WEEK 37, 2020
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# ARTS& CULTURE

A small American flag carried ashore by the 2nd Battalion, 28th Marines is planted atop Mount Suribachi on the island of Iwo Jima on Feb. 23, 1945. Japan surrendered to the Allies on Sept. 2, 1945.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

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FINE ARTS

# CELEBRATING REMBRANDT'S IMPORTANT PUPIL BEYOND HIS MASTER'S INFLUENCE

## ‘Nicolaes Maes: Dutch Master of the Golden Age’ at the National Gallery, London

**LORRAINE FERRIER**

In the painting “Christ Blessing the Children,” earthly browns and pockets of red dominate the divinely touching scene of Jesus blessing children whom their parents so eagerly present to him.

The girl being blessed by Christ appears to hold an apple, perhaps symbolic of the original sin when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The girl seems distracted by something in the distance. As she appears to pull away from Christ, he gently pulls her toward his divine blessing. These subtle gestures allude to the fact that the sins inherent in the human world pull us away from our innate divinity. Only faith in the divine offers us salvation.

To the left of the painting, a mother holds her babe who, yet untainted by the world, looks up to the heavens almost knowingly feeling such divine grace.

The picture is so reminiscent of Rembrandt's subject matter and painterly approach that when the National Gallery in London acquired “Christ Blessing the Children” in 1866, the painting was attributed to Rembrandt rather than the real painter: Rembrandt's student and fellow Dutchman Nicolaes Maes.

Regarded as one of Rembrandt's most important students, Maes (1634–1693) studied in Rembrandt's studio in Amsterdam sometime between 1649 and 1653. And although Maes's paintings from that period reflect his master's hand, Maes moved on to a different oeuvre and often to a far more colorful palette after he departed Rembrandt's tutelage.

### An Influential Dutch Master

Maes found fame in his own right. His pioneering genre paintings depicting Dutch interiors with intimate, and sometimes humorous, domestic scenes directly influenced the Dutch painters Johannes Vermeer and Pieter de Hooch. And Maes's portrait paintings—he painted around 900—were in high demand, making him one of the most sought-after portraitists in late 17th-century Holland.

The exhibition “Nicolaes Maes: Dutch Master of the Golden Age,” at the National Gallery in London, explores Maes's art through 48 paintings and drawings. It is the first international exhibition on Maes alone. The exhibition was organized by the National Gallery and the Mauritshuis museum in The Hague, where the exhibition premiered. The London exhibition is supported by The Thompson Family Charitable Trust.

Divided into three rooms, the exhibition reflects the three distinctive periods of Maes's artwork: the historic and biblical scenes he painted at the start of his career, the genre paintings (domestic scenes) he painted primarily in the mid-1650s, and the portraits he painted exclusively from just before 1660 until his death.

**Maes's portrait paintings—he painted around 900—were in high demand, making him the most sought-after portraitist in late 17th-century Holland.**

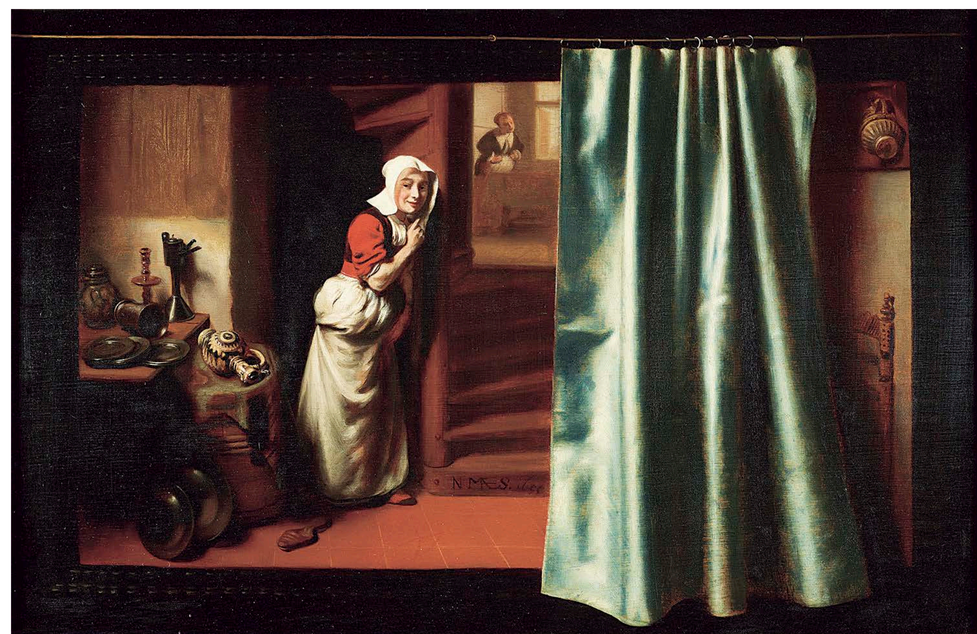
### Everyday Eavesdropping

Maes was born in Dordrecht, Holland; his father was a cloth merchant. Fine textures, used in different ways depending on the subject, feature prominently in many of Maes's artworks. For instance, in his 1655 painting “The Eavesdropper,” a fine blue-green satin or silk curtain hangs open, revealing a servant descending a staircase as she gestures to the viewer to keep quiet while she listens in on her mistress. The curtain allows a peek into another world and also indicates the homeowner's wealth.

Later, in Maes's portrait paintings, immensely fine fabrics clothe the wealthy owners who peer out of the paintings. The attention Maes pays to the rendering of these fabrics is no less than that in his earlier, everyday scenes where sumptuous fabrics look silky to the touch.

Maes painted these genre paintings after he left Amsterdam and Rembrandt's studio and returned to Dordrecht. His genre paintings seem like theater scenes, where his subjects whisper out of the painting to gain the viewer's approval of their wrongdoing or to challenge the viewer's morals. For instance, in his famous eavesdropper paintings, women gesture to viewers to “ssshh!” as they catch others partaking in immoral activity. Or we viewers disturb a woman's own unrighteous behavior. For instance, in the painting “A Sleeping Man Having His Pockets Picked,” a mischievous servant almost makes the viewer her accomplice as she jovially gestures for silence while she reaches over to pick a gentleman's pocket. And in the painting “Two Women at a Window,” a maid stops working to gossip with a friend through a window, unaware that a dog is salivating at the salmon steak she carries.

GUILDHALL ART GALLERY, CITY OF LONDON



“The Eavesdropper,” 1655, by Nicolaes Maes. Oil on panel; 18 inches by 28 3/8 inches. Harold Samuel Collection, Mansion House, London.



THE NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON

“Christ Blessing the Children,” circa 1652–3, by Nicolaes Maes. Oil on canvas; 85 7/8 inches by 60 5/8 inches. The National Gallery, London.

In addition, many of Maes's genre paintings effectively convey traditional feminine virtues that were held in high esteem. Women are pictured diligently carrying out their daily chores, such as a woman engrossed in embroidery or a girl concentrating hard to thread a needle.

Other paintings show often-humorous scenes of idleness or exhaustion after a hard day's work: An accountant falls asleep during her accounting; a maid sleeps soundly surrounded by fallen pots, as she appears to have fallen asleep while carrying earthenware to the kitchen.

### Flamboyant Portraits

Maes returned to Amsterdam in 1673, where he began to concentrate on painting portraits in a style similar to French portraiture and that of the preeminent Flemish portrait painter Anthony van Dyck.

Maes's portraits often included fantastical costumes and idealized backdrops of parklands or ancient influences such as the mythological Greek huntress Artemis, known for her virginity, who seems echoed in his portrait of a girl with a deer. Clothed in an incredible blue dress, reflecting the color of many Madonnas depicted in Renaissance paintings, the girl looks serenely and assuredly out of the painting. Her gaze and the stag's piercing eye contact with the viewer startlingly capture attention.

The painting is one of a pair. The other painting is of the girl's brother, who could be construed as Apollo: The boy gaily bounds in a magnificent orange satin costume, while he balances a bird on his hand and carries a quiver of arrows on his back.

Another fascinating aspect of the exhibition is that some of the paintings are in their original 17th-century frames, which rarely survive. Those frames allow viewers insight into how the sitters wanted to be portrayed. The portrait of Simon van Alphen is a particularly dashing example, both in the enigmatic subject and the simple, elegant frame.

Overall, the exhibition “Nicolaes Maes: Dutch Master of the Golden Age” lets visitors view the versatility of Maes's artistry as he moved beyond Rembrandt's influence and made his distinctive mark on Dutch genre painting and portraiture.

*To find out more about the exhibition ‘Nicolaes Maes: Dutch Master of the Golden Age’ at the National Gallery, in London, which runs until Sept. 20, visit NationalGallery.org.uk*

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“Portrait of a Girl With a Deer,” circa 1671, by Nicolaes Maes. Oil on canvas; 52 1/8 inches by 40 1/8 inches. Private collection.

RIJKSMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM

Portrait of Simon van Alphen, circa 1677, by Nicolaes Maes. Oil on canvas; 28 1/8 inches by 22 1/2 inches. C.H. de Koning bequest, The Hague. Rijksmuseum.

DORDRECHTS MUSEUM

Self-portrait, 1680–5, by Nicolaes Maes. Oil on canvas; 24 3/8 inches by 18 7/8 inches. Dordrechts Museum, Dordrecht.


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Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz signing the surrender agreement on behalf of the United States aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay on Sept. 2, 1945. This print is from the original photograph negative.

HISTORY

# SACRIFICE, COURAGE, PATRIOTISM

## *A Visit to the National Museum of the Pacific War*

**JEFF MINICK**

Maybe you're interested in teaching your children more about their country's past. Maybe you're a history buff looking for adventure. Or maybe you're a lover of museums and memorials.

Or maybe, like me, you enjoy reading books about the American story, particularly our military history. You find pleasure and inspiration in Shelby Foote's "The Civil War," as I did so long ago, or in David McCullough's "John Adams," or the inspirational stories of our World War II veterans in books by Stephen Ambrose.

If so, you might consider a visit to Fredericksburg, Texas.

### Germans, Buffalo, and President Lyndon Johnson

Never heard of Fredericksburg?

Let me introduce you to this quaint town, population 11,000, in the Texas Hill Country.

Founded by German settlers in 1846, many of Fredericksburg's older buildings, the surnames of its inhabitants, an annual Oktoberfest, and the food on the menus of some of its restaurants—Friedhelm's Bavarian Inn, Otto's German Bistro, and The Auslander—still reflect the heritage of those early settlers. Here, too, inhabitants and tourists mingle at Texas wineries, music festivals, and art galleries.

Fredericksburg keeps in touch with its past in other ways as well. The Pioneer Museum tells of the hardships and obstacles those German settlers faced and overcame in their adopted land. Visitors can take a self-guided tour of the Fort Martin Scott Historic Site, one of the first Army posts in Texas, or drive 20 minutes out of town to explore the Lyndon B. Johnson State Park and Historic Site, where they can see Texas longhorns, buffalo, and a variety of Texas wildflowers. In this same park is the Sauer-Beckmann Living History Farm, where park rangers in period costumes tend to livestock and gardens, and cook while telling the story of the century-old farm and answering the questions of tourists.

But the most ambitious of these attractions, and certainly the most grand, is Fredericksburg's National Museum of the Pacific War, which I recently explored online.

### A War to the Death

Unlike any other conflict in our history, the war we fought against the Japanese was merciless, mired in cultural and racial hatred on both sides, and often a cruel, grim battle to the death. Because of their code of bushido and their loyalty to Emperor Hirohito, the Japanese rarely surrendered. When faced with surrender, Japanese soldiers and pilots preferred making suicidal attacks on our troops and ships, or themselves committed suicide when they saw that all was lost. Their brutal treatment of those Americans who surrendered to them was a direct result of these beliefs.

And the stakes in this conflict—the control of the vast Pacific Ocean—were enormous. From Pearl Harbor in 1941 to the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, the war between imperial Japan and the United States decided who would determine the future of the world's largest body of water.

We may now look back and see American victory as a given, but such was not the case in the dire days of the beginning of that war when the Japanese were advancing on every front against the forces of the United States. Even after winning the Battle of Midway in June of 1942, when we crushed Japanese air and naval forces, the war against the Japanese was a slog rather than a rout.

The number of Americans who paid with their lives in that theater was 111,606. The total for the Japanese military was 1,740,000. Add in the number of casualties—the dead and the missing, the wounded and the sick, military personnel and civilians—in countries like the Philippines and China, and the numbers stagger the imagination, about 36 million, or half of the casualties of World War II.

(Below)
The National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas, offers visitors three galleries, including one named after Admiral Nimitz.

ALL PHOTOS BY NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISE

BILLY HATHORN CC BY-SA 3.0

**If we fail to take advantage of the wisdom and lessons our past offers us, the fault lies not with our museums but with ourselves.**

### Paying Homage

A Texas Historical Commission Property and managed and supported by the Admiral Nimitz Foundation, the National Museum of the Pacific War, which was founded in 1969, exists chiefly to remember that dreadful conflict and to honor those who served their country at the time.

Dedicated solely to the fighting in the Pacific, this unique museum offers visitors three galleries with 55,000 square feet of exhibit space on six acres in the heart of the town. You can tour the Admiral Nimitz Gallery—Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz was a native son of Fredericksburg—with its many multimedia exhibits and personal items from the Nimitz family.

In the George H.W. Bush Gallery—former President Bush was a fighter pilot in the Pacific—are more multimedia exhibits, oral histories, artifacts taken from battlefields, and letters and diaries from the American home front. And when you step into the Pacific Combat Zone, you not only see a TBM Avenger and PT-309 (for the uninitiated, that's a torpedo bomber aircraft and a patrol boat, respectively), but you also experience the sights and sounds of an island battlefield come to life.

In addition, the museum provides its 100,000 annual visitors the opportunity to stroll through the Plaza of Presidents, with its monuments honoring those who served in the war, including John F. Kennedy and George Bush, both of whom saw combat fighting the Japanese. Plaques in the Memorial Courtyard and its Veterans' Walk of Honor recognize units and individuals who performed above and beyond the call of duty in the fighting, and a Japanese Garden of Peace includes a replica of the study of Japanese Admiral Heihachiro Togo, a military genius famed for his role in the Russo-Japanese War and much admired by Admiral Nimitz.

Historians and students of the war (by appointment only) will also find a treasure trove of thousands of documents, manuscripts, photographs, and recorded histories of Pacific War veterans at the Nimitz Education & Research Center.

### Bringing the Museum Into Your Living Room

Not all of us can make the trip to Fredericksburg, but for those who are homeschooling or distance learning from a public or private school, or for adults inclined to learn more about the history of the war with Japan, the museum's website offers a wonderful array of resources, guides, and aids. Extensive lesson plans are available for the study of American and world history, featuring links to grade-appropriate plans and addressing such topics as "The Home Front," "Japanese Empire Culture," and "Advancing Across The Pacific." There are even distance learning classes, where registered students receive direct instruction from teachers and professors on a variety of topics regarding the war.

In addition, the website offers live-streaming classes, educational curriculum for young people, a blog filled with oral histories, videos such as the one set on the museum's replicated Pacific island battleground, and all sorts of insights into history, ranging from how to change a tire on a jeep to the role played by women on the home front.

Finally, we find on this site archives of the Nimitz News Dispatch, the museum's quarterly newsletters filled with additional information, as well as a gift shop chock full of books about World War II and various reproductions of posters and other memorabilia.

Altogether, the museum contains more than 50,000 artifacts from the war along with thousands of manuscripts, documents, and interviews.

To sum up, here is a museum, like so many others in our country, focused on an important part of American history. The materials gathered here—the archives, the oral histories, the hands-on exhibits—all these and more attempt to keep alive the memories of our fathers, grandparents, and great-grandparents. We learn of the challenges they faced and the trials, some of them horrific, they endured. Many women of that time grieved the loss of husbands, brothers, or fiancés to the cruel grinding wheels of war. Many men, a lot of them no older than today's college students, gave up their lives fighting for liberty.

The National Museum of the Pacific War asks us to remember them. But do we?

### Forgetting Is Fatal

Mention Pacific battlefields—Bataan, Guadalcanal, Midway, Saipan, Leyte Gulf, and Okinawa—to many people today, and all too often you'll receive a blank stare in return. Mention the names Jonathan Wainwright, Chester Nimitz, Douglas MacArthur, "Red Mike" Edson, Jimmy Doolittle, and you'll likely get the same reaction.

When we forget those who died, bled, and fought for our country, not only in the Pacific but also throughout our history, when we close our eyes to the sacrifices made by past generations, we become orphans battered by the storm of current events. Such negligence comes with a high price, and may even prove fatal to the future of our nation.

Institutions like the National Museum of the Pacific War perform a noble service for our country. In their preservation of the past, those who direct our museums of history and those who work in them ask us to learn from the men and women who came before us, who built this country and whose sacrifices allow us to enjoy liberty and prosperity. If we fail to take advantage of the wisdom and lessons this past offers us, the fault lies not with our museums but with ourselves.

### Freedom Is Never Free

In "With the Old Breed," which many historians consider the finest American memoir on combat in World War II and which provided the background for the miniseries "The Pacific," Eugene Sledge recounts his training as a Marine and his participation in the horrific fighting at Peleliu and Okinawa. Sledge closes his memoir with these words:

"Until the millennium arrives and countries cease trying to enslave others, it will be necessary to accept one's responsibilities and to be willing to make sacrifices for one's country—as my comrades did. As the troops used to say, 'If the country is good enough to live in, it's good enough to fight for.' With privilege goes responsibility."

Compared to so many other people in the world, Americans enjoy enormous privileges. Museums help us recollect our responsibilities.

Sept. 2, 2020, marked the 75th anniversary of the official Japanese surrender. The date may have passed, but we can nonetheless pause and contemplate the enormity of that event. And should I ever visit Texas again, Fredericksburg and the National Museum of the Pacific War will stand at the top of the list of places I want to see. That journey would be less a tourist's jaunt and more a pilgrimage of gratitude and admiration for all those who fought or died on those faraway battlefields or who served on the home front, and so helped preserve the liberties of our unique country.

**1.** Visitors seeing a projected newspaper report of Japan's surrender during World War II.

**2.** The Japanese Garden of Peace includes a replica of the study of Japanese Admiral Heihachiro Togo, a military genius famed for his role in the Russo-Japanese War.

**3.** The Pioneer Village Museum in Fredericksburg, Texas.

**4.** An aerial photo of USS Missouri taken during the surrender ceremony.

**5.** While some of the museum is closed during the pandemic, visitors can visit virtually.

*Several of the museum's attractions, including the popular "Victory in the Pacific Program," are suspended until the end of 2020 because of the pandemic, and the museum has restricted its hours of operation. To enjoy the museum virtually, visit PacificWarMuseum.org*

*Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C. Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.*

SAMEER A. KHAN

COURTESY OF MIKE FRANCE

**(Above)** Mike France, co-founder of Christopher Ward, the world's first online-only luxury watch brand.
**(Below)** The Christopher Ward C65 Super Compressor.

The late Sir Roger Scruton, writer and philosopher, at Princeton University in New Jersey on April 3, 2017. He believed that beauty matters.

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

# A Watchmaker, Artist, and Guitarist Explain Why Beauty Matters

Beauty in art and artisanship deepens our very existence

J.H. WHITE

A sculptor told me recently that Sir Roger Scruton's documentary "Why Beauty Matters" had a profound effect on his life and career as an artist. I watched it and couldn't agree more with Scruton.

"Beauty matters. It is not just a subjective thing but a universal need of human beings," Scruton says.

Though Scruton passed away early this year, his message continues to reverberate. I called up three professionals from different creative fields to get their perspectives.

### A Timeless Virtue

"Beauty is an emotional engagement," says Mike France, co-founder of Christopher Ward, the world's first online-only luxury watch brand. "It needs to be in the touch and the feel of the materials, in the [sounds] that the watch makes, in the precision of the way things move."

For example, France explains that his team labored for hundreds of hours so that the bezel made the right clicking sound on their vintage-inspired C65 dive watches.

"Every sense has to be engaged in a watch," he says. France wants customers to have an unforgettable experience from the moment they open a Christopher Ward box, the world's first sustainable luxury packaging. Christopher Ward spent 12 months crafting it just so that it creates a suction upon being opened, adding a subtle touch to the anticipation of opening the box when a buyer gets the watch.

Since Christopher Ward is only available online and does not have retail locations, the customers have not actually seen the timepieces in person.

"All design teams should be looking for something that encapsulates a design, something distinctive enough that it can live on every watch," he says. The dive watches, for example, include signature details like the Trident symbol on the counterbalance. "It's a surprise. People often don't see it until they own the watch. They think, 'Oh, this is even better than I thought it was.'"

COURTESY OF NEMANJA REBIC

Guitarist, composer, and guitar instructor Nemanja Rebic.

But France explains that with Christopher Ward timepieces, beauty extends beyond your senses.

"One of the ways in which we value things and value the beauty of things is if we are aware that they have been difficult to make and that somebody has poured their efforts and expertise into them," he says.

He likens it to his daughter, who is an opera singer. Yes, she was born with a beautiful voice, but she's put in 10,000 hours to develop it.

"Most people do not understand that it took her eight years of intensive training to train her voice to the level it's at now. Still, every single day, she trains. She produces beautiful sounds, but that's because she's worked hard at it," he says. "That perspiration, blood, sweat, tears, effort, and the grindstone are part of beauty."

Christopher Ward's new timepiece C65 Super Compressor (available this fall) exemplifies the sentiment that "beauty wouldn't have a value if it was easy," France says.

Fifty years ago, a super compressor's case became more airtight as the diver increased the depth of the dive. But since the early 1970s, that super compressor technology has been a mystery. While famous watch brands have introduced "super compressors" in recent years, none of them actually performed the job, France says. "We wanted to produce a genuine one."

Christopher Ward reverse-engineered the vintage models. Over several years of effort, France's team crafted a tension spring that has enabled the magic of the compression. This little spring is only 300 microns thick—the thickness of four human hairs.

But Christopher Ward didn't stop with crafting a real super compressor that was waterproof to 500 feet (150 meters). France wanted to showcase the beauty of the watch's inner workings. So his team made a see-through caseback, the first ever for a super compressor.

Even though the company could have released a super compressor that didn't actually work, France is happy they persevered. "Honesty has a beauty as well. The best art, poetry, and literature are nearly always when they are honest," he says. "Being honest about the work you're doing plays a part in the beauty of what you end up producing."

### Origins From Above

Visual artist Paula Wilson believes beauty reflects divinity.

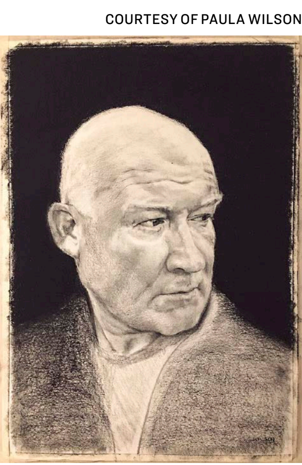
"I have a responsibility because I'm drawing or painting humans. We are created in the image of God. We've all got divine origins," says Wilson. "So it's a disservice for me not to portray people properly, in that light."

COURTESY OF PAULA WILSON

**If you want to keep refining your art, you have to keep refining yourself.**

*Paula Wilson, artist*

COURTESY OF PAULA WILSON



A portrait of author Ethan Gutmann by Paula Wilson.

As a young teenager, Wilson hadn't yet reached that understanding about art. The bane of her mother's existence, Wilson drew cartoons all over the walls and ceilings of their home.

"I was quite wild," she says with a laugh. "I just wanted to express myself artistically." But art as a career never seemed a viable path, and she gave up art until adult life in the early 2010s. She began drawing again with charcoal and Conté à Paris, pencils that allow for various techniques and effects for drawing, sketching, and pastel work.

If she wants to create beautiful works of art, Wilson realizes that she has to improve her inner world in tandem with her external skill.

"Traditional art is a high skill that has been passed down from a high place," she says. "You have to have a lot of respect for it, because it is really quite difficult. You can't just do it. You have to learn it and practice and practice it." But it's not just a matter of artistic skill, either.

For example, as she starts a new piece, "it's like facing yourself," she says. Boredom, impatience, irritability, and all of her emotional and mental blockages surface as she works on the proportions and layout.

"You have to keep going with it and not give up," she says. As she goes through her sketch or painting, layer by layer, her fears and frustrations fade away. She becomes more connected to the divine, and a sense of peace overcomes her.

"If you want to keep refining your art, you have to keep refining yourself," she says. "You want to offer hope to humanity through the art. What you put down on paper, you want it to be beautiful and carry a lot of virtue. So you have to cultivate those virtuous qualities in yourself, as a person."

### A World of Beauty

"When something is truly beautiful, almost everyone will just stop and be astonished. I witnessed that when I worked in a museum," says guitarist Nemanja Rebic.

In "amazing paintings, there's a composition, just like music. In painting and music, the composition has to be balanced. If you follow those specific rules [of balance] and, of course, add your heart and own touch to it, you can produce art that just hits us. It's intrinsic to our nature. It's something very close to us, very universal."

Rebic explains, for instance, that a painter uses colors, light, and shade. In music, he also uses color. "It's just that I use colors that you hear," he says. "I know what specific notes or set of notes can produce a certain emotion. I use those notes, or colors, to express what I want at that moment."

Rebic is from Serbia and has studied Western and Indian classical music. He also draws inspiration from classical Chinese music.

No matter which region around the globe, "classical music is rooted in the belief of the divine. It was divinely inspired art created in temples in the East and churches in the West."

When Rebic first moved to New York City, he attended a concert he'll never forget. The musician, Shahid Parvez, performed on the sitar, a classical Indian stringed instrument. He started playing a long introduction or "Alap," often performed as part of a musical piece in Indian classical music.

"I just started crying uncontrollably. It was kind of embarrassing," Rebic says with a chuckle. He wondered why he was so moved by the performance. "I believe in reincarnation. It really hit something from a very long time ago that I experienced."

Rebic went on to study with Parvez, learning North Indian classical (Hindustani) sitar techniques on his guitar. As Rebic has refined his craft, incorporating classical elements from different regions, he now experiences that same catharsis when making his own music.

Recently, for example, a friend sent Rebic a poem about forced organ harvesting from Falun Gong practitioners in China. Falun Gong is a peaceful meditation practice that's been heavily persecuted in China since 1999. Along with other prisoners of conscience, Falun Gong practitioners are currently being killed for their organs. Rebic has been practicing Falun Gong for 10 years.

He began composing a song based on this poem. But he was experiencing songwriter's block since the topic was both so heavy and important. He stepped back and took a break.

Rebic had one simple wish. "I really wanted to create something that honors ancient Chinese culture, which I really cherish," he says. "Just when I had this thought, something came to me."

On his guitar, Rebic started playing a piece that simulated the guqin, a plucked seven-string classical Chinese instrument. The guqin sounds ethereal and pleasant with its signature long notes and beautiful ornamentation.

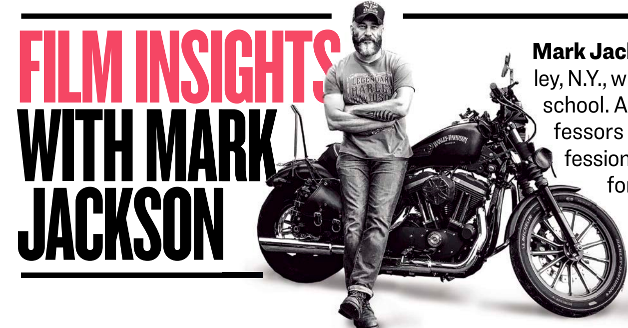
"This full piece was coming out as I was playing it," he says. It wasn't just an improvisation or melody; it was a full song with different parts that worked in harmony with each other. "As I was playing, I was crying. I started remembering something from thousands of years ago. It was this very deep feeling." He recorded it and can now even hear his sobs as he played.

"It was quite a magical experience, because the piece came out from beginning to end. I didn't have a concept before I started playing. It just came out. I still am baffled by that experience. I can't even take much credit for it honestly, but it felt real."

Beauty connects us to higher realms of being. As Scruton says in "Why Beauty Matters," "If we ignore this need [for beauty], we find ourselves in a spiritual desert."

*J.H. White is an arts, culture, and men's fashion journalist living in New York.*






**Mark Jackson** grew up in Spring Valley, N.Y., where he attended a Waldorf school. At Williams College, his professors all suggested he write professionally. He acted professionally for 20 years instead. Now he writes professionally about acting. In the movies.

ALL PHOTOS BY WARNER BROS.

**(Above)** Bradley Cooper (L) and Clint Eastwood on the set of "American Sniper."

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

# Dirty Harry Directs SEAL Story in Ironic Twist

MARK JACKSON

U.S. Navy SEAL Chris Kyle had four tours of duty in Iraq, earned a reputation as the most lethal sniper in U.S. military history, and started a program to heal disabled vets—only to return stateside and get shot and killed by a Marine with post-traumatic stress disorder.

The riveting Clint Eastwood-directed "American Sniper," released in 2015, joined "Act of Valor" and "Lone Survivor" to become one of the most authentic cinematic portrayals of SEAL culture to date. While "Act of Valor" featured actual active-duty SEALs in acting roles, "American Sniper" rivals that movie as a top-tier combat movie.

Although it precisely follows Kyle's autobiography of the same name—factually, not tonally—"American Sniper" is not a thorough accounting of Kyle's life. More on that later.

**'American Sniper'**

**Director**
Clint Eastwood

**Starring**
Bradley Cooper, Sienna Miller, Luke Grimes, E.R. Ruiz, Jake McDorman, Brian Hallisay

**Rated**
R

**Running Time**
2 hours, 13 minutes

**Release Date**
Jan. 16, 2015

★★★★☆

### Flashbacks

The movie opens on Kyle (Bradley Cooper), prone in a rooftop sniper-hide in Fallujah, Iraq. Who's in his crosshairs? An Iraqi woman handing off a big grenade to her 8-year-old son, who then proceeds to walk toward a Marine convoy.

It's a perfect example of why war is hell. As the audience winces and digs in, we're suddenly flashed back to Kyle's boyhood in Odessa, Texas (home of the Permian Panthers high school football team of "Friday Night Lights" fame). Kyle's out deer hunting with dad. When it comes to marksmanship, Kyle has Tiger Woods's early-start advantage. Tiger talent, too.

As a young man, he rides broncos to the exasperation of a bored girlfriend, who Kyle catches "in flagrante delicto" upon returning home early from a rodeo gig. "I just do this to get your attention!" she shrieks. Kyle decides it's time for a change.

Kyle finds change at Naval Special Warfare Command, Naval Amphibious Base Coronado, San Diego. It's the home of the West Coast SEAL teams and the notorious Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) course.

BUD/S training, otherwise known as SEAL bootcamp, is famous for its brutality. It can easily kill a man. It doesn't separate boys from men; it separates already tough men from world-class warriors.

Sienna Miller as Chris Kyle's wife, Taya.

More flashbacks establish what will become Kyle's stateside narrative—the courtship of his wife-to-be, Taya (British actress Sienna Miller, in a shape-shifting performance as a brunette).

U.S. Special Operations personnel don't lightly reveal what they do, instead saying things like, "I'm the guy who sits in the ATM machine and dispenses cash," and during Kyle and Taya's initial verbal sparring at a bar, Kyle maintains he's a "professional dolphin waxer." Taya's got his number, though, and it's a proverbial whirlwind romance.

### Iraq

All too soon, Kyle is "in-country," stacking the Taliban like cordwood. The Iraqis begin calling him "Shaitan Ar-Ramadi" (the "Devil of Ramadi"). The Americans call him "The Legend."

With an $800,000 price on his head, Kyle's finally in his element. With his .300 Winchester Magnum, he excels at the complicated math of it all: yardage, windage, bullet spin, and the Coriolis force (Earth rotation/curvature).

He can compute fast, and under the extreme duress of instantaneous life-or-death decision-making (who's a combatant, who's a civilian), not to mention lethal incoming rounds and shrapnel. Wrong combat decisions could mean lawsuits and court-martials.

We watch Kyle chalk up kill after kill, nailing Iraqi insurgents he observes planting IEDs (improvised explosive devices), suicide-jockeying car bombs, and creeping hither and yon schlepping AK-47s. His platoon hunts al-Qaeda beheading specialist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, al-Zarqawi's lieutenant "The Butcher" (whose weapon of choice is the power drill), and Syrian sniper Mustafa, a former Olympian marksman.

Bradley Cooper as the American hero Chris Kyle.

The movie switches back and forth between four collections of war stories (labeled, naturally, "Tour One," "Tour Two," and so on) and the ever-deteriorating state of Kyle's marriage.

This switching has a ratio similar to that of a NASCAR race, with Iraq being track laps, and Taya-time the pit stops. This is unfortunately the hard reality of Special Forces culture; Navy SEALs, like Navy pilots, tend to be adrenaline junkies, which is more often than not ruinous to relationships.

Modern warfare can eventually become ruinous to warriors as well. We see its creeping effects in the soldier's classic thousand-yard stare, thanks to Cooper's muscled-up, bull-necked, soft-spoken, Texas-twanging, gun-culture-steeped, Southern-male, Oscar-nominated performance. It rings highly authentic. Its authenticity is due also to Eastwood's directing: America's onscreen manliest man telling war stories about America's manliest men.

And yet Eastwood left out one of the most interesting (and tragic) stories of Kyle's life, which was recounted by former Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell, author of the bestselling "Lone Survivor." Luttrell is a fellow Texan and former sniper. He and Kyle were buddies. Leaving the following story in might have helped explain some things.

### Omission

Fact is, when Kyle got home, he bought a brand-new, tricked-out truck. Went to the gas station to gas up. Two men exited a car, drew guns, and demanded the keys. Kyle automatically (just another day at the office) sized up which miscreant handled his gun better, slowly reached for the keys, then pulled his own Colt 1911 and fired two shots under his left armpit, killing both thieves instantly.

Then he proceeded to lean up against his truck and smoke a cigarette until local law enforcement arrived. The cops ran his license; he gave them a number to call, where some higher-up at the War Department informed them that they were dealing with one of America's most decorated war heroes. The police didn't want to involve a highly decorated veteran in a legal situation, along with all the media bells and whistles.

### The Irony

I attended the premiere of "American Sniper" at the Tribeca Film Center. It was packed. I thought, "That's way more journalists than usual." Usually, when the credits roll, film critics exit the movie theater en masse with alacrity. This time, only a few people left; the majority stayed, in a state of deep, respectful silence. I thought, "That's odd." Went to the restroom and returned to the lobby, which was now packed with young men who all looked like NFL running backs. I thought, "Ahh, most of this crowd aren't press; this is a big group of Navy SEAL friends of Chris Kyle."

I recognized one, Brandon Webb; I'd read his book—he'd revamped, single-handedly, the entire SEAL sniper school. I introduced myself and told him I enjoyed his book. He asked me what I thought of the movie. I really wanted to hear what he thought of the movie, but I told him I wondered why the above truck story got left out of the movie, and why Kyle left it out of his autobiography. And then I thanked him for his service and exited the theater with alacrity, because putting a question mark next to a Navy SEAL who died, in front of his SEAL best friend, struck me as very much akin to walking near a lake of gasoline with a lit match.

**Modern warfare can eventually become ruinous to warriors.**

So why bring it up? Because in order to be able to discuss the moral of the story, we need the whole story. Eastwood portrayed pure heroism, Hollywood style, but there's a flagrant omission of truth.

What irony, you ask? Here's the deal: Kyle's Colt 1911 is a .44 Magnum. That's a "Dirty Harry" gun. As Dirty Harry says: "This is a .44 Magnum, the most powerful handgun in the world. It can blow a man's head clean off." Who directed "American Sniper"? Dirty Harry did. That makes the fact that Dirty Harry omitted this gun narrative rather ironic.

### Moral of the Story

Fighting for your country is one thing, and doing it well is even better. With 255 kills, Kyle served his country—he was good to go. Then he killed two civilians at a gas station. Shortly after, he was killed by an ex-Marine with PTSD whom he was trying to help. The fact that so many war vets with PTSD are not getting help is one of the greatest crimes in the United States. Our homeless veterans are legion.

But we in America love "Dirty Harry" vigilante stories too much. We, especially guys (me included), romanticize the idea of a manly man with whom you absolutely do not mess. But there are differences between warriors in war, and warriors in civilian life. Different rules of engagement and rules of law apply. In Kyle's era, the U.S. military was more known for pinning medals on its heroes' chests and sweeping their PTSD under the rug.

I sure as heck wouldn't want anyone stealing my brand new truck either. But I'd like to think if I had Kyle's sidearm accuracy skills with a .44 Magnum, I'd have blown a couple of hands or feet off and waited for the cops to take them to the hospital and then to jail. Then it's all legal, and nobody, not law enforcement, not Kyle, and not Eastwood, would have had to fudge the truth.

**REACHING WITHIN:**
WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

# A Harmonious Culture Creates Riches: 'Forging of the Sampo'

**ERIC BESS**

The story of the Sampo is told in the Finnish epic "Kalevala," which was compiled from the poems and songs of Finnish oral traditions. The Sampo was a powerful and mysterious device that had a lid of many colors, three mills on its sides, and produced endless fortune. Outside of this description, however, no one really knows exactly what the Sampo was or what it looked like.

The story of the Sampo found its beginning with a bard and sage as old as the earth itself, Vainamoinen. Vainamoinen was washed up on the shores of the evil land of Pohjola. This land was also the evil counterpart of the land of heroes, called Kalevala, from which Vainamoinen came and where the Finnish epic gets its name.

Pohjola's ruler, the evil witch Louhi, found the hero Vainamoinen on the shore and nursed him back to health. In return for her kindness, Louhi told the hero that she wanted something which would create for her an endless source of wealth—the Sampo. Vainamoinen agreed to find her a Sampo, but he knew of only one being with the ability to create such a thing: the eternal hammerer, Ilmarinen.

Ilmarinen was said to use his tools to hammer the firmament into shape. Vainamoinen tried to convince Ilmarinen to help him, but the hammerer had no intention of helping the evil land of Pohjola. In order to obtain Ilmarinen's help, Vainamoinen summoned a storm, which carried Ilmarinen to Pohjola.

Ilmarinen was treated very well in Pohjola. He was even offered the hand of Louhi's beautiful daughter if he would make the Sampo. These kindnesses made him agree to undertake the task.

At first, while trying to make the Sampo, Ilmarinen produced only objects that caused harm. But after summoning the wind to work the bellows, he was able to forge the Sampo in three days.

Ilmarinen completed and presented the Sampo to Louhi, who, with access to endless wealth—grain, salt, and gold—was excited. She locked up the Sampo inside a mountain. Finished with his task, Ilmarinen went to accept Louhi's daughter's hand in marriage, but she refused.

Years passed and Pohjola prospered, but Vainamoinen and Ilmarinen suffered. Fed up with their struggles, the two decided to take back the Sampo for themselves. They recruited Lemminkainen, a hero noted for his beauty, to help them on their journey.

When they approached Louhi, they requested half of the Sampo's wealth or they'd take it by force. Louhi was outraged and summoned her dark forces to battle.

Vainamoinen, however, was a wonderful musician and lulled her evil minions to sleep with his music. The three heroes were able to take the Sampo without anyone noticing. In their escape at sea, however, Lemminkainen asked Vainamoinen to sing a celebratory song. Vainamoinen, believing it too early to celebrate, refused to sing.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

"Forging of the Sampo," 1893, by Akseli Gallen-Kallela. Oil on canvas, 78.7 inches by 59.8 inches. Ateneum, Helsinki.

But Lemminkainen was unable to control his excitement and sang loudly and badly, so loudly that he woke up Louhi and her dark forces.

Louhi and her troops followed the three heroes out to sea. In the struggle, as Louhi tried to take back the Sampo, it dropped into the sea and was forever lost.

**'Forging of the Sampo'**

Akseli Gallen-Kallela was a Finnish painter during the 19th century. He traveled extensively and learned a great deal from the artistic styles of French realism and symbolism. He was able to use the lessons gained from these styles to express his love for this own culture by illustrating stories from the "Kalevala."

In "Forging of the Sampo," Gallen-Kallela depicted multiple figures creating the Sampo. The painting shows workers in a wooded environment of muted browns and greens contrasted with intense oranges and yellows.

In the foreground are two figures to the left and center of the composition who look into an opening that contains a fire. Also in the foreground, smithing tools sit on a trunk stump.

The figure in the center looks intently at what is presumably the unfinished Sampo, which remains concealed behind a structure built from wood and rock that contains the fire. The other figure also looks intently into the fire and appears to be using a very large branch to possibly adjust the Sampo's position in the fire.

The line of sight of these two figures leads us to the standing log at the right of the composition. The standing log leads us up to the long log at the top of the structure, and this leads us all the way back to another group of figures at the top left of the composition.

These figures at the top left work together to pull down another log, which is tied to a branch. This log appears to work the bellows in order to blow air into the fire and intensify the heat, the heat needed to make the Sampo produce its riches.

> **The story of the Sampo found its beginning with a bard and sage as old as the earth itself, Vainamoinen.**

**A Harmonious Culture Creates Wealth**

It's interesting how the Sampo is created and lost: It is created through harmony and lost in discord.

Gallen-Kallela depicted the elements coming together for the sake of creating the Sampo. Too much or too little of any element, as was the case when Ilmarinen had too little air and too little heat from the fire, causes the Sampo to produce harmful things instead of riches.

Gallen-Kallela also depicted people working in harmony with these natural elements. Here, I believe, lies the beginning of the endless wealth represented by the Sampo. Endless wealth comes from working with one another and with nature. Going to extremes and working against each other and against nature brings about the opposite result from that intended.

Maybe the two painted figures in the foreground represent Ilmarinen and Vainamoinen. It's interesting that Vainamoinen enhances the environment with music and Ilmarinen shapes the environment with his hammer, and that both of these characters are necessary for the creation of the Sampo.

Let's delve a little deeper into what this might mean. I see Vainamoinen as a representation of music and Ilmarinen as a representation of visual art, using tools to fashion his creation. The representations of art and music come together to create the Sampo, a source of endless wealth.

I see art and music as the embodiment of culture, and culture is what harmonizes a group of people around certain ideas and beliefs. So, it is a harmonious culture that brings about endless wealth.

But for what purpose does culture bring about endless wealth? When culture is used to benefit evil, as it was in Pohjola, evil prospers. In other words, when culture is used to encourage and legitimize evil, evil will be normalized and will increase harm to all. Culture can be co-opted by evil.

How do the heroes try to take culture back from Louhi, its evil possessor? First, Vainamoinen and Ilmarinen invite a third member to their party: Lemminkainen, a representation of beauty. So, now art and music have beauty to help them, and these three representations begin a journey to take back culture to Kalevala, the land of heroes.

Interestingly enough, the three initially demand only half of the wealth created by the Sampo from their evil counterpart. Why do they require only half? Is it because if evil were completely without sustenance and disappeared, perhaps the heroes would lose their roles as those who struggle against evil?

When evil denies them their wish, they lull evil to sleep with their music and take the Sampo back.

Music, art, and beauty are capable of lulling evil to sleep. With evil asleep, culture—and its endless wealth—can be used for the purposes of good. When culture is built on the qualities that come with being a good and upright hero, these qualities are the ones that will be normalized and will increase the good of all.

But evil can always find its way back into culture. Beauty can be used to make otherwise harmful things pleasing to the senses. When beauty lacks wisdom, that is, when a culture looks good on the surface but is not in true harmony or acts inappropriately, evil can find its way back in, and endless wealth risks being lost forever.

How will we approach the evolution of our own cultures? Will we construct a culture fashioned on the righteous hero's journey toward the harmony between people and nature? Or will we allow the divisiveness of evil to run rampant and destroy all good things in its wake?

*Art has an incredible ability to point to what can't be seen so that we may ask "What does this mean for me and for everyone who sees it?" "How has it influenced the past and how might it influence the future?" "What does it suggest about the human experience?" These are some of the questions I explore in my series "Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart."*

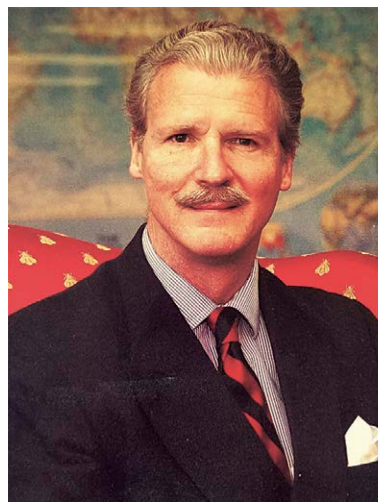
*Eric Bess is a practicing representational artist.*



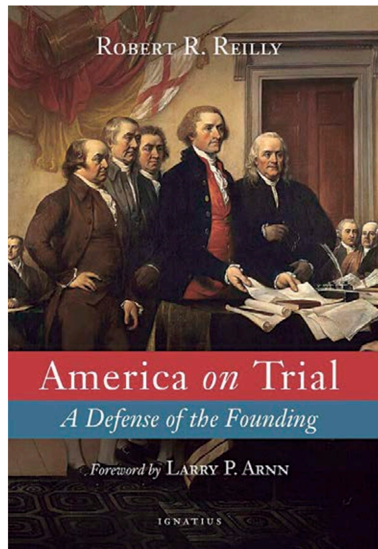
# Defending America's Rule of Reason

## An interview with author Robert R. Reilly

COURTESY OF ROBERT R. REILLY



Robert R. Reilly has worked in government for 25 years.




**'America on Trial: A Defense of the Founding'**
Robert R. Reilly
Ignatius Press
384 pages, hardcover

> **The key issue, including in theology, is: Does the will follow reason, or does reason follow the will? Everything hinges on the answer to this question.**
>
> *Robert R. Reilly*

**JOSEPH PEARCE**

America is in crisis. Beyond the trials and tribulations associated with COVID-19, there is rioting in the streets and calls for the "rebranding" of the United States in terms of identity politics. These are times in which the very history of America is being questioned and in which heroes, such as those who founded the nation, are being demonized and derided. The very meaning of what it is to be an American is being questioned.

In the shadow of these attacks on the integrity of the United States, a leading scholar and former special assistant to the president has stepped forward to defend the American founding. Seeing the founding principles of the United States as part of natural law tradition, dating from the ancient Greeks, Robert R. Reilly has shown how the Founding Fathers saw themselves and the nation they were creating as part of the living tradition of Western civilization.

Robert Reilly is uniquely qualified to comment on the current crisis. He is the director of the Westminster Institute, established in 2009 to promote individual dignity and freedom for people throughout the world. He also has 25 years of government service. Reilly has served as director of Voice of America, was senior adviser for information strategy to the secretary of defense, and has taught at National Defense University. He has written and published widely on American politics and foreign policy. His books include "The Closing of the Muslim Mind: How Intellectual Suicide Created the Modern Islamist Crisis."

In the following exclusive interview with The Epoch Times, Mr. Reilly, author of "America on Trial: A Defense of the Founding," addresses, by email, the issues that have been ripping the nation apart.

**JOSEPH PEARCE:** Mr. Reilly, your book has been published at a time when many people are questioning the very foundations of the United States. How would you respond to those who see nothing worth celebrating on the Fourth of July?

**ROBERT R. REILLY:** I would respond that they are committing colossal acts of ingratitude and impiety. By what standard of worth would they find nothing worth celebrating in the very thing that provides them with their freedom?

**MR. PEARCE:** At a time when statues are toppling, including statues of the Founding Fathers and of former presidents of the United States, how can we make a reasoned defense of the founders and of the founding principles of our nation?

**MR. REILLY:** You cannot make a reasoned defense against those who have abandoned reason. The American founding was based on the primacy of reason as against the primacy of will and power. However, when the primacy of reason is being threatened, sometimes it must employ force in order to protect itself—as in federal officers being sent to keep violent mobs from burning down federal court buildings.

**MR. PEARCE:** Much of the identity crisis that many Americans are experiencing is due to the acceptance and embrace of relativism and the demands for radical self-autonomy, which is a logical consequence of relativism. What do the Founding Fathers say about relativism?

**MR. REILLY:** Moral relativism is antithetical to the American founding, which relies on transcendent, immutable truths as in "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God"—for its justification. "That all men are created equal" is articulated as a moral principle in the Declaration of Independence. Either that is true universally, at all times, for all peoples, and you can therefore have something like the American Republic, or it's not, and you get something like Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, or communist China.

**MR. PEARCE:** How would you respond to Justice Anthony Kennedy's statement in Planned Parenthood versus Casey (1992) that "at the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life"? Can Justice Kennedy's understanding of liberty be reconciled with the concept of liberty expressed in the Constitution?

**MR. REILLY:** The founders would have found completely objectionable Justice Kennedy's misunderstanding of freedom. The idea of freedom as contentless choice was totally alien to them, as would be the idea that liberty is the right to define one's own meaning of the universe. For them, the meaning of the universe originates not in ourselves but in "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." Man's obligation is to conform himself to those laws. That is what leading a moral life means. The Founding Fathers were unanimous in saying that the success of the American Republic was wholly dependent on the virtue of the American people, and that it could not survive without it. Much less could it endure the erasure of the distinction between virtue and vice, which is what Justice Kennedy's nonsensical statement achieves.

**MR. PEARCE:** You write that the whole crisis is based on two opposing conceptions of reality, whether it's constituted by reason or by will. What's the difference between these two conceptions and why is it so important?

**MR. REILLY:** Primacy of reason means that "what is right" flows from objective sources in nature and the transcendent, from "what is," as Plato said. Primacy of will, on the other hand, means that "what is right" flows from power, that will is a law unto itself. In other words, right is the rule of the stronger.

The key issue, including in theology, is: Does the will follow reason, or does reason follow the will? Everything hinges on the answer to this question. Either the intellect directs the will, and the will then acts in accord with reason, or the will is in charge and reason becomes the servant of the will. There are huge political ramifications to this issue. As French writer Bertrand de Juvenal said, "The man who finds in God before all else will and power, will be disposed to the same view of human government." If reason is primary, you get things like natural law and the rule of law as reason. If the will is primary, you get things like tyranny.

**MR. PEARCE:** You quote Robert Bellarmine as saying that "a bad law is not a valid law." If this is so, what constitutes a good law? How is the validity of the law to be judged?

**MR. REILLY:** The validity of law is judged in accordance with its conformity to natural law. Another way to state this is that a bad law is not reasonable. Let me expand upon this from my answer to the preceding question. If God in his essence is Logos or Reason, then one must have reasons for law because law is Reason at the very source of creation. Therefore, the constitutive element of law is not will, but reason.

Reason is obligatory in man's behavior and in his laws because it exists in nature's order and as the law of God's essence. That's why bad laws are defined as unreasonable. Bad laws are a reflection of the primacy of the will over reason.

**MR. PEARCE:** John Locke, who was a major influence on the founders, stated that "the taking away of God, even if only in thought, dissolves all." What did he mean by this? How important is it that the United States remains "one nation under God"?

**MR. REILLY:** In the "Second Treatise," Locke wanted to demonstrate the inviolability of the human person as God's property. "For men being all the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker; all the servants of one sovereign Master, sent into the world by His order and about His business; they are His property, whose workmanship they are, made to last during His, not one another's pleasure."

Like his predecessors, Locke believed that human life is sacrosanct because of its provenance. Obviously, man's life cannot be sacred unless there is a God to sanctify it, which is why Locke was so adamantly insistent on God's existence. This also helps explain Locke's revulsion at atheism: "Those are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon or sanctity for an atheist."

Locke maintained that "the belief of a deity is not to be reckoned amongst purely speculative opinions, for it being the foundation of all morality, and that which influences the whole life and actions of man, without which a man is to be counted no other than one of the most dangerous sorts of wild beasts and so incapable of all society."

The "infinitely wise Maker" is also the guarantor of man's equality, as no one is any less the workmanship of God than anyone else. This is the sacred basis of equality in Locke, as well as in the Declaration of Independence.

I would only add that the Declaration mentions God four times. It is no exaggeration to say that American independence was based on dependence on God. When I mentioned that the American founders were unanimous on the necessity of virtue, I should have also said that they all agreed that religion was the principal source of virtue. Should Americans today think that they are autonomous, no longer dependent on God, then they should prepare for what prior attempts at total human autonomy have produced: the Great Terror of the French Revolution and the charnel houses of the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and communist China.

**MR. PEARCE:** You claim that "failure is written into the DNA of the modern project." What do you mean by this, and why is it a cause for hope?

**MR. REILLY:** Radical modernity and its project for man's total self-sufficiency is parasitic. It will fail to the extent to which it succeeds. It cannot survive its own erasure of natural law and Christianity. Paradoxically, the loss of faith and reason is a cause for hope. It proved the downfall of the Soviet empire, which imploded from its own hollowness. The West's moral, social, and political implosion proceeds apace for similar reasons. Yet we can avoid the cataclysm anytime we choose to, by returning to reality, to reason, to "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." Reality is resilient because, as Plato said, it is "what is"—not whatever one fancies. Logos wins in the end.

*Joseph Pearce is the author of "Solzhenitsyn: A Soul in Exile" (Ignatius Press).*

"Washington as Statesman at the Constitutional Convention," 1856, by Junius Brutus Stearns. Oil on canvas. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

# Unwavering English Spirit During World War II

IAN KANE

With all of the carefully orchestrated chaos and divisiveness permeating the world these days, many aren't aware that 2020 marks the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II—which the Allies won, of course, or else we'd all be speaking German and Japanese.

As such, I've been watching more than my usual number of World War II films, mainly those that I've never seen before (or don't remember seeing). Some have been well-intentioned but ultimately so-so affairs, while others, such as 1942's "Mrs. Miniver," took me completely by surprise. I'd seen the term "romance" mentioned among its listed genres, as well as the fact that its runtime is over two hours, and thought that it might be a schmaltz-fest. Boy, was I wrong.

Directed by legendary American filmmaker William Wyler, this movie is timely, involving themes of omnipresent, ever-encroaching danger countered by indefatigable resolve and earnest righteousness.

### Meet the Family

It opens with the titular character, Mrs. Kay Miniver (Greer Garson), midway through a feverish shopping spree in London. She returns to her beautiful home in the fictional village of Belham, just outside of the sprawling capital. Her tall, dashing husband, Clem (Walter Pidgeon), is a successful architect. And the happy, upwardly mobile couple has three children: Toby (Christopher Severn), Judy (Clare Sandars), and their older son, Vin (Richard Ney).

The first act has a light, comedic tone as Clem and Kay admit to each other that they've probably been spending a little too much on frivolous things: She's purchased a gaudy hat and he, a snazzy sports car. This establishes them as having nouveau riche fever and shows how the free market was making it possible for average folks in England to strive and succeed in life.

**Directed by legendary American filmmaker William Wyler, this movie is timely.**

However, the film soon introduces Lady Beldon (Dame May Whitty), an elderly blue blood who hails from 800 years of noble lineage. Lady Beldon disregards Kay's nouveau riche ways as inferior to her supposed hereditary superiority, and the famous class system that the country is known for becomes apparent.

Part of the film's plot revolves around the village's venerable flower competition. Lady Beldon, an overbearing personality in the village, has intimidated the competition's judges to the extent that she miraculously wins its first prize every year with her white roses.

However, a local elderly man by the name of Mr. Ballard (Henry Travers) has become so flattered by Kay's friendliness that he has named one of his carefully cultivated roses after her. They plan to enter the rose into the competition. Lady Beldon eventually finds out about their plan and can't believe that a couple of "commoners" would have the audacity to challenge her for the competition's highfalutin rose trophy.

Things get even more complicated when Kay's son Vin comes home for a visit. While he's regaling the family with his newfound idealistic ideas that he's adopted at Oxford, Lady Beldon's granddaughter Carol (Teresa Wright) drops by and politely "encourages" Kay to withdraw her and Mr. Ballard's rose from the competition.

Vin chides Carol on her thinly veiled classist maneuver, but the young lady fires back, revealing that she is heavily involved in charity work while he just talks a lot.

The saying "opposites attract" becomes a reality for Vin and Carol and they eventually fall deeply in love, much to the consternation of Lady Beldon. Soon, Vin informs everyone that he's joined the Royal Air Force because of the encroaching war with Germany.

The film is mainly told from the perspective of Kay as she alternates between being a loving and supportive wife, rearing their younger children, and gradually melting the icy Lady Beldon, who reveals that she lost her own young husband to an earlier war.

But for all of her savvy, there is a point when Kay becomes vulnerable. When her husband takes off on his boat along with thousands of other volunteers to rescue soldiers stranded in Dunkirk, and her son is busy fighting the German Luftwaffe, she is left alone wondering if she'll ever see either of them alive again.

During this dark period of contemplation, a certain downed German pilot, whom the entire village has been searching for, makes an untimely appearance.

### Rich Characters

One of the things that I really appreciated about this film was that Wyler took his time building up each of the characters: the main and the supporting ones. Although I had the overall feeling of impending doom—the bombs finally start to drop during the film's third act—each of the characters was thoroughly interesting, to the extent that I didn't want anything bad to happen to them.

"Mrs. Miniver" is an unabashedly patriotic film that helped to uplift the spirits of the Allied forces during World War II, and the same result can apply to good-intentioned folks during these modern times.

*Ian Kane is a filmmaker and author based out of Los Angeles. To learn more, visit DreamFlightEnt.com*

MGM

Mrs. Miniver (Greer Garson) and her dashing husband (Walter Pidgeon), before World War II encroaches on English life, in "Mrs. Miniver."

**'Mrs. Miniver'**

**Director**
William Wyler

**Starring**
Greer Garson, Walter Pidgeon, Teresa Wright

**Running Time**
2 hours, 14 minutes

**Not Rated**

**Release Date**
June 4, 1942 (USA)

★★★★½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