrau von Orleans*, 1801; the dramatic trilogy *Jeanne d'Arc* by Charles Peguy, 1897 ; *Sainte Jeanne* by GB Shaw, 1923; *L'Alouette* by Jean Anouilh, 1953<sup>6</sup>, *Jeanne au Bucher* by Paul Claudel and the double triumph of 1937 in Paris by Sarah Bernhardt representing *La Pucelle*, first in 1890, a middling quality play by Barbier and then in 1909, at the age of 65, in *The Trial of Jeanne* by Émile Moreau.

Verdi's lyrical drama for a Solera's libretto (Milan, 1845), the symphonic poem by Paul Pierné, the lyric work by Max d'Ollonne *Joan of Arc in Domremy*, and musicians like Wagner, Giovanni Pacini, Franz Liszt, Reinhard Anselm Weber, Kreutzer and Honnegger, author of the music of the Claudel's oratorio, previously mentioned, also contributed to the spread of the French heroine's memory.

Just born, cinema also put the Maid of Domremy on the screen and up to today dozens of films were produced on the theme of Joan of Arc. One of the latest would have been the one by the French filmmaker Luc Besson who, in 1999, put a star system figure, the Polish model Milla Jovovich in the role of the medieval star who we are dealing with in *The Messenger: Joan of Arc*. But Méliès, Cecil B. DeMille, Dreyer (even during the time of silent movies), Marco de Gastyne, Victor Fleming<sup>7</sup>, Roberto Rossellini, Jean Delannoy, Robert Bresson, Jacques Rivette and even the Soviet director Gleb Panfilov, are some of the filmmakers responsible for film adaptations of Joan of Arc's saga, often with inspiration from the heroine's representations built by the nineteenth century or in the documents of the three proceedings – condemnation, rehabilitation (for some people the richest source, being the most authentic and the most exciting, for others already with an hagiographical contamination) and canonization (Cf. CONTAMINE, 1994:77-79; BOSSÉNIO, 1997:70-71).

But it was literature and historiography that more and better made for the Joan of Arc's legendary image in a scene with so many *nuances* as the differing authors' views. In the nineteenth century, successive "stories of France" - those of Henri Martin, Michelet,

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<sup>5</sup> Included in Part 3. «De l'archive à l'emblème», in volume III «Les France».

<sup>6</sup> We can also remark as a small or large coincidence that in the wide dramaturgy of this French playwright it is also included, as it was already pointed out previously, a piece inspired by the myth of Antigone, *Antigone* (1944).

<sup>7</sup> Ingrid Bergman became the best-known Joan of Arc's face with this 1948 film and then again in 1954, now under Roberto Rossellini's direction. But beyond this image "Hollywood style", other actresses, such as Maria Renée Falconetti, Michèle Morgan, Sandrine Bonnaire, had their features forever associated to the figure of the French heroine.

Lavisse ... - celebrated the heroine in a tone that came up to be largely responsible for the two major features that will stress her image into the next century : holiness and nationalism. Also, encyclopedias (Diderot, Barbier, Michaud and Poujoulat) haven't stopped devoting her articles and details, discussed according to the different ideological readers, and the edition, between 1841 and 1849, of the proceedings with attached documents by Jules Quicherat also had relevance as a memorization tool for this medieval epic girl, which it would be referred as the "homeland's saint". In France, Germany and in the United Kingdom, top names such as Francois Villon, Shakespeare, Rousseau, Schiller, Charles Péguy, Anatole France, Bernard Shaw, Brecht interpreted his footsteps and charisma to give her a literary destination.

From this almost always laudatory choir it just seems to be dissonant the eighteenth century: Voltaire's rationalist view takes Joan of Arc as a target of ferocious satire to ridicule her in *La Pucelle d'Orléans* (1762), while Beaumarchais, in his *Lettres Sérieuses et Badines* (1740), considers her an unfortunate fool manipulated by crooks and Montesquieu in his medieval epic adventure sees no more than a «pious fraud» (Cf. LE GOFF, 1968:417).

Joan of Arc is also, since shortly after her death, a recurring theme of arts such as sculpture, painting and iconography that includes her in the most famous museums in the world and in priceless private collections. We must refer the 1874 equestrian statue by Frémiet, which, at the *Place des Pyramides* in Paris, became a site of veneration for the national heroine, and the murals of the National Pantheon by Lenepveu.

To this "memorial" artistic inventory we should add that, in France, "johanniques" studies are a specialized area with academic prestige and studies recognized even abroad<sup>8</sup> and that the very active *Centre Jeanne d'Arc d'Orléans*<sup>9</sup> is dedicated for more than four decades to collect and to treat all sources of information concerning this historical figure. Besides all that, since the fifteenth century, throughout entire France, statues, monuments, processions and/or historical parades (more deconsecrated) celebrate the major places and facts of the path taken by the heroine during those two epic years, from her home village to the Normandy city where her "sacrifice" takes place by fire. A reading through the visitors' records of the three Joan of Arc museum-houses - Orléans, Domremy, Rouen -, the heroine memory's privileged repositories, is a clear indication of a fervent pilgrimage (national and foreign) that, between the cult and folklore, proves the recognition to a symbolic heritage, respected, without taking into account ideological quarrels or political struggles.

So, whether the "myth" of Joan of Arc was born during her own life or not, the fact is that it was fed by the eighteenth century romantic patriotism, and crossed the entire twentieth century as an assumed "French passion", generally without complexes and with familiarity. The name and image - in a word, the icon - of the heroine appear associated to a countless number of commercial products, to social and sportive institutions, and to public and private organizations. We can take as examples souvenirs

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<sup>8</sup> Régine Pernoud, Marie-Véronique Clin, Colette Beaune, Jacques Le Goff are just some of the medieval scholars with particular interest on Joan of Arc, whose names cannot fail to be mentioned.

<sup>9</sup> Founded in 1974, precisely under the direction of Régine Pernoud, under the patronage of former De Gaulle's culture minister, André Malraux, its file contains more than eight thousand volumes, thousands of slides, dozens of films, hundreds of press dossiers. The center, which also organizes medieval history seminars and meetings and publishes a newsletter, aims to add a dimension of scientific order to the undeniable popular character of this national heroine.

and mineral waters, car and plumbing companies; hairstyles; schools and hospitals; names of streets and squares, scout groups, a French Navy's helicopter carrier, church stained-glasses, comic books ... and we have another dimension of popular identity of this female figure in France<sup>10</sup>. Another angle of reflection on how a proven historical character, with an action that, taking into account the time when she lived, must be seen both unpredictable and wonderful (or even unusual), finally came to be an inexhaustible source of mythical admiration, political motivation, religious inspiration and aesthetic fable for six centuries of French generations and even people beyond the borders of the Hexagon.

To her – for diverse reasons and circumstances often opposed - had been successively compared the Gallic chief Vercingetorix<sup>11</sup>, the revolutionary Charlotte Corday, the American suffragist Anne Dickinson, the feminist *avant la lettre* Jeanne Deroin<sup>12</sup>, Marshal Petain, de Gaulle, Jean-Marie le Pen, Ségolène Royal.

*Marianne*<sup>13</sup> and *anti-Marianne*, according to the ideologies, her name always appears in any French inventory of the great figures of conquerors, founders, visionaries and resistant people who, in situations of glory or despair, ensured the continuity of French history and of its place in Europe, side by side with figures such as St. Louis, Hugues Capet, Charles Magne, Clemenceau and Jean Monnet.

Considered in the chapter of "great men of State and War", right after Napoleon and before Louis XIV (LIPIANSKY, 1991:47), the national heroine also took a prominent place in the final list of the television show that, in 2006, chose de Gaulle as "*Le Plus Grand Français*". Similarly, in 1431, the date on which Joan of Arc was burned alive in Rouen, in the middle of the conflict known as the Hundred Years' War (1346-1452), it

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<sup>10</sup> Simone de Beauvoir remembered that in a group of about a thousand statues existing in Paris, only ten represent women and, among those, three were lifted under Joan of Arc's memory (Cf. SARDE, 1983:27).

<sup>11</sup> The first hero of a French "mythology" of homeland defenders against a foreign invasion. During the Roman invasion of Gaul, Vercingetorix faced with courage and intelligence Julius Caesar's armies. He was defeated at Alesia, but his heroic behavior of resistance to prison and death, gave him special status in the pantheon of heroes that the French people most venerate. This Gallic myth is the context for the famous adventures of Asterix and his companions in the series of comic books written by Goscinny and Uderzo.

<sup>12</sup> In an atmosphere of general disapproval, including from their socialist peers and women of letters such as George Sand, the worker and self-taught journalist Jeanne Deroin was, in 1849, the first woman candidate for the French legislative elections, at a time in France during the II Republic, when women had not even the right to vote.

<sup>13</sup> Pictured in various / forms and materials in France, Marianne is the name (familiar term) given to the *République* and therefore their symbolic representations. Successively transformed, from a revolutionary symbol to a *partisane* emblem, and then in the incarnation of the *Nation*, Marianne had an eminently political route, but currently, this allegorical figure - less institutional and more with media coverage - is almost only present in the form of a bust in the French *mairies*. There is a controversy about the name, according to one explanation, it was born in the beginning of the Third Republic, when the *Royalistes* choose this name, pejoratively, in reference to a republican secret society of the end of the Second Empire. Others argue that Marianne is just an adaptation of Anne-Marie, formerly a very popular name among the common people. Also not without controversy, there has been in recent decades the regular replacement of these other effigies sculpted based on new models. Brigitte Bardot, Catherine Deneuve and Laetitia Casta have been the faces (and busts) of the latest Marianne. The discussion was particularly high – in the good French way, when French, including a few intellectuals, were discussing about one of the last choices (2003), Evelyne Thomas, a simple TV presenter, accused them of representativeness. Therefore, in the view of many French people, this option (or rather a lack of others) would be the signal of the "French decline".

is inevitably part of the list of dates and facts considered historical references of the *Nation*, while, remembering the liberation of the city, May 8<sup>th</sup> is in Orleans, occasion for the official and popular celebrations that, as French political tradition dictates, the Republican President attends. The Catholic Church, for its part, celebrates in the entire country the festivity of St. Joan of Arc on May 30<sup>th</sup> or on the last Sunday of that month. Now if we add that, since 1988<sup>14</sup>, in every 1<sup>st</sup> of May, the *Front National* parade ends up necessarily in Paris with a speech by Jean-Marie (before) or by Marine (now) Le Pen near the statue of Joan of Arc, invoking the heroine as a symbol of the French essence and of the battle against "invaders" – not anymore the English, but foreigners, or immigrants, now blamed for the decline of France - we can conclude that Joan of Arc remains, in France, today, as in the past, subject of a “disputed memory” (Winock, 1992:693).

Let's notice how even in the election campaign of the Spring of 2007, the old French Socialist Party allowed, with approval, the renowned association of the "appearance" of Ségolène Royal, the freshness of her combative tone, and even some adventures of her election campaign, with the epic career of Joan of Arc (there were even the political "stabs" of some socialist barons). The candidate herself fed the analogy, expressing her admiration for this French icon - more publicly beloved by the right party than by the left one – and she did not resist to identify herself metaphorically as a new Joan of Arc, feminist and rebel<sup>15</sup>, ready to what, in a chronic with the symptomatic title - *The Gazelle and the Leopard* -, Eduardo Lourenço considered the «meritorious (...) lonely battle» of the one that would eventually be able to give back to the French Socialist Party (and to France?) the popular passion, that magical mythology of left that fed him since Jean Jaurès (Cf. LOURENÇO, 2007:98).

In fact, many people tried to see in this new socialist face the materialization of the so-called *changement* to be pursued by “*the grand homme*” that the French always seem to be waiting for to lead them to glory.

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<sup>14</sup> Until then, the party of Le Pen, as all the French political right spectrum, conducted its celebrations dedicated to the heroine on May 8<sup>th</sup>, the date of the release of Orleans. But that year the second round of presidential coincided with this date and therefore Le Pen anticipated a week his homage speech to Joan of Arc, and thus established a tradition that gives him wide media exposure. This is, however, considered by many people in France a disrespectful deviation of the symbolic value of the heroine (Cf. Tincq Henri, «Jeanne d'Arc détournée», *Le Monde*, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1988; Pierre Besnard, «Le rapt de Jeanne d 'Arc'», *Le Monde*, May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> The French and foreign media have widely reported at the time the candidate's own words, in interviews and campaign rallies, showing not only Joan of Arc as their childhood heroine, but also as a model of life and action, with references colored by a feminist touch as «testimony of insubordination and tenderness», «strategist woman», «war woman», «woman of God (...) in a world seized by men», «if I were Joan of Arc, they would have burned me alive».

On the other hand, there were also numerous newspaper headlines with word games exploiting the analogy between the Socialist candidate and the national heroine, with obvious allusions to her combativeness and to the confrontational character, almost "military", of the mission that she felt invested in, with examples such as: «Rocky against Joan of Arc»; «A rooster against a chicken».

Perhaps for this reason, the political and ideological speech of the socialist candidate (in fact, defeated), did not end with this approach to the legacy of the figure of Joan of Arc, and thus Segolène Royal caused some shock waves in her party when assumed in the political debate the so polemically French issue of the national identity.

A vague and complex concept, this one of the national identity, always tempered by the ambiguous relationship between myself and other and by the report we do of the



collective identity that we are co-founders. It appears to us, in the French case, even more difficult to express in other words than the ones used by de Gaulle in his famous formulation: “une certaine idée de la France / a certain idea of France”, largely made of history, language and geography. Let us add a fourth ingredient remembered by Eduardo Lourenço quoting Francois Mitterrand: «In France we solve the problems through crises. And we must reach a climax to solve them» (LOURENÇO, 2005:74) and we will have «the French exception» (itself a myth or a reality?).

Keeping in mind the idea of the self-proclaimed French exceptionality corresponding *tant bien que mal* to something similar to the excess of identity that we got used to accept in ourselves, Portuguese, since *O Labirinto da Saudade*, it seems to us that results from it that, in the French imaginary, France, more and better than the French people, is not an abstraction. Therefore, it needs concrete figures - like de Gaulle, Joan of Arc ... – destined to organize the living matter that the *République* - unique and indivisible - feels itself distinctly nurtured from any other community.

And it does not prevent, on the contrary, it may increase, that in the reporting of the most popular and iconic historical figure in France may, in fact, coexist various images to crystallize the multiple hues of a French national feeling. Saint, warrior, naïve peasant, usurper, witch, secular-saint, martyr for her country or of the history, an (in) voluntary victim ... associated to the right party, a symbol of the nation's defense against foreign invaders; to the left, a daughter and a symbol of oppressed people ; a victim of power and of the Church, the purest glory of French history, holding a mystical *élan*, reborn from the ashes ... General features of an image that, calibrated in the right measure, and added with the right amounts of conflict, rebellion, daring, politics, propaganda, death and tragedy, somewhere, between reality and legend, here we are again near to our pretext: a myth.

Let us recall a very simple myth definition: anonymous narrative, so, belonging to all, which allows a community to screen conflicts and solve them - some of them being hard to solve- in / by the narrative discourse itself, and thus to explain its conception of the world – of itself and of the other.

Therefore, and being aware of how controversial is the character of Joan of Arc as the protagonist of the events that gave rise to a legend travelling through the culture of different countries, we consider one last point of view stating on the possibility that this French heroine may be seen far more than as the French symbol of liberty, fighting spirit and bravery.

In 2007, in the context of the well-known debate about a widening and/or deepening of European Union, Jacques Le Goff proposed the inclusion «of Joan of Arc’s destiny in the European imaginary», because, in his point of view, in the Europe of The Nations, as this medievalist historian sees it, «being faithful to the spirit of Joan of Arc is a step to make France and England sister nations», and, at the same time, the good way to get for itself an «European pantheon of national glories» where, no doubt, the French heroine should be included in (LE GOFF, 2007:77).

Curiously, almost three decades earlier, knowing about the French language and culture just the little she had been able to learn at home with her father, during the school lessons of History and French and in a handful of afternoon adventure tv movies, the Portuguese author of these lines chose - alongside with Madame Curie - Joan of Arc as one of her favorite heroines. An insignificant detail, indeed, but that might confirm the idea of Jacques Le Goff, according to which, we could see in «Joan of Arc, an European heroine!».

Finally, let’s give the word to the Poet! We take again the headings that we chose for this text because it seems to us that also in the satire, in the subversion of caricature,

with irony and tenderness, we have the matter to be involved either with criticism or affection for us and others (the «regret of all of us . . .»). That's how we (re)construct, hand in the hand with Antigone and Joan of Arc, an entire imaginary, a «silver vase which will become replete with thought and life».

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