

Listening to the Voices

Joan of Arc as a Spirit-Medium in the Celtic Revival

Michelle Foot

Joan of Arc has been celebrated across the centuries for many reasons. The legend began in the 15th century with a peasant girl in Domrémy. Upon hearing the voices of saints, she was inspired to intervene on behalf of the French cause in the 100 Years War with England. Famously, the warrior-maid of Orléans was captured, tried and burned at the stake. Her legend has often been misunderstood, mistaking the reason for her execution as a result of a prosecution for witchcraft or for hearing the voice of the devil but historically she was sentenced to death due to the heresy of cross-dressing.¹ As with many myths and legends, such tales inspire appropriations and revisions of the values embodied by the characters in the story. Since the 19th century Joan represented a national champion, particularly during and after the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71). She has also symbolised steadfast loyalty to a religious or spiritual cause, or a feminist icon as a female heroine in a world of men.²

For the Celtic Revival in Scotland at the *fin-de-siècle*, Joan of Arc represented the Auld Alliance with France. This was a celebration of the historic political and cultural ties between France and Scotland. Meanwhile, for the international movement of Spiritualism, Joan represented the witch as a misunderstood spirit-medium in history. These two seemingly disparate interests are united in the painting *Jehanne d'Arc et sa Garde Écossaise*, by the Scottish and Celtic Revival artist John Duncan (1866–1945), in 1895–96 (Fig. 1). This painting is usually considered in terms of its engagement with the Celtic Revival's interests in national and cultural identities. Yet it is the intention of this article to reconsider Duncan's painting in the context of 19th-century Spiritualism in order to demonstrate how the appropriations of both the Celtic Revival and the Spiritualist movement coalesce in the image of Joan.

1 For more see Daniel Hobbins, *The Trial of Joan of Arc* (Harvard University Press, 2007).

2 Warner provides an extensive overview of how Joan of Arc became a representative of a range of ideals in Marina Warner, *Joan of Arc: The Image of Female Heroism* (University of California Press, 2000). Also see Venita Datta, *Heroes and Legends of Fin-de-Siècle France: Gender, Politics and National Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); Gerd Krumeich, 'Joan of Arc Between Right and Left', in Robert Tombs (ed.), *Nationhood and Nationalism in France: From Boulangism to the Great War, 1889–1918* (HarperCollins, 1991), 63–73. For Roman Catholics Joan of Arc was beatified in 1909 by Pope Pius X and then canonised in 1920 by Pope Benedict XV.



**Fig. 1. John Duncan, *Jehanne d'Arc et sa Garde Écossaise*, 1895–96, oil on canvas, 107.1cm x 138.4cm.
Museums & Galleries Edinburgh – City of Edinburgh Council
Photo: Museums & Galleries Edinburgh – City of Edinburgh Council**

The painting shows the French protagonist on horseback and escorted by a Scottish guard on the way to Rheims. This episode depicts the day before the crowning of Charles VII as King of France, for whom Joan fought under the direction of spiritual guidance. Her winged guides maintain a visible presence close by. Also nearby are the Scottish guard who fought as allies alongside the French in the 100 Years War, when Scotland and England were separate kingdoms. From 1418 the Garde Écossaise acted as the personal bodyguard to the French monarchy and the Scots came to the aid of Joan during the 1429 siege of the English-held town of Orléans. The painting is symbolic of the close connection

between the two countries and epitomises the Auld Alliance. In addition to its painted version, Duncan made a similar line drawing of Joan in *The Way to Rheims* for the Celtic Revival project, *The Evergreen*, a four-volume journal that celebrated the ties between countries with a Celtic culture.³

The Celtic Revival

The Celtic Revival was interested in a pan-European identity between countries with a shared Celtic heritage or past.⁴ These included Brittany in France, Cornwall in England, the Isle of Man, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. In Scotland, one of the main centres for the Celtic Revival was at Ramsay Lodge on the Royal Mile in Edinburgh's old town. Patrick Geddes (1854–1932) was an influential figure around whom many artistic and intellectual individuals gathered from both Scotland and further afield. One of the shared visions amongst this group was the belief that art could provide the genesis for cultural and social rejuvenation.⁵ Duncan's oeuvre contains a number of paintings that seem to represent the ties between different Celtic nations. His painting *Tristan and Isolde* (1912) is perhaps the most famous example of this. Tristan, a knight from Cornwall, and Isolde, an Irish Princess, stand upon a boat holding a love potion between them to express their eternal bond. The scene provided the opportunity to present the union of two Celts in front of a seascape, devoid of any indications to a specific national landscape, thus representing a universal message about the bond between Celtic nations of the North-Western Atlantic archipelago of Europe. In a similar vein, the image of Joan of Arc with her Scottish guard marching to victory was adopted by the Celtic Revival as a manifestation of the close bond between French and Scottish Celts.

The Celtic Revival appropriated Celtic archaeology and antiquaries for its own purposes, usually to find stylistic inspiration from artefacts and thematic motifs from folkloric stories that were broadly understood to be 'Celtic' in the 19th century. Such appropriations are found in *The Druids: Bringing in the Mistletoe* (1890), by the Glasgow artists George Henry (1858–1943) and Edward Atkinson Hornel (1864–1933), in which the costumes of the Druids draw on a range of appropriated imagery, such as the lunula-shaped sickle derived from an early Bronze Age neck ornament, and a snake design from the Pictish Aberlemno stone.⁶

3 *The Evergreen, A Northern Seasonal. The Book of Summer* (Patrick Geddes & Colleagues, 1896), 99.

4 Murray Pittock discusses the role of Celticism in British identity in depth in *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester University Press, 1999). Also see 'Chapter 7 – Celtic Revival' in John Morrison, *Painting the Nation: Identity and Nationalism in Scottish Painting, 1800–1920* (Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 185–223.

5 Murdo Macdonald, *Scottish Art* (Thames & Hudson, 2000), 152.

6 Frances Fowle, 'The Celtic Revival in Britain and Ireland: Reconstructing the Past, c. AD 1600–1920' in Julia Farley & Fraser Hunter (eds.), *Celts: Art and Identity* (British Museum Press, 2015), 237.

John Morrison noted that Duncan took a similar approach in his painting *The Riders of the Sidhe* (1911), by applying symbols from various archaeological discoveries found across Britain and further afield. For example, the rider's shield is modelled on the Battersea Shield in the British Museum (originally retrieved from the River Thames, London) and one of the helmets may be based on the carnyces represented on the Gundestrup cauldron from Jutland.⁷ This appropriation of an eclectic range of 'Celtic' prototypes was not necessarily problematic. In Duncan's case it was typical of the pictorial synthetic approach of Symbolist art to which many of his paintings belonged. Such synthetic approaches in his work also apply to the spiritual syncretism and mystical quality of his paintings, which borrow from Christianity, Spiritualism, Theosophy, folkloric superstitions and mythological tales of the supernatural.⁸ His work is often imbued with an air of mystery, a deeply imaginative quality that revels in suggestions of otherworldliness.

This is not surprising, as many other Celtic Revivalists were interested in different forms of esotericism, mysticism and the occult. William Butler Yeats (1865–1939), an Irish Celtic Revival poet, who was famously a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, took an interest in Rosicrucianism and Theosophy, and was inspired by Maude Gonne (1866–1953), who herself was deeply interested in occultism.⁹ Duncan was also interested in Theosophy and joined the Theosophical lodge in Edinburgh in 1909.¹⁰ Yet he was simultaneously drawn to the predecessor of the Theosophical movement: Spiritualism.¹¹ These two movements were eclectic in their beliefs, the lack of strict dogma permitted each adherent the ability to subscribe to a range of alternative spiritualities, picking and choosing which aspects best suited their own individual approach to Theosophical and Spiritualist teaching. Madame Helena Blavatsky (1831–91), who founded the Theosophical Society in 1875, began her mystical career as a spirit-medium. It was not uncommon for adherents to take an interest in both movements throughout the late decades of the 19th century.

Spiritualism

Spiritualism originated as a movement in 1848, in Hydesville, New York. Phenomenal events in the household of the Fox

7 Morrison, *Painting the Nation*, 206.

8 This leaning towards esoteric and mystical interests was typical of Symbolism at the *fin de siècle*. See Serena Keshavjee, *L'art Inconscient and L'esthétique Des Esprits: Science, Spiritualism and the Imaging of the Unconscious in French Symbolist Art* (Doctoral Thesis, University of Toronto, 2002); Vivien Greene, Jean-David Jumeau-Lamond and Kenneth Silver (eds.), *Mystical Symbolism: The Salon de la Rose Croix in Paris, 1892–1897* (Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2017); Tessel Bauduin 'The Occult and the Visual Arts', in Christopher Partridge (ed.), *The Occult World* (Routledge, 2014), 429–45.

9 George Harper, *Yeats and the Occult* (Macmillan Press, 1976); Susan Johnston Graf, *Talking to the Gods: Occultism in the Work of William Butler Yeats, Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood and Dion Fortune* (SUNY, 2016), 17–56.

10 See Michael Shaw, 'Theosophy in Scotland: Oriental Occultism and National Identity' in Christine Ferguson & Andrew Radford (eds.), *The Occult Imagination in Britain, 1875–1947* (Routledge, 2017), 34.

11 Duncan's private notebooks make numerous references to his interests in Spiritualism. National Library of Scotland, John Duncan Archives, AC6866-2/-3/-12.

family resulted in three sisters, Katherine, Margaret and Leah, identifying a series of coded knockings, or rappings, in the walls and on furniture, as communications from a spirit. This spirit was believed to have left the afterlife and crossed through the Veil, the threshold between worlds, into the mortal realm. The events gained considerable attention from both locals and a wider audience due to reports in the American Press. As the story spread, the Fox sisters gained followers who believed in the alleged phenomenon.¹²

Central to Spiritualism was the belief that human personality survives bodily death and continues to take an active interest in the mortal realm. Communion with spirits was widely believed to be possible and attempts to contact the spirits usually took place at social gatherings known as séances. These séances were often led by an individual who was deemed to be peculiarly sensitive to the presence of spirits. Such individuals were known as mediums. Mediumistic abilities ranged considerably but the most common powers were clairvoyance (clear-seeing), clairaudience (clear-hearing) and clairsentience (clear-feeling).

Séance transcripts reported that the spirits delivered many messages in the séance parlour. These messages were not only to comfort the recently bereaved but, much more importantly, were also supposed to be lessons and guidance from the Other side. Spirits were viewed by Spiritualists as enlightened teachers who knew the secrets of the afterlife. Spirit messages were intended to better humankind and lift those who listen to their lessons to a higher spiritual state. For this reason Spiritualists felt duty-bound to listen to the spirits, to share their messages and to act on their guidance. This was the driving force which saw Spiritualism spread across the globe to become an international movement.¹³ It was in this context that attention was given to acting upon the advice of spirits received via clairvoyant and clairaudient means, which became particularly poignant for the subject of Joan of Arc. She was a historic figure who was seen to parallel modern Spiritualist practices.

Witches as mediums

From the moment of the movement's conception, its followers took a keen interest in exploring the possibility of earlier examples of Spiritualist beliefs throughout history. During their

12 The origins of Spiritualism were well documented by early Spiritualist adherents: Emma Hardinge Britten, *Nineteenth Century Miracles: A Complete Historical Compendium of The Great Movement Known as 'Modern Spiritualism'* (Lovell & Co., 1884); Arthur Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism* (Cassell & Co., 1926), 1.

13 It was this Anglo-American Spiritualist movement that made the most impact in Scotland rather than the Spiritism of Allan Kardec that originated in France and influenced other areas of Europe. See Michelle Foot, *Modern Spiritualism and Scottish Art Between 1860 and 1940* (Doctoral Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2016).

search Spiritualists retrospectively perceived the witch as a spirit-medium. As an international leader of Spiritualism, Emma Hardinge Britten (1823–99) stated in 1871:

*In the trials in the Middle Ages which disgraced humanity, those who were accused of witchcraft possessed the gifts, which in ancient times were called witchcraft, and now called Spiritualism.*¹⁴

It is not surprising that Spiritualists were interested in witches as historic mediums. In 1848, the Fox sisters were accused of witchcraft by some contemporary commentators.¹⁵ Nineteenth- and 20th-century mediums were regularly prosecuted in Britain under the Witchcraft Act of 1735, which remained in law until it was repealed and replaced by the Fraudulent Medium Act in 1951.¹⁶ Most infamously Helen Duncan (1897–1956), a Scottish medium, was amongst the last people to be convicted and imprisoned under the Witchcraft Act in 1944.¹⁷ Spiritualists ran several campaigns against this law, viewing it as a discriminating and problematic deterrent to the progress of the movement and the development of mediumship across Britain.

Sceptics warned that people attending séances were duped on the grounds of sentimental reasons whereby the medium, as a charlatan, took advantage of people who were emotionally vulnerable, usually following a bereavement, and therefore not rational or of sound mind.¹⁸ Spiritualists claimed this was not the case and that they were helping those in mourning to find comfort in the belief that their loved ones were still available to them. Nonetheless, for every Spiritualist there was also a sceptic and many Spiritualists felt that they were under threat from discrimination, supported by the law in the case of the Witchcraft Act.¹⁹

- 14 Emma Hardinge Britten, 'Ancient Magic, Witchcraft and Modern Spiritualism', *The Medium and Daybreak*, 2:72 (1871), (265–68) 267–68.
- 15 The early activities of the Fox Sisters were described as 'absurdities of modern witchcraft' in *New York Tribune* (25 February 1850); Leah Underhill (née Fox) described the treatment of herself and her sisters as 'a striking revival of the old Salem (and medieval) spirit of animosity against the so-called witchcraft'. Leah Underhill, *The Missing Link in Modern Spiritualism* (Thomas Knox, 1885), 178; Britten also noted how Margaret Fox was attacked in 1850 for being a 'witch-woman'. Emma Hardinge Britten, *American Spiritualism: A Twenty Year's Record of the Communion Between Earth and the World of Spirits* (Britten, 1870), 88. Even if sceptics did not widely accuse the Fox family of witchcraft, there was certainly an attempt by Spiritualists to draw out the parallels with historic witch hunts and prosecution. This also resulted in a connection being drawn between the Hydesville and Rochester phenomena in 1848–50 and the Salem witch trials in the 1690s due to Allen Putnam's *Witchcraft of New England Explained By Modern Spiritualism* (Colby & Rich, 1880).
- 16 A brief history of how these laws affected the practice of mediumship and Spiritualist campaigns against them can be found in Gregory Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society* (Routledge, 1969), 166–67.
- 17 The account of Helen Duncan's trial and prosecution has received extensive commentary. Alan Crossley, *The Story of Helen Duncan: Materialisation Medium* (Stockwell, 1975); Manfred Cassirer, *Medium on Trial: The Story of Helen Duncan and The Witchcraft Act* (Stansted, England: PN Publishing, 1996); Nina Shandler, *The Strange Case of Hellish Nell: The Story of Helen Duncan and the Witch Trial of World War II* (Da Capo Press, 2006); Malcolm Gaskill, *Hellish Nell: Last of Britain's Witches* (Fourth Estate, 2001).
- 18 In 1876 Professor Henry Calderwood made a scathing attack on mediums in his lecture at the University of Edinburgh and was reported in 'Moral Philosophy. Professor Calderwood on Science and Spiritualism', *The Scotsman*, (2 November 1876), 3.
- 19 The 'Witchcraft Act' as a term is somewhat confusing. The law actually states that it is illegal to believe in the superstitious claims of witchcraft, but those unfamiliar with the conditions of the law may assume the persecution is based on the practice of witchcraft as a dark art. In some cases this led to a misunderstanding of mediumship as dangerous rather than superstitious.

Joan the clairaudient

The discrimination faced by 19th-century mediums was likened by Spiritualists to the prosecutions faced by historic mediums as witches. The most famous example of these historic figures to be identified by Spiritualists was Joan of Arc. According to Spiritualist theories, Joan was a clairaudient, a medium who could hear the spirit voices bringing messages from beyond the Veil. By listening to the spirits Joan achieved victory, but sceptics disbelieving her mediumistic abilities were thought to be the cause behind her prosecution. As the foremost Spiritualist newspaper in Victorian Britain, *The Medium and Daybreak*, stated:

*[Joan of Arc] saw supernatural lights and heard supernatural voices. These voices urged her to undertake deeds of daring on behalf of the Dauphin of France, and kindled in her martial enthusiasm which bore her on to victory on an irresistible tide. During her life she had known nothing of the causes of these supernatural voices, but she had learned them in the spirit-world. She had been a physical medium, and spirits were able to address her in the spirit-voice. (...) The gift of mediumship had been to her misfortune, and she paid the penalty with her life, for she perished at the stake. How different was it now! Yet her case illustrated the continuity of Nature's laws, and in dark times she had been an early ray from the sun of modern Spiritualism.*²⁰

Such was the popularity of Joan amongst Spiritualists that by 1901 she was regularly cited by those who wished to suggest that Spiritualism had a long history.

Now it is seldom one goes to a place where spiritual meetings are kept up that there are not in the course of the year one or more lectures delivered on Joan of Arc. This is as it should be; the time has come when preachers of Spiritualism should instruct their hearers more in history. The spiritual movement should every day grow more educational. Nothing strengthens the facts and phenomena of today as the proof that they are not something 'new under the sun'. When the

20 'Solution of the Historical Mystery of Joan of Arc', *The Medium and Daybreak*, 4:144 (1873), 8.

world learns that history backs us in all the phenomenal parts of Spiritualism, then it sees that opposition to it weakens.²¹

By referencing well-established examples of historic figures who could be claimed to be mediums, Spiritualists hoped to use history as a means of countering sceptical claims. Although deeply subjective, they thought history could in some way authenticate their beliefs.

Celtic Revivalists were also interested in revisiting history. Scholars on the Celtic Revival have already established that Joan of Arc was appropriated for the cultural revival in order to demonstrate a pan-Celtic connection between countries with a shared Celtic heritage or past, in this case France and Scotland. This correlated with the Auld Alliance, which was nurtured and rekindled in the late 19th century by the Franco-Scottish Society, founded in 1895 to celebrate the cultural ties between the two countries.²² It is within this context that the painting by Duncan from around 1895 has so far been understood. Murdo Macdonald and Frances Fowle have previously noted that this painting was commissioned or prompted by Geddes at the suggestion of the Scottish novelist, poet and literary critic Andrew Lang (1844–1912).²³ Geddes wrote to Duncan in November 1895 to ask, ‘What do you say to a picture suggested by Andrew Lang of the Franco-Scottish Society, of Joan of Arc with her bodyguard of Scots archers?’²⁴ Yet this detail about its conception is more important than has previously been realised.

In addition to being a member of the Franco-Scottish Society, Lang was also a member – and eventually President – of the Society of Psychical Research, which sat in on Spiritualist séances to investigate the authenticity of mediums. In the Society’s *Proceedings* from 1895, Lang wrote a lengthy article on Joan of Arc and the spiritual nature of her voices.²⁵ He suggested that it was possible she was admitted to the sanctuary of the universe by spiritual means but he was reluctant to say she was specifically led by spirit-guides, although he ruled out most of the other possibilities in his article.²⁶ He quietly suggested it but avoided explicitly writing it. This is perhaps appropriate for an article for the discerning Society of Psychical Research.²⁷ In Lang’s hesitancy to avoid making a final conviction, he quickly concluded his article with a joke. Quoting a Frenchman, two decades after

- 21 Moses Hull, *Joan The Medium, or, The Inspired Heroine of Orléans*, (Sunflower Publishing, fifth edition, 1901), 5.
- 22 The formation of the Franco-Scottish Society is discussed in detail by Siân Reynolds, *Paris-Edinburgh: Cultural Connections in the Belle Époque* (Routledge, 2016), 101–14.
- 23 Frances Fowle, ‘The Franco-Scottish Alliance: Artistic Links Between Scotland and France in the Late 1880s and 1890s’ and Murdo Macdonald, ‘Patrick Geddes’s Generalism: From Edinburgh’s Old Town to Paris’s Universal Exhibition’, both in Frances Fowle & Belinda Thomson (eds.), *Patrick Geddes: The French Connection* (White Cockade Publishing, 2004), 34, 85–86.
- 24 Letter from Patrick Geddes to John Duncan, 18 November 1895, National Library of Scotland, Patrick Geddes Archive, MS 10508A, f.135.
- 25 Andrew Lang, ‘The Voices of Jeanne D’Arc’, *Proceedings of the Society of Psychic Research*, 11 (1895), 198–212.
- 26 Lang clearly states that Joan of Arc was not mad or hysterical, presumably taking into consideration and rejecting the theories of French neurologist, Jean-Martin Charcot. Eighteen years later Lang would write Joan’s biography: Andrew Lang, *The Maid of France: Being the Story of the Life and Death of Jeanne D’Arc* (Longmans, Green & Co., 1913).
- 27 For an in-depth account of the aims and attitudes of the Society of Psychical Research see Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850–1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1985).

the Franco-Prussian War, he said: 'If there are so many Joan of Arcs today, i.e. mediums, why is it that we have not taken back Lorraine?'²⁸

Lang's burgeoning interest in Joan of Arc in 1895 was not only limited to her symbolic relevance for the Franco-Scottish Society but also her increasing recognition as a potential medium in Spiritualist perceptions of history. Moreover, Lang's interest in Joan's mediumistic abilities was reinforced when, in the same year, the Celtic Revivalists in Edinburgh were visited by the Spiritualist William Thomas Stead (1849–1912). Stead tends to be remembered for his journalism, particularly with regard to his investigation into child prostitution in Victorian Britain, and as a tragic victim of the *Titanic* disaster in 1912. However, Stead was also the founder and editor of a popular Spiritualist magazine called *Borderland*, published between 1893 and 1897. When Stead visited Geddes and colleagues, this may have included a meeting with Duncan.²⁹ In July 1895, that same year, Stead published a short article on Joan of Arc in *Borderland*:

*The chief importance of the prominence which is now given Jeanne both in France and in England is the witness which she bears to the possibility of clairaudient communication between mortals and invisibles.*³⁰

Through the network of Celtic Revivalists centred around Geddes and his acquaintances with Lang and Stead, Duncan had the opportunity to gain an insight into Spiritualist ideas about Joan of Arc when he first approached the design of his work. Lang foregrounded the treatment of Joan as a subject in Spiritualist discourse with his evaluation of the theories pertaining to her phenomenal legend, meanwhile Stead reinforced these interests in the same year that he visited Edinburgh.

Artistic inspiration

While Spiritualist ideas about Joan contributed to the conception of his painting, Duncan could choose from numerous examples of other artworks for pictorial inspiration. This may have included examples such as Jan Matejko's *The Maid of Orléans, Entrance of Joan of Arc into Reims in 1429* (1886), or Jean-Jacques Scherrer's *Entrée de Jeanne d'Arc à Orléans* (1887) – both of which have

28 Lang, *Proceedings*, 212.

29 William Thomas Stead wrote about his visit in *Borderland*, 2:9 (1895), 234.

30 William Thomas Stead, 'Jeanne D'Arc and Her Voices', *Borderland*, 2:9 (1895), 197.



Fig. 2. Jean Poinssart, *The Entrance of Charles VII into the City of Rheims, 17th century, engraving, Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Reproduced in William Forbes-Leith, *The Scots Men-At-Arms and Life-Guard in France* (1882), 12*
<https://bibliotheque-numerique.inha.fr/idurl/1/25584>

a similar processional quality to the composition. Meanwhile, Jules Eugène Lenepveu's famous cycle of paintings depicting key episodes from Joan's legend for the Panthéon in Paris, from 1886 to 1890, had recently gained considerable attention. Alternatively in 1890, the actress Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923) had achieved success when she played the character of Joan in a play by Jules Barbier (1825–1901). A depiction of Bernhardt as Joan of Arc at Her Majesty's Theatre was circulated via *The Illustrated London News* (28 June 1890). The show was a success and widely acclaimed by critics, so it was likely to have been known by Duncan.

Yet Duncan decided to base his painting on an illustration from William Forbes-Leith's two-volume text *The Scots Men-At-Arms and Life-Guard in France* (1882). Duncan regularly researched his subjects as part of his creative process. In this case he found Forbes-Leith's text to be the most pertinent as a starting point for

his image of Joan and the Scottish guard. It provided Duncan with a foundation for understanding the history of the Auld Alliance, as the opening 46 pages of the first volume discussed the origins of the Garde Écossaise and their relationship with Joan of Arc.³¹ Additionally, the illustration on page 12 shows *The Entrance of Charles VII into the City of Rheims* (Fig. 2). The illustration is a reproduction of a 17th-century engraving by Jean Poinsart held in the *Cabinet des estampes* in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. This image provided an obvious template for Duncan's version of Joan entering the city. The guards wear strikingly similar outfits, with crosses on their chests, hemmed by borders with more crosses, and plumed helmets. The guards who are carrying bows in Duncan's painting match the royal guard in the illustration who also carry bows as they follow the French King on foot. The two guards who are facing each other to the front-right of the composition in the engraving are copied, but shaven and reversed in Duncan's painting. The dog from the engraving has been transformed into a motif on a flag, symbolic of Scottish fidelity to the French cause, the King and, in the case of Duncan's painting, specifically to the French heroine. The city and cathedral of Rheims featured in the background of the engraving are copied in Duncan's design for *The Evergreen*, although the buildings are not present in the painted version. Significantly, Joan of Arc is also featured in the illustration and described as *La Pucelle* in the annotation. Her armour is similar in Duncan's rendition, although the breastplate is less decorative and he removed her helmet in favour of long, flowing black hair. She rides on horseback, her mount wearing the same *fleur-de-lis* caparison. This was undoubtedly the template on which Duncan based his painting.³²

However, in Duncan's painting there is an emphasis on the spiritual communication significant to Joan's story, which is not necessary in the illustration of Charles VII entering Rheims. Although two *putti* hold up the caption atop the engraving and may provide the basis for the angels swooping towards Joan in Duncan's work, there is more attention given to this spiritual agency than is initially derived from the illustration in Forbes-Leith's volume.

In terms of the quiet spiritual quality associated with the contact between spirits and mediums, Henri-Michel-Antoine Chapu's celebrated sculpture *Jeanne d'Arc* (1870) provides a useful

31 William Forbes-Leith, *The Scots Men-At-Arms and Life-Guards in France: From Their Formation to Their Dissolution*, 1 (1882), 9–46.

32 Forbes-Leith concluded his chapter on Joan and the Scots Guard by suggesting that after Joan's execution and 'From that day the nationality of France was revived' (Forbes-Leith, *The Scots Men-At-Arms and Life-Guards in France*, 46). Perhaps Lang, Geddes and Duncan saw Joan as an instigator for the cultural revival of Scotland's shared Celtic identity with France in the context of the formation of the Franco-Scottish Society.



Fig. 3. Jules Bastien-Lepage, *Jeanne d'Arc Écoutant les Voix*, 1879, oil on canvas, 25.4cm x 27.9cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

case study to heighten the viewer's awareness of clairaudient powers. Although Chapu (1833–91) is not known to have been a Spiritualist, his sculpture reflects a sophisticated interest in the generic spiritual connection between Joan and the voices. The sculpture focuses on Joan as a peasant when she first hears the voices at Domrémy. The artistic medium is apt for forcing the viewer to become aware of what the sculptor has not included in the figural composition. With the subtle tilt of her head, Joan indicates that she is clearly engaged in the act of listening. Yet the absence of a physical depiction of the saints, or spirits, draws attention to the presence of invisible entities, who are necessary to complete the narrative and provide meaning to the sculpture.

In this way, the viewer becomes aware of her mediumistic potential, if only the sculpture could speak to relay the message of the voices, which cannot be heard by anyone else.³³ Therefore Joan becomes an effective example of a motif that encourages the contemplation of clairaudience as a mediumistic ability. The sculptor charges the empty, three-dimensional space around the sculpture with meaning, but painters are not necessarily able to engage the viewer in the same way and with such ease. Unlike the real space around a sculpture, a vacant space on the canvas risks being misunderstood. As such the painter often has to deal with the challenge of making the invisible visible. Duncan chose to do this by providing the spiritual voices with the forms of winged heads who can be seen actively speaking to his protagonist.

Jules Bastien-Lepage's (1848–84) painting from 1879 may have been a source of inspiration for Duncan when he made a visible depiction of the spiritual contact that is central to the narrative of Joan's story. In Bastien-Lepage's painting, *Jeanne d'Arc Écoutant les Voix* (Fig. 3), Joan is treated as a mystical figure who is beseeched by the voices of higher powers who inspire her to take up the French cause when she is still a peasant at Domrémy. The treatment of the subject is interesting from a Spiritualist perspective, as she is disengaged from the mortal world around her while she is beseeched, showing she is instead engaged with the otherworldly agents. The manner of her distant gaze is similar to a mediumistic trance but she does not look at the figures appealing to her, instead she listens to them clairaudiently.

Spiritualist viewers would understand that the clairaudient experience might provide a clairvoyant response, as Joan is able to see prophetically the events she is called to enact. Bastien-Lepage reportedly achieved this dreamy expression on his model 'only by the aid of hypnotism'.³⁴ During the 19th century hypnotism was closely associated with Spiritualism; the theory was that by being hypnotised into a passive state it helped the spirits to work actively through the person hypnotised, similar to a mediumistic trance. As a Chicago Spiritualist newspaper stated:

One of the remarkable features of hypnotism, particularly as related to the afterlife, is the development of the gift of prophecy, with which gift is blended ever conscious and

33 Alex Owen pointed out that Spiritualism was dominated by female mediums. Therefore, in the context of the 19th century and the widespread popularity of Spiritualism, it is possible that the sculpture of Joan would be more quickly identified with female mediumship and extrasensory powers. Alex Owen, *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago University Press, 1989), 4–5.

34 Richard Muther, *The History of Modern Painting*, 3 (Henry & Co., 1896), 24–26.

*unconscious trance, clairvoyant sight and psychometric sensitiveness. History furnishes remarkable examples in this particular line, notably in the cases of Socrates, Joan of Arc, Lilly, Zadkiel, Cazotte, and others; and in our own time we have sensitives, known as mediums, who possess these gifts.*³⁵

These ideas were also explored in texts such as Ernest Hart's *Hypnotism, Mesmerism and the New Witchcraft* (1893). In Bastien-Lepage's painting Joan's intense absorption presents a hypnotic quality that would be readily associated with the Spiritualist movement by contemporary viewers.

The way in which the saints – Michael, Margaret and Catherine – are depicted is interesting too because of their ethereal nature. They do not have wings, although they do have halos. Compared with earlier paintings by Bastien-Lepage, in which he actually depicts wings, for example, *The Annunciation to the Shepherds* (1875), the saintly figures in the visitation at Domrémy are treated more like ghosts from the beyond than angelic beings. While this is indicative of his stylistic shift towards a more naturalistic approach, it also coincides with Spiritualist dialogues about spirits being a natural part of the universe, as alluded to in *The Medium and Daybreak* quote above. Bastien-Lepage apparently derived the idea for his painting from his mother when she claimed to have had a fleeting vision after she returned to her home in Damvillers, fatigued from a long day working in the fields.³⁶ If it is true that his mother made such a claim, it would seem his family's rustic mysticism provided a bridge to the earthy naturalism of his style. Yet not everyone appreciated the blend of the natural and supernatural. Émile Zola criticised the disruption of the naturalism in his work with their ethereal intrusion.³⁷ It is as if these figures have materialised into the mortal realm, partly concealed by the texture of the paint, as though the surface of the canvas is behaving like the Veil between both worlds. It would not have been difficult for those inclined to Spiritualism, such as Duncan, to read this painting in a way that addressed Spiritualist ideas.

Generally, many Scots were familiar with Bastien-Lepage's work by the time Duncan painted his image of Joan in 1895.³⁸ It is possible that Duncan saw one of the many engraved copies of the painting, perhaps in Julia Cartwright's book *Jules Bastien-Lepage*,

35 'At The Threshold of the Great Beyond', *The Progressive Thinker*, 1:16 (1890), 1.

36 Bojidar Karageorgevitch, 'Personal Reminiscences of Jules Bastien-Lepage', *Magazine of Art*, 13 (1890), (83–88) 86–88.

37 Marnin Young, *Realism in the Age of Impressionism: Painting and the Politics of Time* (Yale University Press, 2015), 99. His friend and biographer André Theuriot also disagreed in *Jules Bastien-Lepage and His Art: A Memoir* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1892), 54.

38 Kenneth McConkey, 'From Grez to Glasgow: French Naturalist Influence on Scottish Painting', *Scottish Art Review*, 4 (1982), (16–34) 20–22.

published in 1894, which featured an engraving of the work on its frontispiece, or even when it was printed in *The London Illustrated News*.³⁹ Furthermore, Duncan had the opportunity to see the painting himself when he visited Paris in 1890.

A comparison between the two paintings is interesting because, arguably, Duncan attempted to create a similar effect to that in Bastien-Lepage's painting. There is a suggestion that the spirits are appearing from beyond the Veil but in a more naïve manner than in the French painting. The flags become symbolic metaphors for the Veil, through which the spirits have passed to address Joan. The spirit to the right of Joan parts its lips, as if speaking, and in turn Joan must be listening clairaudiently. Added to which, Spiritualists argued simply that the word 'angel' traditionally meant messenger, and therefore angels were spirits bringing messages to mortals from the spirit-world.⁴⁰ This is what can be interpreted as being represented here in a Spiritualist reading of the image: Joan the clairaudient medium has listened to the spirit lessons from beyond the Veil and her reward is victory – the Scottish guard escort her to the forthcoming coronation of the French King.

Conclusions

As a case example, John Duncan's painting *Jehanne d'Arc et sa Garde Écossaise* demonstrates a connection between the Celtic Revival and Spiritualism. It shows that cultural revivals operated on multiple levels and the interpretation of their artworks require closer examination to take into account the wider esoteric and occult trends of the 19th century. This is especially the case with subjects that appear on one level to be concerned primarily with national and cultural identities but on another level allude to the beliefs of a spiritual movement. In the case of Joan of Arc, the notion was that spirit-mediumship is deeply entrenched in history and that listening to the spirits is essential for positive outcomes. In Duncan's painting this was represented by a strong bond between France and Scotland and the triumph of divine providence, both of which are rendered in the scene of the Scots escorting Joan to the coronation of her king.

This article has identified the previously unrecognised template for Duncan's painting of Joan of Arc and her Scottish guard as the 17th-century engraving by Jean Poinssart, which was

39 'Jeanne d'Arc écoutant les Voix', *The Illustrated London News* (8 August 1891).

40 The role of angels as spirit-messengers was discussed in-depth in a prominent Christian-Spiritualist text by Stainton Moses, *Higher Aspects of Spiritualism* (E.W. Allen & Co., 1880).

known to Duncan as an illustration in William-Forbes Leith's 1882 publication. However, Duncan also had the opportunity to draw on a rich oeuvre of images depicting Joan of Arc, which would be readily understood as depictions of clairaudient and clairvoyant engagement within the context of 19th-century Spiritualism. Duncan not only drew on this rich oeuvre but also on Spiritualist beliefs and ideas to inform his painting at a time when witches were being actively and retrospectively revised as spirit-mediums. Duncan most likely encountered these ideas via widespread Spiritualist publications but also through Andrew Lang, whose involvement in the 1890s with both the Franco-Scottish Society and the Society of Psychical Research prompted his own interest in Joan of Arc and his subsequent request for the painting.

Joan of Arc represented historical clairaudience perceived as witchcraft and she embodied the Auld Alliance between two countries with a shared Celtic heritage. The authenticity of these subjective 19th-century perceptions of history is questionable, but for a Symbolist artist such as Duncan it was these ideas that provided a depth of meaning to his image. In this case, the appropriations of the Celtic Revival extended to the re-appropriations of the Spiritualist movement to produce a complex image that was steeped in cultural resonances and occult currents at the *fin-de-siècle*.

Dr **Michelle Foot** is the Teaching Fellow of Nineteenth-Century Art at the University of Edinburgh. She received her PhD from the University of Aberdeen in 2016, after successfully completing her doctoral thesis *Modern Spiritualism and Scottish Art between 1860 and 1940*. Her research interests include Scottish Art, the Celtic Revival and Modern Spiritualism.