dôNrm'-lā-pūsl

kariedwards, TinaŽigon

Published by Punctum Books

kariedwards and TinaŽigon.
dôNrm'-lā-pūsl.

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introduction

“ready to do battle with proverbs and pronouns”

an introduction to kari edwards’ dôNrm´-lä-püsl

“To me, gender is a poetry each of us makes out of the language we are taught.”

–Leslie Feinberg, Trans Liberation: Beyond Pink or Blue

Why are we still so fascinated by Joan of Arc? In her recent book Joan of Arc: A Life Transfigured, Kathryn Harrison offers one possible answer:

The tension between truth and fiction continues to quicken Joan’s biography, for a story, like a language, is alive only for as long as it changes. Latin is dead. Joan lives. She has been imagined and reimagined by Shakespeare, Voltaire, Schiller, Twain, Shaw, Brecht, Anouilh, and
thousands of writers of less renown. Centuries after her death, she has been embraced by Christians, feminists, French nationalists, Mexican revolutionaries, and hairdressers, her crude cut inspiring the bob worn by flappers as a symbol of independence from patriarchal strictures. Her voices have held the attention of psychiatrists and neurologists as well as theologians. It seems Joan of Arc will never be laid to rest. Is this because stories we understand are stories we forget? (16)'

Harrison’s question suggests that even after centuries have passed since Joan of Arc lived, and even after numerous retellings of her story, it lives on because there is still something unfathomable about it. Readers return to the story because Joan, even after all the social change that has occurred since her times, is still a complex and mysterious heroine — courageous, unwavering in her faith and love for her country, unshaken in her determination to do what her voices are telling her to do. But if the readers’ interest can be explained, what is it about her story that makes writers keep retelling it?

Perhaps Joan’s story is a way for authors to tell their own stories. In her study of various versions of Joan of Arc, Ann Astell focuses on the concept of authorship. Discussing some of the early adaptations (Paul Claudel’s libretto Jeanne d’Arc au bûcher (scored by Arthur Honegger), Christine de Pizan’s Le Ditié de Jehanne d’Arc, and Robert Southey’s Joan of Arc), Astell locates the beginning of these retellings in what

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1 Kathryn Harrison, Joan of Arc: A Life Transfigured (New York: Doubleday, 2014).
she calls “authorial identification with Joan of Arc” (4). She writes,

What is striking about Jehannine fictions is the way Joan’s portrayal varies from work to work, each time mirroring the life and “death” of the author. To the extent that Joan is made to resemble the author who recreates her, she attests to the importance of biographical criticism and to the thought of the poets, playwrights, essayists, and novels who conceived of her in an imaginary relationship to themselves, identifying with her. (8)

I suggest that kari edwards’ Joan of Arc stems from this same identification. As a transgender woman, edwards could identify with Joan. Further, edwards’ retelling of Joan’s story not only rekindles interest in Joan’s legacy, but also ensures that the language used to tell her story keeps changing to stay in step with changing times. As transgender issues continue moving into the mainstream, edwards’ Joan story puts language itself on trial, questioning words’ rigidity and disrupting language patterns to show what’s possible.

One of the documents in edwards’ archive in the SUNY Buffalo’s Poetry Collection includes notes about her Joan of Arc project, an “artist statement” and “PROPOSED PROJECT,”3 in which she outlines her plan for completing dôNrm’-lä-püsl, as well as a “PROPOSED BUGET.”4 In the notes attached to these documents, edwards writes that what first attracted her

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3 kari edwards, “PROPOSED PROJECT” (Box 7, PCMS-40, kari edwards Collection, The Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, University at Buffalo, State University of New York, Buffalo, NY).

4 kari edwards, “PROPOSED BUGET.” Unless otherwise noted, I preserve edwards’ original spelling throughout this introduction.
to Joan’s story was “exploring my linage.” Her notes continue, “the disruption of gender, burnt at the stack for wearing men’s cloths.” At the end, she explains that even though Joan has been used throughout history for everything “from a nationalist figure, procatholic figure, to a figure for womens rights and transgender rights,” as edwards continued to learn more about Joan, she was touched by “how this person lived for the most part in a state of grace, a state of pure rapture and alignment with the universe, living with the language of the heavens and wondering how could one speak of rapture” (italics mine). It is not clear if the wondering edwards brings up here is her own wondering or Joan’s; in either case, as is true throughout edwards’ work, there is a clear emphasis on the importance of language. Tellingly, even though in the “PROPOSED PROJECT” she titles the manuscript dôNrm’-lä-püsl, at the end of her notes she writes, “the title. beyond language.” This shows that her focus with this project was on something that edwards in her “artist statement” calls “inadequacys of language,” especially when it comes to gender. Where language fails, edwards’ poetry enters.

The only record of Joan’s story that is actually told from her perspective comes from the transcripts of her trial. In Joan of Arc in Her Own Words, Willard Trask gives us Joan’s story, translated from the trial transcripts in French and arranged chronologically. In a little over one hundred pages, we get an insight to Joan’s mind — her resolve, quick wit, and sense of humor. But because we only get her lines, a lot of the context is missing and open to interpretation. Not surprisingly, most of the authors portraying Joan’s story provide this context by

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5 Willard Trask, Joan of Arc in Her Own Words (New York: Turtle Point, 1996).
appropriating Joan for their own purposes. Bertolt Brecht’s “Joan Dark,” for example, is a Marxist Joan — a sort of missionary activist for the meatpacking workers in twentieth-century Chicago; Mark Twain’s Joan is the ideal Romantic heroine with all the saint-like virtues that a woman should possess; Vita Sackville-West’s biography underscores Joan’s androgynous characteristics; and so on. These and other authors who write about Joan of Arc do give Joan a voice, but that voice is filtered through their own perceptions.

There have been too many Joan of Arc retellings to be able to discuss them all in this introduction, so I will only mention a couple as an example of how Joan’s story is deployed and appropriated. Like Edwards, other authors put Joan of Arc in the context of their time and place, and endow Joan with characteristics they find important and which serve their own purposes. In “Joan of Arc Internationale: Shaw, Brecht, and the Law of Nations,” Julie Stone Peters argues that Brecht was one of the first writers who focused on the whole legal system as the main culprit for Joan’s death and disgrace:

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6 Ann W. Astell discusses some of these retellings in her book (see footnote 2). Her focus in discussing these stories is on the concept of authorship — the relationships between Joan’s story and the authors of her story. She also points out that the transcripts of Joan’s trials are not only the first book about Joan, but also, she argues, the first one by her.


10 One useful resource that overviews depictions of Joan of Arc in literature since the middle ages is Ingvald Raknem’s *Joan of Arc in History, Legend and Literature* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1971).

To attack only the “illegalities” of the trial, as so many others had done, would have been to suggest that the legal system itself was not at fault, but merely plagued by corrupt and malevolent judges. To attack directly the laws of the Inquisition would have been to attack a historical relic, to suggest, as so many others had, that a world made safe for democracy would now be safe for its saints and saviors. Both Shaw and Brecht were attempting, through their refigurations of the Joan of Arc myth, more fundamental critiques of the legal system itself, both national and international. (358)

Bertolt Brecht’s Joan Dark (as he names the heroine of *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*) shares his anti-capitalist leanings. She helps the meatpacker workers through a group called Black Straw Hats:

> The workers’ destinies are ruled by the coterie of owners (in fierce competition with one another), by the wild fluctuations of the stock market, which often result in massive layoffs and wage decreases, and by invisible forces in New York, which are mysteriously controlling international trade treaties. When the workers try to strike, the sentimental Pierpont Mauler, who weeps over the plight of the mooning cows on their way to the slaughter and swears to give up his murderous occupation, calls in the army, which brings in its tanks and machine guns, firing into the crowd, just as Brecht had seen the German police do at a communist rally in Berlin in the year he wrote *Die heilige Johanna*. (Stone Peters 365)

In Brecht’s play, Joan and her group are tricked into actually helping the oppressor instead of the oppressed, and Brecht
shows us how one person is not enough to institute any meaningful change. In this sense, Brecht uses Joan’s story to put forward his beliefs. He does the same thing with two other Joan of Arc plays he wrote after this one.\textsuperscript{12}

Similarly, Vita Sackville-West describes a Joan who in many respects resembles the author who is telling her story. In her essay on Sackville-West’s biography of Joan, Karyn Z. Sproles writes, “Sackville-West does, I believe, idealize Joan of Arc — not as a saint or a visionary, but as an active woman who led the life of a man without becoming male” (158).\textsuperscript{13} She talks about West’s cross-dressing as one of the catalysts for her identification with Joan. But she also acknowledges the main difference — West cross-dressed to pass; Joan wore armor not to become a man — her transformation was “powerfully enabling, not transformative” (159).

Some of the most important markers of gender identity, and, particularly in Joan’s case, rigid gatekeepers of gender norms and rules, are clothes. Interestingly, one of the original quotations that Edwards uses in her manuscript, “for you will not do what you say against me without suffering for it both in body and soul,” is preceded in Trask’s Joan of Arc in Her Own

\textsuperscript{12} After Saint Joan of the Stockyards, Brecht wrote two more Joan of Arc plays: The Trial of Joan of Arc at Rouen 1431 (Brecht: Collected Plays: Volume 9, ed. Ralph Manheim and John Willet [New York: Pantheon, 1972], 147–88), in which he “interspersed material from the actual trial with commentary by French onlookers in order to address simultaneously (if only implicitly) both the questionable socialism of ‘National Socialism’ and the questionable legality of the Third Reich” and The Visions of Simone Machard (Brecht: Collected Plays: Volume 7, ed. John Willet and Ralph Manheim [New York: Bloomsbury, 1976], 1–65), “his third Joan of Arc play, written in collaboration with Lion Feuchtwanger in 1942–43, in response to the occupation of France” (Stone Peters 369–70).

Words with, “When I shall have done that for which I am sent from God, I will put on women’s clothing” (130). Joan says this in response to prosecutors asking her if she does not consider “our holy father the Pope” her judge. Her answer tells them that only when she completes her mission will she stop wearing men’s clothing. In her mind, then, the clothes are connected to the character she is supposed to play. It also shows her resolve and tenacity, and, ultimately, her belief in God who (through the voices she has been hearing) guides her on the only possible path.

For edwards’ Joan, clothes are a matter of practicality. In the following passage, for example, la pucelle talks about her choice of clothing, and though her choices at first allude to the feminine character (what a bride is supposed to wear on her wedding day), she quickly adds that the comfort of good boots is more important: “I decide between a red coat or metal leggings, maybe just borrowed, loaned, and or something blue. though good boots always seem more useful than preconceived contrasts” (italics mine). Clothes are also important during Joan’s first meeting with her companion choisy: “from my first day here this giant glamour queen14 approached me, or maybe it was the universe that brought us together. there huddled under the entry way to the universe with the smooth glow of dawn, dressed like one who could have been held in high regard in the medical profession but chose professional tennis as an option.” We find out here that choisy is glamorous, but edwards also points out another important service of clothes — they can denote one’s rank and profession. edwards’ playfulness here also indicates the randomness of many possible

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14 “Glamour queen” could be an allusion to drag queen, so edwards is hinting here already at choisy’s gender fluidity.
interpretations of people’s clothing choices. When choisy later asks la pucelle, “what of what you wear, red, maybe a little too much for nationalist testers and meeting off-shoot royals?” she responds, “I wear not what is expected, I wear for the indication, it’s a matter of what suits me any more than that and it’s too much sugar in the cake. there is work to be done here.” For la pucelle, then, the clothes are her personal choice, and her point that “there is work to be done here” indicates that she does not want to spend much time discussing her sartorial choices.15

edwards’ retelling is centered around Joan as a symbol of breaking gender barriers, but her Joan is also a fighter against rigid language norms. The pressing issues of language norms and oppression against the transgender body are what make edwards’ intentionally anachronistic reinterpretation of the Joan of Arc story (with its direct application to current events) so important. la pucelle is a fighter for all those who are asked, as she writes, to “lie on their gender exam”16 or to claim one normative gender. At the beginning of the manuscript, we meet Joan in a meditative state, not even sure where she is: “I could be somewhere else right now imagining being

15 The other possible reading would be that the clothes she is wearing help her get the work done.

16 From edwards’ “Narrative/Identity”:
I mean, here I am riding along in my car and the gender police pull me over and demand that I circle either the, “F” or “M,” and if don’t, I am informed I won’t receive my pension, subscription, monthly medication, food stamps, taxes, or student loan repayment plan. . . . and you know I have to laugh since I know, and you know, this gender thing is all made up, I know I was never a boy, and I know I was never a girl, so hey . . . where does that leave me . . . lying on my gender exam . . . so if I am lying . . . I want to know who else lies on the gender exam . . . go ahead raise your hands . . . it’s fine, the destabilization process has already started . . .
here, imagining being somewhere else.” However, edwards quickly moves on to situate us in the stark reality: “the verdict is in . . . they stack the wood . . . I saw the fire lighted, the faggots are catching and the executioner . . . build(s) up the fire further . . .” (original italics). Since we all know how Joan’s life will end, it is an interesting choice for edwards to allude to Joan’s death so early in the manuscript. It is a premonition and a reminder that despite the heroism of la pucelle, her story will and must end. This also indicates another type of awareness on edwards’ part — that all of these retellings of Joan’s story do not only confirm her heroism and martyrdom, but also participate in reliving Joan’s death. Joan is symbolically killed — we kill her, as readers and writers, over and over again. In the words of la pucelle, “in these moments when I can catch my breath . . . these perfect pauses before being submerged again in the anguish of a billion torturous shrouds . . . before I die again and again and again” (italics mine). “I saw the fire lighted, the faggots are catching and the executioner . . . builds up the fire further” is also the first example of edwards using Joan’s own (translated) words in her manuscript. The words in italics are Joan of Arc’s words from her trial on Wednesday, May 23, 1431: “If I were at the place of execution, and I saw the fire lighted, and the fagots catching and the executioner ready to build up the tire, and if I were in the tire, even so I would say nothing else, and I would maintain what I have said at this trial until death. I have nothing more to say” (Trask 131–32). Joan is responding here to being threatened with torture. Her words show her resolve to stay true to her story and her beliefs. They also show her courage and willingness to face death for her cause.

Throughout edwards’ edited document, she does not cite her sources, but she does signal to the reader which words are
not hers by putting them in italics. In edwards’ “PROPOSED PROJECT” document, she notes,

each section [of the manuscript] has selections from la pucelle’s documented voice, along with facts of the life documented and recorded in numerous trials and retrials as a direct transmission of la pucelle. there are also cuts and past quotes and sections from: julian of norwich, mark twain, lawrence stein, james joyce, getrude stein, raymond roussel, virgina wolf, and others.

Significantly, edwards adds, “this incorporation of other writers in to this text makes this the history of avant garde as a way to keep the idea of language out of bounds.” Her Joan of Arc story, then, is a pastiche and a collection of different voices.17 So, as edwards uses “sometimes, something, whatever, or both” in a day in the life of p. instead of pronouns “he” or “she,” edwards uses other writers’ (and Joan’s own) words to get her message across.18 These appropriations are more common in the first part of the document; later, for the most part, edwards’ own words take over.

edwards uses Joan’s words quite a few times in the manuscript, and those familiar with Joan’s story would probably be able to recognize them even if they were not marked in italics. “I would rather die than do what I know to be a sin,” for example, are the words Joan utters after the siege of Orléans; she

17 Considering that Joan of Arc was guided by the voices of saints, perhaps with this appropriation of words by other writers edwards is guiding her la pucelle in a similar fashion.

18 kari edwards, a day in the life of p (New York: Subpress Collective, 2002).
is wounded, and when someone offers to charm her wounds, she responds with those words. Also, for example, after Joan revokes her abjuration, she says, “If I should say that God had not sent me, I should damn myself. It is true that God has sent me” (Trusk 140); edwards’ Joan at one point exclaims, “if I should say that heavens had not sent me I should damn myself.” edwards adds, “and then without warning long tumultuous shouting sounds like the voice of a thousand waters,” which is the last sentence from Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher.” There are also quotes from Julian of Norwich, such as “red blood trickling down from under the crown, all hot, flowing freely and copiously, a living stream, just as it seemed to me that it was at the time when the crown of thorns was thrust down.” General pop culture references also appear in the text — for example the quote from the science fiction film The Day the Earth Stood Still in the following lines: “this is the place where I begin and end, alpha-betaomega, klaatu barata nikto.” In the document prepared by edwards, it is safe to assume that the italicized text was taken from some other work. But in the original, handwritten manuscript, the line between edwards’ words and those she borrows is blurrier, and it is often impossible to tell where her words end and other authors’ begin. She sometimes acknowledges her sources in marginal notes, but most of the time the reader is left to herself to either pick up the intertextual reference or miss it entirely.” She also mixes genres (macabre fiction, religious vision, personal accounts, etc.) and gender (by using both female and male authors’ words). Thus, edwards opens the Joan story to all of literary history, bringing writers, religious

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19 In this edition, we have included notes following the text to alert the reader to edwards’ quotes and references.
mystics, and other artistic fellow travelers as allies and witnesses in Joan’s trial.

The original journey of Joan to meet the Dauphine is replaced in Edwards’ version with La Pucelle, a modern-day heroine, a gender warrior who travels long distances to meet “the one who knows” and to convince him that her fight is worth fighting. She doesn’t make her journey riding on a horse; she takes “the local,” with its cheap plastic seats and humming fluorescent lights, “to Domrémy and beyond.” Joan’s journey to get an audience with “the one who knows” is also repeated time and time again (she is continuously asked to go back and, just like the historical Joan of Arc, to return the next day for more questioning). This perhaps symbolizes not only Joan’s long struggle to get an audience with the dauphin (and later her trial), but also the constant interrogation faced by people who don’t strictly adhere to socially accepted gender rules and norms. La Pucelle is thus someone who stands up for outcasts. She gives voice to those who might not have the courage to stand up and speak for themselves. She might not have a whole army to back her up, but she does have two companions by her side — “choisy” and “caeneus.”

Edwards’ choice for Joan’s companions is interesting, and it also stresses the importance of gender fluidity and freedom that she associates with Joan. The choice of “caeneus” is particularly telling: Caeneus is a character in Ovid’s Metamorphoses. After Nestor briefly mentions Caeneus as one of the greatest warriors he has known and that he was born a woman, Achilles urges him to tell his whole story. Nestor obliges and tells the

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20 Domrémy is the original name of Joan of Arc’s birth village. It is now called Domrémy-la-Pucelle.
story of how Caenis who was famous for her beauty, is transformed into a great warrior Caeneus:

But Caenis accepted none of her suitors. One day she was strolling along a secluded beach on her own, when, according to rumour’s report, she was raped by the god of the sea. As Neptune savoured the joy of his latest conquest, he said, “I’ll allow you to ask for a gift which I promise not to refuse you. Now choose what you want to ask me!” (so the rumour continued) Caenis replied: “The wrong you have done me is great, so I’ll ask you the greatest of favours I can: let me never be able to suffer such wrong again. If you will make me a woman no more, your promise will be fulfilled.” She delivered those final words in a lower voice, and they might have appeared to come from a man — as they surely did. The god of the sea has already granted Caenis’ request and had also bestowed an additional power: the new male body can never be wounded or fall at a sword’s point. (473–74)²¹

edwards would have been attracted to this story because it involves transformation and triumph; from the aftermath of

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gender-based violence change and growth is possible — a
great warrior can emerge.

Joan’s other companion, “choisy” is modeled after
François-Timoléon de Choisy (1644–1724), a transvestite
French writer and abbot. Nancy Arenberg writes,

From a young age, Choisy’s mother, seeking to further her
social ambitions in the court, dressed her son as a girl
in the hopes of cultivating the friendship of the King’s
brother. She succeeded in her plan since Choisy was a
frequent visitor to the court; he soon became the play-
mate of Philippe d’Orléans. Their mutual fondness for
feminine fashion, jewelry, make-up and other accessories
was never concealed at court. In fact, Philippe’s travesty
of gender was even encouraged, since it would dimin-
ish any threat to Louis’ absolute power. Choisy’s growing
taste for women’s clothes did not, however, disappear as
he grew up and became a man. During the course of his
life, he alternated between periods of cross-dressing and
reverting to his masculine clothing, and more often than
not to his ecclesiastic robes. (13–14)²²

Arenberg’s description of Choisy is suggestive of edwards’
interest in this sexually ambiguous figure. Choisy’s connection
to French court and princely power must have proven irre-
sistible to one approaching the topic of Joan-as-gender-warrior,
and the idea of “alternating” freely between gender identities
would certainly have been appealing as well. Paul Scott, how-
ever, contends that Choisy’s memoirs of dressing as a woman

²² Nancy Arenberg, “Mirrors: Crossdressing and Narcissism in Choisy’s His-
toire de Madame la Comtesse de Barres,” Cahiers du dix-septième X.1 (2005):
11–30.
are a complete fabrication: “the inescapable conclusion is that they represent nothing other than an elaborate and sustained fantasy on their creator’s part.” Scott points to a lack of “supporting evidence,” or any mention of Choisy’s cross-dressing by any of his contemporaries. Whether Edwards supposed Choisy to be fabricating the account is, in some sense, irrelevant (and there is every indication Edwards took it at face value); yet Edwards might have found the idea of Choisy’s faked gender-bending to accord well with her sense that gender is fluid and ever-changing.

This gender-bending is amplified by Edwards’ decision to take some of the lines she gives to Choisy directly from Chevalier d’Eon, another interesting eighteenth-century gender-bending figure. d’Eon’s story is particularly fascinating because during his lifetime it was largely thought that he was born a woman and lived as man in order to be able to rise publicly; the truth, however, was the other way around. As Gary Kates writes,

> During the last decade of the Old Regime the Chevalière d’Eon was considered one of the most famous and accomplished women of the eighteenth century. After all, no other woman of the Chevalière’s age had achieved what d’Eon had: become a major diplomat who negotiated the 1763 Treaty of Paris with England; a military hero who was awarded the highly coveted Cross of Saint Lois for military valor; and an author of over fifteen volumes, mostly on government finance.

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What fascinated European commentators was that all of this had been achieved by not only a woman but by a woman who has also posed as a man. . . .

When d’Eon finally died in 1810, everyone, including Mrs. Cole, d’Eon’s housemate of fifteen years, was shocked to discover the naked truth: the eighty-one-year-old chevalière actually possessed a male body, ordinary in every way. (558–59, 561)

Thus, edwards’ interest in d’Eon is not surprising, and her choice to create a character who is a mixture of Choisy and d’Eon shows her desire to weave the history of transgender lineage into her work, as well as, again, point out the fluidity of any kind of identity, but especially that of gender.

Like many of edwards’ other works, this manuscript is also unconventional when it comes to narrative techniques — it is not linear in terms of time and space, and it is not binary when it comes to gender. For example, throughout the text edwards keeps destabilizing the idea of time and reminding the readers that Joan does not fully belong to the past, just as she does not fully belong to the present. When she talks about

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26 In fact, in her “PROPOSED PROJECT,” edwards explains that everything happens in a span of a single day, “the text is broken into seven parts, from prevision (or darkness) to light (or after death). it moves through the day, from nighttime to high noon when the ‘la pucelle’ was actually burnt at the stake.”
being tortured, la pucelle wonders if her remains will be “scattered on the future sight of a 7–11.” When Joan describes her long and repeated journey to “the one who knows,” edwards also sprinkles several current concepts into this paragraph:

*I ride the local* everyday, or I attempt to take it every day and every day it’s the same thing. I arrive, *I mind the gap* and take a seat. I look across from me and see the person to the right is the same person. maybe this is a visionaries’ waiting room, yet, every day as before, tests, exams, questions of my whereabouts on this day and that day. who spoke to me and have I ever left my *carry on luggage* anywhere. (italics mine)

Later in the manuscript, there is also mention of a “tupperware container,” and the notion that Joan’s message should be delivered “through the post office overnight express,” and so on. The mention of such anachronistic objects and concepts breaks the narrative temporally, introducing a diachronic element that connects us with Joan and makes her story more immediate. These objects and concepts also converse with edwards’ ideas about gender — that it is fluid; that it involves movement and gaps; that there are “containers” that we are put in and must break out of. There is even one occasion when edwards uses Joan to ventriloquize a kind of meta-commentary on this work. When Joan is trying to get an audience with “the one who knows,” she tells her interrogators to tell him that “that was the universe straightening out the sheets, not some probate indication writing up so called historical fictional characterizations.” But what is the meta-commentary edwards is making? The word “probate” can be a noun, a verb, or an adjective, and thus it fits with edwards’ idea of nouns becoming
verbs. “Probate” is also (mostly) a legal term; a probate court has jurisdiction over matters relating to wills. The word is derived from Latin “probare,” which means “to prove.” Thus Joan’s commentary mocks the jurisdiction of her interrogators, asserting the supremacy of “the universe” or perhaps edwards’ own writing.

The Joan of Arc project is a continuation of edwards’ playing with language: throughout the manuscript, edwards alludes to how language affirms norms and, at the same time, is inadequate in its possibilities to express something as nuanced and layered as gender. And though the original Joan was fighting for her country and her king, la pucelle, “dress[ed] in armor that caeneus offered, shinning and ready to do battle with proverbs and pronouns,” has a different fight in mind. edwards had previously engaged in this “battle with proverbs and pronouns” in a day in the life of p., and she also addresses it more in her unpublished essay “The Voices of Ten Thousand Genders: A Inquiry Into One Hundred Years of Alternative Gender Literature.” edwards outlines the goals of this essay as follows,

In examining alternative gendered writings I hope to bring some continuity to the history of a group of people that has been, until recently, fragmented, adapted, obliterated or assimilated. I also intend to show that these texts constitute a persistent alternative to the master narratives of gender, a counter-discourse. I will focus on the language of resistance used even at times when resistance of the dominant culture was followed by the swift response of “the law.” This is the language of individuals

who have written themselves into existence despite a lack of language to adequately represent them.

Here, language of resistance has two meanings: it is that which dares to be spoken, but it is also language that is, just like in edwards’ *a day in the life of p.*, pliable. It is also the language that needed to be invented by those who until they invented it could not speak of their experiences. Discussing language that is flexible and adjustable in the same way as gender, edwards chooses to rebel against the artificial stability of either of these two concepts. She writes,

> When bodies become malleable so does language. When primary sexual indicators no longer locate the gender of that individual, the signifying economy is disrupted. Language loses it[s] function to signify, pronouns no longer have viability, or become. As C. Jacob Hale states, we “are living in a historical discursive moment in which our language has run out” (1997, p. 335). Alternative gendered individuals’ presence, and their literature, are bringing language as we know it to a point where it must expand to encompass the not yet readable. This is the historical struggle against ideological fixation, “the struggle against the codes that translate all meaning perfectly” (Haraway, 1991, p.176).  

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These passages from “The Voices of Ten Thousand Genders” encapsulate Edwards’ main stance on gender and language. Unlike a day in the life of p., the Joan of Arc manuscript does not directly interrupt established language codes by inventing new words, but Edwards constantly stresses that one of the fights Joan is fighting is related to gender and language.

The importance of language for Edwards in this project is evident from its title. According to her notes, she at first proposes Beyond Language, but then she chooses the title dôNrm’-lä-püsl, an approximation of a phonetic transcription of Domrémy-la-Pucelle, Joan’s birth village. From a quick visual scan, the reader can at once sense Edwards’ effort to connect to the non-normative, to the unspeakable, by virtue of our inability to say the title’s name and the discomfort that goes along with this inability. We might detect the word “norm” in “dôNrm” and, perhaps, the message “do” or “do not norm,” and in a similar way, one could read the name of Joan’s companion Choisy as a pun on “choice.”

Edwards’ idea of “language out of bounds” is expressed in several places in the manuscript. When La Pucelle describes one tool of torture (“this rusted rake being drawn across my skin”) as “nothing more than a ragged sentence that has fallen out off the page — lifeless carcass telling lies,” Edwards seems to indicate that the meaning, and thus truthfulness, of language (a “ragged sentence”) in or outside the text, is not to be taken for granted. When Joan talks about her vision at the beginning of the second section, she also refers to language existing not only in the text itself, but also outside of it. Joan, guided by the light, is looking for “a seat on a the local to cross the boundary of the page.” This light is also referred to as “a sermon without words.” During one of her questionings, Joan says, “I have been sent in part to bring zero language.” And when she is talking to Choisy for the first time, she says, “but soon we will
see places change from things to verbs. it will be miraculous, but I think you already know that and know what to do.” In another instance, edwards explicitly points out that the problem is the rigidity of nouns (which, compared to verbs, are stable): “on the field of grass of grain of pleasure, on the field of yesteryear tomorrow and the next one to come, on the field bloodied with too many nouns.” And soon after, “after the night has settled and gone away, after the morning light had been readjusted. after dressing in armor that caeneus offered, shining and ready to do battle with proverbs and pronouns.” All these examples speak to edwards’ insistence on how language, just like gender, should be flexible, pliable, and not complicit in policing the strictness of the gender binary.

The mention of “zero writing” also echoes Roland Barthes’ *Writing Degree Zero*, and Joan is perhaps an avatar for edwards’ desire to approach the “zero degree, pregnant with all past and future specifications.” But as always with edwards, even this desire is not so straightforward. Barthes continues, “[e]ach poetic word is thus an unexpected object, a Pandora’s box from which fly out all the potentialities of language” (48). So far, so good; and edwards would seem to strongly agree with the idea of unleashing “all the potentialities of language,” especially if that means freeing the self from gender binaries. But: “This Hunger of the Word, common to the whole of modern poetry, makes poetic speech terrible and inhuman” (48). “Terrible” because, as Barthes adds, “there is no humanism of modern poetry. This erect discourse is full of terror, that is to say, it relates man not to other men, but to the most inhuman images in Nature: heaven, hell, holiness, childhood, madness,

pure matter, etc.” (50). Yet “thing” language, the word as pure object, does not seem to be what Edwards is after; in a sense we observe Edwards approach “zero” only to, at the last moment, add rather than subtract possibilities — and precisely on the plane of embodied humanity. Take, for example, the mention above of Joan “ready to do battle with proverbs and pronouns.” On the one hand, we imagine Joan contending against proverbs and pronouns, especially those that would tend to impose and box in gender. On the other, are we not also invited to imagine Joan fighting with, along side of, proverbs and pronouns? This second sense of the phrase gains credence if we recall Edwards’ inventive, experimental, potential-laden use of pronoun substitutes in a day in the life of p.

Edwards’ La Pucelle is not only a fighter for her country and “heavens,” but through telling her story Edwards is able to connect the text to a contemporary way of discussing embedded gender constraints. La Pucelle is also aware of these constraints and fights against them. When she meets Choisy for the first time, Choisy tells her, “I’ve heard rumor of you and that you’re here to remove the veil, I would like to serve with you in the struggle, since I am also from a place of boxes box cutter, which usually fit horribly, and bleed heavily.” The veil Choisy refers to is, seemingly, the blindness of those who choose not to see beyond the aforementioned gender norms. The boxes here can be metaphorical boxes one is supposed to fit in perfectly and never think outside of them; but they can also stand for literal boxes, the ones that require us to check one or the other to indicate “male” or “female.” Choisy’s words here show solidarity with Joan, who also doesn’t fit neatly into either of these categories, and it also alludes to the violence perpetuated against those who don’t fit. If one does not fit in a box, “the box cutter” is going to be used to make them fit. Soon after Choisy joins her, La Pucelle is hopeful that she can, indeed, bring

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about change: “I knew after that brief moment I was on my way to turning this around, I also knew they would try to find a box for both of us to fill out, but I know if I could connive those inquisitors I could finally throw these boxes out.” She is aware that she and choisy will be forced to fit in, but she is also positive that she can overthrow this kind of thinking and get rid of such attempts. She later tells her inquisitors, “I have come to give a sign to the one who knows, I have come to help raise a siege against those forces that grasp labels with bloodied stumps just to receive their months’ disablement checks.” The siege “la pucelle” refers to is not the famous siege of Orléans that Joan raised in 1429; it is the siege that forces certain labels on people. What edwards also acknowledges is that this siege is futile and that both those who fight to maintain it and those on the other side get hurt. Further, those maintaining the siege do so not because they necessarily believe in its mission, but because they can benefit from it. Such is edwards’ commentary on any belief systems that establish artificial hierarchies and rules in order to maintain power. Her Joan, then, is a heroine who will help to overhaul the system, but, as she says, “I am here to show us set us there and there but I can’t do it on my own.”

When Joan finally puts on armor, it makes her feel like “a mythical figure born in the castration of the sea. I was ready, we were ready, ready to take the domrémy line to new sovereign and beyond to begin again.” It is this readiness for the new beginning, for taking up the journey and the fight yet again (at least in this first section of the manuscript), that makes edwards’ Joan relevant and important because it gives us, like the original Joan and those who followed, hope that a better world, one without restrictive boxes and violent box cutters, is possible. It also tells us that we should demand it for ourselves.
Working on dôNrm-lä-püsl was exciting and terrifying at the same time. Exciting because I was privileged to be one of the first — if not the first — people reading edwards' unpublished work. Terrifying because there was great pressure on my editorial efforts and whether they could do the work justice. No matter how carefully and meticulously I approached the manuscript, I knew that it was impossible to shape the work exactly as edwards would have wanted it.

My first archival discoveries were the notebooks with the handwritten manuscript of the Joan of Arc project. However, I also found a typewritten draft of the first part of the project in one of the boxes. When I contacted Frances Blau about editing and publishing this already typed-up document, she was delighted and surprised. She did not know that edwards had formalized any portion of this work. So even though I spent quite some time transcribing the handwritten notebooks, this text reflects my edited version of the document edwards typed up herself. Next to this document, edwards filed the “PROPOSED PROJECT,” in which she discusses how she envisions this project, but also mentions her dyslexia and her need for editorial guidance. She writes, “I am severely dyslexic and the assistance of an editor is of the utmost importance, for without one I have to rely on friends and loved

31 edwards did, however, post a part of this project on her blog: http://transdada.blogspot.com/2003/10/from-dnrm-l-psl-prelude-this-could-be.html

32 I am hoping to return to the handwritten notebooks in the future.

33 Though there is no address or other record that would indicate to whom and where edwards sent or planned on sending this manuscript, the existence of the typed pages together with this proposal can be seen as proof that she was planning on finding a publisher for this project, or that she was seeking financial support for it in a form of a fellowship of some kind.
ones.” When I worked on the notebooks, edwards’ dyslexia and her scrawling penmanship made movement through the manuscript exceptionally difficult: it was nearly impossible at times to decipher the words on the page. But I do not regret that labor; on the contrary. The fact that I transcribed some pages from those notebooks and was later able to see edwards’ own transcript was helpful: it not only gave me useful insights into her editing process, but it also helped me make decisions when I set out to edit her typewritten pages.

Even though working with the typed manuscript was much easier than working with the handwritten notebooks, there was still a good amount of editorial work required. There were some parts in which it seemed pretty clear what edwards was trying to say; most pages, however, took a lot of time and more deliberating about what edwards intended. Likewise, some of the words in the manuscript were more easily deciphered than others. I knew that when edwards writes in the proposal that la pucelle was “burnt at the stack,” she means “stake.” Also, “clearing sound of chiken moans and pit bowls” was revised to “clearing sound of chicken moans and pit bulls” without much difficulty. Sometimes, however, it took weeks to decide on a single word or phrase. And even after the decision was made, I would go back to a certain word and phrase after reading through the manuscript again and change it to something else, something I thought worked better or made more sense.

One of the most involved and in the end the most rewarding processes was trying to pin down who la pucelle’s companions are. edwards spells “choisy” and “caenus” several different ways throughout the manuscript: “chosy,” “chosisy,” “choisy,” “chosiy,” “chaosy,” “chsy,” “caenis,” “canus,” “cans,” “canous,”
“cnaus.” I at first thought that “choisy” was Edwards’ pun on the word “choice.” This explanation fits well with Edwards’ position on the fluidity and choice of one’s gender and gender expression. Likewise, there are instances in the text that suggested that “choisy” could in fact be either a woman or a man. As it turned out, my explanation was partially correct, but in fact referred, as I discovered after some research, to François-Timoléon de Choisy, as described previously.

In other instances where it was difficult for me to work out a word or a phrase due to spelling, I had to eventually make a best-guess decision. This was a task that I had the most difficulty doing, as I understand that one word can make all the difference in how a text is read. I also realize that a different reader might have chosen a different word. And neither one of us might be “correct,” since Edwards’ intention could be entirely different.

Here are a few examples of what the original pages looked like, followed by my editorial revisions:

“weaving stright at me from the grande quzine of com-namd in guttraal retention”

“first the first things first we must know of local petei-clars so first things first?”

“I am sent here to stiop the atrocities before its to late. sex or not has not barring on the wheather. all you need

34 These different spellings are listed here in the order of their appearance in the manuscript.
to know is I am more than suritable to show secrets of an ever expansive soul.”

In my version, these lines read:

“waving straight at me from the grand cuisine of command in guttural retention”

“first the first things first we must know of local practitioner so first thing’s first?”

“I am sent here to stop the atrocities before it’s too late. sex or not has no bearing on the weather. all you need to know is I am more than suitable to show secrets of an ever expansive soul.”

As one can see, some of the words, such as “suritable;” for example, are simple misspellings; others took more deliberation and thinking. In the above selections, the most difficult for me to decide on was “local practitioner.” edwards’ “peteiclars” reminded me of French dessert “petite éclairs,” which would disrupt the meaning of the sentence in a fun way and give it a local peculiarity. There was also a possibility of “local particulars.” In the end, local practitioner made the most sense, since this figure comes up a few times later in the manuscript, and it became clear that it is a reference to the priest from Joan’s village.

Some might, of course, ask: why not just leave edwards’ spelling as is? After all, especially in this case, for example, her (mis)spellings invite one to imagine all the possibilities I mention (and, of course, most likely many more). In a few cases in the manuscript, I actually did leave edwards’ spelling untouched. However, since the work that follows is my own

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edition of the text, I had to make certain decisions. Leaving everything as is would defeat the purpose of editing the manuscript, and the original is available in the SUNY Buffalo’s Poetry Collection. Likewise, as is clear from Frances Blau’s description of edwards’ editorial process, this manuscript would not be considered finished by edwards herself. While making editorial decisions, I tried to strike a balance between my interpretations of edwards’ words and the possibilities of other interpretations. I believe that given her project, which aims to show both the limitations and endless possibilities of language, this kind of approach was appropriate.

In the end, this book must be called a possible “version” of edwards’ manuscript. I take full responsibility for my decisions, even as I acknowledge that what follows surely would not have been the final version of dôNrm´lä-püsl if edwards had lived to see it through to publication. In every writer’s archive there are previously unread and undiscovered manuscripts. There are notes, letters, and unfinished projects, and increasingly, as is the case with edwards, electronic materials, word files, emails, blog posts. . . . Many of these items are best left to the specialist or the scholar who might, reading them, gain a better understanding of the author’s extant work. Previously unpublished work is unpublished for a reason, and is often better left that way. My discovery of edwards’ Joan of Arc project, however, is different. Not only did edwards clearly intend for this work to be published — as the copious plans, project and budget outlines attest — but also, as I have shown, the work provides an important, even essential, further extension of edwards’ lifelong artistic and activist pursuits. In her

Joan of Arc, edwards forges an exciting new direction in these pursuits, one that I was excited to discover in the notebooks and eager to bring to other readers. The Joan of Arc project, though incomplete, can be seen as culmination of her ongoing work and, on that merit alone, is a significant addition to edwards’ visible poetics.

*Tina Žigon*