At first glance, *L’Enfant du Régiment (The Random Shot)* by Sir John Everett Millais (1829-1896) looks like an innocent and peaceful work. A child is resting on a wall, eyes closed and seemingly lost in her dreams. A closer look, however, tells quite a different story. The child’s blanket is the garment of a French grenadier, and in the background, a group of soldiers appears to be in the midst of a fierce battle. A rat is staring up at her. The illusion of peace is broken, as we are transferred to the French Revolution, known as one of the bloodiest events in Western history. The story presented now brings forth many contradictions: innocence and violence, pain and comfort, injury and healing, sleep and death, religion and war.

Millais based his painting on *La Fille du Régiment*, an opera by Gaetano Donizetti. In the opera, a girl named Marie plays the “daughter of the regiment,” as she is adopted by the soldiers of the French Revolution in service and she grows up in the military.1 In *L’Enfant du Régiment*, the girl’s “family” is seen behind her, presenting a “careful blending of vulnerability and care, danger and nurture.”2 This battle has been both the cause and the healing of the wound, as the soldiers have bandaged her hand and covered her with a garment.

The sweetness of the child immediately presents unmistakable innocence. Millais created the above painting at the Priori Church of Icklesham, England, in the autumn of 1855. The tomb is a sculpture effigy to Gervaise Allard, a medieval knight. The duality of the ancient knight and the relatively modern coats of the French soldiers is echoed in the peaceful sleeps of both this knight and the child. After crying herself to sleep, she is the ideal image of peace in the middle of violence. Is she dreaming? If so, maybe she is imagining her country in peace. Lying on top of the past soldier and covered in a soldier’s coat, she is supported and covered by images of battle but may be dreaming of a more peaceful reality and future.

Disclosures

The authors have declared that they have nothing to disclose.

References