



Blood Red, Sister Rose

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For centuries the story of Joan of Arc has held a special fascination for writers all over the world. Each has seen her in a different way. Novelist Thomas Keneally is no exception. For him Joan--or Jehanne--is a rather ordinary young girl, a plain-spoken bewildered adolescent--albeit one who literally saved France for Charles VII. Concentrating largely on the Maid's lifting of the seige of Orleans, Keaneally's research has been impeccable and his interpretation brilliant. As victory is assured, Jehanne--who by this time is regarded by many as an unchivalrous transvestite witch--undergoes a natural transformation which at once makes her woman and inevitably seals her doom. And she knew it.

Blood Red, Sister Rose Details

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From Reader Review Blood Red, Sister Rose for online ebook

Melisende d'Outremer says

Loved this! Joan of Arc from the perspective of Giles de Rais (aka: Bluebeard). Fascinating story of good and evil and one man's obsession.

Noelle says

Read this book at my high school library when I was growing up. The story of Joan of Arc, her remarkable life, and doing everything she has done, dying at 19. It just makes me wonder about the role models of young girls these days. And how different it was during my time.

Danielle Canever says

Heartbreaking.

Jo says

Most of us know something of the story of Joan of Arc, even if it is only the way in which she died and she has been a figure of interest for me for years –hence buying this book about twenty years ago. I'd also never read anything by Thomas Keneally and 'Schindlers list' is the only one of his books I am familiar with through the movie.

The Aussie author though, takes the story of Joan and puts his own spin on it making Joan an absolutely compelling character. Starting out as a simple peasant girl who is nevertheless set apart, the visions she experiences put her on a path to her King. The way in which she acts and reacts to the primarily male cast is passionate, brutally honest, down to earth, spiritually zealous and often comic.

It is the tongue in cheek dark comedy of the book that sets this apart from other historical novels, with the ridiculousness of war and the inequality between knights and peasants strong targets. It is almost reminiscent of Shakespeare in its comic touches and Keneally has the book set up like a play with all dialogue preceded by the name of the person speaking. This actually makes it really easy to read and understand who is who as there is a long list of characters with similar sounding names and it makes the often snappy dialogue more effective.

Sometimes the numerous war scenes get a little boring, ironically because much of war is portrayed as a series of set piece movements and rules orchestrated by the knights and Generals while the hoi polloi look on. King Charles for whom Jehanne (Joan) is ready to become a blood sacrifice for is effectively portrayed as a weak, odd looking, anxiety ridden man-boy with his mother-in-law Yolande being the real power. The way she and Jehanne manipulate the men around them is admirable and heartwarming in a world where their word usually held little sway even if they hold their religion has on them, and its absolute importance, is alien to many of us today.

I appreciated the fact that Kenneally didn't focus on Jehanne's death and only mentions it in a short letter at the end; it was the right move. Although tempted to Google much of what he writes about while reading the novel, I didn't want to ruin it and waited until the end to research. The series of events matches the record as do many of the characters but Kenneally makes them totally his own, making this feel an utterly human story of a remarkable girl and a unique and enjoyable read

Jennifer (aka EM) says

Not the fictionalized treatment of Joan of Arc's life that I was looking for. Focused on Joan as a soldier up to Charles's annointment at Rheims. Close to half of the book was endless, repetitive description of the battles between English (known here as the Goddams - hehe) and French in the lead-up to and liberation of Orleans; most of it focused on Joan's comrades in arms and her various relationships with them. By about p. 300 it became clear that there would be nothing of her capture or remarkable trial; nor was there much that probed the source of her conviction that she was the sister to Jesus Christ and the pre-ordained human sacrifice necessary to put Charles on the throne.

Might work for people most interested in the style of warfare used by the English-French at the time - but she didn't even really have to be in the story for that. Definitely the least interesting aspect of her life, death and legacy.

Disappointing.

Laura says

The famous tale of Jeanne D'Arc. However, I missed her judgement and her consequent execution.

Allyson Shaw says

Beautiful, vivid, strange. How did he do it? One of the best books I have read in a good long while.

Joseph says

I thought the story of Joan of Arc was supposed to be mystical and violent; at least, thats what makes it interesting. There's not much of that here - not in a good way, anyway.

John Newcomb says

Having read a book about the Apache wars where women and children on both sides suffered all kinds of atrocities, followed by a book about a son murdering his mother and a father murdering his daughter, I thought it would be safe to read a book with a strong female lead dishing it out to all who cross her.

Unfortunately, despite a heap of victories it all ends in tears (and fire) for poor old St. Joan. Unlike Shaw's sassy Joan, Vita Sackville-West's divinity and Luc Besson's action hero, this Joan is a peasant girl made good which makes it an interesting take on the legend.
