Fit for Print, Not for Spectacle: Ringling Bros. and the Careful Exploitation of Joan of Arc[1]

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The Ringling Bros. circus was the biggest promoter of Joan of Arc's story in American popular culture in 1912 and 1913. As this was right in the middle of the country's infatuation with the Maid, between her beatification (1909) and her canonization (1920), it is worth understanding how they reached such an apex, as well as the story they told.[2] The Ringling Bros.' version of Joan of Arc is complex owing to the multiple mediums the circus employed – couriers, librettos, heralds, newspapers, posters, and of course, the performances. Through the text, would-be circusgoers read Al Ringling's romanticized, promotional copy emphasizing piety and patriotism, presented alongside a smattering of conflicting Victorian images of Joan that downplayed her struggles and execution. Through posters and performances, circusgoers were exposed to Ringling's anachronistic sixteenth-century style French court, complete with a modern ballet and original images, that always kept Joan far from danger and never finished her story. Through this careful

[1] This article would not have been possible without the infectious enthusiasm of Fred Dahlinger, Jr., who pointed me toward a plethora of leads across multiple archives after a simple email years ago. Concepts from this paper were originally presented at the 2018 Mid-Atlantic Popular & American Culture Association Conference in Baltimore, as well as the 2019 International Congress of Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, where attendees, especially Kevin J. Harty, provided extensive feedback and motivation. Finally, Dawn Manning reviewed several incarnations of this article and provided extensive editorial direction that was crucial into honing this into finished form. All errors are my own.

[2] Between 1894 and 1929, one historian has recorded no fewer than 456 articles published in English, 30 books by American authors, and an additional 30 books by English and French authors about Joan of Arc, demonstrating the appetite for her story. Anne Bleigh Powers, "The Joan of Arc Vogue in America, 1894–1929," *The American Society Legion of Honor* 49 (1978): 177–92 (181).

exploitation of the life of the Maid, Ringling Bros. achieved acclaim for their "historical accuracy" by providing circusgoers what they expected in costumes and pageantry while any of Joan of Arc's struggles were deemed barely fit for print, and certainly not fit for spectacle.

During this period, before the rise of radio or feature-length films, Americans lived in the Golden Age of the Circus.[3] And circus spectacles, or "specs" as they were known, were part of a concerted effort to bring highbrow entertainment in a world that most considered lowbrow.[4] Al Ringling was the mastermind, as he selected Joan of Arc for the subject of the 45-minute spec that would precede every Ringling Bros. performance in 1912 and 1913. Nearly all performers would be involved in these tableaux-esque, orchestra-intensive, wordless pantomimes that climaxed in a procession and ended with a ballet. The topics of these specs were vast, but always biblical, historical, or fantastical in nature, with themes such as Noah's Ark, the Crusades, and Cinderella.[5] The selection of Joan of Arc was not simply owing to her immense popularity in America at the time; she also met the two criteria the Ringling Bros. later claimed they sought in picking subjects for their specs. First, Joan provided "a simple, striking story that can be intelligibly told by a spectacle," and second, the French court permitted "a lavish display of color in the way of costumes and trappings and properties."[6] Al Ringling would carefully exploit these aspects for the promotion and production of the *Joan of Arc* spec to bring circusgoers exactly what Angela Jane Weisl has defined in the medievalism term "Spectacle," which is "both a longing for the past and a longing to make it present, a desire to make the fantasy of the spectacle into a kind of reality."[7] The *Joan of Arc* spec would focus on a few moments from the Maid's story and enhance them with anachronistic customs, and modern music and ballet.

[3] There were at least fifty known active circuses in America in 1912 and in 1913. "Who's Who in the American Circus Sturtevant's List of Circuses 1910–1919," *Circus Historical Society*, <https://classic.circushistory.org/History/Sturtevant1910.htm>, last accessed January 14, 2020.

[4] Jennifer Lemmer Posey, "The American Circus Spectacle," in *The American Circus*, ed. Susan Weber, Kenneth L. Ames, and Matthew Wittman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 309–29 (311).

[5] There were at least ninety-three known circus specs performed between 1800 and 1956, many of which were medieval-esque in nature. See the list of forty specs performed worldwide between 1800 and 1875 in Fred D. Pfening, Jr., "Spec-ology of the Circus, Part One," *Bandwagon: The Journal of the Circus Historical Society* 47.6 (2003): 4–20 (4). See the list of an additional fifty-three specs performed by American circuses between 1881 and 1956 in Posey, "The American Circus Spectacle," 328.

[6] For commentary on selecting spec topics, see interview with Al Ringling's brother, Alfred T. Ringling, in George MacAdam, "What It Costs in Money and Effort to Devise a Circus Spectacle," *New York Times Magazine*, April 8, 1917, 6.

[7] Angela Jane Weisl, "Spectacle," in *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, ed. Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2014), 231–8 (237).

Concerning this period in America, medievalists have thoroughly covered Joan of Arc plays, films, and literature,[8] but the circus – especially specs and posters – remain a predominately untapped medium.[9] Although the existence of the *Joan of Arc* spec is well known by circus historians and medievalists, most of us have only scratched the surface, as we tend to rely on readily available posters, newspaper ads, and advance copy in the context of making larger points about circus logistics or the use of Joan of Arc as a commercial product.[10] The neglect of the *Joan of Arc* spec is likely related to the same problems Antony Hippisley Coxe highlighted about circuses in general:

> The exaggerations of circus publicity are more irksome to the historian than anyone else. There are so few ways in which statements made a hundred years or so ago can be checked. When the circus moves on, what does it leave behind apart from its own rain-washed posters and a few crumpled throw-aways? Newspaper reports, perhaps, but of doubtful accuracy; and impressions left in the minds of the spectators, impressions which have become faded by forgetfulness or distorted by much retelling.[11]

[8] The scholarly work is vast, but starting points include Nadia Margolis, *Joan of Arc in History, Literature, and Film* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990); Robin Blaetz, *Visions of the Maid: Joan of Arc in American Film and Culture* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001); and John Flower, *Joan of Arc: Icon of Modern Culture* (Hastings: Helm Information, 2008).

[9] Even circus historians have lamented that specs and circus posters need more attention. See, for example, Michael H. Means, "Imre Kiralfy Meets Barnum & Bailey – And the Circus Spec is Never the Same Again," in *The Many Worlds of the Circus*, ed. Robert Sugarman (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2007), 3–10 (3); Paul Stirton, "American Circus Posters," in *The American Circus*, 107–35 (112).

[10] See, for example, Pfening, Jr., "Spec-ology of the Circus, Part One," 12–13; Jerry Apps, *Ringlingville USA: The Stupendous Story of Seven Siblings and Their Stunning Circus Success* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2005), 177; Laura Coyle, "A Universal Patriot: Joan of Arc in America during the Gilded Age and the Great War," in *Joan of Arc: Her Image in France and America*, ed. Nora M. Heimann and Laura Coyle (Washington, DC: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 2006), 53–73 (63–6); Posey, "The American Circus Spectacle," 321; David Lewis Hammarstrom, *Inside the Changing Circus: A Critic's Guide* (Duncan, OK: BearManor Media, 2012), 205; Charles Philip Fox and Tom Parkinson, *Billers, Banners and Bombast: The Story of Circus Advertising* (Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing, 1985), 43–5; Fred D. Pfening III, "The Strobridge Lithographing Company, the Ringling Brothers, and Their Circuses," in *The Amazing Circus Poster: The Strobridge Lithographing Company*, ed. Kristin L. Spangenberg and Deborah W. Walk (Cincinnati, OH: Cincinnati Art Museum, 2011), 36–41 (36–7, 38); Stirton, "American Circus Posters," 115; and Fred D. Pfening, Jr., "Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows: The 1913 Season," *Bandwagon: The Journal of the Circus Historical Society* 37.2 (1993): 4–18.

[11] Antony Hippisley Coxe, *A Seat at the Circus*, rev. ed. (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1980), 23.

Specifically, when a historian reads readily available copy about a 1,200-person *Joan of Arc* spectacle featuring 300 ballerinas that cost $500,000 to produce, they are left to either quote these exaggerated figures or simply acknowledge the spec's existence and move along.[12] This article aims to break through the hyperbole and reconstruct the promotional campaign and production of the Ringling Bros. *Joan of Arc* spec to understand Al Ringling's intentions and what circusgoers experienced.

The Ringling Bros. Advertising Campaign for the Joan of Arc Spec

To fully appreciate the advertising campaign for the *Joan of Arc* spec, it is helpful to understand the reach of the Ringling Bros. In 1912 and 1913, they targeted 302 cities and put on 717 performances throughout the United States and Canada (see Fig. 1 for the breadth of territory covered).[13] Seasons ran from April to the first few days of November, performing Monday through Saturday, and with few exceptions, two performances per day. There were only a handful of cancellations owing to flooding or fire, but the advertising campaigns still touched each city.

Before a circus approached a town, advance teams would arrive to secure wall space for posters and banners, window space for heralds, shelf or counter space for couriers, and columns in newspapers. Circuses had found that the most effective method of generating hype was through posters, and throughout the nineteenth century, circuses had shifted from word-heavy bills to giant, colorful images printed through lithography. The decrease in words on these posters meant that those that remained needed to earn their space, so there was an increased emphasis on adjectives such as "greatest" and "magnificent," as well as hyperbolic statistics on the magnitude and cost of the show. The size and prevalence of the posters created a "national visual network,

[12] See, for example, Tom Ogden, *Two Hundred Years of the American Circus: From Aba-Daba to the Zoppe-Zavatta Troupe* (New York: Facts on File, 1993): 322–3; Blaetz, *Visions of the Maid*, 16; James A. Freeman, "Joan of Arc: Soldier, Saint, Symbol – of What?," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 41.4 (2008): 601–34 (611).

[13] For 1912, Ringling Bros. covered 155 cities and put on 358 performances. For 1913, Ringling Bros. covered 148 cities and put on 359 performances. The only overlap was in Chicago where they began their seasons. The numbers for 1912 assume two performances per day listed in the Ringling Bros. Route Book, accounting for the single- show days in Fergus Falls, MN and New Albany, MS. There were zero performances in Sterling, IL when the big top caught fire before the show and all tickets were refunded, but the show continued the following day in Kewanee, IL. City and date route information available in *The Route Book of Ringling Bros. Shows 1882–1914* (n.p.: n.d.), 216–20, The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Circus Collection of Route Books, Section 12, Drawer 47.12.04. Details on the Sterling fire and continued show in "Davenport May be Jungle Town Soon," *Moline Daily Dispatch*, August 23, 1912, 7. For 1913, a detailed city-by-city analysis including cancellations can be found in Pfening, "Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows: The 1913 Season," 18.

Fig. 1. Ringling Bros. targeted cities in US and Canada, 1912–13.

seen by all."[14] Even today, some of these posters will be familiar to those who have studied Joan of Arc in early-twentieth-century America, and several are accessible in the Library of Congress and circus archives.

Posters also mark the earliest surviving indicator of Al Ringling's intent to produce the *Joan of Arc* spec, and his December 1911 order to the Strobridge Lithographing Co. included detailed descriptions of four poster designs. The order reveals that the Ringling Bros. had no costumes yet, but "as the costumes of this time were not as elaborate as at a later period we will use costumes of 100 years later; namely, during the period of Francis the 1st [and] Henry VIII of England."[15] Ringling planned to repurpose pieces from *The Field of Cloth and Gold* spec (1905–6).[16] Ringling believed this would provide "an opportunity to use more colors and more elaboration in costume," which he planned to further exaggerate "to make the thing as magnificent as possible."[17] The result can be seen throughout Ringling Bros.

[14] David Carlyon, "A Picture is Worth 757 Words: Circus & Culture, Language & Perception," in *The Amazing Circus Poster*, 29–35 (32).

[15] Letter to A. A. Stewart, December 15, 1911. Milner Library, Ringling Bros. Lithograph Related Material, Strobridge-Z, box 2 of 2. In this folder at Milner Library, there are two letters addressed to A. A. Stewart from the Ringling Bros. on this date. This paper will refer to them singularly throughout.

[16] For a detailed examination of the Henry VIII spec, see Michael H. Means, ""The Field of the Cloth of Gold': The Ringling Brothers Reinvent Henry VIII Reinventing Chivalry," *The Journal of American Culture* 21.3 (1998): 69–73.

[17] Letter to A. A. Stewart, December 15, 1911.

printed material, as the Dauphin and his court sport flat caps with feathers along with colorful striped doublets and puffy breeches, all stuffed with bombast, and, of course, hose.

As for the four poster designs, first and foremost, Al Ringling wanted a coronation scene "as gorgeous as possible" that was "a massive picture of splendor and grandeur." To him, that meant "not making too much of the church dignitaries," allowing for the archbishop and bishops, but "as few other priests, etc., as would be necessary." In addition, he wanted to elevate the platform, with Charles receiving his crown next to "JOAN OF ARC with banner and sword," surrounded by "ladies and gentlemen of the court, soldiers, guards, etc."[18] The surviving versions of this poster match closely with Al Ringling's original request, and the initial design was approved with the exception of replacing a cardinal with a priest, a request emphasized in two separate letters.[19] Although this predated the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan, which promoted anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant stances hand in hand, such prejudice had existed in America for decades.[20] From 1910 to America's 1917 entry into the First World War, the circulation of anti-Catholic publications grew tremendously. The most successful, literally titled *The Menace*, reached approximately 1 million weekly readers in 1913 and would peak at 1.6 million in 1915, "a circulation three times greater than the largest daily papers in Chicago and New York City combined."[21] Ringling's temperance of some of the Catholic imagery in his Joan of Arc posters toed the line between the country's then-largest religious body, especially among immigrants, versus a fervent anti-Catholic contingent that sought to deny citizenship from those they deemed unpatriotic, un-masculine, subversive, and a threat to small-town values.[22]

18 Letter to A. A. Stewart, December 15, 1911.

19 Surviving versions of this poster are available online. "Ringling Bros. tremendous character spectacle Joan of Arc – An inspiring, vivid picture … The magnificent coronation of Charles VII.," Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/98500527/>, last accessed January 14, 2020. There are four photographs of two different designs available in the New-York Historical Society Library, Print Room (PR-067), Strobridge Collection 1909–1915, box 2, nos. 65 and 226. The two letters concerning replacement of the cardinal are Letter to Strobridge Lithographing Co., December 30, 1911, and Letter to Strobridge Lithograph Co., January 4, 1911 [misdated 1911], Milner Library, Ringling Bros. Lithograph Related Material, Strobridge-Z, box 2 of 2.

20 For a recent survey on early-twentieth-century anti-Catholicism in America, see Josh Zeitz, "When America Hated Catholics," *Politico Magazine*, September 23, 2015, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/09/when-america-hated-catholics-213177>, last accessed January 14, 2020.

21 Justin Nordstrom, *Danger on the Doorstep: Anti-Catholicism and American Print Culture in the Progressive Era* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 83, 10.

22 For more examples of these publications' tactics and claims, see Nordstrom, *Danger on the Doorstep*.

The coronation poster was unique in this order, because it is the only poster where Al Ringling explicitly instructed Strobridge to copy existing artwork.[23] The final version of the poster appropriates the coronation scene painted by Jules Eugène Lenepveu between 1886 and 1890 and still displayed in the Panthéon at Paris today. Although there are different characters surrounding the scene with restyled sixteenth-century costumes in the Ringling Bros. poster, the principal figures of the archbishop of Rheims, the Dauphin, and Joan of Arc are in the same positions and poses. In addition, there is a bishop in the foreground, bent over with his right hand outstretched in the same pose as in Lenepveu's painting.

The second poster was of the ballet, which represented "festivities in honor of the coronation" that will "take place before the King and his court and the royal guard," yet these spectators should not dwarf "the ballet itself." Al Ringling was explicit that Joan should be omitted from the spectators and instead appear superimposed "at the end of the bill [...] standing beside her horse," as "simply a large initial figure."[24] Although numerous copies of the ballet poster are accessible, none featuring Joan of Arc are known to survive outside of mono-color proofs and collages, but they depict her superimposed beside the scene with a shield outline reminiscent of a field from a coat of arms.[25] Concerning the ballet, Ringling suggested "something that will show the figures without approaching a burlesque show bill" with the skirts "knee length," which "in the movement of the figure would probably display a little more of the feminine form than from the knee down."[26] Here, Ringling aimed to modernize the past by incorporating a modern ballet into a medieval celebration.[27] At the same time, he toed the line between highbrow and lowbrow to avoid the risqué.[28]

[23] Ringling starts his description for the poster, "Interior of the cathedral at Rhemes [*sic*], France. There are many pictures extant of the coronation of Charles VII which undoubtedly you will have or can get." Letter to A. A. Stewart, December 15, 1911.

[24] Letter to A. A. Stewart, December 15, 1911.

[25] Some historians have mistaken the central ballerina in the poster as Joan of Arc, and some archives have misleadingly titled the poster to indicate Joan is present. However, based on Al Ringling's instructions for the poster and extant designs in the form of mono-color proofs, he never intended Joan to be depicted as a ballerina. The most common surviving version of the ballet poster is viewable at "Ringling Brothers: Joan Of Arc and 300 Dancing Girls," *The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art*, <https://emuseum.ringling.org/emuseum/objects/10154/>, last accessed January 14, 2020. There are five mono-color proofs of the ballet poster depicting different sizes and ratios available in the New-York Historical Society Library, Print Room (PR-067), Strobridge Collection 1909–1915, box 2, nos. 47, 66, 92, 225, and 230. Joan of Arc is standing next to horse superimposed in no. 47.

[26] Letter to A. A. Stewart, December 15, 1911.

[27] This fits squarely with Weisl's definition for "Spectacle." Weisl, "Spectacle," 237.

[28] This is the same goal that Posey described for circus spectacles. Posey, "The American Circus Spectacle," 311.

After some back and forth over the coloring, typograph, and crowd size appearing in the initial proofs for the ballet poster, Al Ringling ultimately approved the design with instructions to replace the replace the "Maid of Orleans" caption with "JOAN OF ARC."[29] Joan's Maid title would not appear in the titles or captions of any Ringling Bros. printed material in an effort to eliminate confusion among would-be circusgoers about the show's star.

The third poster was the procession "passing through the streets of Rhemes [*sic*] to the Cathedral," featuring "JOAN OF ARC mounted on a white horse with banner and sword, she being attired in white and armored." She was then flanked by "General Dunois" and the "Arch Bishop of Rhemes." Although Al Ringling wanted soldiers depicted in the poster, he was explicit that "we should avoid making it appear like the march of an army only." That meant "show all the characters appearing in the coronation scene." He listed Joan's attendants, the Dauphin "and his retinue," "dignitaries of the church," "groups of girls strewing flowers on the streets, Heralds, etc., etc., Show as many characters as possible in this procession."[30] The mono-color proofs and a surviving version of the poster match closely with Al Ringling's specifications.[31]

The fourth and final design of this initial poster order would feature "the full figure of JOAN OF ARC mounted on her white horse. She is clad in the white armored suit carrying banner and sword." There is also a suggestion of the background featuring a "troupe of soldiers."[32] Although the surviving mono-color proofs and final poster depict a mounted Joan with sword and banner, the scene is much more dramatic than what was originally requested. Joan is well in front of a mass of charging cavalry, leaping across defenses toward a castle wall, and pointing her sword forward with arrows flying past her (Fig. 2). Yet, uncharacteristic of a battle scene, the final poster depicts a large smile on Joan. Her horse also seemingly portrays a smile and breaks the fourth wall by looking at the viewer. The movement of Joan and her horse looks more like a mid-dance leap than a charge into a hail of arrows. In addition, the two are brightly colored when compared the soldiers and castle in the background, which has the added

[29] Letter to Strobridge Lithograph Co., January 4, 1911 [*sic*]. For extensive commentary and photos of rejected and accepted posters, see Fox and Parkinson, *Billers, Banners and Bombast*, 43–5; Pfening III, "The Strobridge Lithographing Company," 36–7, 38; and Stirton, "American Circus Posters," 115.

[30] Letter to A. A. Stewart, December 15, 1911.

[31] The most common surviving version of the poster is viewable at "Ringling Brothers: Joan of Arc," *The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art*, <https://emuseum.ringling.org/emuseum/objects/10142/>, last accessed January 14, 2020. Mono-color proofs are available in the New-York Historical Society Library, Print Room (PR-067), Strobridge Collection 1909–1915, box 2, nos. 46 and 224.

[32] Letter to A. A. Stewart, December 15, 1911.

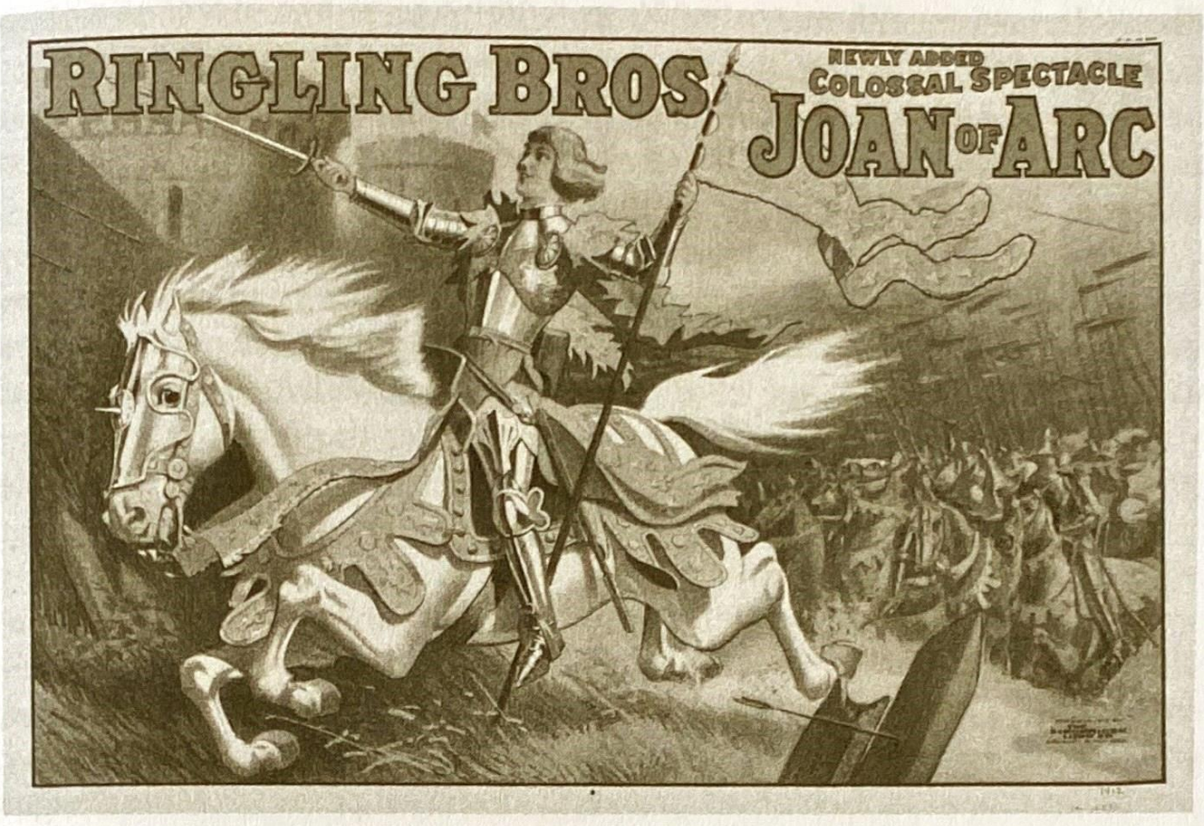

Fig. 2. Ringling Bros. poster. Designed and printed by Strobridge Lithographing Co., 1912.

effect of making her appear superimposed and out of place in the scene.[33] Conversely, the original mono-color proofs depict a stoic Joan and more flying arrows, indicating that Al Ringling likely requested modifications in the final design to downplay the danger of the situation.[34]

Each incarnation of Joan of Arc in these four posters is similar. Although she is always in armor, she foregoes her helmet, revealing a blonde, pageboy haircut. Comparatively, all other armored soldiers in the posters wear their helmets, closing their visors in the charging scene. Joan also wears a surcoat over her armor, sporting fleur-de-lis. The images of Joan on these posters are consistent and ensure the viewer sees her as feminine and safe, appearing more for parade and show than for battle.

This initial order of posters was massive, and Al Ringling requested each of the four posters in different ratios and sizes, some as big as 24.5 x 9.3 feet.[35]

[33] The most common surviving version is viewable at "Ringling Brothers: Joan of Arc on Charging Horse," *The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art*, <https://emuseum.ringling.org/emuseum/objects/10145/>, last accessed January 14, 2020.

[34] New-York Historical Society Library, Print Room (PR-067), Strobridge Collection 1909–1915, box 2, nos. 234 and 115.

[35] Letter to A. A. Stewart, December 15, 1911. Circuses measured posters by sheets of 42 x 28-inch paper that were pieced together to build larger posters. Using sheets as the denominator, posters varied dramatically in size and dimensions, and the most common were

The order requested between 3,000 to 6,000 posters for each incarnation, totaling 41,000. Although we lack details for every Ringling Bros. poster order in 1912 and 1913, this initial preseason order, for which there is no surviving price tag, was enough to cover nearly 2.9 million square feet, or just over 66 acres, if laid out on the ground.[36]

Ringling Bros. spent at least an additional $81,492.70 in printing advertisements during their 1912 campaign season.[37] After inflation, that comes to just over $2.1 million in 2019.[38] Although we do not have the exact numbers and sizes of posters for the entire year, we do know that for the previous season, Ringling Bros. ordered nearly three times the initial Joan of Arc poster order, enough to cover more than 171 acres.[39] This does not include expenditures for couriers, heralds, newspapers ads, and advance copy, or what would have been a similar promotional campaign for 1913.

Other poster designs, for which no instructions from Al Ringling survive, also emphasized the *Joan of Arc* spec. For example, one features a Joan standing next to a horse, again armored with no helmet and sporting a blonde, pageboy haircut.[40] Other posters feature a collage of images from the circus, including snapshots each of the previously described posters.[41] More designs would come in 1913, including a trumpeter announcing the spec, again in sixteenth-century-style costume.[42] In addition, two more extant designs

1/2-sheet, 2-sheet, 3-sheet, 8-sheet, 12-sheet, 24-sheet, and 28-sheet. For the reader, all designs are listed with modern-day measurements. However, a detailed analysis on sheets, layouts, and ratios is available in Kristen L. Spangenberg, "Strobridge Pictorial Posters: Design, Printing, and Posting," in *The Amazing Circus Poster*, 85–91 (91).

36 This calculates 41,000 posters made up from a total of 350,000 sheets, each sheet measuring 42 x 28 inches, plus an additional 6,000 half-sheets measuring 21 x 28 inches each.

37 See "Printing Advertising" page in "1912 Ledger," CWM MSS, vol. 66, Circus World Museum.

38 The US Bureau of Labor Statistics only provides inflation data back to January 1913, so the real number is slightly higher. The $2,136,888.27 figure is based on calculating the buying power of $81,492.70 in January 2013 compared to December 2019. "CPI Inflation Calculator," *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, <https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm>, last accessed January 14, 2020.

39 Ringling Bros. ordered 914,000 sheets in 1911. Fox and Parkinson, *Billers, Banners and Bombast*, 56.

40 A surviving poster is viewable at "Ringling Brothers: Joan of Arc," *The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art*, <https://emuseum.ringling.org/emuseum/objects/10150/>, last accessed January 14, 2020. There is a photograph of one design available at the New-York Historical Society Library, Print Room (PR-067), Strobridge Collection 1909–1915, box 2, no. 197.

41 A surviving poster is viewable at "Ringling Brothers: Joan of Arc," *The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art*, <https://emuseum.ringling.org/emuseum/objects/10140/>, last accessed January 14, 2020.

42 A surviving poster is viewable at "Ringling Brothers: Joan of Arc," *The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art*, <https://emuseum.ringling.org/emuseum/objects/10151/>, last accessed January 14, 2020.

featuring different versions of a fully armored *and* helmeted Joan of Arc on her horse survive through mono-color proofs in the New-York Historical Society Library and no surviving records indicate that they ever made it to mass production.[43] Unfortunately, there is no indication why they would have been rejected, but one possible explanation is that these helmeted Joans portray an androgynous look for the Maid, which conflicts with all the other poster designs of a feminine Joan sporting a pageboy haircut.

Once the posters were printed, it was the work of billposters to hang them everywhere. Their work with the circus inspired terms such as "paper the town" and "post no bills," as they would hang posters and banners on the sides of buildings, warehouses, barns, and even outhouses – wherever they could find a flat surface and an owner willing to accept money and/or free tickets to the circus.[44] Also part of the Ringling Bros. advertising campaign were newspaper advance men tasked with garnering space in every newspaper for a town and the surrounding area.[45] Although little survives from these behind-the-scenes efforts, any search throughout newspapers during these years will reveal hundreds of articles and advertisements – often side by side – for the Ringling Bros. show and especially the *Joan of Arc* spec.

Finally, the advance men hung heralds in windows and distributed couriers in high-traffic locations. The heralds were long strips of newsprint material, printed on both sides, and, for these seasons, measured 10 1/2 x 28 inches.[46] Couriers were booklets, numbering between fourteen and

[43] New-York Historical Society Library, Print Room (PR-067), Strobridge Collection 1909–1915, box 2, nos. 157 and 241.

[44] Fox and Parkinson, *Billers, Banners and Bombast*, 72.

[45] The few surviving notes from their efforts in the Joan of Arc seasons reveal that each newspaper had different methods of measuring space – inches, lines, or fraction of a page – and they accepted payment in the form of money and free tickets. A small town with one day's worth of performances such as Freeport, IL (August 20, 1912) would feature 80 inches of space in three different publications, each costing $16.00 and 25 tickets to the circus. "Press Agent's Advice Sheet," Freeport, August 20, 1912, CWM MSS 32, Circus World Museum. For a larger town such as San Francisco with three days' worth of performances (August 30 – September 1, 1913), the advance men tried to secure seven different publications. The measurements ranged from 26 inches to 560 lines, costing between $15.00 and $145.00 along with 30 to 50 tickets. Another paper promised a quarter page on four separate days. The notes from San Francisco reveal some of the haggling these advance men experienced, as one newspaper "failed to come through with 150 word announcement story. Yet had the nerve to ask for 200 tickets for newsboys." See "Press Agent's Advice Sheet," San Francisco, August 30 – September 1, 1913, CWM MSS 32, Circus World Museum.

[46] Two heralds from the Joan of Arc seasons survive and are viewable online at "CWi 6608 A-B - Ringling Bros. Circus," *Circus World Museum*, <https://circus.pastperfectonline.com/archive/E5EC163F-5643-47C9-B55D-707028465576>, last accessed January 14, 2020; "CWi 6607 A-B - Ringling Bros. Circus," *Circus World Museum*, <https://circus.pastperfectonline.com/archive/C1B50A70-813D-41B8-9864-450768494840>, last accessed January 14, 2020.

twenty-six pages.[47] Although no printing numbers survive for this material in 1912–13, heralds and couriers were "the most numerous of all the circus promotional pieces."[48] Advance men placed stacks of couriers wherever they could find space, including "grocery stores, blacksmith shops, saloons, hotels, babershops, hardware stores, livery stables."[49]

If this is overwhelming, then the Ringling Bros. would have been proud, as this is exactly how they wanted a town to feel when they approached. As the biggest promoter of the story of Joan of Arc in American popular culture in 1912 and 1913, they told a story that is vital to early twentieth-century medievalism in America and is fleshed out in the content of the heralds and couriers.

Priorities for Joan of Arc Spec Heralds and Couriers Content

There are common themes and priorities that become apparent when examining the content of Ringling Bros. 1912 and 1913 heralds and couriers, which all served as fodder for newspapers recycling copy for money and free tickets. These priorities were first and foremost to *impress* the reader with the pomp, pageantry, size, cost, and logistics of the spectacle. The copy in one courier for the performances slated in St. Louis, MO (April 29, 1912) describes the spec as they described most of their shows – "magnificent," "marvelous," "miraculous," "great," "the greatest," "the most extravagant," "the most thrilling, gorgeous," "mighty," "stupendous," and "epoch making." There is always an emphasis on the $500,000 budget and the cast of 1,200 actors, 600 horses, and 300 ballerinas.[50]

In heralds and couriers, we constantly learn of the size, as well as specific names and titles of the crew, some of which were fictitious. For example, there is a Captain Felix Dufard of the French Army who supposedly directed the construction of the spec's "artillery and implements of war." However, Captain Dufard was not a real person, but instead a stage name meant to bring credibility to the show.[51] We are promised the "smoke of battle," "the

[47] Four copies of two styles of couriers distributed in the 1912–13 seasons survive in the Circus World Museum including the shows at St. Louis (April 29, 1912), Decatur, IL (August 28, 1912), Hartford, CT (May 25, 1913), and Okmulgee, OK (November 1, 1913). Aside from the dates and locations, the promotional text and images are the same between the copies of each style of courier.

[48] Fox and Parkinson, *Billers, Banners and Bombast*, 171.

[49] Fox and Parkinson, *Billers, Banners and Bombast*, 173.

[50] *Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows and the Newly Added $500,000 Spectacle with 1200 People: Joan of Arc*, 1912 St. Louis courier available in the Circus World Museum.

[51] Thanks to Fred Dahlinger, Jr., retired as Curator of Circus History at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, for helping flesh out this mystery. Email to the author, June 19, 2018.

crumbling of great fortresses," "battle after battle," and "smoking fortresses of the English."[52]

When a newspaper affords more space, the materials reveal the second priority, which was to *inspire*. Such text often tells us that Joan of Arc is "a story lesson that every child should know, with an earnest appeal to youthful minds and a deep underlying moral of purity, patriotism, courage, and the power of faith and zeal."[53] This sort of language fits squarely within what Robin Blaetz identifies in others commercializations of Joan of Arc in early-twentieth-century America, as the Maid "evoked an authentic sense of piety or patriotism" by simplifying her story into "the much-desired authenticity that melodrama translated into clear, popular terms."[54] Ringling simplified this medieval, French figure in melodramatic phrases that promoted patriotism and faith for an American audience. Similarly, Ringling further described her story as "breathless," "a supreme triumph," "sublime," "beautiful," "poetic," "tragic," "inspired," "great," and "Christian." Joan of Arc is described as "brave," "tremendous," "revered as a saint," "divinely inspired," a "simple, sweet girl," a "sweet, peasant girl," a "poor, peasant girl," "but a child," and "one of the greatest heroines in the history of the world."[55] Through this language, Al Ringling sought to capitalize on not just the historical element of his production, but also the religious value. With no shows on Sundays, circuses did not seek to compete with church, but instead wanted to compliment the Christian experience with such a production.

The final priority of the Ringling Bros. advertising campaign was to *educate*, if there was space. Here, readers learn that Joan was executed and that at one point she wore men's clothing, but these are typically only side notes, if mentioned at all. Instead, the Ringling Bros. text focuses on the encounter with St. Michael, the Burgundians, her trip to meet the Dauphin, the relieving of the siege of Orléans and the capture of other cities along the Loire River, her "final routing of the English armies," the crowning of the Dauphin at Rheims, her eventual capture, and even her attempted escape.[56] Yet, completely absent from any Ringling Bros. texts are the initial verbal interrogation and physical examination she went through before she was entrusted with the Dauphin's army; her various wounds in battles; her failure at Paris, her trial, or her retrial. With this selective approach, Al Ringling emphasized the victories of the Maid while downplaying or omitting her difficulties and failures. This exploitation of Joan of Arc's story fed the desire of

[52] 1912 St. Louis courier.

[53] 1912 St. Louis courier; incarnations of this text survive in numerous newspapers, such as "the story of Joan of Arc should be told to every child" in "'Joan of Arc' a Circus Feature," *St. Joseph Gazette,* July 7, 1913, 3.

[54] Blaetz, *Visions of the Maid,* 15–17.

[55] 1912 St. Louis courier.

[56] 1912 St. Louis courier.

early-twentieth-century Americans "to see the world once more as magical" through Joan of Arc, a desire that Robin Blaetz identifies in other mediums.[57]

Throughout the couriers and heralds, readers are exposed to numerous images of Joan of Arc, including the previously described ballet, coronation, and charging scenes, the latter of which donned the cover of the couriers.[58] In heralds and couriers are two scenes appropriated from Boutet de Monvel's wildly popular children's book *Jeanne d'Arc* (1896), featuring Joan kneeling at the coronation and Joan leading a charge against defenses outside Orléans.[59] The couriers include more Boutet de Monvel images such as Joan crossing the river outside Orléans, traveling to Chinon, attempting to escape, and her interrogation at Poitiers.[60] The latter is presented with the vague caption "JOAN CONVINCING THE COUNCIL," completely shielding the reader from the eleven-day interrogation and thus, downplaying the struggles of Joan's narrative. There is also an appropriation of Boutet de Monvel's St. Michael.[61] Other images include a horizontally inverted appropriation of Gustave Doyen's 1881 painting of Joan kneeling with her banner, an inverted imitation of Joan as a peasant in her father's garden, a sketch of the 1837 statue of Joan clutching her sword by Marie Christine of Orléans, and Joan in armor, kneeling before the Dauphin.[62]

Aside from the poster designs and covers for couriers and librettos, none

[57] Blaetz, *Visions of the Maid*, 15–17.

[58] A cover of a 1912 courier is viewable online at "2016.11.36 – Painting," *Circus World Museum*, <https://circus.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/A5014D1E-708E-42F8-8D96-775212209921>, last accessed January 14, 2020.

[59] Scenes found in M. Boutet de Monvel, *Jeanne d'Arc* (Paris: Plon Nourrit, 1896), 31, 18–19. Originally published in French, Monvel's book was translated into English in 1897 and reprinted in at least 1907, 1912, 1915, and 1916. Isabella Nières-Chevrel, "In and Out of History: Jeanne d'Arc by Maurice Boutet de Monvel," in *The Presence of the Past in Children's Literature*, ed. Ann Lawson Lucas (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 33–9 (38–9n1). Monvel's work was often serialized in magazines such as Louis-Maurice Boutet de Monvel, "The National Hero of France: Joan of Arc," trans. Will H. Low, *The Century Magazine* 53.2 (November 1896): 119–30. For more on the book's popularity in America, see Coyle, "A Universal Patriot," 53–9.

[60] 1912 St. Louis courier; Boutet de Monvel, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 14, 10, 12, 39.

[61] Although St. Michael is inverted from the original and he is portrayed with black instead of shiny golden hair. Boutet de Monvel, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 6.

[62] A lithograph of Gustave Doyen's painting is available online at "10645–1224 – Print; Gustave Doyen; Offset Lithograph; Joan of Arc," Nebraska State Historical Society, <https://nebraskahistory.pastperfectonline.com/webobject/046B3084-4ADD-4010-9BB8-133487389428>, last accessed January 14, 2020. The image of Joan as a peasant in her father's garden is available as a plate in François Guizot, *L'Histoire de France*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1875). There are multiple copies of the statue by Marie of Orléans originally cast at Domrémy. One such copy at Cliveden Estate, Buckinghamshire is viewable online at "Joan of Arc (c.1412–1431)," National Trust Collections, <http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/766374>, last accessed January 14, 2020.

of the artwork is original nor are the original sources credited anywhere in Ringling Bros. material. Readers are exposed to eleven Victorian images of Joan of Arc from five different artists, spread across fifty-nine years (1837–96). In an extreme departure from the consistency on the Ringling Bros. posters, the couriers and heralds present a glaring lack of uniformity in styles of dress and armor, as well as competing hair styles and lengths on Joan and other characters. These conflicting images indicate that Al Ringling was content with different Joans in at least his heralds and couriers, and the differences are easily explained in the personal archives of Harry A. Ogden, the main artist of Ringling Bros. at the time. Ogden, a very active illustrator for numerous publications throughout his life, kept an extensive archive of notes and clippings of historical imagery. Upon his death in 1936, the New-York Historical Society acquired his private archives and they remain there today, for the most part unprocessed.[63] Among the 150 boxes, one is labeled "Medieval" and further sorted into categories such as "Warfare," "Arms and Armor," and "Personalities." Although the acquisition of this collection was well removed from Ogden's work on the *Joan of Arc* spec, it is evident how he garnered such a wide array of images of Joan, as the surviving clippings include pages from illustrated publications such as *The Sphere* (1900–64), *Scribner's Magazine* (1887–1939), the oft-reprinted and revised *Cassell's Illustrated History of England*, and numerous souvenir magazines from pageants.[64] Al Ringling gave clear instructions on how to depict Joan of Arc and the French court in his posters, but for additional images in heralds and couriers, Ogden was free to appropriate any relevant image he could find in his collection. The goal for all this promotional material was to get people in the tent and none of it adequately prepared circusgoers for what they would experience with the *Joan of Arc* spec.

The Ringling Bros. Joan of Arc Spec

Circus historians have long described heralds and couriers as "the epitome of hyperbole,"[65] and Ringling Bros. text on the *Joan of Arc* spec is no exception. When a reader became a circusgoer, they would see a much different spec than the one advertised, starting with the length, size, and contents. While most advance copy and fluff reviews reiterate Ringling's claim for a forty-five-minute length, it likely varied between thirty and thirty-six minutes.[66]

[63] Hugh M. Flick, "The Harry A. Ogden Collection," *The New-York Historical Society Quarterly Bulletin* 21.1 (1937): 3–11. Acquisition record available in *Library Additions, 1935–38*, vol. 26, RG-15, New-York Historical Society Library.

[64] Ogden Collection, box 8, PR-147, New-York Historical Society Library.

[65] Fox and Parkinson, *Billers, Banners and Bombast*, 171.

[66] One reviewer clocked it at thirty minutes in "Circusy Circus is Offered by the Ringlings,"

If quibbling about the length seems trite, then consider the 1,200-person cast and 300-ballerina troupe where "working scenarios," or scripts for the spec survive in multiple archives to provide the exact counts for the cast and extras.[67] For the procession, which featured the largest on-stage cast, the script lists eighteen familiar characters in Joan of Arc's story, including Charles VII, Marie of Anjou, Yolande of Aragon, Robert de Baudricourt, Georges de La Trémoille, the duke of Alençon, La Hire, and Jean de Metz.[68] There are also sixty noble ladies, forty-eight French subjects, twenty-four people "carrying staffs, water bottles and bags," twenty noblemen, twelve unnamed knights, ten "Women Nuns," nine French guards, nine Swiss guards, nine queen's attendants, six male entry riders, six female entry riders, four bishops, three "Acolyths [*sic*] with Censors," and two flag bearers. Marie and Yolande rode on a float along with an additional two girl pages and two boy pages, while two more men led the horses.[69] Sixty-three of these people were mounted on horses and ninety-two carried banners or emblems. The script demonstrates that these scenes pulled staff from every corner of the circus, as the roles called for property men, cook house men, animal men, elephant men, and grooms, as well as forty-eight ballerinas changing costumes to play noble ladies. The result is a total of 249 participants in the spec.[70]

As for *where* to perform the spec, the Ringling Bros. three-ring big-top measured 190 by 450 feet, which covered an area of 77,739 square feet.[71] The stage for the spec took up a large portion of one of the 450-foot sides. This stage would display a pavilion for the Dauphin's throne in one scene

The San Francisco Examiner, August 31, 1913, 45. Another reviewer clocked it at thirty-six minutes in Harry F. Rose, "Big Ringling Circus Acclaimed in Chicago," *The Player*, April 11, 1913, 1, 4, 7.

67 Alfred T. Ringling referred to them as "working scenarios." Each spec only had about twenty-five made. MacAdam, "What It Costs in Money and Effort to Devise a Circus Spectacle," 6. The *Joan of Arc* spec script is titled "The Grand Parisian Spectacle: Joan of Arc and the Coronation of King Charles VII at Rheims, July 17, 1429." There are at least two complete copies and one incomplete copy of the synopsis in the Circus World Museum, two complete copies in the Milner Library, and one complete copy in the Pfening Private Archives. These surviving synopses of the spec only describe the 1912 version of the spec.

68 Character and place names have multiple incarnations throughout Ringling Bros. letters, production notes, and advertisements. They are standardized throughout this article unless noted otherwise.

69 "The Grand Parisian Spectacle."

70 "The Grand Parisian Spectacle." Fred D. Pfening, Jr. counted 233 characters, including 50 ballerinas, but it is easy to get lost in these numbers. Pfening Jr., "Spec-ology of the Circus: Part One," 13. There is also a surviving letter where Al Ringling debates whether the 1914 spec should continue to use fifty or sixty ballerinas, demonstrating that forty-eight is much more within the range of reality instead of the advertised 300. Letter quoted in Pfening Jr., "Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows: The 1913 Season," 16.

71 By comparison, a regulation NFL playing field measures 57,600 sq. ft., Fred Dahlinger, Jr., "The American Circus Tent," in *The American Circus*, 200–31 (221, 224).

and the altar at Rheims for another scene. Various curtains with painted backdrops would close throughout the spec while stagehands rearranged the scenery. The events of the spec spilled out into the three rings in the middle of the tent, giving circusgoers unique views of the spec, depending on their angle.

Surviving *Joan of Arc* spec scripts only cover the 1912 production. It featured three parts, which were also briefly described in the synopsis found in the surviving librettos sold at the shows.[72] The first part takes place in the court of the Dauphin and features seven pieces of music. Again, with few exceptions, the entire spec is performed through pantomime. After characters march in and take their places, the would-be king hosts a tournament, which was simply five knights catching dangling rings with their spears. A winner receives accolades from the Dauphin while the cast cheers. It is from this scene that a reviewer tells us, "One was lifted back into the centuries when helmeted and spiked knights charged and competed for fair lady in gay tournament."[73]

After a sounding of trumpets, Joan of Arc is announced. Before she enters, Trémoille instigates the traditional disguise test where the Dauphin and the duke of Alençon swap clothes, and the latter takes the throne. Joan of Arc enters the scene accompanied by a large group including bishops and ten nuns, emphasizing her piety. As Joan approaches the court, Trémoille is described as having a "snearial [*sic*] smile and sarcastic actions" while Joan walks right past the throne and kneels before the disguised Dauphin. Trémoille provides the sole indication of any doubters of the Maid in the spec and any circusgoers not paying attention were sure to miss it. Joan and the Dauphin pantomime a side conversation, stopping in front of the cross "in an attitude of worship." Joan describes her mission and the convinced Dauphin orders she be given armor, a sword, and a banner, before knighting her. Jean de Metz holds Joan's helmet and shield. Joan stands up with "attitude" and the cast sings hallelujah, again emphasizing the religious aspect of Joan's mission. Joan and Jean de Metz exit on opposite sides, the lights dim, trumpets blare, and new music plays for a transition.[74]

The next scene featured a mounted Joan of Arc leading a grand procession of the 249 characters carrying 92 banners and emblems on their way from Chinon to Rheims. As the procession is passing out of view, characters are busy taking their places for the coronation of King Charles VII. Again, through pantomime, the archbishop of Rheims asks Charles if he is ready, to which the Dauphin confirms. A Bible is brought for the Dauphin to

[72] The script breaks up parts with the curtain opening and closing, as "CURTAIN-(O)" and "CURTAIN-(C)."

[73] "'Tis a Great Circus," *The Buffalo Evening Times*, July 3, 1913, 5.

[74] "The Grand Parisian Spectacle."

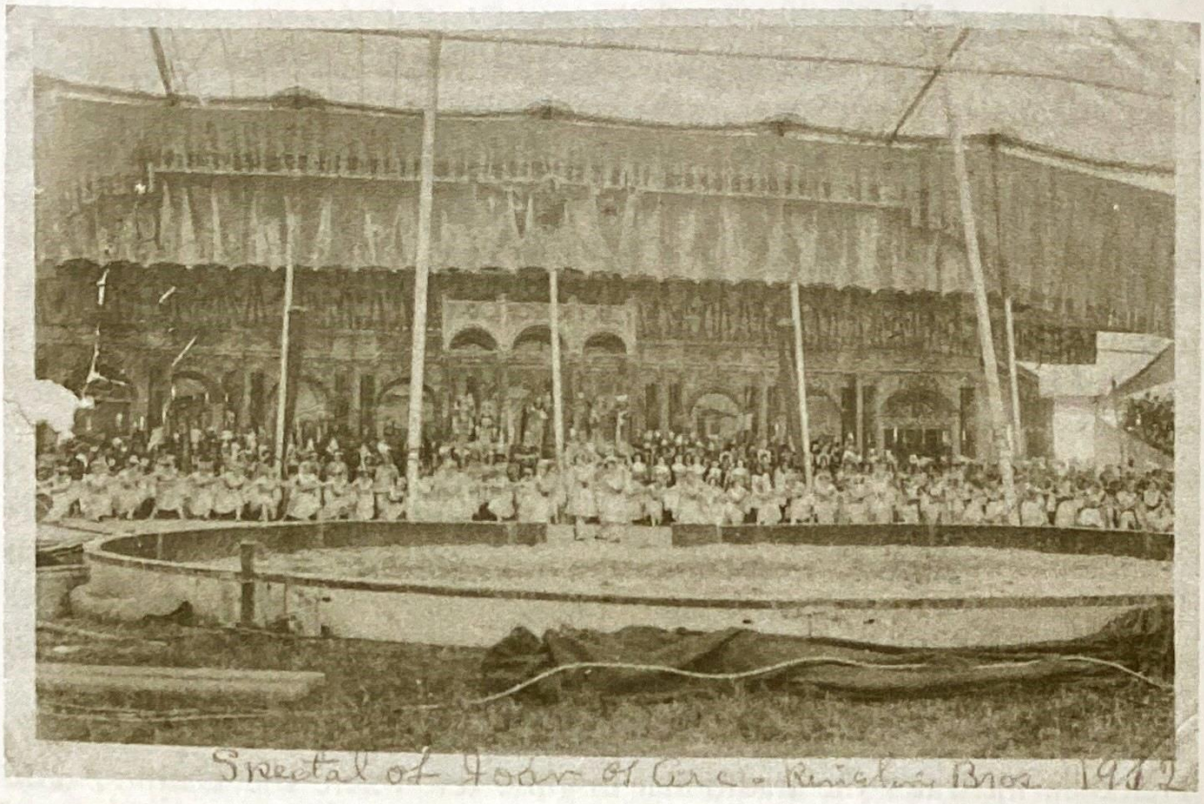

Fig. 3. Ringling Bros. *Joan of Arc* Spec, 1912.

swear upon. He then kneels and the rest of the cast follows suit. He arises crowned. A nearby Joan is visibly excited. The king pats Joan on the shoulder approvingly and indicates this was only possible because of her. The king then takes a flag and waves it dramatically, kisses the flag, and then motions to the characters and the crowd to indicate they are all France. The cast then yells "VIVA LA FRANCE" three times and the ballerinas, many dressed as nuns or noble ladies just moments before, rush onto the open area to dance.[75] There is a sole surviving photo of the *Joan of Arc* spec in action, featuring this moment when the ballet begins (see Fig. 3). In the background, you can make out the king waving next to Joan of Arc holding her banner (see Fig. 4).

Part three of the spec is described in librettos simply as "Tableaux. Joan at the Cross."[76] When the ballet stops and strikes "attitude," a curtain drops to reveal "JOAN OF ARC kneeling at the cross with her religious escort in proper position so as to show a nice tableaux [*sic*] with JOAN OF ARC as the central figure." There are explicit instructions that "all of the calcium lights to be turned on full force in this tableaux [*sic*], also red fire to be used."[77] As he did in print, Al Ringling follows similar commercializations of the Maid, evoking "an authentic

[75] "The Grand Parisian Spectacle."

[76] 1912 edition of the *Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Show Libretto: Magazine of Wonders and Daily Review* available in the Circus World Museum.

[77] "The Grand Parisian Spectacle."

Fig. 4. Detail, Ringling Bros. Joan of Arc Spec, 1912.

sense of piety or patriotism" by simplifying her story into "the much-desired authenticity that melodrama translated into clear, popular terms."[78] He evokes patriotism for the audience with King Charles VII motioning to the American audience to indicate they are all France. Joan's piety is emphasized throughout with her entourage of bishops and nuns and her reverence for the cross. If that did not drive the point home, the cast sings hallelujah after her knighting and a scene is dedicated to Joan kneeling at the cross with dramatic lighting. This focus on Joan and the cross is a foreshadower to Cecil B. DeMille's image of Joan standing with arms outstretched with the fleur-de-lies in the background in his film *Joan the Woman* (1916), another commercial attempt to simplify Joan's story in order evoke piety in Americans.[79]

After this intense moment, the script calls for multiple painted backdrops, which "represent JOAN OF ARC in her various undertakings."[80] The only one described in detail is of Joan meeting "Arch Angel St. Michael." Although none of the backdrops are known to have survived, one does appear in the background of a promotional photograph of Joan standing next to a

78 Blaetz, *Visions of the Maid*, 15–17.

79 Although there is no evidence that DeMille saw the *Joan of Arc* spec, during the end of the six-day run of Ringling Bros. in Philadelphia on May 9, 1913, DeMille was in attendance for his play *The Reckless Age*, performing two miles south on Broad Street at the Grand Opera House. "Ringling Circus Coming," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 30, 1913, 6; "The Reckless Age," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, May 3, 1913, 24.

80 "The Grand Parisian Spectacle."

mounted Charles VII. Marching troops are very faint in the painted background.[81] As backdrops are revealed through lighting, scenery men construct the interior of the "King's Palace" in the central ring. When attention turns there, the audience sees several tables covered with draperies sporting fleur-de-lis. Charles is seated at one table with an undescribed painted backdrop. Joan of Arc sits at another table and she "is on with her attendants for a final tableaux [*sic*]."[82] Thus, ends the *Joan of Arc* spec.

Reception of the Joan of Arc Spec and 1913 Modifications

If the volume of glowing newspaper copy counts for anything, then the reception of the *Joan of Arc* spec was overwhelmingly positive, but most of the accolades are recycled copy from the Ringling Bros. Among the genuine reviews, common themes arise from what circusgoers appreciated. First, there was a sense of authenticity in the costumes. The *Nashville Tennessean* believed "it portrayed all the elements of the old French feudal system and the divisions of the army, the swordsmen, archers, cross-bowmen, monks, heralds, mounted knights and peasant women."[83] The crossbowmen are the most evoked authentic attribute in the reviews (see upper left of Fig. 4). The sole criticism to point out any anachronisms came from a sarcastic reviewer who noticed chewing gum among the soldiers.[84] These reactions to the "accuracy" of the costumes and thus the spec itself, demonstrate one of the fundamental principles of medievalism: people find authenticity in seeing what they *expect* to see or what matches other medievalism productions. Al Ringling's recycling of costumes from his Henry VIII spec, although anachronistic, still acted as a *signpost* of medieval legitimacy to circusgoers. Pam Clements astutely points out that such signposts "can create a sense of authenticity"

[81] Photograph viewable online at "CWi 4760 - Ringling Bros. Circus," *Circus World Museum*, <https://circus.pastperfectonline.com/photo/99783285-1BA3-43F9-AB93-970114932275>, last accessed January 14, 2020.

[82] "The Grand Parisian Spectacle."

[83] "Lure of the Circus Draws Large Crowds to Tents: Ringling Bros. Introduce New Features This Year – Joan of Arc Proves Gorgeous Spectacle," *Nashville Tennessean*, September 7, 1912, 3. More genuine commentary on the accuracy is found in "Circus Showed to Two Enormous Audiences In This City Yesterday," *Evening Star*, September 21, 1912, 1; "Circus Brings Thousands Here," *The Star Journal* (Lansing, MI), June 27, 1912, 6; "Crowds Attend Ringling Circus," *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, May 21, 1912, 20; "'Greatest Shows' Delight: Thousands Attend Circus," *The Salt Lake Herald-Republican*, August 2, 1913, 14; "Lure of the Circus Draws Large Crowds to Tents," *Nashville Tennessean*, September 7, 1912, 3; and "Ringling Triumph with Great Circus," *The Tribune-Republican*, June 3, 1912, 3.

[84] "Little Quips and Quirks: Mr. Pepys Jr. Goeth to the Circus," *Chicago Tribute*, April 15, 1912, 8.

even when the "viewer or player is fully aware of the work's lack of historical accuracy."[85]

A library in Moline, Illinois, used the spec to boast of its "plentiful" books on Joan of Arc, claiming they received "many inquiries" as a result of the advertising by the Ringling Bros. The library listed sixteen books about "the great French martyr," including five with Joan of Arc in the title (e.g., Mark Twain, Boutet de Monvel), but also general works on English and French history.[86]

The spec was not without its critics, though. *The Gazette Montreal* tells us, "The presentation conveys no adequate idea of the story of the heroine of Orleans."[87] Similarly, *The San Francisco Call* found that "the only fault in the pantomimic story told in the spectacle this year arises from a certain lack of action in the roles of the principals."[88] *Variety* was harsher, telling readers "the principal weakness in the Ringling show this season, and there is no denying the fact it is a weakness, lies in the pantomimic production of the much-herald elaborate spectacle 'Joan of Arc,'" ultimately criticizing the spec's "shyness."[89] These conclusions are possible to corroborate from reading the script, as the story features all the celebrations with none of the necessary struggles to attain them. It even ends on a positive note with Charles and Joan eating in each other's company. Joan spends much of the spec offstage while the Dauphin and his court enjoy a tournament. By beginning with such a merry scene, one may ask what was the need for Joan of Arc in the first place? She faces no real struggles while she floats through scenes, enabled by men who knight her and thank her for marching in front of a procession. Joan is never the impetus of her own fate.

It was likely owing to criticisms that Al Ringling decided to create a fourth part, which was added in the 1913 season to the beginning of the spec along with newly painted backdrops that had to be replaced after a fire.[90] No known 1913 script survives in the archives and we know of this additional part's existence only through that year's edition of the Ringling Bros. libretto, which describes it briefly.[91] The added part takes place in the court of Robert de Baudricourt in Vaucouleurs, who is "being entertained by several peasant girls in a merry dance." Joan of Arc enters the scene and begs Baudricourt to

[85] Pam Clements, "Authenticity," in *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, 19–26 (23).

[86] "Books on Joan of Arc," *The Daily Times*, July 12, 1913, 17; "Books on Joan of Arc Plentiful in Library," *The Dispatch*, July 14, 1913, 9.

[87] "Big Crowds Saw the Circus," *The Gazette Montreal*, June 11, 1912, 2.

[88] "Ringling Circus is 'Stupendous'," *The San Francisco Call*, August 31, 1913, 12.

[89] "Ringling Circus: Chicago, April 10," *Variety* 26.6 (April 13, 1912): 22.

[90] D. W. Watt, "Side Lights on the Circus Business," *The Janesville Daily Gazette*, January 18, 1913, 12.

[91] The following description based on the 1913 edition of *Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Show Libretto: Magazine of Wonders and Daily Review* available in the Circus World Museum.

send her to meet the Dauphin in Chinon. Baudricourt is apprehensive and after several unsuccessful attempts, Joan's uncle and Jean de Metz intercede and convince the reluctant noble. Baudricourt then provides Joan with a suit of armor, a horse, and a lance, and he then orders her intercessors to accompany her to Chinon before bidding them farewell on their journey.

Aside from resituating Joan of Arc's armor acquisition from Chinon to Vaucouleurs and adding new backdrops, nothing else appears to have changed with the remaining parts of the spec. It is also difficult to see how this added scene brought more context for circusgoers, aside from demonstrating that Joan had to win over more doubters than just a few in the Dauphin's court, providing the clearest indication of Joan's struggles in her story albeit a tame interpretation. By presenting her only succeeding with the help of other men, it further diminishes Joan's independence and agency in confronting doubters. Again, she is never the impetus of her own fate.

There were more changes made in the 1913 libretto content, aside from the added part to the synopsis. In the 1912 libretto, there is what amounts to two pages outlining a straightforward narrative of Joan of Arc's story in a sea of advertisements, a history of the Ringling Bros., and animal facts. On the page facing the description of the show's parts, there is a paragraph that starts, "Joan of Arc tells the story of a simple peasant girl who, through her faith and Christian courage, became the deliverer of France, and who then deserted by all, even the indolent monarch whose crown she restored, was put to death on the false charge of heresy." In the middle of the libretto is a section titled "Joan of Arc" (with quotations) that provides more details of the title character. It, too, starts with a brief mention of Joan's demise, "In the old market place of Rouen there now stands a monument by which the French of to-day have sought to redeem their part in the execution of Joan of Arc, who on May 30, 1431, was burned to death on the charge of heresy," a sentence found in advance newspaper copy.[92] Then follows a brief narrative of Joan's story.

The only image of Joan of Arc on the 1912 libretto takes up a small portion of the cover and features Joan charging forward on her horse, a similar design to the poster ordered by Al Ringling before the start of the season. In the 1913 libretto, the story of Joan of Arc is spliced with sensationalized text from the couriers, emphasizing scenes that never appear in the spec (e.g., battles). In addition, there are four Boutet de Monvel images previously used in only the couriers, including Joan on the way to Chinon, meeting Charles, "convincing the council," and her failed escape attempt. Al Ringling was likely addressing a scenario where a circusgoer might come to see the spec without any context from distributed couriers or newspaper copy in the days leading up to it. By

[92] For example, see "A Great Spectacle," *The Richmond Palladium and Sun-Telegram*, May 2, 1912, 3.

expanding the narrative on Joan's life in the libretto with sensationalized details and interspersing these images, he dedicated more space and visuals to further emphasize its historical value.

"Careful Exploitation" of Joan of Arc

Even with these modifications, it is hard to get past the contemporary criticisms of the "shyness" of the spec, which conveyed "no adequate idea of the story of the heroine of Orleans" or that it lacked action from the principal characters. There is no battle, conflict, or execution. The reason why is buried deep within one of their couriers where Al Ringling admitted, "The last days of Joan of Arc are too sad for this drama of gladness."[93] This explains Al Ringling's reaction to John Ringling's insistence that they depict Joan of Arc's execution, as the former saw it as potentially "sacrilegious."[94] The circusgoer is never exposed to the trials, battles, nor Joan's execution in the spec. In fact, the narrative of the couriers ends just after Joan of Arc's failed escape, ominously telling readers, "A more Cruel Fate was Reserved for her."[95] The approach differs greatly to that of George Bernard Shaw, who hauntingly reflected on his own play *Saint Joan* (1924) that "it does not matter in the least why a woman is burnt provided she is burnt and people can pay to see it done."[96] In the Ringling Bros. spec and posters, Joan is never in danger. She does not enter the Dauphin's court until the tournament is over, ensuring that she is always far from any violence whatsoever, regardless of how mild. The sole poster design of Joan engaged in battle depicts her smiling and carefree, downplaying the danger of the situation.

Reflecting on another Joan of Arc production from the same period, Cecil B. DeMille lamented the use of the phrase "careful exploitation" employed by promoters of his film *Joan the Woman* (1916) when publicizing her story.[97] Yet, the phrase perfectly encapsulates Al Ringling's promotion and production

[93] 1912 St. Louis courier.

[94] This is the most quoted exchange over the production of the spec. See, for example, Pfening, Jr. "Spec-ology of the Circus, Part One," 12–13; Apps, *Ringlingville USA,* 177; Coyle, "A Universal Patriot," 63–6; Posey, "The American Circus Spectacle," 321; and Hammarstrom, *Inside the Changing Circus*, 205. A common misconception is that John Ringling was the impetus behind the *Joan of Arc* spec after seeing a similar production in France. However, he did not contact Al Ringling about the spec until January 27, 1912, six weeks *after* Al Ringling had already initiated the first order of Joan of Arc posters from Strobridge. John Ringling to Al Ringling, January 27, 1912, Pfening Private Archives. Letter to A. A. Stewart, December 15, 1911.

[95] 1912 St. Louis courier.

[96] George Bernard Shaw, *Saint Joan: A Chronicle Play in Six Scenes and Epilogue* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2019), xlviii.

[97] Cecil B. DeMille, *The Autobiography of Cecil B. DeMille*, ed. Donald Hayne (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1959), 179.

of the *Joan of Arc* spec. Although Ringling Bros. heralds and couriers depict and describe Joan of Arc leading charges in battle, Al Ringling still saw Joan as a little girl, not as an uncommon warrior who won over doubters, upended the patriarchy, suffered wounds, lost battles, and withstood inquisitions, both verbal and physical. Where DeMille sought to soften Joan's story through a love interest in his film, Al Ringling simply omitted all the danger. He could not present her as Joan the woman, soldier, or leader; to him, she was Joan the "simple, sweet, poor, peasant girl."[98] To circusgoers, Joan of Arc was part of a spectacle that told an incomplete, confusing story that sidelined the Maid in her own tale. This story that Al Ringling believed "every child should be told," ensured that the struggles and execution of Joan of Arc were barely fit for print, and certainly not fit for spectacle.

[98] This combines the various ways Al Ringling described Joan of Arc in the 1912 St. Louis courier.

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Studies in Medievalism XXX

Politics and Medievalism (Studies) II

This volume continues the theme of its predecessor, addressing how the Middle Ages have been invoked to score political points, particularly with reference to the rise of populism fueled by recent recessions and a pandemic. The nine essays in the first portion of the volume directly address political medievalism in Tariq Ali's 2005 novel on Mideast instability, *A Sultan in Palermo*; attempts by twentieth-century Czech politicians to anchor their causes in the fifteenth-century Czech hero Petr Chelcický; far-right deployment of Robin Hood memes to slander Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama; the ways Rory Mullarkey's 2017 play *Saint George and the Dragon* comments on English national identity relative to Brexit; how national stereotypes have come into play amid cross-channel reporting on Brexit; nationalism in the medievalizing German monument to their fallen at the 1942 Battle of El Alamein; the English-speaking world's reception of Anthony Munday's 1589 book on conduct, *Palmendos*; nationalism in the self-characterization of two contemporary British Pagan movements; and how various communities in the television series *Game of Thrones* comment on medieval and/or contemporary nations. Nor are politics entirely absent from the final four articles in the volume, as they examine attempts to promote such particular agendas as toxic masculinity in *Game of Thrones*; misogyno-feminism there and in the George R.R. Martin book series on which the television program is based, *A Song of Ice and Fire*; the potential for audience self-realization amid the tension between the individual and the collective in *The Mere Wife*, Maria Dahvana Headley's 2018 adaptation of *Beowulf*; and ideal individual and collective behavior as modeled in the Ringling Brothers' 1912–13 spectacles about Joan of Arc.

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