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THE REITH LECTURES 2018: THE MARK OF CAIN

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Reith Lecturer: Margaret MacMillan

Lecture 5: War's Fatal Attraction

AUDIENCE APPLAUSE

ANITA ANAND: Welcome to the fifth and final Reith Lecture by the Canadian historian, Professor Margaret MacMillan.

This is very much a homecoming for Margaret and what a place to end. We are here in the architecturally breathtaking Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, and here in this huge LeBreton Gallery we are surrounded by tanks in a place packed with weapons from the 18th century to the present day. In fact there is a war plane hovering rather ominously over our heads.

Here lies one of the great paradoxes of war and how we feel about it because, I won't lie, it is exciting to be here, to be surrounded by all of these things even though we know that these are weapons that were designed, and possibly even used, to kill people.

Professor Margaret MacMillan has called her lecture series *The Mark of Cain*. Cain's murder of Abel was, according to the bible, both the first homicide and amongst the earliest occasions that we as humans have written about murder.

In this lecture Margaret MacMillan is going to turn her attention to the following questions: how do we represent conflict? How does art deal with war? Can we really create beauty from horror and death? And how do we best remember war and those who die because of it?

This lecture is entitled *War's Fatal Attraction*. Please welcome 2018's Reith Lecturer: Professor Margaret MacMillan.

AUDIENCE APPLAUSE

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Thank you so much and merci bien. Je suis bien heureuse d'être ici. Wonderful to be at home and to be with so many friends and so many compatriots, and so thank you all very much for being here; it is a great pleasure.

In April 1918, A.Y. Jackson, the great Canadian artist, wrote: 'I went with Augustus John one night to see a gas attack we made on the German lines. It was like a wonderful display of fireworks with our clouds of gas and the German flares and rockets of all colours.' He then did a painting of that scene, which is in the collection here at the War Museum called *Gas Attack*, Lievin 1918. Many of you will have seen it. It's a sombre painting with a very dark foreground, the land is blasted; but in the distance are green and pink streaks of light, bursts of what look like stars and large bluish-grey clouds. It is a very beautiful piece of work and it is about one of the most deadliest of the types of attacks that took place in the First World War.

This is a very appropriate place to be talking about how we deal with war in the arts, how we try and imagine it, how we try and cope with it, how our artists try and deal with it; and it's also a very appropriate place because part of what we do with war is commemorate it – we try and remember it, we try and teach about it. And so a museum is a place both to collect the artefacts of war, the products of war, but also to try and make sense of it, to try and commemorate it.

What I have been talking about in these lectures is the complicated relationship that war has with human society, the ways in which war is mixed in with the history and development of human society and about our own very mixed feelings about war – how we are both horrified by it but also attracted by it. And today I want to look particularly at how the Arts deal with that attraction and horror and how we try and grasp through the Arts the complexity of war and also how we try and commemorate it. And of course those in the Arts and the Arts themselves respond to war, but they also shape our attitudes: they help us to conceptualise war, they help us to remember war, and sometimes they help us to oppose war. When you think of the war literature that came out of the First World War or the literature, the songs, the movies that came out of Vietnam, those had a very important part in shaping reactions that we had then and since towards those war. And it is a paradox, I think, that things of great beauty can come out of this attempt to deal with war, but we have only to think of things like Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* or the great novel *War and Peace* or that wonderful statue which you can see in the Louvre: *The Wing Victory of Samothrace*.

It's curious, I think, that not all wars seem to produce the same level of artistic engagement. The First World War, it seems to me, produced much greater literature, much greater poetry, much greater questioning of the meaning of war than did the Second World War, and that may be because the Second World War, at least for those of us on the allied side, was much clearer: it was a war that we felt had to be fought; whereas the First World War increasingly we came to think was a war that perhaps should not have been fought. And I think perhaps that's the reason why a great deal of artistic writing and film and photography the reason I think why so much

came out of the Vietnam War; that it was a war that many Americans and others around the world began to think was not necessary and began to wonder why it had been fought.

So I want to look at some of the reasons, particular reasons why artists try to deal with war and why we appreciate what they try to do. One reason I think is catharsis – simply to try and get the feelings that we have about war, whether we fought it or whether we simply observed it or whether we have suffered from it, out into the open. There is something about war which violates the norms of society and we feel in some ways that war is something that taints.

In *The Aeneid* when Aeneas persuades his father finally to flee from Troy, he asks the old man to carry the most sacred things they have, the symbols of their religion of their gods, and his father refuses at first to carry them and Aeneas argues with him and says, “Father” – and I quote “take in your arms the sacred emblems of our country’s household gods. For me, fresh from fierce battle and recent slaughter, it would be sinful to handle them until I have washed myself clean in running water.” And I think that is part of what the arts can do, is that act of catharsis.

A Soviet woman who was a medical assistant in the Second World War said once, “In war your soul ages.” Homer was seen by the Greeks as a doctor of the soul and so I think that is a very important part of what the arts can do.

I think what the arts can do, particularly perhaps during war, is act as a gesture of defiance and of hope. During the Second World War, for example, prisoners of war staged plays and concerts. Oliver Messiaen, the great French composer, was made a German prisoner of war in 1940 and he found himself in the company of three professional musicians – a clarinetist, a violinist and a cellist - in their prison camp in Germany, and he himself played the piano. He managed to obtain some paper and a pencil from a friendly German guard and they found, amazingly, some old and very battered instruments and he wrote a quartet which he called *The Quartet for the End of Times*. It was based on *The Book of Revelation* in eight parts and it was performed first outdoors in the prison camp and in the rain on the 15th January 1941. He later recalled, “Never was I listened to with such rapt attention and comprehension.”

The eighth and last part of the quartet is entitled *Praise to the Immortality of Jesus*, and again in Messiaen’s own words, and I think they’re worth quoting here, “It is especially aimed at the second aspect of Jesus: Jesus the man, the word made flesh, immortally risen for our communication of his life. It is all love. Its slow ascent, the acutely extreme is the ascent of man to his god, the child of god to his father, the being made divine towards paradise.” And so acting I think as a gesture of defiance, acting as a catharsis, but also I think the arts can help in making sense of the mystery of war because it is a mysterious activity. How can human beings organise themselves in these ways, how can they endure what they endure in war and how can they often of course commit such horrors?

Tim O’Brien, who is one of the great (in my view) writers about the American war in Vietnam said, “To generalise about war is like generalising about peace. Almost everything is true. Almost nothing is true.” Yet he and others keep trying to do it. They keep trying to explain war and they keep trying to probe the experience of war itself. And again I quote from Tim O’Brien: “For the common soldier, at least, war has the feel, the spiritual texture of a great ghostly fog,

thick and permanent.” And yet we keep trying to make that attempt. We keep trying to give voice to the soldiers, many of whom of course could not give voice to themselves, especially before the age in which most soldiers were literate. In the old days only the officers could read and write, but we have tried to recover the experiences of those soldiers, listening to soldiers’ songs, listening to the poetry that’s written about them, trying to get at their voices.

Now the arts have played other sorts of roles in war: they have of course glorified war and they have acted in the employ of war; the Arts have helped to prepare young men to fight, and it has generally been young men who have gone off to fight. If you think the novels of G.A. Henty, who wrote literally dozens of novels before the First World War about heroic young men who went off to fight, and he wrote them very consciously with the purpose of fitting them to go and fight for the King, for the Queen, for the British Empire; you think of those English public schoolboys, or private schools as they’d be called here in Canada, who were given classical educations, who read Homer, who read *The Iliad*, who read *The Odyssey*, who read *The Aeneid*. Classical educations who thought that the wars they were about to fight would be like that, who went into The First World War with the ideas of those heroic exploits of the classical heroes in their minds and of course were going to find something very different when they got there.

And there’s always also been a theatrical element in war, the use of means to try and intimidate and terrify your opponents. In India, the various kings of India prized elephants very highly in the days before the British Empire was formed there because elephants were terrifying. I mean they often actually weren’t that much good in war - they were very large, if they got wounded it could be a real problem; they consumed enormous amounts of food - but the elephant was there to shock and awe. And I think of course the words ‘shock’ and ‘awe’ we are familiar with from the recent invasion and occupation of Iraq. And down through the centuries peoples have made war machines, have used cavalry to intimidate their opponents.

Often in war too, you can see some of the same manoeuvres and the discipline that you need in the arts, in dance in theatre. In Mesoamerica, in fact, many of the battles that took place among the different states of the Americas would only take place at allotted times in the calendar and often in Central America and Mexico they fought wearing very elaborate clothing. They arranged the rules of the battles before they started and they arranged when those battles would finish. They were in a sense choreographed.

And there have been very specific uses of the arts in war. Music, for example. Before modern communications on the battlefield, it was very difficult to communicate, very dangerous. If you sent runners, they would often get killed and the messages would not get through. And so musical instruments could often carry over a distance - such things as trumpets, bugles, drums, the bagpipes. They could be used to keep time for the soldiers to march into war; they could be used to call them into the battle lines; they could be used to call the retreat. The British Army even had special signalling so that those in the battle lines could indicate whether it was infantry or cavalry coming towards them. And so there were very specific uses of the arts in war.

In the British Infantry regulations for riflemen, Napoleonic Wars, there were lists of the different messages that musical instruments could convey during a battle, and of course there was always

the psychological impact. If you heard the bagpipes coming if you were on the other side, it could be absolutely terrifying.

There's a wonderful quotation I found from a British veteran of the Spanish War in the Napoleonic Wars who made it through to Waterloo, and so by this point he would have been a very hardened soldier indeed. And he said, "The French artillery opened fire and that was bad enough, and then we heard the French drums beating the signal to charge." And he said – and this was someone who had been through a great many battles – "This was a sound which few men, however brave they may be, can listen to without a somewhat unpleasant sensation."

I just today was in the art gallery here and I was looking at some of the wonderful paintings, and one of them was of yet another use of the arts – and this was in the First World War: the dazzle ships. A number of very famous painters – and there's some pictures here as well of dazzle ships – painted ships, cargo ships or battle ships, with crazy designs to make it difficult to spot them when they were at sea, to make it difficult to estimate their speed and their direction. And these were in fact very effective; if you go to the National Gallery, you can see a wonderful painting of a dazzle ship. And then of course we've always had in wars writers writing things to encourage people to enlist, to keep up their spirits, writing propaganda. Thomas Hardy, the great British poet, who tended not to be someone who supported authority, when the First World War broke out wrote a ditty – I would say not one of his best but let me read it to you: 'England's need are we; Her distress would leave us rueing: Nay. We see well what we are doing, Though some may not see! Then victory crowns the just.'

So that the Arts have played a very specific role in war and sometimes people have attacked the Arts of the other side. In the First World War, for example, Saint-Saens, Camille Saint-Saens, the French composer, and others formed something called La Ligue Nationale pour la defense de la Musique Francaise to try and prevent all prefer to try and prevent all performances of German music in France. This, it was said, would undermine French morale.

Of course what the arts have also done – and this again is something that goes down through the centuries – is distort the reality of war. If you look at pictures for example from the 18th century of battlefields, they're often very neat and tidy. There may be a few corpses decoratively displayed on the ground, but no blood, no entrails falling out, none of the things that you would actually see on a battlefield.

The Moguls had wonderful paintings. They would make commemorative books after great battles, which would show the sieges, the battles, the guns, the soldiers, the cavalry, the corpses, and they would all be beautifully painted and they would all be very decorative and you never got any sense that anyone had actually been sweating and fighting and dying in this. And then when wars are over, of course, the Arts have often come in to triumph, to show the winning side, to create the statues, to create the paintings, to create the monuments that will fix in the minds of people their side has won and the other side has lost.

But let's be fair to the arts because they haven't just been used for propaganda, they haven't just been used to stir up people to fight or to triumph at the end. They also I think have been very good at showing the ambiguities of war, the very mixed feelings and the very mixed aspects of

war. I just want to give one example from I think one of the great plays by Shakespeare, and that is Henry V, and there are three different speeches I want to refer to. The first is Henry V himself as he is trying to encourage his men to attack the besieged town of Harfleur once more. And it's a very famous speech, you'll probably all know it, and it starts: "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more, or close the wall up with our English dead." And it is one of the most rousing of speeches and you can see that he would be encouraging the men to fight and quite likely to die.

And then there's another moment later on in the play, the night before the Battle of Agincourt, and Henry V himself is going round the camp of his soldiers in disguise and is listening to what they say. They don't know it's the King. And a common soldier says to him, as they talk about the battle which is going to happen in the morning, "I am afeared there are few die well that die in battle." And then the final scene – and it's in the last part of the play – is when the Duke of Burgundy, the constable of France, talks about what the war has done to France and he mourns the wilderness and the cruelty that war has brought to his country. And I'll just read it, just a bit of it, because I think it gets some of what war does to civilians and to society. 'And as our vineyards, fallows, meads, and hedges, Defective in their natures, grow to wildness, Even so our houses and ourselves and children, Have lost, or do not learn for want of time, The sciences that should become our country, But grow like savages - as soldiers will, That nothing do but meditate on blood.'

We also of course have the Arts showing, as they show the ambiguities, they show the beauty as A.Y. Jackson did and as Felix Vallotton did in his wonderful painting Verdun, but they also in the plastic arts, the visual arts show the horror of war, and I just want to give you a couple of examples and you will all be able to think of your own. But I think some of the most graphic and terrifying depictions of the horror of war are Goya's disasters of war done during the Guerilla War, the Small War as it was called, the Spanish fought against the French in the Napoleonic Wars, and what it shows is the savagery of both sides. He really isn't choosing one side over the other. For example, in his terrifying picture *Wild Beasts*, he shows women, one with a baby on her arm, killing the French soldiers. In another, entitled *Barbarians*, he shows French soldiers shooting a monk who's tied to a tree while other soldiers watch indifferently at this spectacle.

Photography, when it began to make its appearance on the battlefield, became a new medium for conveying some of the horrors of war. In the US Civil War people were made aware, perhaps for the first time, just how horrific war could be. It's very difficult to understand war if you're far away from it, but the photographs made it clear.

In 1862 at the Battle of Antietam, which was the bloodiest day I think in the Civil War, a very famous photograph was taken – well a number – but a very famous one was taken of the dead bodies laid out after the battle, and they literally stretch away into the horizon; you can't see where those battles end.

The Battle of the Somme. A movie was made of The Battle of the Somme in 1916, which recreated – actually mostly in Hyde Park – what trench warfare was like, but did actually show something of what it was like, and something like a quarter of the whole UK population saw that movie in its first six weeks of showing and was horrified by what it saw. And I think one of the

reasons that American opinion or much American opinion turned against the war in Vietnam was because that war was televised and it was brought into people's households and they could see what was happening.

The First World War, the authorities tried to control what was seen and the painters tried to resist it and the photographers tried to resist it. One of the curious things I think about the First World War – and I think it is a coincidence rather than some sort of foreshadowing, but it's hard not to think that it might not be – was that the artists in Europe were developing styles which were so well suited to the shattered battlefields even before the war started. Cubism, futurism, expressionism, all these new styles which people were experimenting with were horribly apt for what was about to happen to Europe and what was about to happen to the European soldiers and what was about to happen to the European battlefields. And some of the paintings remain with us I think to haunt us. John Singer Sargent, a society painter, a man known for his beautiful portraits, was persuaded to go to the battlefields in the spring of 1918. He worked there in watercolours and later came back and painted one of his most famous paintings called *Gassed*, and it was simply those soldiers who had been gassed, who were lining up – many of them blind of course – to be treated.

A number of painters of course got into trouble for doing this. The German painter Otto Dix painted a graphic and terrifying painting – we can no longer see it, unfortunately – of decomposing bodies after a battle called *The Trench*. The Nazis loathed the painting. They denounced him as a degenerate and when they got into power burned the painting.

War has often been opposed through the arts – and of course we can all think of a number of examples – but I want to look at one of the most famous paintings of the 20th century for a moment and that of course is the painting that Picasso did of *Guernica*. April 1937, a small town in the Basque country, important for the Basques because it was where a sacred tree was where they had often met in their councils. It was a symbol of Basque independence or at least Basque autonomy, famous in their history. It had 7,000 inhabitants, this little town. Didn't have much military significance. And German aircraft, in which was one of the first times that civilians were bombed from the air, dropped one hundred thousand pounds of explosives on *Guernica*. Fifteen hundred people died, a large proportion of the population. General Franco, the Spanish fascist leader, claimed later that the Basques blew it up themselves. Picasso had already been commissioned to paint a mural for the Spanish pavilion at the World's Fair in Paris and he now found his subject. He'd been hesitating about what to paint and he painted this painting enormously quickly. And it has become I think one of the most memorable paintings of the 20th century. It shows chaos. It shows horses and people flying apart and screaming. There's a woman with a dead child. It is important in many ways, partly because it begins to show the impact of war on civilians in the 20th century.

Finally of course what the arts do – and there are many other things they do and you will all be able to think of your own – is it helps or it helps at least to show mourning and grief. And again I just want to give you one example, although of course there are hundreds, and that is *Kathe Kollwitz*, the great German sculptor and painter and left wing activist, a social activist.

She and her husband lived in a very poor part of Berlin where he ran a clinic for the people who lived there. They had an 18 year old son. He volunteered in August 1914 to fight in the German forces and she did not try to stop him from volunteering, something for which she later on reproached herself for the rest of her life. He left for the front on October 12th 1914 and he died ten days later. She never and her husband never ended their mourning. His bedroom was kept as it was. Every year when he had his birthday or his birthday would have been, they lit candles to celebrate the birthday and every year they added one more candle to show how old he would have been if he hadn't been killed at the age of 18. As she said of her son called Peter, she said, "Peter was a seed to be planted who should not have been ground." She tried to make a memorial, she experimented with various things for the cemetery where he was buried in Belgium, and what she finally created – and you can still see it there – is two figures. She was going to have the dead boy and then she felt it was just impossible. He had disappeared into a void. And so there is a grieving mother with her head bowed and her arms wrapped around herself and there's a father who is upright looking out, also grieving. Both are there and they are alone, each of them in their grief.

So the arts I think have played and are very important and run through war in a very important way. And of course they also help us to commemorate war as this museum shows so well. They help to shape our memories of war, they help to give form to how we remember war. And often there's a tension in this because you will get an official version of what people think should be remembered. Governments quite often want to convey a message when they try and commemorate war and sometimes they sponsor a particular view. There are always arguments of course over how we should commemorate war. There have been many arguments since 2014 about how the First World War should be commemorated. In Britain, for example, should it be seen as something that was necessary and just or should it be seen as a complete and wasteful disaster? The government at the time felt the first version was more correct and there were quite important and I think interesting public arguments.

Often when governments try and direct the commemoration, they find that people somehow begin to get involved and begin often to take it over and so you always have this tension between what people would like to remember, all of us would like to remember and we may have different things we want to remember, and what governments would like us to remember.

Let me just give you an example from the Great War, from the First World War. In Whitehall there is a cenotaph. Every year on November 11th, they lay wreaths there. A cenotaph is an empty tomb. It's a memorial for those dead whose remains are elsewhere, and of course in the First World War it was impossible to recover many of the remains of those who were dead because they literally were blown to pieces.

It was initially designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens in wood and plaster as a temporary structure for a victory parade in July 1919, but the public somehow took it over. The parade happened and the public kept coming. Hundreds of thousands of people from all over the United Kingdom visited. They left flowers and wreaths. Of course for many people it was the only hope they had of somehow connecting with the person they loved who had vanished into the morass of the Western Front and so the government decided there must in fact be a permanent structure in stone.

On November 1920, a permanent cenotaph was unveiled. That day the body of the unknown soldier was brought back from the Western Front, through the streets to Westminster Abbey, and it was meant to be put into a tomb there (where it is in fact today) but again the authorities had to change their plans; they had to allow for public participation. The grave was left open for two weeks and the coffin was there. One and a quarter million people filed past it – many of them weeping, many of them crying out. It was an act of collective mourning which the government I think was simply forced to concede.

And we've seen the same thing more recently. If you go the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, that wonderful you will see that people come and they put their own offerings down – sometimes a teddy bear, sometimes a bottle of beer which was perhaps a soldier's favourite beer – and I think it's a very good thing that we get this combination of official and unofficial commemoration.

All over Britain and France and much of the Western world after the First World War people in their local villages and towns built war memorials. Eventually some 60,000 of them in the UK ... United Kingdom and France alone. The obelisk was popular because it was easy to make and cheap, but people also put up useful buildings, they put up cottage hospitals, libraries, gardens, fountains. In my grandmother's village in North Wales, there is something called the Criccieth Memorial Hall where I was a very tubby and rather sullen bluebell in a victory parade in 1946.

So part of what we're doing with commemoration and with the arts in that famous phrase 'lest we forget'. We're thing to remember what war means, we're trying to preserve some recollection of it for the generations that are to come. Perhaps there's inner hope that they won't suffer what those generations who went before have suffered. And so we preserve battle sites, we have war graves – imperial and then the commonwealth war graves. Soldiers from all over the British Empire were buried where they fell around the world and I think very tellingly there was no distinction of rank on those tombstones in those cemeteries.

And we also in the aftermath of the First World War founded war museums, and this is something quite new but I think it was an attempt to deal with a war that was bigger than anyone could have imagined. The Imperial War Museum in Britain was founded in 1917. Australia founded its also in 1917. The Canadian one was founded in the Second World War. Museums – and I don't need to tell people who work here this can be a bit tricky because people expect them to be in a sense both memorials and places of education - in Australia they simply dealt with that by making their war memorial a museum. They simply combined the two.

We should also I think remember – and part of this comes into the disagreements over what should be in museums and are they memorials or are they places of education and how do these two go with each other – we should remember that how we remember wars does change. We tend now to have a particular view of the First World War very largely as a futile war, a wasteful war, a dreadful war. When we think of the First World War, we think of mud, we think of trenches, we think of enormous losses of life to no apparent purpose. We should remember that's not how people, including the veterans, saw it at the time. The cenotaph and many other war memorials had inscriptions to 'our glorious dead'.

When the memorial to the Newfoundland dead at Beaumont-Hamel was unveiled - this was the attack in which Newfoundland lost so many men – the general who had been commanding, overall responsible General Haig, was asked by the Newfoundland government to unveil the war memorial; and when General Haig died in 1928 huge numbers of veterans turned out to mourn him.

It was only later in the late 1920s that some of the great anti-war novels and anti-war poetry began to come out that we began to think differently about it, and so we should always remember that how we remember the past changes over time and it often reflects our preoccupations. For Canada the Vimy Memorial has changed its meaning. It was put up in a place where Canada had won a victory and where Canadians had first fought together as a unit, and when it was opened in 1936 people talked about hallowed land, sanctified land, sanctified by the sacrifices of those who had died. I think now when we go to Vimy, we probably see it more as a memorial to mourning for the dead in those wars and the futility of that war.

It's very difficult to know why we remember in particular ways. I would have thought if you'd asked me in the 1970s that we were beginning to forget about the First World War. In Australia very few people were turning out for the Dawn Service at the war memorial in Canberra on the anniversary of Gallipoli. In Britain in the 1980s, there was talk of dropping Remembrance Day in churches and ending the ceremonies on November 11th, and yet somehow we have revived an interest in the First World War and it now has become something that certainly in some countries, but not all, we commemorate.

What I find encouraging in the way we've commemorated the First World War is some of it has been transnational, and so there is a museum in France near Verdun, one of the great French battles, which tries to show the Battle of the Somme from the German and the French and the English perspectives and I think that has actually been very important.

So I will leave you with a question: how long will we or should we continue to remember and how much will our memories change again? And should we continue to think about war itself? Should we continue to probe the mysteries of war – its horror and its beauty, its baseness and its nobility, its boredom and its excitement, its devastation and its waste and its stimulus to change? How long should we continue to try and understand war? I think we have to. I think we have to because in understanding war, we understand something about being human – our ability to organise ourselves, our emotions and our ideas and our capacity for cruelty as well as for good. We fight because we have needs, because we want to protect what we hold dear or because we can imagine making different worlds. We fight because we can. But that long intertwining of war in society may be coming to an end – or perhaps it ought to – not because alas we have changed, but because technology has. With new and terrifying weapons, the growing importance of artificial intelligence, automated killing machines and cyberwar, we face the end of humanity itself.

I hope these lectures have helped us understand what war has meant in the past. It will be up to all of us to consider what it will mean in the future. Thank you.

AUDIENCE APPLAUSE

ANITA ANAND: Another completely stimulating and thought provoking talk. We can take questions now from the floor. We have our first question from over here.

RICHARD BALFOUR: Richard Balfour. I'm a lawyer from Toronto. Can we divorce our view of even the greatest of the works of war art from the view they express? So to put the question in another way: what if *The Guernica* had depicted a republican bombing or the *War Requiem* had mourned the Nazi defeat? And if we can't, does the war trump the art?

ANITA ANAND: It's a very good question.

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Yes that's a wonderful question and I've just got to think about it for a moment. Can great art come out of things that we disapprove of? Yes I think it can. I mean if you think of some of the triumphal statues that the Romans did of their wars, which often showed great cruelty but yet what they produce is very beautiful; and one of the last things Richard Strauss wrote, *The Metamorphosen*, I think can be listened to as a mourning for the destruction of Germany and a regret for that destruction but it is an extraordinary piece of music. I mean musicologists have tried to argue that he's also criticising the Nazis, but it's not clear that he is. Yes I think if there had been a republican bombing and a Spanish artist on the Franco side had done a painting like the *Guernica*, I think we would probably look at it as great art.

And this may be idealistic – perhaps great art can transcend the particular circumstances and can show a universal human suffering. I will have to keep thinking about it.

ANITA ANAND: It's such an interesting question because is it not the thing that allows you to think of it as great art is the distance of time? For example, in America we are currently seeing a very heated debate about confederate statues and confederate art, which to some people is art but to some people is a horrible reality of suffering that wasn't so long ago for their people. Is that then the difference between say Strauss and what went on there is the distance of experience?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: There have been a lot of debates about what we should take down and what we should leave, and I've come to think that it's got to be a case by case decision. And the statues that were put up in the American South, the confederate generals, a lot of them were put up very recently. They were put up during the 1950s when the Civil Rights Movement was beginning and they were put up very deliberately to say to black Americans, African Americans living in the South, we won and you've lost, and I think those statues should be taken down no matter how beautiful.

But it is true that distance makes a difference. I mean you look at these wonderful mogul paintings of battles, which show battles which caused great cruelty at the time; and we look at them as works of art and because we don't really know the context we're not taking sides and we don't feel obliged to take sides. And I look at some of the triumphal pictures – I mean the David of Napoleon crossing the Alps, which is an extraordinary piece of art. When you think of the misery that Napoleon brought to Europe, he should not be commemorated, but you do look at that painting and you say it is a very great piece of art.

I mean we have the same issue with Wagner. You know if you look at Richard Wagner's views, they are so often retrograde, we so often find them appalling. I mean his anti-Semitism is something we find appalling, but he wrote wonderful music. And it's always going to be tricky and we're always going to be finding this tension between who did it, what is being depicted and the thing itself and it will never be entirely resolved, but I think that's part of the complexity of being human and dealing with the arts.

NICK PANTER: Hi there. Nick Panter, just a Canadian citizen, and thanks for doing this. A modern art form that I see is television – a new art form which has also led to YouTube and things like that – and television of course has entertainment but it also (some may say) used to or still kind of has journalistic integrity, but what we're seeing is the convergence of the two. Do you find that the new style of journalism, which is on and can be seen as an art form on television, is exacerbating or expediting comments of the mark of Cain and just the concepts of war that people have from watching such television shows?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Again it's difficult. does it desensitise people, does it make them less willing to confront the horrors of war? And I think perhaps what I find lacking so in so much of television news now is the attenuation of the capacity of most broadcasting networks to actually have people in the field and And we often get people covering conflicts who don't really know ... especially with complex conflicts. I mean if you look at what's happening in Iraq and Afghanistan where you get these moving parts and people changing sides and different ideologies coming and going, I think you need people with profound local knowledge. And I think our media, I think – partly television is and news ... print media as well – simply do not have the capacity to do that much anymore and I think we all lose as a result.

ANITA ANAND: Margaret, we've done a lot of miles with *The Mark of Cain*. We've travelled to places which have seen war very recently, others which have seen a long stretch of peace. Hearing all the voices that you've heard, thinking about all the things that you have been thinking about, where are we right now?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: I think we are, as we have often been in the past, muddling through. There are many of us who would prefer not to see another war, but we also I think (many of us) recognise that sometimes wars come whether or not you want them. I sincerely hope that they don't and I don't think I would urge people to look at war because it's something glorious, but I think if we don't look at it I think we do not have then the capacity to understand it. I don't think studying war is to assume that war is good, to assume that war is always going to be with us, but I think it's something we need to confront and we need to try and understand because if we don't understand it I don't see how we have any hope going ahead looking into the future of avoiding it yet again.

So many wars in the past have started out of things like hurt pride, honour. I mean you know we think we're grown-ups, but we often behave in very adolescent ways. You know if you look at what people were saying in the capitals of Europe in 1914, they were saying things like "We can't let them do this to us." I mean it's no different, it seems to me really when you get right down to it, from gangs fighting in the street. People don't want to be dishonoured and in some

cases they would rather die than be dishonoured, and I think we have to understand that and try and deal with it and try and persuade them that there are other ways of having honour and other ways of avoiding dishonour.

ANITA ANAND: I can't think of a better note to leave it. Thank you for such a memorable and thought provoking series. All the lectures from the series are available on the Reith site via the Radio 4 website and there's loads of information about past lectures too. A huge thanks to our hosts here at the War Museum, to our audience but a very special thanks to the BBC's Reith Lecturer for 2018, Professor Margaret MacMillan.

AUDIENCE APPLAUSE