



JOAN  
d'ARC

A FILM BY  
BRUNO  
DUMONT



OFFICIAL SELECTION  
UN CERTAIN REGARD  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES



# *Joan of Arc*

## *A film by BRUNO DUMONT*

### **Synopsis**

*In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, both France and England stake a blood claim for the French throne. Believing that God had chosen her, the young Joan leads the army of the King of France. When she is captured, the Church sends her for trial on charges of heresy. Refusing to accept the accusations, the graceful Joan of Arc will stay true to her mission.*

*Bruno Dumont's decision to work with a ten-year-old actress re-injects this heroine's timeless cause and ideology with a modernity that highlights both the tragic female condition and the incredible fervor, strength and freedom women show when shackled by societies and archaic virile orders that belittle and alienate them.*

## Cast

Lise Leplat Prudhomme, Jean-François Causeret, Daniel Dienne, Fabien Fenet, Robert Hanicotte, Yves Habert. With the kind participation of Fabrice Luchini and Christophe.

## Crew

*Director & Screenwriter:* Bruno Dumont

*Based on novels by* Charles Péguy

*Music Composer:* Christophe

*Producers:* Jean Bréhat, Rachid Bouchareb, Muriel Merlin

*Line Producer:* Cédric Ettouati

*Cinematographer:* David Chambille

*Script Supervisor:* Virginie Barbay

*Sound:* Philippe Lecœur

*Mixing:* Emmanuel Croset

*Sound Editor:* Romain Ozanne

*Editors:* Bruno Dumont and Basile Belkhiri

*First Assistant:* Rémi Bouvier

*Casting:* Clément Morelle

*Dialogue Coach:* Julie Sokolowski

*Make Up:* Simon Livet

*Hair:* Clément Douel

*Costume Design:* Alexandra Charles

*Set Designer:* Erwan Legal

*Location Manager:* Edouard Sueur

*Still Photographer:* Roger Arpajou

*A 3B Productions. With the participation of Pictanovo and the support of La Région Hauts de France with the participation of the Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée. In association with CINECAP 2.*

*World Sales:* Luxbox

*French Distribution:* Les Films du Losange

**2019, 138 minutes, France,  
Color 1.85 - 5.1 – French**





AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

## Bruno Dumont

*Joan is the sequel to Jeannette and the two films form the adaptation of a play by Charles Péguy. Why tackle the subject of Joan of Arc through this writer?*

While Jeannette was a film «in song», like a musical, Joan of Arc is a psychological action film with dialogue because it focuses on the debates of the Battles and the suspense of a Trial.

Charles Péguy is an author that I discovered quite recently and I was very impressed by his writing, especially its song-like aspects and musicality. When I first had the idea of making a musical, I was looking for the ideal text, so I naturally thought of him and his play, Joan of Arc, as a libretto. My previous film, Jeannette, was about Joan's childhood and was the adaptation of the first part of the play, which is called "Domrémy". Joan of Arc is the continuation of it and adapts the other two parts: The Battles and Rouen. The literary complexity that can at times be attributed to Péguy no longer frightened me because the cinematic and musical adaptation allowed me to remedy it and establish an unprecedented balance: if what Péguy says is sometimes very deep and obscure, it is counterbalanced here by the cinematography of action, songs and music which make everything simple and easy to access, much lighter and with its power undiminished.

Péguy wrote a text that was precise in the field of ideas and very lyrical in its form, which, with such cinematography, could then be preserved as it was, without renouncing or pretending, as if it kept both the rose and its thorns, so to speak. With Joan of Arc, I wanted to extend this ambition and this balance, that of all things, the natural bond of gentleness and ardour, that is to say without falsifying things, without dissolving them, without giving in to the clarion calls of popularization.

Then, in addition to the poet, I was also very interested in the philosopher in Péguy's thinking. Beyond literary pleasure, there is an intellectual power, a very new way of thinking; in particular a rather dazzling comprehension of our modern world.

Behind the simplicity of Joan's story lies something essential and true, without it being intellectual or cerebral, because, with Péguy, the background occupies the surface and, even if the surface is simple, it is still the natural expression of its depth. Joan of Arc is the expression and very thrust of this thought.

### ***Why does the character of Joan of Arc remain so important in the French psyche?***

To be honest, I didn't really care about Joan of Arc... You could say that Charles Péguy «revealed» her to me. When Péguy wrote his Joan, he was a total atheist... He was 24 years old, a socialist and universalist, anticlerical and idealistic: this is very obvious in his text which, in lambasting the Christian Church, actually attacks all «churches», that is to say, all forms of dogmatism...

Moreover, Joan is a historical and national heroine of the Hundred Years' War, she naturally and universally carries with her a country and an entire people. The story of Joan of Arc is thus a theatre that would benefit all humanity through a national, historical and incarnate narrative... On the other hand, it seems to me that the figure of Joan of Arc - like that of any hero - has a certain opacity, which says many things, deep down, about what remains secret in the nature of beings and things, in this case France and the French: like her mystery.

All major questions related to the French Nation are very difficult themes to express - surely because they are «knots» in the French family tree. After all, we French too find them difficult to grasp. This common nucleus where everything rests seems almost concealed by what the word «France» covers. The only way we can attain it, to hear it recount us what unites us, is to tell a story, to show heroes struggling, in other words transfigure what is being played out and represent it. This always has to be expressed through a story, a narrative, so that we can understand everything that is impalpable and secret. From this point of view, relating Joan of Arc means relating France. Timeless France. Representing the

story of Joan of Arc means revealing what is hidden and thus bringing to light what connects us: to show what it means to be French, for each of us...

Péguy has a natural penchant towards the quest for this timelessness; although medieval, there is nothing outdated or old-fashioned about it here; his text makes Joan a subject as powerful as ever, not at all remote in the past, because through the representation of history, he touches the truth, which appears immobile and presents itself to us... Joan of Arc's metaphorical power is awesome!

What makes this possible, what underlies this edifying power of the heroic narrative in general, and that of Joan of Arc in particular, is that in human history, according to Péguy, there is little or no progress. History is not linear, it is more like a spiral, a loop, a resumption, a repetition. Human life is a cycle, everything returns, like Nature in the perpetual cycle of its seasons. Evolution is, at the same time, mysteriously, a repetition. No progress, no salvation, therefore no bright tomorrows, only the present is worth anything. For Péguy, the mission of heroes is to reveal this incredible process.

The representation of Joan of Arc, in the many cinematic or theatrical adaptations, focuses on the perpetual development of this mystery and proves the need to «rethink» it. Heroes and their stories must thus be repeated and recalled to us, for the sole purpose of endlessly reminding us of the truths that we tend to forget. Their «present time», reiterated for the duration of their performance, in the cinema in this case, is the culmination of this mysticism of which all of us, the audience, are part and parcel.

Joan gives a heroic dimension to what is buried and hidden...

Joan bears a timeless truth that can solely express itself through a heroine: cinema carries out this incredible and dazzling manoeuvre of delight and knowledge. It is, strictly speaking, a form of mysticism setting in motion the secret connections in a harmony in which the viewer is a participant and the cinema the framework.

### ***How does Joan of Arc go about talking to us today?***

Joan resonates strongly within us, she touches everything and everyone: spiritually, socially, politically... To the very extremes, both right and left, whirling them around and reconciling them... Have not many intellectuals of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and from all walks of life claimed her as their inspiration? Her aura is so vast. It speaks of everything: the Church, the King, nationalism, socialism, Earth, Heaven, war, peace... For them and against them... She baulks in her obedience to the King, she baulks in her submission to the Church, but never compromises in her love of God and in her mission to deliver France. It is a veritable hotbed of ideas!

I am particularly won over by the way the story mixes the intellectual and opinion. Indeed, this is very present in the film: we constantly move from one to the other, from the scholars to the conversations between workers and guards. Péguy found a balance between intelligence, the all and sundry and the commonplace. He does not renounce intelligence on the pretext that it is demanding. He finds a way to say deep things without pontificating, without idealism, spiritualism or angelism, and, at the same time, he says simple things. Joan of Arc is precisely that: we are at ground level and we talk about heaven. In the film, we move from ordinary discussions between soldiers or craftsmen to fairly subtle

and complex theological debates, in which I myself do not understand everything... Again, I find it very fruitful to cover the whole range of the human mind, its accessibility as well as its darkness, without favouring one or the other. And Péguy offers us both: the spiritual and the temporal. It is even a poetic world where the spiritual can only pass through the temporal. Everything is linked and mysteriously united. Even humour is present in this very human painting.

I really believe in the idea that deep things go through the surface, necessarily through the surface. They must not become cerebral and indigestible from the mind's point of view. There is nothing pure, everything is mixed up. We must combine intelligence and opinion. I find this in Joan, in Péguy and in my idea of cinema: relating things that are simple yet not devoid of depth and roughness. Let's not remove the thorns from the rose!

### ***How do you go about prolonging this balance on film?***

Péguy is very cinematic. Therefore, he strongly believes in time - in the ministry of the present time - in the duration, in the «piercing brilliance» of heroes and their impetus. Péguy is a Bergsonian: he believes in action as the only expression of spiritual truths. When characters present both such a human dimension and a spiritual mission, their correspondence with cinema becomes possible. The film hero is a spiritual incarnation of which cinema is a natural expression, a representation, and like a theatre where the flow of human life and all its sediment mysteriously runs.

The film relates an experience in present time, where the goal is to bring the audience in, to lift it up, to draw it towards something that, of course,

surpasses us but infuses us. However, it is necessary to find the right balance, to adapt to the modern world in which the audience lives, to seek a connection. When I choose Christophe, for example, to compose the score and perform a song, or when I choose young Lise Leplat Prudhomme, who is ten years old, to play a teenage Joan at the end of her life, all that is part of the links I forge with our present: seeking analogies and correspondences. The same goes for the trial, where the roles were assigned to academics, theologians, philosophy or literature teachers, all very much at home with this subject and already connected to it.

***Can you tell us more about the choice of Christophe as the composer and his appearance towards the end of the film?***

To this general cinematic «orchestration», I wanted to add the clear line of melodies, rhythms and musical harmonies to further enhance the understanding and scope of the film. Music has subtle equivalents and nuances to difficult and superimposed places of thought.

The collaboration with Christophe was extraordinary. He understood very quickly what I needed. He discovered Péguy on this occasion and his writing clearly inspired him.

The writer's stanzas, rhythms, layers and repetitions seem predisposed to their musical metamorphosis and, therefore, close to the universe of a contemporary composer whose musical evolution is unheard-of. Finally, Christophe wrote four songs, one of which he sings himself in the film. Its sound architecture mysteriously follows Joan's heart all along, it is her song. It is extraordinary: the musical composition provides a sort of «knowledge» of what is happening in the story, a fine and contrasting sketch of the mysteries of Joan's interiority.

***Regarding Joan, you never use the word "myth".***

Because I want to get as far away from that as possible! My goal is to «temporalize» the spiritual. To bring the icons down among us today. To show that Heaven is on Earth, that the sacred is not found in religious institutions but is present in the common things. I further «demythologize» the myth of the religious and institutional straitjacket to «re-mythologize» it in a cinematic representation, that is to say, to return it to its original theatre. It could be a means to return to the sacred, but with the sacred set where it should be, in Art. The proximity of Art and Religion says a lot about what unites these two: the former probably being at the origin of the latter for it to have demanded to be part of it to such an extent.

I am a great admirer of Pasolini's Gospel According to Saint Matthew, which puts the sacred exactly where it belongs: in the cinema. I think that the artistic experience is the source of the spiritual one and that, to achieve this, God is a very good character, a good story. Christ is very propitious, very favourable to cinema from this point of view!

That is also why we should not distance ourselves too much from the religious trappings, it would be a shame: on the contrary, we should put God back in our theatre... In the cinema!

Cinema can satisfy our deepest veneration and cinematic superstition is merely poetic, that is to say, it is finally put back in its place. Like all art, cinema emancipates us and frees us from religious alienation.

***The modernity of the film also comes from its transposition of this story.***

Joan's theme belongs to a cinematographic tradition, with no less than thirty adaptations. My favourite Joans so far, are those of Méliès, De



Mille and Dreyer. Because she is silent in them, entirely poetic and of excessive formalism.

For me, the most crucial thing is the form, the style, because that's what connects the viewer to the content. With Joan, everyone knows the story and how it ends. The real question is how to adapt it, connect it and represent it nowadays... Through his repetitive style, Péguy immediately adapts it to the modern world: the modernity of the eternal mystery of human freedom... here the mystery of Joan's vocation, the mystery of the confusion of the voices of her heart and the voices of Heaven...

Personally, in cinema, I only believe in transposition. The cinematic reality is poetic. Joan is thus a sublimated form of the human soul which, before our eyes, struggles and fights in the vicissitudes of existence. The heroine delivers us from what is at stake, from what is being portrayed and of which we are the stakes because Joan is simply the transfiguration of our interiority. Deep down Joan plays us, she works for us by examining our own mystery. That is the function of every hero.

### ***The film does not seek historical accuracy.***

Not at all. More a timeless accuracy. Although all the protagonists and facts related by Péguy are true, that is the surface necessary for the plausibility of what will be played out. As the challenge for any representation is spiritual and interior, the historical background is secondary. Joan's true existence only requires this historical plausibility, whose chronology Péguy respects. Joan's imprisonment in English prisons, for example, is historical; the blockhouses chosen are representations of that: for the sole purpose of evoking her solitude and imprisonment. Only the inner truth counts, as well as the means of representation working towards that.

The Battles and defeat of Paris are historical... The musical choreography represents the ritual and internal figures, the ecstasy and hallucinatory nature of any struggle... The choreography roots out «the round» of any human action with its timeless mechanism.

Once again, transposition must operate for the work to serve its purpose.

Another part of the action, for example, takes place in prison but I didn't see any reason to literally illustrate it and I didn't want to shut myself in to film. I don't like the idea of having to shed light on everything. So I filmed a kind of prison outdoors, in old blockhouses... For the cathedral of Amiens, which was very important to me but which could not be closed to the public, we restricted the set to an area hidden behind a curtain, such as a chapel. I needed this space to move from the «savage» side of the dunes and the battlefield to the sacredness of the Trial, which was made possible by the Gothic verticality of the building that so tangibly inspired spirituality. I seek out locations that talk to me, I do not want silent places that tell me nothing. Through persuasion and patience, it is possible to find them.

I do not worry about anachronism or historical truth. We are in a timeless world and the film is historically inaccurate. Everything is wrong, one might say. Because I only seek equivalences: Joan carries a timeless truth and I remain captivated by the power she can still deploy today, something that I did not measure before.

Only the transposition counts and not the illustration, because cinema is a representation. That of interiority and not of the outside world, even if the outside world necessarily embodies it, here with blockhouses, there

with a cathedral... The chemistry of a film is so paradoxical, contradictory, falsified and true!

### ***We would have thought that Jeanne Voisin, who played Joan at the age of 15 at the end of the first part, would resume the role. But you have entrusted it to Lise Leplat Prudhomme, who played Joan as a child in the previous film...***

No actress playing Joan of Arc in the history of cinema has ever been the same age as Joan, 19 at the time of her death. Renée Falconetti was 35, Ingrid Bergman 39... Which proves, if necessary, that it is not historical accuracy that is being sought... Lise is 10 years old.

Fortunately, a combination of circumstances prevented the actress who played Joan as an adolescent in Jeannette from resuming the role that had indeed been reserved for her... But the idea of casting Lise came as a revelation. When we saw in screen-tests how she looked in armour, we understood that she mysteriously had something extraordinary, a unique expression of childhood and innocence, as a trace of what is intangible and permanent in each of us... The treasure sought, which already «rang out» in Péguy's work.

The choice of Lise, a child, quickly reveals itself to be the true means of expression to render everything that is at play in Joan of Arc visible, fragile and nascent. Through this little girl, it becomes incarnate: her youth, her passion, her hope, her ardour in the face of adults and their arguments, her candour in the face of obstacles, her determination in

her mission... In short, aged just ten, Lise embodies and accentuates, obviously and naturally, the frail birth of a woman and a dazzling soul, so universal and so special as if Lise were its original nucleus and the thrust of it... The heroine is embodied in Lise's features to such an extent that representation is at its peak. As a result, her youth troubles us and resonates within us as never before, as it should in the cinema.

In one stroke, the little girl resonates with our modernity... Her small size undermines all our expectations, both in relation to Joan and to our prejudices; deep down, she has the proportional size of our childhood, a childhood that, in life, remains the foundation of every human soul, forever. We can feel it when faced with the little actress. We mysteriously know this. The cinema transports it.

The girl is extraordinary, very powerful, and on the set many adults were clearly awed to perform with her for all these reasons even if they could not name them.

Moreover, this recalls the Flemish paintings that I love so much, those paintings from the Middle Ages where, in the days of Joan, painters from the North were already strangely altering figures, creating smaller, miniaturized characters in comparison to others. Thus, the play of proportion exists in the quest for perspective and truly works in representation. Like portraying it in a dot or square, or even in an abstract manner... Then, the alteration of the figures alone could relate the whole quest of the history of representation. Wasn't the disproportion at work the reality of art itself? A question of weight and measurement. Isn't Joan of Arc's size here just the right transposition of ours in the «Human Battle»?



Charles Péguy says somewhere that we are all twelve years old. Definitely. Subsequently, it is the little child inside us who sees himself getting older. When I go to the movies, I'm twelve years old and there's always this little guy inside me who's watching.

***What would be your strongest point in common with Joan?***

Her ordinary appearance, no doubt. Her earthly aspect, without looking to heaven. Then her will and determination. Hope incarnate. «Joan, said Bernanos, is the wonder of wonders». She lambasts. Joan lambasts institutions and everything created by them. She draws attention to the malignancy of dogmas and dogmatism and their reasoning. She stands before people who are always there to tell us who is «damned» and who is «chosen». Behind these Catholics, Péguy is targeting all sectarians. Sectarians remain and are an abomination of thought. No matter what Joan says, she will be condemned. Her prosecutors are engaged in a brilliant and acrobatic display of hypocrisy. Although they remain human, as the film shows, they are totally corrupted by their institution and dogma, which make them capable of sending a child to the stake in a logical manner. I find that this produces very current and contemporary resonances with the discourse of all those who believe or claim to hold a truth and judge blindly according to it. There is no progress, human history is an endless

interpenetration of evolution and repetition. Human nature is always the same, the human battle is continuous, there is nothing behind us that would have been resolved once and for all. So human life is exhilarating.

In addition, Joan is a woman. A small woman, certainly, but no matter how small she is, she also speaks of a woman's own substance. Her germination.

***Joan's loneliness is very striking. Could it resemble that of the filmmaker?***

It is the loneliness of the condition of human existence taken to its fullness. I have never seen a woman love so much; a wonder!

Joan does not represent someone but something. Something unimaginable within us and that seems transfigured here in the guise of Joan and the medieval landscapes.

This represents, let us say, not so much clarity but clarification. For us, Joan, here, is a clarification, taken to its peak.

All this theatre always takes place in our hearts.

Interview by Olivier Séguret







## FILMOGRAPHY

# Bruno Dumont

- 2019** JOAN OF ARC  
Cannes Film Festival - Un Certain Regard
- 2018** COINCOIN AND THE EXTRA-HUMANS  
Locarno Film Festival - Golden Honor Leopard
- 2017** JEANNETTE  
Cannes Film Festival - Directors Fortnight
- 2016** SLACK BAY  
Cannes Film Festival - Competition
- 2014** LIL'QUINQUIN  
Cannes Film Festival - Directors Fortnight
- 2013** CAMILLE CLAUDEL 1915  
Berlin Film Festival - Competition
- 2011** OUTSIDE SATAN  
Cannes Film Festival - Un Certain Regard
- 2009** HADEWIJCH  
Toronto Film Festival - FIPRESCI Prize
- 2006** FLANDRES  
Cannes Film Festival - Grand Prix
- 2003** TWENTYNINE PALMS  
Cannes Film Festival - Competition
- 1999** HUMANITY  
Cannes Film Festival - Grand Prix
- 1997** THE LIFE OF JESUS  
Cannes Film Festival - Golden Camera's Special Mention



## Christophe (MUSIC COMPOSER)

*Christophe is a French singer and composer whose recording career spans several decades. In 1965, its famous song "Aline" gave him worldwide recognition and success. At the beginning of the 1970's, he starts to work with the young Jean-Michel Jarre on his cult album Les Paradis Perdus, very influenced by the British and American artists such as Pink Floyd and Lou Reed. His next albums Les Mots Bleus (1975) and Succès Fou (1983) are true consecrations for Christophe, whose concerts are all sold out. Since the 1980's, he is dedicating his time to his juke-boxes and rare albums collection as well as his passion for cinema. After composing the music for George Lautner's Road to Salina in 1967, Christophe worked several times on film's soundtracks. In May 2019, he released a new album called "Christophe etc."*

## Charles Péguy

*Born in Orléans in 1873, Charles Péguy was a writer, a poet and an essayist, a unique talent in French literary landscape. Intellectually committed, he did not fit the models of his time: at first a socialist and a libertarian, he did not agree with his party's pacifism and internationalism; then a fervent catholic, he aroused mistrust of the Church. His work, strongly influenced by medieval mysteries (The Tapestry of Our Lady), was traversed through by mystical figures like Joan of Arc (Joan of Arc and The Mystery of the Charity of Joan of Arc). Through his work and poetry, Péguy restored their nobility to Christian and National values – notably in Eve, a poetic fresco to the glory of French soldiers – and warned against modern drifts – in Money among other works. Long forgotten after he passed way at war in 1914, Péguy is today rehabilitated by Right-wing and Left-wing French intellectuals, both claiming his invaluable inheritance.*

**JOAN OF ARC is based on "Les Batailles" and "Rouen" (1897) by Charles Péguy.**

A group of seven men in historical attire are seated in a courtroom. They are wearing various types of hats and robes, including black hennin-style hats and fur-lined cloaks. The setting is a room with stone walls and a patterned curtain. The men are looking towards the camera with serious expressions.

*Fabien Fenet*  
*Bookseller*

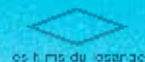
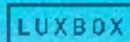
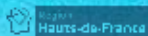
*Jean-François Causeret*  
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*in Lille University*

*Yves Habert*  
*Priest of the Dominican Order*

*Daniel Dienne*  
*School Teacher in Maubeuge*





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Fiorella Moretti - [fiorella@luxboxfilms.com](mailto:fiorella@luxboxfilms.com)

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Hédi Zardi - [hedi@luxboxfilms.com](mailto:hedi@luxboxfilms.com)

Leslie Semichon - [leslie@luxboxfilms.com](mailto:leslie@luxboxfilms.com)

**Festivals**

Valentin Carré - [festivals@luxboxfilms.com](mailto:festivals@luxboxfilms.com)

[www.luxboxfilms.com](http://www.luxboxfilms.com)

**International Press**

Cinetic Marketing

Ryan Werner

[Ryan@cineticmedia.com](mailto:Ryan@cineticmedia.com)

Claudia Tomassini

[claudia@claudiatomassini.com](mailto:claudia@claudiatomassini.com)

**French Press**

Matilde Incerti

[Matilde.incerti@free.fr](mailto:Matilde.incerti@free.fr)