

Woke Silliness at Its Worst: A Non-binary Joan of Arc

A new play about Joan of Arc, *I, Joan*, opens in London next week. After all the plays, poetry, novels, and biographies published since she was burned at the stake in 1431, it's difficult to imagine that anything fresh can be said about the Maid of Orleans,

However, the Globe Theatre, a successor to Shakespeare's theatre, believes that it has a new angle—a non-binary Joan. Instead of celebrating her holiness (she was canonized by the Catholic Church in 1920) or her martial prowess, the Globe is [depicting](#) her as “the essence of transgressive androgyny.”

I, Joan was written by Charlie Josephine, who identifies as non-binary. The play uses they/their pronouns instead of she/her, making a perusal of the publicity rather confusing. But the Globe sums up the play [as follows](#): “Rebelling against the world's expectations, questioning the gender binary, Joan finds their [her] power and their [her] belief spreads like fire.”

The play treats Joan's life as [a neglected chapter in trans history](#). “Joan is also part of a long and cross-cultural history of people who have experienced their gender nonconformity as spiritually motivated. Throughout their period in the military, and throughout their trial, Joan remained consistently clear that their gender nonconformity was at the command of God.”

Will anyone find this convincing? Perhaps. According to a survey reported in [The Times](#), of London, the British are ignorant of their history: “A tenth thought Henry VIII had eight wives not six and the same ratio believed Joan of Arc was one of them. A third did not realise Henry established the

Church of England, and 54 per cent had no idea William Shakespeare was alive in the Tudor period.”

So if 10 percent of Brits believe that Joan of Arc was married to Henry VIII, why wouldn't they believe that she was trans or non-binary or two-spirit or whatever?

The Globe is committed to a [ShakesQueer](#) view of drama. What the playwright and the director see in Joan is a person who was true to an inner voice which told her to be gender transgressive. Gender fluidity is the Globe's religion. The notes for the play explain:

So when we read that Joan said, 'It was necessary that I changed my clothes', what if we were to take that at face value? Joan is telling us that for them, gender nonconformity felt necessary: like something they had to do. It seems clear that part of that necessity had to do with their [her] faith: their God had told them [her] to dress this way, and they [she] felt wholeheartedly bound to follow that command... But this is also a feeling that so many of us, whether we have a faith or not, can relate to: a sense that this next step in our lives is the right one, even if we can't tell exactly why.

This is, according to the Globe, what makes *I, Joan* “alive, queer and full of hope.”

In fact, what made Joan's life full of hope was something altogether different. The historical Joan would have been baffled by the idea of gender transgression. She was completely feminine and dressed in male attire only to protect herself amongst the rough soldiers of the French Army. She had made a vow of virginity and was uncompromisingly chaste and modest. Queer sexuality would have been abhorrent to her.

There's no point in a literary work which is unable to account for her character. In a back-handed way *I, Joan* may be a

genuine homage to her simplicity, wisdom, leadership, and courage. But queering her strange life sheds no light upon these qualities at all.

Joan is one of the most astonishing figures in history. An illiterate 17-year-old peasant girl who inspired battle-hardened men, enabled the coronation of her king, and saved her country from English invaders. And as quickly as she appeared, two years later she disappeared—betrayed, tried on trumped-up charges, and then burned at the stake.

The only coherent explanation for this is her unbending faith, not a bogus gender-fluidity. She believed that in obeying her conscience—which often went clean against her own feelings—she was obeying God. That is what gave her fortitude in all her tribulations.

And that is what gave her the peace of soul to bear the humiliation, betrayal, loneliness, lies, injustice, and agony of the second half of her career. She found a serenity in her deep Catholic faith that is simply unimaginable for the snowflakes of the LGBTQI+ movement.

The Globe justifies its bizarre production by asserting: “That is the role of theatre: to simply ask the question ‘imagine if?’” But queering Joan of Arc shows an impoverished imagination. The truly transgressive and imaginative question is: what if Joan really was a warrior for God?

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