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ARTS & CULTURE

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LITERATURE

OPPOSITES ATTRACT

Mark Twain and Joan of Arc

Why did the author write about the saint, whose beliefs appeared so contrary to his own?

JEFF MINICK

More than a century after his death, Mark Twain (1835–1910), the pen name for Samuel Langhorne Clemens, remains a figure of controversy. Some schools, for example, have dropped his American classic “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” from required reading lists for its racial language.

Twain’s religious skepticism, directed in particular toward Christianity, has also made his reputation a battleground between believers and atheists. In both his public speaking and his writing, Twain



I like Joan of Arc best of all my books: and it is the best.

Mark Twain

satirized Christians, the Bible, and religion in general, though during his lifetime he proceeded with caution so as to avoid alienating readers. Only many years after his death did his daughter Clara and others publish some of his more controversial attacks on faith, like “The Mysterious Stranger” and “Letters From the Earth.”

Twain was particularly fierce in his disdain for Catholicism. He grew up in an anti-papist culture—he once noted that he was “educated to enmity toward everything that is Catholic.” And his antipathy toward Rome appears most notably in “A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court.”

Continued on **Page 4**

▲ Mark Twain wrote that “she was the Wonder of the Ages.” “Joan of Arc,” 1865, by John Everett Millais. Oil on canvas. Private Collection.

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A reenactment in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on May 20, 2019, on the annual Day of Remembrance to mark the Khmer Rouge regime's genocide of Cambodians. The regime ruled the country from 1975 to '79.

BOOK REVIEW

A Family's Journey From the Khmer Rouge to Freedom

ANITA L. SHERMAN

The years following the communist Khmer Rouge takeover in April 1975 were dark ones for Cambodia. It was a cruel regime. Many were killed, died from disease, or were separated from their families. An estimated 160,000 Cambodian refugees made the perilous decision to leave their homeland and seek a new life in the United States; others went elsewhere, perhaps in France, West Germany, or Australia—distances unheard of in their former village lifestyle.

"Go West! A Memoir for My Sons: Our Family Journey and Khmer Rouge Life Experiences" tells the story of one family's struggle to reach, for them, the promised land: America. Ultimately, six siblings from the original nine family members found themselves in Minnesota. This is their story.

Life under the Khmer Rouge regime was difficult at best. As Niev writes: "They wanted to restart, reset, redo, rebuild everything their way, how they envisioned the world for everyone else. Their attitude was, 'Forget traditions. Good or bad, they are a waste of time.'"

The Khmer Rouge was on a rampage to purge various ethnic groups. They had a disdain for the Vietnamese at the same time as tensions were building between Vietnam and Cambodia with cross-border raids. Niev's family was slated for execution in 1978. What saved them, by three days, was the Vietnamese forces invading Cambodia. The miracle of their lives being spared is one for which the family is eternally grateful.

A Euphoric Escape

Readers will learn of unspeakable hardships that the family withstood: foraging for food, eating critters found in the waters of rice paddies, digging for plant roots, losing their scant possessions, and, at times, losing each other.

While their lives were bleak, the author maintains an optimistic attitude. Along with their trials and tribulations, he shares joyous moments, occasional times when their stomachs were not empty, and games played with other young boys that he met.

The Khao I Dang camp opened in 1979 in Thailand after the fall of the Khmer Rouge. It was one of the enduring refugee camps on the Thai-Cambodia border. At its height, this compound of bamboo and thatched houses sheltered nearly 140,000 refugees. It closed in 1993.

This was the last stop for the author's family before they finally made it to America, a family that endured years of separation, forced labor, and starvation.

Some of the author's final words to his three sons are humbly shared:

"We pray that the United States of America, that supposedly 'big and bad' country, in actuality perhaps the greatest nation on earth, will continue to be a beacon of hope to the oppressed, and down-trodden of the world. May those loving and seeking freedom, life, liberty will still find it in the generations ahead. Please cherish it, protect it, and defend it, if you have the power in the days ahead."

Anita L. Sherman is an award-winning journalist who has more than 20 years of experience as a writer and editor for local papers and regional publications in Virginia. She now works as a freelance writer and is working on her first novel. She is the mother of three grown children and grandmother to four, and she resides in Warrenton, Va. Anita can be reached at anitajustwrite@gmail.com



'Go West! A Memoir for My Sons: Our Family Journey and Khmer Rouge Life Experiences'

Author
Sideth D. Niev

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STAYING TRUE TO WESTERN ART TRADITIONS

Guido Reni's 'Immaculate Conception'

LORRAINE FERRIER

Divine beauty, purity, and light emanate from 17th-century Italian painter Guido Reni's work "The Immaculate Conception," wherein the Virgin's every gesture reveals her pious heart. She tilts her head and gazes adoringly up to God, while gently clasping her hands together in prayer. You can almost hear the chorus of angels singing among the clouds in adulation.

A sublime golden light (symbolizing sunlight) dominates the scene as the Virgin stands on a crescent moon, and above her head a 12-star halo hovers (with each star symbolizing one of the 12 apostles). Reni depicted the sun, moon, and halo as signs to

direct Catholics to Revelation 12:1 in the Bible.

Reni's painting beautifully shows that he stayed true to established artistic traditions. For instance, the Virgin stands in a "contrapposto" pose (holding most of her weight on one foot), a pose first seen in ancient Greece. And the whole scene of idealized, graceful figures wouldn't look out of place as a painting in Raphael's workshop, some 100 years before Reni.

Tradition

At around 9 years old, Reni began his first apprenticeship with Flemish mannerist painter Denis Calvaert in Bologna, Italy (Reni's birthplace). At around 20 years old, Reni entered the Carracci Academy led by the best painter in Bologna, Ludovico Carracci. There, he learned deft draftsmanship. From 1601 to 1614, Reni worked in Rome, and during that time, he painted one of his most celebrated works, the ceiling fresco "Aurora." The dynamic work shows Aurora (the Roman goddess of dawn) leading Apollo (god of the sun) in his horse-drawn chariot, crossing the sun.

Most of Reni's works can be defined by sweet, idealized figures, and pastel coloring. In "The Immaculate Conception," his use of pink and blue on the gold background illuminates the Virgin, making the blue (which symbolizes purity and virginity) of her robes

stand out. But this painting is in sharp contrast to some of his other works, as for a time Reni painted like Caravaggio, with expressive figures and extremes of light and shade—a technique called chiaroscuro. Reni soon found his way back to painting in a more classical and graceful style, which characterizes his works. When Carracci died in 1619, Reni became the greatest painter in Bologna and the most celebrated painter of 17th-century Italy. Over his career, he trained some 200 artists, sending their workshop pieces across Europe.

Reni was "the noblest, and most majestic painter that ever lived—not only in my own opinion, but by common consent," according to Baroque painter and biographer Giovanni Battista Passeri in his book "Lives of the Painters Sculptors, and Architects Who Practiced in Rome, and Died Between 1641 and 1673." Reni dressed in the latest, often expensive, fashion. But he was modest, hating profanities and obscenities, according to The Oxford Dictionary of Art.

Legacy

Reni influenced Spanish painters Jusepe de Ribera and Bartolomé Esteban Murillo. Murillo's "The Immaculate Conception of El Escorial," now at The Prado Museum in Madrid, appears similar to Reni's painting of the Virgin here. Reni's works also inspired French artists, such as the founder of the French Academy, Eustache Le Sueur, and Louis XIV's court painter, Charles Le Brun.

Some 18th- and early 19th-century art critics lauded Reni as second only to Raphael, according to The Oxford Dictionary of Art. German art historian and archaeologist Johann Joachim Winckelmann compared Reni to the eminent ancient Greek sculptor Praxiteles. And English portrait painter and president of the Royal Academy of Arts, Sir Joshua Reynolds wrote that Reni's idea of beauty "is acknowledged superior to that of any other painter."

Through Reni's art we can follow the thread of Western art traditions weaving its way from



"The Immaculate Conception," 1627, by Guido Reni. Oil on canvas; 105 1/2 inches by 73 inches. Victor Wilbour Memorial Fund, 1959; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

ancient times to the Renaissance, and right through the 19th century to the representational artists of today.

Lorraine Ferrier writes about fine arts and craftsmanship for The Epoch Times. She focuses on artists and artisans, primarily

in North America and Europe, who imbue their works with beauty and traditional values. She's especially interested in giving a voice to the rare and lesser-known arts and crafts, in the hope that we can preserve our traditional art heritage. She lives and writes in a London suburb, in England.

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LITERATURE

OPPOSITES ATTRACT

Mark Twain and Joan of Arc

Continued from **Page 1**

Twain could be just as vitriolic toward the French. In the middle years of his life, sometimes moved by negative Gallic criticism of his work, he frequently poked fun at the French he met while abroad, mocking their manners and morals, and their high regard for their culture. So how was it that this American writer, best known for his books on the Mississippi River and boyhood, would become enthralled by a French girl devoted to her church and its Catholic faith, who claimed to speak with saints and angels, and who died a martyr? What moved this man who scoffed at organized religion to write what he regarded as his best novel about someone whose aspirations and beliefs appear so contrary to his own?

Some Background

Most of us are familiar with the story of Jeanne d'Arc or, as we in the English-speaking world call her, Joan of Arc. Born around 1412 in the village of Domrémy in northeastern France, Joan grew up in a poor peasant household, unlettered but with a deep devotion to her Catholic faith. In her early teenage years, she began hearing voices, which she regarded as heaven-sent, telling her that she had a mission to drive the English from French soil—the Hundred Years' War had already lasted for decades—and to help restore Charles of Valois to his rightful place on the French throne. At age 16, after convincing a local court that she should not be forced into a marriage arranged by her father, Joan set off to gain access to Charles and his court. After miraculously doing so, and upon meeting with him, Joan promised Charles that he would soon be crowned king at the ancient site of coronation in Reims. Within the year, she delivered on that promise after driving the English

forces from Orleans and accompanying Charles through enemy territory to Reims. In May of 1430, enemy forces captured Joan and sold her to the English, who tried her as a witch and a heretic, and had her burned at the stake. For centuries, she remained an iconic French hero, and in 1920, the Church declared her a saint. Scores of books and dozens of films, including the classic silent movie "The Passion of Joan of Arc" (1928), brought her exploits to a wide public.

An Unlikely Champion

"She was the Wonder of the Ages. And when we consider her origin, her early circumstances, her sex, and that she did all the things upon which her renown rests while she was still a young girl, we recognize that while our race continues

'Joan of Arc' is lively and well written, and appeals to our modern sensibilities.

she will also be the Riddle of the Ages." So wrote Mark Twain in his essay "Saint Joan of Arc." Throughout that essay, he heaps praise on this charismatic girl, not only writing of the miracle of her gaining the ear of Charles and her accomplishments on the field of battle, but speculating as well on her personality, conjectures derived from years of studying and reading about her. "She was," he writes, "gentle and winning and affectionate; she loved her home and friends and her village life; she was miserable in the presence of pain and suffering; she was full of compassion." Without a trace of irony, this longtime religious skeptic notes that Joan "had daily speech with angels" and that "she had a childlike faith in the heavenly origin of her apparitions and her Voices, and not the threat of any form of death was able to frighten it out of her loyal heart." He ends by stating, "She is easily and by far the most extraordinary person the human race has ever produced." And in his novel "Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc by the Sieur Louis de Conte (Her Page and Secretary)," published before Joan's beatification, Twain paints a marvelous portrait of this saint.

An Enigma for Readers and Critics When this book first appeared in serial form in Harper's Magazine beginning in 1895, Twain kept his name out of the publication, and many readers assumed that de Conte and the fictitious translator, Jean François Alden, were indeed the actual authors of Joan's story. In his Introduction to my copy of "Joan of Arc" (Ignatius Press, 1989, 452 pages), Andrew Tadie suggests that Twain indulged in this sly deception to "keep a certain psychological distance from his subject." Tadie also surmises, correctly so, that the public which had delighted in Twain's humor would be perplexed by this straight-up

attempt at historical fiction. Regarding this latter consideration, Twain had correctly assessed his fans. Readers familiar with "Huckleberry Finn" and "Tom Sawyer," or even with "Life on the Mississippi" or "A Connecticut Yankee," were baffled by Twain's latest novel. The same holds true today. Students who delve into Huck's adventures find themselves exploring an entirely different world in "Joan of Arc." Critics past and present have taken Twain to task for spending so much time and energy on this story, viewing it as an aberration or a waste of time. As Tadie reports, an early critic, William Peterfield, stated of "Joan of Arc" that Twain should write "simply and truly about that which he is fullest of and best understands." Bernard DeVoto, editor, historian, and for a time manager of the Mark Twain estate, regarded the novel as mediocre and accused the author of a "worship of mulieberty, a belief in the sanctity of femaleness." Having decided to investigate Twain's folly a bit more, I found "Joan of Arc" largely ignored. An article in Publisher's Weekly that lists and briefly describes his top 10 books makes no mention of this novel. Visits to my public library and to the nearby Christendom College library rewarded me with numerous books about Mark Twain, both biographies and literary analyses, but entries in their indexes either ignored "Joan of Arc" altogether or offered scant information.

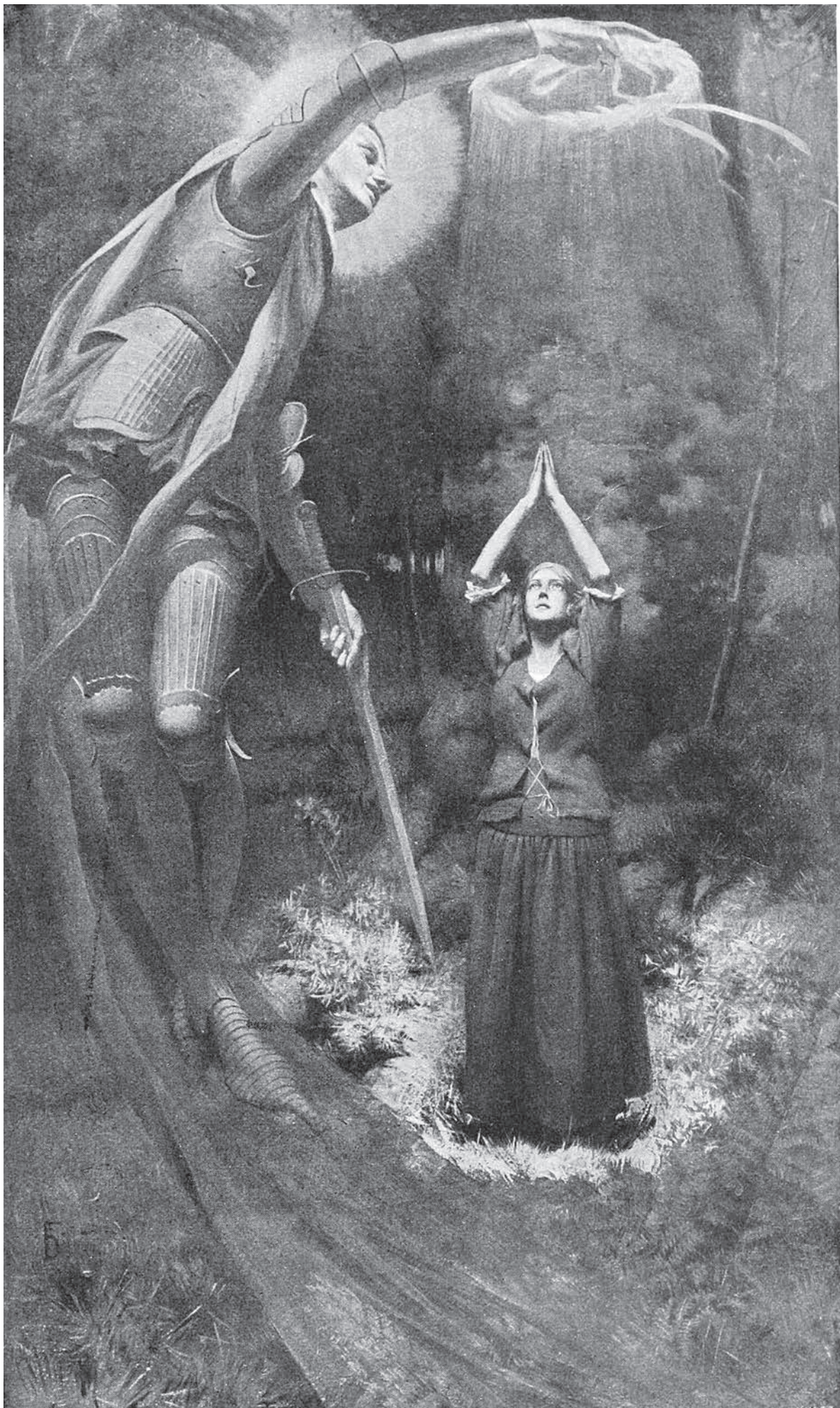
The Search for Motivation

That "Joan of Arc" is not of the same literary caliber of "Roughing It" or Twain's Mississippi works is beyond debate. Had another author with less name recognition written this same book, it's possible that by now the novel would have disappeared down the rabbit hole of forgotten books. This would be unfortunate, for "Joan of Arc" is lively and well written, appeals to our modern sensibilities, offers insights into the history and culture of the 15th century, and gives us an excellent portrait of the girl who became a warrior and a saint. Still unanswered, however, is our original question: Why did Mark Twain devote so much effort and time to this subject? What was the enchantment that kept him at this work?

Critics have long put forth reasons for Twain's high regard for "Joan of Arc." Some have argued that the aging author was simply in search of a topic. Others cite Twain's long battles with organized religion, claiming that in this French girl he had at last found the religious purity he claimed was missing in most Christians. In "The Riddle of Mark Twain's Passion for Joan of Arc," Daniel Crown examines several more theories, including an outlandish one, for example, about cross-dressing. Twain had Huck disguise himself as a girl at one point in that novel, and Joan had dressed in the attire of a soldier while leading the French—one major charge against her in her trial was her wearing of male apparel. This supposition brought a smile, as it seems highly unlikely that a man might devote over a decade to research simply because his subject wore britches and cropped her hair short. I am no trained literary critic and certainly no expert on Mark Twain, though I have twice read and taught "Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc." But after revisiting the novel and rereading in particular Twain's essay about Joan, I have my own theory about his infatuation with her.

An Affair of the Heart

I think Mark Twain fell in love with Joan of Arc. I think the man in the white suit was smitten by this flower of France. Though he was not so profound a misanthrope as his contemporary Ambrose Bierce of "The Devil's Dictionary" fame, Twain was pessimistic about human nature, deriving much of his humor by calling attention to our quirks and contradictions. Likely, he was brokenhearted by what he saw



An illustration titled "The Capture of the Tourelles" from "Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc," 1896, by Mark Twain.

around him and dealt with it, as a sharp mind might, with satire. Then this pure soul appeared, so opposite from others whom he knew and even from himself, and he discovered hope after all. I think that in this adolescent heroine he found that flame of purity, goodness, and fervor he had sought his entire life. This "slender girl in her first young

bloom" who had as a teenager inspired an army to victory and had crowned a king, "that wonderful child, that sublime personality, that spirit which ... has had no peer and will have none," had, quite simply, stolen Twain's sorrowing heart. This passion only deepened as he immersed himself in the story of this remarkable human being. Consequently, near the end of his life, he would write: "I like Joan of Arc best of all my books: and it is the best; I know it perfectly well. And besides, it furnished me seven times the pleasure afforded me by any of the others; twelve years of preparation, and two years of writing. The others needed no preparation and got none." "The heart has its reasons which reason may not know," wrote French philosopher Blaise Pascal. This is often true of love, and better than any literary theory it explains the ardor and devotion that Mark Twain showered on the Maid of France.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminary homeschooling students in Ashville, N.C. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust on Their Wings," and two works of non-fiction, "Learning as I Go" and "Movies Make the Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va. See JeffMinick.com to follow his blog.

The second panel from "The Life of Joan of Arc" frieze at the Pantheon in France, by Jules-Eugène Lenepveu, unknown date. In this panel, the people of France are depicted hailing Joan of Arc and kissing her hands and feet.

An illustrated plate titled "Joan's Vision" from the "Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc," 1896, by Mark Twain.

The third panel from "The Life of Joan of Arc" frieze at the Pantheon in France, Jules-Eugène Lenepveu, unknown date. In this panel, Burgundian soldiers, who are allies of England, are capturing Joan.



Lithograph poster for Mark Twain's "Joan of Arc," 1894, by Eugène Grasset. Library of Congress.



REWIND, REVIEW AND RE-RATE

A Cinematic Masterpiece on the French and Indian War

Director Michael Mann’s stunning historical 1992 epic has something for everyone

IAN KANE

Filmmakers who attempt to make historical dramas have to walk a careful tightrope when attempting to appeal to a mass audience. On one hand, if they focus on too much historical accuracy, the action can become bogged down to the extent that you feel like you’re watching a rather dry documentary. And on the other hand, if they play a little too fast and loose with historical accuracy, their projects won’t be taken seriously.

Based on an 1826 novel by James Fenimore Cooper and directed by Michael Mann, 1992’s “The Last of the Mohicans” not only successfully traverses the aforementioned tightrope, it does so with self-confident assurance.

This is a bold, visionary film the likes of which one sees only once in a while. Although Cooper’s book has been adapted for the big screen numerous times, this version has the most historically accurate feel to it, and it features some gorgeous outdoor photography and a highly memorable score to boot.

The film is set in 1757, during the onset of the French and Indian War (1754–1763). The British and French are viciously vying for control of eastern North America, and both countries utilize Native Americans to bolster their armies. While the Mohican tribe is allied with the British, the Hurons side with the French.

The film opens up on a cozy settlement on the frontiers of upstate New York owned by the Cameron family of settlers. We are introduced to the main characters: Mohican trappers Chingachgook (Russell Means), his blood son Uncas (Eric Schweig), and his adopted white son Nathaniel (Daniel Day-Lewis), who typically goes by “Hawkeye” due to his uncanny accuracy with rifles.

The scene soon switches to a British outpost (also in upstate New York), where Major Dun-

can Heyward (Steven Waddington) is being ordered by his superior General Webb (Mac Andrews) to escort Cora and Alice Munro (Madeleine Stowe and Jodhi May, respectively) to their father, Colonel Edmund Munro (Maurice Roëves).

Col. Munro is the garrison commander of Fort William Henry in the Adirondack Mountains. Before they leave, Heyward gets pushy with Cora about marriage and she tells him that she needs more time to decide.

Webb assigns a Native American guide named Magua (Wes Studi), whom he assumes is one of the friendly Mohawks, to guide Heyward, Cora, and Alice. Along with a detachment of British soldiers, they set out for Ft. William Henry. But as they ride by horseback through deep woods, Magua sneak attacks some of the British soldiers from the rear, and a group of Hurons ambush the party and slay all but Heyward, Cora, and Alice. It turns out that Magua is actually an undercover Huron.

Fortunately for the survivors, help arrives: Hawkeye, Chingachgook, and Uncas appear on the scene and take out all of the Hurons, except for the dastardly Magua, who disappears into the forest.

Although resistant to the idea of accepting help from their saviors, Heyward reluctantly agrees to let the trio escort them to the fort. Along the way, Heyward arrogantly assumes that Hawkeye, Chingachgook, and Uncas are scouts loyal to the Brits, to which Hawkeye responds, “I ain’t your scout and I sure ain’t no damn militia.”

Some attraction begins to develop between Hawkeye and Cora, as well as between Uncas and Alice. Thus, Cora starts walking right next to Hawkeye instead of Heyward, with the latter understandably becoming jealous. But they all have something much more serious to worry about when they finally arrive at the fort and discover that things aren’t as they’d assumed.

This masterpiece of cinema has aged



20TH CENTURY FOX

This is a bold, visionary film the likes of which one sees only once in a while.

‘The Last of the Mohicans’

Director: Michael Mann

Starring: Daniel Day-Lewis, Madeleine Stowe, Russell Means

MPAA Rating: R

Running time: 1 hour, 52 minutes

Release Date: Sept. 25, 1992

★★★★★

very well over the past few decades. The performances by its cast are utterly convincing and do a great job of drawing you into the action.

Day-Lewis is brilliant as ever, playing a man caught between two worlds: one of “civilization,” and the other related to ancient Native American ways. Stowe is also superb as a woman bred and raised in a proper British setting, yet who begins to gradually open up to other ways of living through her contact with Hawkeye and his adoptive family.

The score is also hauntingly beautiful (developed by Trevor Jones and Randy Edelman). It’s the kind that pairs so well with the incredible scenery (the film was shot in North Carolina), that it elevates an already excellent film to something sublime. Believe me, you will remember the score long after watching the ending credits roll. I caught myself unconsciously humming it on numerous occasions and laughed at myself.

Due to Mann’s incredible visionary genius, “The Last of the Mohicans” is a stunning epic film that combines visceral action, nuanced romance, and gripping drama. It has quickly managed to climb into my top 15 films of all time. Watch it, if you haven’t already, and you’ll see why.

Ian Kane is an U.S. Army veteran, author, filmmaker, and actor. He is dedicated to the development and production of innovative, thought-provoking, character-driven films and books of the highest quality.

(L–R) Chingachgook (Russell Means), Hawkeye (Daniel Day-Lewis), and Cora (Madeleine Stowe) gaze at the frontier and their future, in “The Last of the Mohicans.”

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

Director Jessie Nelson’s Uplifting and Heartwarming Family Drama

MICHAEL CLARK

Let’s get this out of the way first and be done with it. I’m pretty sure I’m not alone here when I say that I don’t align with Sean Penn politically. He’s entitled to his opinions, and under the rights afforded to him by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, he is free to express those views—and I, as an American and ardent constitutionalist, will forever defend his right to do so. That’s how this country works, at least for the time being.

My job is to critique movies, and, as such, I am required to separate the off-screen beliefs of artists from their work. And Penn’s carefully measured performance as a mentally challenged single parent in “I Am Sam” is among the most impressive I’ve ever witnessed by any actor in any movie. There, done.

With a Little Help From His Friends

Immediately after delivering a daughter (Dakota Fanning as Lucy), an unnamed homeless woman abandons her and the child’s father, Sam (Penn), at a Los Angeles hospital. Working as a custodian at a coffee shop, Sam has the mental capacity of a 7-year-old, yet is able to support Lucy thanks to four similarly challenged buddies and his agoraphobic neighbor Annie (Dianne Wiest).

The problems begin when Lucy enters second grade and she starts to intellectually eclipse Sam. Trying to stave off the inevitable, and in a gesture of solidarity with her functionally illiterate father, she refuses to commence learning how to read. This in turn becomes an issue at school that eventually leads to the courts initiating proceedings to forcibly separate the parent and his child.

Hello Goodbye

An understandably panicked Sam is able to get the attention of attorney Rita Harrison (Michelle Pfeiffer), a family law specialist who politely blows him off by telling him that another lawyer will “get back to him.” When this doesn’t occur, Sam approaches her again, this time in full view of her entire firm, most of whom (correctly) consider Rita to be an over-caFFEinated, tightly wound cold fish. Backpedaling quicker than a White House spokesperson, Rita makes sure everyone

hears that not only will she take Sam’s case, but she’ll do so pro bono.

Not nearly as happy or together as she might appear on the surface, Rita has her own set of familial issues to contend with, namely, a husband (unseen and unnamed) with a serial roving eye and a son about the same age as Lucy (Chase MacKenzie Bebak as Willy) who barely speaks to her.

Transformed Rita

As time progresses and Sam’s court case draws closer, we see Rita slowly begin to loosen up and relax, which she later attributes to her time spent with him. At one point, she wells up and says to Sam, “I’m afraid I’m getting more out of this relationship than you.” And it’s true. Before the movie ends, Rita has become a better person and is the only character in the film afforded a transformational arc.

The screenplay, co-written by producer and director Jessie Nelson and Kristine Johnson, pulls off a few minor miracles along way while avoiding some dangerous, deal-killing missteps.

Act Naturally

The first and most successful victory was in allowing the Oscar-nominated Penn to improvise while filming and coming up with

material they had not considered; almost all of it made the final cut. Penn himself never goes over the top with his speech, ticks, hand gestures, and all-around physicality. He doesn’t act like a mentally challenged man; he behaves like one: There’s a big difference between the two.

Second, in any type of legal drama, a villain or two is essentially required and the filmmakers are sure to include a couple, but here it’s not in a manner we’ve come to expect. Social worker Miss Calgrove (Loretta Devine) is caretaker during the trial and, despite the child’s clear resentment, she never loses her cool or disciplines Lucy. She simply and dispassionately does her job.

Much the same can be said for Mr. Turner (Richard Schiff), the state’s attorney who is charged with proving that Sam is incapable of continuing to be Lucy’s parent. He speaks with a direct, measured tone while asking open-ended questions and never verbally attacks Sam. Again, he’s doing his job and nothing more.

Last, it would have been so easy to have included an evil foster or adoptive mother as a foil, yet Nelson and Johnson did not. They instead present Randy (Laura Dern) as a happily married, stable, and even-keeled woman who, even with considerable levels of charm and grace, can never fully win Lucy over.

As is all too often the case with many family-friendly “message” films, the majority of the critics hated “I Am Sam” (currently 35 percent on Rotten Tomatoes). Yet I listed it as my favorite movie of 2001, and the audience rating on the same site is at 86 percent.

The people and I have spoken.

Originally from Washington, D.C., Michael Clark has provided film content to over 30 print and online media outlets. He co-founded the Atlanta Film Critics Circle in 2017 and is a weekly contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaManRadio.com. Since 1995, Mr. Clark has written over 4,000 movie reviews and film-related articles. He favors dark comedy, thrillers, and documentaries.

‘I Am Sam’

Director: Jessie Nelson

Starring: Sean Penn, Dakota Fanning, Michelle Pfeiffer, Dianne Wiest, Laura Dern

Running Time: 2 hours, 12 minutes

MPAA Rating: PG-13

Release Date: Dec. 28, 2001

★★★★★

FILM REVIEW

Director Robert Davi’s Brilliant Biden Satire

ALL PHOTOS BY THE UNREPORTED STORY SOCIETY

MICHAEL CLARK

Less than a minute after the start of the hotly anticipated “My Son Hunter,” director Robert Davi and screenwriter Brian Godawa include an 11-word text scroll (with tongue firmly in cheek) that both downsizes and heightens the expectations of what we’re about to see:

“This is not a true story ... except for all the facts.”

By doing this, the filmmakers somewhat defuse what is sure to be an onslaught of negative reactions from the mainstream media, its minions, and the dozen or so people who still think Joe Biden is the greatest thing since sliced bread.

Had this movie been presented as a straight-out drama with a chronological narrative, it simply wouldn’t have worked. The sheer jaw-dropping, truth-is-stranger-than-fiction nature of the depicted events is so brazen, so self-aggrandizing, so outrageous, and so self-parodying, it all but begs for a satirical treatment.

While preparing to shoot “Dr. Strangelove,” Stanley Kubrick and his co-writer Peter George (adapting his novel “Red Alert”) realized essentially this same thing and brought in humorist Terry Southern to add the comedic flourishes. That film is a classic mostly because it mocks certain dread, and that is indeed the case with “My Son Hunter.” This film is Shakespearean-level tragicomedy along the lines of “Richard III.”

Speaking of Which ...

Several stage and screen adaptations of “Richard III” (particularly the 1995 film) employs the breaking of the “fourth wall” (when a character directly addresses the audience), a potentially deal-killing story-telling device the filmmakers employ here to tremendous effect.

The primary “Richard” character here is an unnamed composite Secret Service agent played by Gina Carano (“The Mandalorian”), part of the detail assigned to guard then presidential candidate Joe Biden (John James, “Dynasty”) who also occasionally interacts with his son Hunter (Laurence Fox, in a career-defining performance). Fox founded the Reclaim Party in the UK in order to oppose what he deemed to be “extreme political correctness.” However, the party came up short in the 2021 London mayoral election.

Opening with lampoon news coverage of a Black Lives Matter riot that would make the editors at The Babylon Bee proud, the story gets underway in earnest with Hunter’s arrival at a Los Angeles nightclub where he’s escorted to the “Red Box” VIP lounge. Overflowing with booze, drugs, and scantily clad women, this is where Hunter locks eyes with composite dancer “Kitty” (newcomer Emma Gojkovic), whose real name is Grace Anderson, and who was also present at the BLM event.

After pressing a thick wad of cash into the hand of a pronoun-favoring host-manager, Hunter invites all present to relocate to his bungalow at the infamous Chateau Marmont hotel where the debauchery shifts into overdrive.

Fever Dream

In the cold morning light, while still in a fever dream and zonked out of his gourd, Hunter



Laurence Fox, as Hunter Biden, smirks directly at the audience in a career-defining performance from “My Son Hunter.”

has an imaginary conversation with a little dog that someone brought to his room. Here, instead of actual dialogue between the two, the filmmakers use text balloons that appear in comic books for the exchange. The pocket-sized canine tells him that the revelers are not his friends and to get rid of them. Heeding the dog’s advice, Hunter launches into a bellicose, profanity-riddled tirade, ordering everyone (save for Grace) to vamoose.

With the filmmakers dropping down the pace a gear or two, Hunter and Grace exchange details of their pasts and the narrative takes a surprising, thoroughly unexpected pivot.

Rather than lie about or explain away his past sins and blame others, Hunter declares that he has goofed up big time and delivers a semi-Munchausen purging of his soul containing a litany of indiscretions and bad decisions to a not quite total stranger.

It’s worth noting that everything Hunter tells Grace has been proven to be fact and, at this point, she still doesn’t know his surname.

Most of the second act is set in the back of a limo; there sit father and son. Joe begins calling Hunter to task in the wake of the New York Post article regarding the existence of the “laptop from hell,” arguably the most lethal, ticking time bomb in American political history.

Quotable Joe

Those on the lookout for some of Joe’s most famous “folksy” and “benign” catchphrases will not be disappointed. Among them are the golden nuggets: “no joke,” “come on, man,” “bologna sandwich,” and “dog-faced pony soldier,” alongside name dropping “Mandela” (Joe’s fabricated meeting with Nelson Mandela), and “Corn Pop” (the skin-crawling details about Joe’s life-guarding days).

Peppered throughout are scenes with Grace “net surfing” alongside one of Hunter’s unnamed bodyguards (Nigerian footballer Franklin Ayodele), who explains to Grace why doing a Google dive on the Biden family might not yield any unsavory details.

It is also during this stretch that flashbacks go into painstaking detail of Hunter’s (and Joe’s) interactions with assorted foreign political leaders and heads of companies. “Quid

The filmmakers let Hunter Biden’s words and actions speak for themselves.

pro quo” doesn’t begin to capture the level of malfeasance taking place during these clandestine meetings.

Before the naysayers prepare to pounce on perceived “conjecture” on the part of the filmmakers, they should first reference what is contained in “Beautiful Things,” the memoir penned by Hunter Biden. In addition to his drug addiction, Hunter goes into detail regarding his overseas business dealings.

In Their Own Words

It would have been quite easy for Davi and Godawa to weaponize, politicize, or exploit Hunter’s personal foibles for shock value, but they don’t, mostly because they don’t have to. They figuratively stand back and let Biden’s words and actions speak for themselves.

Framing this type of powder-keg material within the framework of satire (and not all of it is satire) might strike some as irresponsible, flip, or ill-advised. But they miss the point. If the filmmakers had passed judgment on Hunter (and Joe, for that matter) with airs of moral superiority, furrowed brows, or stern finger-wagging, that might have gone over well with some, but this approach would not pass muster with independents and disillusioned moderate Democrats.

There’s a reason why people remember George Carlin, Mort Sahl, Ricky Gervais, and Bill Burr, and movies such as “Being There,” “Dave,” “Wag the Dog,” and the aforementioned “Dr. Strangelove.”

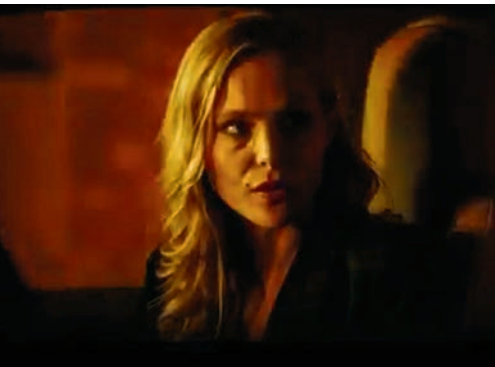
If you want to make a political point stick, comedy in general—and satire specifically—will provide the ideal vessel to achieve the greatest impact and longevity.

“My Son Hunter” is available for streaming. For details visit MySonHunter.com

Originally from Washington, D.C., Michael Clark has provided film content to over 30 print and online media outlets. He co-founded the Atlanta Film Critics Circle in 2017 and is a weekly contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaManRadio.com. Since 1995, Mr. Clark has written over 4,000 movie reviews and film-related articles. He favors dark comedy, thrillers, and documentaries.



A promotional ad for the hotly anticipated satire on the Biden family.



Newcomer Emma Gojkovic stars as the dancer “Kitty,” whose real name is Grace Anderson.



Gina Carano plays an unnamed Secret Service agent assigned to guard then presidential candidate Joe Biden.

BOOK REVIEW

‘How to Be a Farmer: An Ancient Guide to Life on the Land’

Ancient selections that direct us to the virtues of working the land

DUSTIN BASS

Princeton University Press continues with its rather large selection of introductions, or reintroductions, to classic literature in its Ancient Wisdom for Modern Readers series. One of the latest books is “How to Be a Farmer,” which contains ancient Greek and Roman works selected, translated, and introduced by M.D. Usher, the Lyman-Roberts Professor of Classical Languages and Literature at the University of Vermont. Usher and his wife, Caroline, have also been farmers for the past two decades.

This latest edition could hardly be better timed. In a time when consumers are more concerned about what goes into their food, the increase of fast-food chains, and supply chain issues, learning what it takes to be a farmer—or at least tend your own crops, however minute—is pivotal.

“How to Be a Farmer” is not a breakdown of farming techniques, but rather the trials and benefits of being a farmer. Usher notes in his introduction that “How to Be a Farmer” presents a small contribution to that new imaginary” and that “one need not actually be a farmer to enjoy this book.”

Usher is right. These works from millennia ago do not require rural or ancient eyes to understand the principles of farming. From Varro and Vergil to Homer and Horace, the book discusses the virtue of work and how right living, virtue itself, leads to blessings from the ground and from fellow countrymen.

Working the Land

Usher has selected a varied assortment of enlightening, straightforward, and even humorous works. There are countless principles that these ancient authors connect with working the land. One in particular is that success requires work, and that success makes idle people jealous.

Several of the authors, as if speaking directly to our moderns, admonish those who indulge in leisure and luxury. There are warnings about how easy living can lead to a diminished character, but there are many benefits to the soul of a man or woman who works with their hands.

Usher himself believes this so much that he utilizes Varro’s “The Prestige and Antiquity of Rearing Livestock” in order to indirectly indicate that greatness, individual or collective, stems from humble beginnings. “Who would deny that the Roman people themselves are descended from shepherds?” Varro rhetorically asks. “Who does not know that Faustulus, the foster-father who raised Romulus and Remus [the founders of Rome], was a shepherd?”

Usher praises the very character of the farmer with his selection of the Roman poet Vergil’s “Praise for the Countryside,” which reads: “It was among farmers that Righteousness left her final traces when she quit the earth.”

Along with showing a good work ethic and righteous character, Usher’s selections point out how to pick and treat farm animals. Lucius Junius Moderatus Columella discusses the importance of having a dog on the farm; not only that, but also what to name the dog and why. In the other selected works, Columella talks about



MOUNTAINPIX/SHUTTERSTOCK

A Roman mosaic of a young man herding geese.

how to choose and treat a donkey and a ram. Lastly, he discusses the proper working relationship between a man and his wife, and how the farm should come first. He expounds on how this team mindset can offset the possibility of infidelity and the vices of luxurious living.

Farmers and Philosophers

Farming and philosophy were viewed as being in conflict with each other. Even after thousands of years, this is the case today. Usher has wisely chosen to remind the modern reader that wisdom and working the earth can be synonymous. It is in Musonius Rufus’s work, “Why Farming Is the Best Job for a Philosopher,” that we find this correlation.

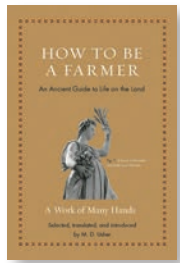
“The most pleasing aspect of all farm work is that it affords the mind more free time to think,” Rufus writes, “and to investigate matters that have a bearing on one’s moral development.”

There is definitely an interest there from the editor of these works. Usher is both professor (philosopher) and farmer, and has obviously experienced the philosophical benefits of being a farmer. Just as Rufus (among many others) passed down his views to the next generation (a millennia of them), Usher is doing the same.

In a way, Usher allows for a parting shot at the industry of philosophers (that is, professors) from Rufus, who writes: “It seems to me, that young people would be helped more, not by associating with their teacher in the city, nor hearing him lecture at school, but by seeing him engaged in agricultural tasks whereby he demonstrates in practice exactly what reason instructs.”

As Rufus was a philosopher of the Stoic school, it wasn’t simply a strong mind that he hoped to cultivate in young people. He recommended farming because it would

The author reminds the modern reader that wisdom and working the earth can be synonymous.



‘How to Be a Farmer: An Ancient Guide to Life on the Land’

Translated by Mark D. Usher

Publisher Princeton University Press,

Date Nov. 2, 2021

Hardcover: 272 pages

make physically strong those young men who practice philosophy. Usher, it seems easy to conclude, is hoping that this message of strong minds and strong hands comes through.

Seeds for Personal Growth

In searching the landscape of classical material, Usher has found golden nuggets of wisdom that can be used as seeds for personal growth. It does not take special people to become farmers. Usher’s moving final selection suggests as much.

The editor and translator of these works notes before the final selection that “most of what we hear about farming in the ancient world is filtered through the experience of highly educated elites.” This seems all the more reason for him to choose the ancient common man to speak to the modern common man.

Usher pulls from an inscription on an epitaph that was erected by the Tuscan citizen Gaius Catricius Calvus, who identifies himself as “a man of good will ... a farmer.” In this short inscription, the reader learns about what it takes to be a farmer and, more importantly, “a man of good will.” Calvus informs the reader that “these precepts that a farmer teaches you to remember he acquired not by instruction from the learned, but from his own nature and experience.”

Usher’s grand selections coincide perfectly with each other, even often echoing each other, as Rufus’s and Calvus’s do. These selections are a reminder that the land can help cultivate more than just our physical bodies; it can help cultivate the mind and the soul.

Dustin Bass is the host of EpochTV’s “About the Book,” a show about new books with the authors who wrote them. He is an author and co-host of The Sons of History podcast.



MARZOLINO/SHUTTERSTOCK

An 1843 illustration of apple harvesting in Normandy, France, published in Magasin Pittoresque, Paris.



An engraving of a farmer planting seeds in the spring.

HISTORY

Walnut Grove: The Humble Birthplace of International Harvester

BOB KIRCHMAN

“Indomitable perseverance in a business, properly understood, always ensures ultimate success.”—Cyrus McCormick, inventor and industrialist

Walnut Grove does not appear to be a place where much history was made, particularly history that forever changed the face of American agriculture. It is a peaceful farm like so many others in the Great Valley Region of Virginia. There is the big brick farmhouse and a handful of stone and log outbuildings in Walnut Grove, as well as a small mill and a shop with a forge that stand just down the hill from the main house.

The buildings are a beautiful example of what farms looked like in the 19th century. It was here that Robert McCormick, with his bride, Mary Ann Hall McCormick, emigrated from Great Britain. In 1809, their son Cyrus was born, the first of eight children.

Robert McCormick was a farmer, but he was also a miller and an inventor. In his forge and shop next to the mill, he worked on some agricultural devices. He successfully created a clover huller, a blacksmith’s bellows, a hydraulic power machine, and other labor-saving devices for the farm.

There was, however, one design that eluded him. He wanted to mechanize the process of harvesting. He had in mind a horse-drawn reaping machine.

A Practical Reaping Machine

In the first half of the 19th century, harvesting grain was still done by manual labor. Cutting the stalks and binding the sheaves required an army of laborers. Farmers and their neighbors would come together for the task. It was long and tiring, and it limited the amount of grain a farmer could realistically plant.

Scottish inventor Patrick Bell had built a machine for harvesting grain but never patented

it. It was pushed by horses and was cumbersome and impractical. Robert McCormick was aware of this device but worked out some fundamental changes in the design.

Young Cyrus took up tinkering with his father’s design. Though he had little formal education, he loved to work in his father’s shop. With the help of Jo Anderson, a slave on the farm, he made even more changes to the machine.

In just 18 months of serious tinkering, and at the young age of 22, Cyrus had a functional reaping machine. The year was 1831, and McCormick gathered friends and neighbors in the village of Steele’s Tavern for the first public demonstration of his labor-saving device.

The neighbors must have scratched their heads as the younger McCormick hitched up the strange-looking device. It looked like a huge sled with machinery piled on top. There was a cutting blade and a rotating device to hold the stalks to be cut. Surely, there was skepticism and some outright laughter—until the machine started moving.

At first, Cyrus built a few more of the machines and sold them to local farmers. He applied for a patent in 1834. Then he set the reaper aside to focus on running his father’s iron foundry. That business failed in the panic of 1837, leaving the family deeply in debt. It was then that Cyrus returned to the reaper.

He set up a small production facility in his father’s shop, and by 1841 he was producing the machine for sale. He noticed that orders were coming in from the West, where the vast flatlands, largely free of rocks, allowed for acres of crops to be planted and harvested.

In 1847, convinced that the future of agriculture lay in the fertile fields of the Midwest, Cyrus and his brother Leander opened the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company in Chicago. In their first year in business, they sold 800 machines.

POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

‘The Farmer’s Daughter’: From Naive Farm Girl to Politically Astute Firebrand

RUDOLPH LAMBERT FERNANDEZ

Imagine this scene: Neophyte maid Katie Holstrom (Loretta Young) is serving at her first big party at the household of Congressman Glenn Morley (Joseph Cotten). As she weaves her tray through a floor full of well-heeled guests from the Hill, butler Joseph Clancy (Charles Bickford), who’s served the Morleys for 40 years, softly warns, “There’ll be a lot of talk about politics. Just stay out of it.” Katie smiles and nods, “Of course!”

Does she follow that sage advice? In “The Farmer’s Daughter” (1947), the joke’s on us. Director H.C. Potter’s comedy-drama is about a young woman who can’t “just stay out of it.”

Katie (Katrin to her Swedish American farming family) had planned to attend nursing school, but must take up maid duty because she’s been duped out of money that she’d saved up for school.

The guests at the party see more than her beauty and spontaneity, both of which win the Morleys over; they see her warmth, her attention to detail, and her common touch. Let’s not forget her sharp eye and ear for politics.

More Than a Maid

When a congressman prematurely dies, Katie’s swelling crowd of admirers urges her to run against a candidate propped up by cronyism and expediency. Her journey tests her trust in politicians, speechwriters, campaign managers, pollsters, and voters, but most of all, herself.

Director Potter doesn’t quite explain Katie’s transformation from gullible farm girl to politically astute firebrand, or satisfactorily justify how partisan politicking can ever become bipartisan. Thankfully, he doesn’t allow the subplots of Katie’s bitter electoral campaign, or her blossoming romance with Morley, to overrun the main narrative.

Instead, Potter’s guiding theme here is a woman’s voice, centered around the fact that in a man’s world, she’s able to speak at all. He focuses on how everyone changes the way they look at Katie, based on what she says,

how she says it, why she does what she says she will do, and how well she does what she says she will do.

Even in the moneyed Morley mansion, Katie doesn’t hesitate to speak up if someone’s misrepresenting an issue or getting things plain wrong. Never mind if they’re from the Hill, or if it’s even Morley himself.

Her voice bears authority because she’s neither disagreeing for the sake of being disagreeable nor contradicting just to be contrarian. She’s talkative all right, but thoughtful, too.

Potter cheekily shows us Katie’s brush with pomp. She’s fascinated but never overawed.

At one point, Morley is climbing up his grand staircase while his mother, Agatha (Ethel Barrymore), goes up with a chair elevator, buzzer on hand. We see Katie gaping at the spectacle and, in the same shot, a giant mirror reflecting mother and son ascending the stairs. Later we spy Katie’s impish delight as she furtively tries that chair elevator out herself.

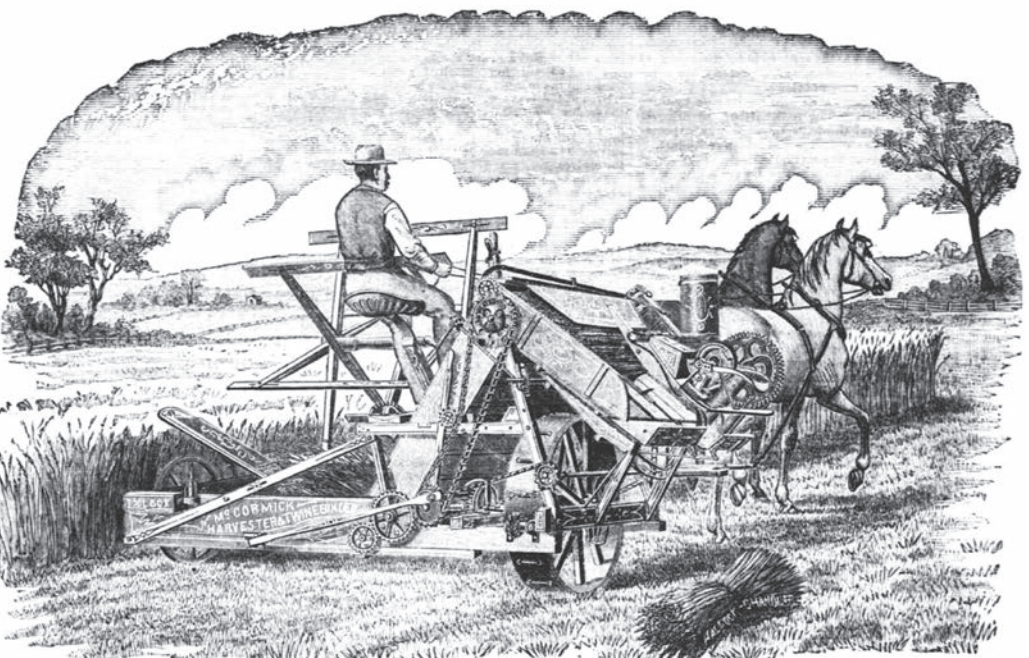
Young won a Best Actress Oscar for her spirited portrayal. She’s so fresh-faced here, it’s hard to believe that, at the time, she’d been in films since the silent era.

A Sensitive Screenplay

Potter’s 1947 film was inspired by the 1937 Finnish play (written by Hella Wuolijoki) and the Finnish film “Juurakon Hulda” (directed by Valentin Vaala). Years later it inspired the 1963–1966 Screen Gems TV-ABC sitcom of the same name, built on the same central character but with an altered storyline and unrelated to the 1940 film.

Husband-wife screenwriting duo Allen Rivkin and Laura Kerr wrote several screenplays together, but their work on Potter’s movie is exceptional because it offers a model of how women and men can relate to each other with dignity, restraint, and humor, but without always feeling threatened or envious.

When guests acknowledge her presence as a maid, Katie’s more than gracious; when they don’t, she makes them aware of it. If they can’t be bothered to stop talking for a second, even to look at her, she curtly tucks napkins into their lapels and eases her way



ALL PHOTOS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

In 1851, the reaper won the gold medal at the Great Exposition in London’s Crystal Palace.



An engraving of Cyrus McCormick, from “Leading American Inventors” by George Iles.

International Acclaim

In 1851, the reaper won the gold medal at the Great Exhibition in London’s Crystal Palace, the first great world’s fair. The machine, with continual improvements, revolutionized agriculture around the world. The factory was destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire, but the family rebuilt it. Eventually, it would become International Harvester—and it all began in the inauspicious shop at Walnut Grove.

Today, you can still see the shop and forge where the McCormick family wrestled with the design of their reaper. Upstairs from the forge, there is a room containing a full-sized reaper as well as many meticulously crafted models of the reaper and other agricultural devices made by the company.

These particular models were shown at the 1907 Jamestown Tercentennial Exposition in Virginia. At that fair, hidden motors powered the little models so that viewers could envision the machines at work. Though they no longer move, they remain an inspiring testimony to American inventiveness and its contribution to the world.

Bob Kirchman is an architectural illustrator who lives in Augusta County, Va., with his wife, Pam. He teaches studio art to students in the Augusta Christian Educators Homeschool Co-op.



(L–R) Joseph Cotten, Loretta Young, Charles Bickford, and Ethel Barrymore in a scene from 1947’s “The Farmer’s Daughter.”

to the next guest.

Witness how respectfully Morley and Clancy, with all their clout, treat Katie. Or the way her hulking brothers treat their “little” sister. The nearly 7-foot-tall James Arness debuts here, as one of the brothers.

In one scene, Clancy confides in Katie how power is double-edged: When you win some of it, you lose some of yourself. He tells her how he was with the senator when the senator made his first million, and how they’d gone to Washington together. Then he pauses before he says, “Part of us died together.” Bickford was, rightly, nominated for a Best Supporting Actor Oscar for his masterful performance.

Morley falls for Katie in part because of her crusade against cronyism, her vision for victorious House of Representative candidates to truly represent common voters, not just sponsors and campaigners.

With a name like Holstrom and a thick Swedish accent, Katie personifies the outsider. So Morley liberally offers her tips to subdue the forcefulness in her speeches, and to be more guarded and less open.

In fact, far from shushing her, men like Clancy and Morley end up helping Katie go up the ladder she’s chosen to climb.

It is Katie’s father who gives the definitive lines as he chides both Morley and Katie: “I thought that Katrin was married to the truth.... If you don’t want to fight for the truth, then you shouldn’t be in Congress!” Relevant advice for today

Rudolph Lambert Fernandez is an independent writer who writes on pop culture.

‘The Farmer’s Daughter’

Director: H.C. Potter

Starring: Loretta Young, Joseph Cotten, Charles Bickford, Ethel Barrymore

Not Rated

Running Time: 1 hour, 37 minutes

Release Date: March 25, 1947

★★★★★

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

An Intimate, Character-Driven Portrayal of Men at War

IAN KANE

A little cinematic gem that I discovered recently is the “Story of G.I. Joe,” a gritty and realistic war film that was produced in 1945, toward the tail end of World War II. Part of the film’s realism is due to the fact that it’s based on the real-life experiences of the Pulitzer Prize-winning war correspondent Ernie Pyle.

Directed by William A. Wellman, the film features acting legends Burgess Meredith and Robert Mitchum in his breakout role.

Pyle volunteered to ship overseas and cover the Allied invasion of Europe. He wanted to tell the story of the common Army foot soldier—the American G.I. To achieve this goal, Pyle traversed the same perilous territory, ate the same rations, crouched in the same foxhole as they did, and even ducked some of the same bullets as the soldiers. These actions garnered the soldiers’ respect for him.

Pyle was also respected at home. Embedded with Company C of the 18th Infantry Regiment, he told those soldiers’ stories with the utmost detail and brought the war to those at home. This resulted in Pyle becoming one of the most respected war correspondents of World War II.

The film’s storyline is a relatively straightforward affair. Pyle (Meredith) accompanies the soldiers of the unit from the parched deserts of North Africa to the lush hills and valleys of Sicily and Northern Italy. As he slogs along with the men of Company C, they take action against the Nazis and some of the soldiers don’t survive, which makes quite an emotional impact on the journalist.

As with many of the other soldiers, Pyle befriends the unit’s able leader, Lt. Walker (Mitchum), who leaves the greatest impression on him.

While I’ve seen a lot of war movies over the years, few have so effectively portrayed the brutal, harrowing experiences of the common infantryman in World War II. Director Wellman (“A Star Is Born,” “The Ox-Bow Incident”) crafted a war film that eschews sentimentally and instead is brutal yet very human. It’s as much the story of the mud, blood, and despair that surround the average G.I. as it is one of bravery, self-

A scene with Robert Mitchum (C) and Burgess Meredith (R) from the “Story of G.I. Joe,” based on the writings of World War II journalist Ernie Pyle.

It’s a deeply moving homage to the G.I.s who risked their lives to defend their country.

‘Story of G.I. Joe’

Director: William A. Wellman

Starring: Burgess Meredith, Robert Mitchum, Freddie Steele

Approved

Running Time: 1 hour, 48 minutes

Release Date: July 13, 1945

★★★★★



sacrifice, and determination.

This is a well-made, slow-paced drama that conveys the infantrymen’s banter and humor while also portraying them sympathetically. It captures the soldiers’ idiosyncrasies, motivations, and concerns in a natural way. This is one of the better war films out there and serves as a deeply moving homage to the G.I.s who risked their lives to defend their country.

Fortunately, Mitchum’s outstanding performance made him a Hollywood star and earned him an Academy Award nomination for Best Supporting Actor. The film itself was nominated for a total of four Academy Awards. Meredith was also perfectly cast as Pyle, a likable and respectful journalist who was on the front lines by choice rather than by assignment.

Both critics and war historians agree that “Story of G.I. Joe” is simply one of the most moving World War II movies ever made.

Ian Kane is an U.S. Army veteran, author, filmmaker, and actor. He is dedicated to the development and production of innovative, thought-provoking, character-driven films and books of the highest quality. You can check out his health blog at [IanKaneHealthNut.com](#)

There’s as much action in “Story of G.I. Joe” as weary downtime.



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