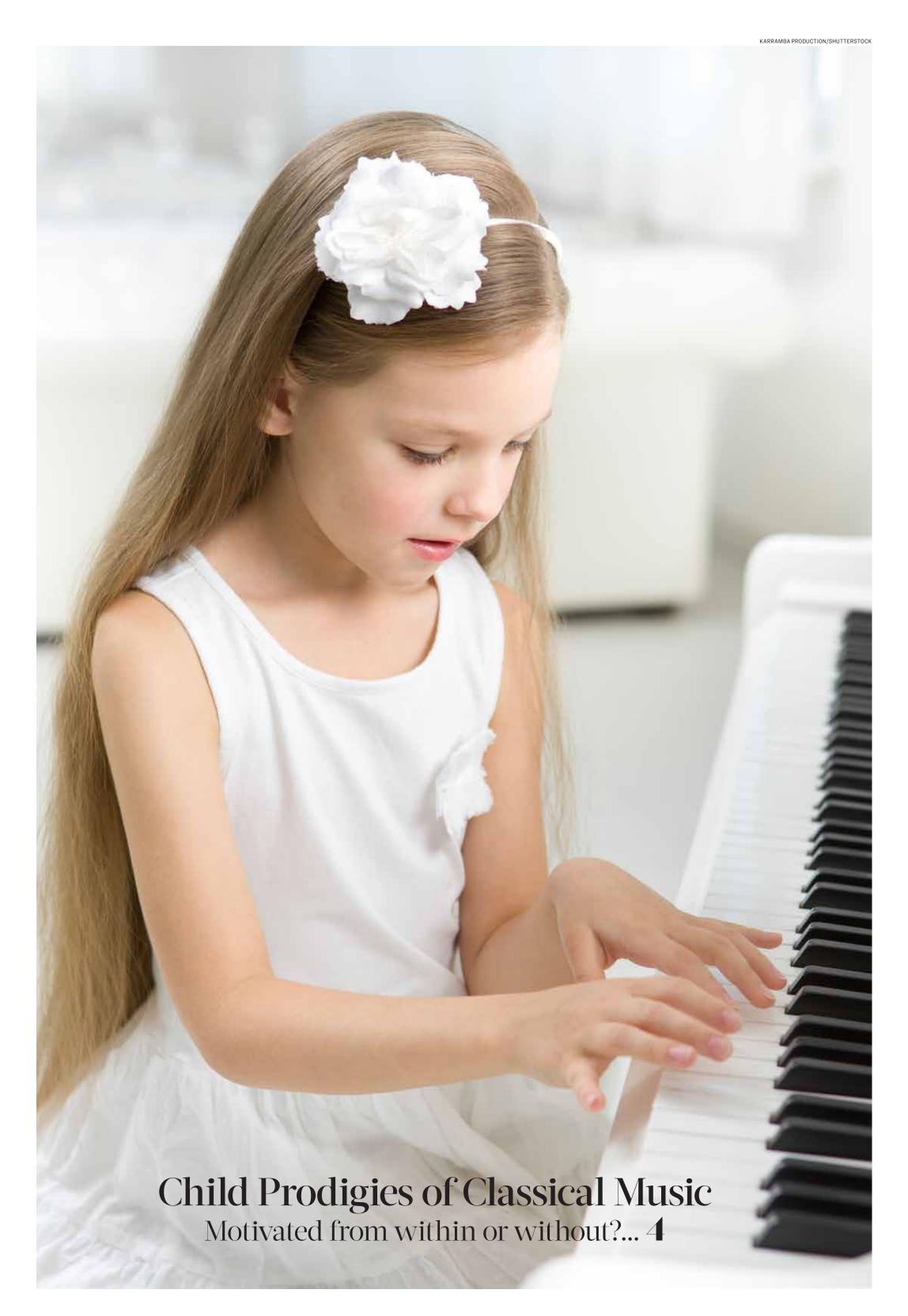
WEEK 19, 2019 • 1

# THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS© TRADITION



# HOW **LITERATURE** TOTALITARIANS FORCE CONFESSIONS

# FROM INNOCENT PEOPLE

**GRAYSON QUAY** 

recently re-read George Orwell's anti-Soviet fable "Animal Farm" for the first time since high school, and I found myself at a loss to explain one of the book's darkest scenes to the student I was tutoring.

In this scene, Napoleon (Orwell's stand-in for Stalin) consolidates his power over Animal Farm (i.e., the Soviet Union) by accusing a group of pigs of conspiring with the exiled Snowball (i.e., Trotsky) to undermine the revolution. The pigs, having been coerced by Napoleon's dogs (i.e., the secret police), confess to being agents of Snowball.

When they had finished their confession, the dogs promptly tore their throats out, and in a terrible voice Napoleon demanded whether any other animal had anything to confess. The three hens who had been the ringleaders in the attempted rebellion over the eggs now came forward and stated that Snowball had appeared to them in a dream and incited them to disobey Napoleon's orders. They, too, were slaughtered. Then a goose came forward and confessed to having secreted six ears of corn during the last year's harvest and eaten them in the night. Then a sheep confessed to having urinated in the drinking pool-urged to do this, so she said, by Snowball-and two other sheep confessed to having murdered an old ram, an especially devoted follower of Napoleon, by chasing him round and round a bonfire when he was suffering from a cough. They were all slain on the spot. And so the tale of confessions and executions went on, until there was a pile of corpses lying before Napoleon's feet and the air was heavy with the smell of blood.

Why, my student wanted to know, would these animals confess if they knew they were going to be executed?

His next question was even more insightful: Did the animals even commit the crimes to which they confessed? Some crimes, such as the goose stealing corn, seem plausible, and the hens really did rebel, but the murder of the old ram sounds completely absurd. The tendency to echo Napoleon's propaganda by blaming the phantom scapegoat Snowball further suggests that many of these confessions are fiction.

I found the first part of my answer in "A Tale of Two Cities" by Charles Dickens. As Dickens describes the mass guillotinings of the French Revolution, he alerts his readers to "a species of fervour or intoxication," caus ing unnecessary executions due to "a wild infection of the wildly shaken public mind.'

Like Orwell, Dickens portrays innocent men and women clamoring for execution at the hands of a bloodthirsty revolutionary regime. But why?

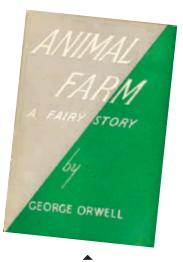
According to Dickens, the French Revolution degenerated into a death cult, with the guillotine replacing the Cross as the instrument of mankind's salvation. Christians hope to reach a heavenly paradise by placing their faith in Christ and expressing that faith through good works.

Revolutionaries, on the other hand, seek to create an earthly paradise by killing everyone who stands in their way. Execution thus becomes the sacrament by which the community is purified. Those who truly believe in the future utopia promised by Marx or by the leaders of the French Revolution will



The cast of "Animal Farm" in Steppenwolf for Young Adults' 2014 production.

The French Revolution degenerated into a death cult, with the guillotine replacing the Cross as the instrument of mankind's salvation.



George Orwell's political satire "Animal Farm" illuminates the methods of Soviet Russia's leaders.

naturally be drawn to partake of it.

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Marxism is more rigorous and unforgiving than any religion in its call for total commitment to the cause, a standard of which all people (and animals) must necessarily fall short. If I, a sinful man (or hen or goose or sheep) who had tried and failed to live up to the revolutionary ideal, believed that I could best hasten the arrival of heaven on earth by allowing myself to become a victim of sacred state violence, the temptation would certainly be strong. Whether the goose stole the corn or not, it is easy to imagine why he felt he had no choice but to embrace his own execution. Having been deceived into feeling a revolutionary reverence for death and driven to despair by the demand for total ideological orthodoxy and orthopraxy, what

The second part of my answer came from an article titled "Why Do People Admit to Crimes They Didn't Commit?" According to this article, almost 30 percent of people exonerated by DNA evidence originally confessed to crimes of which they were innocent. The author lavs most of the blame for these false confessions on police, who are legally permitted to lie to suspects in order to extract confessions. Here's one example:

[I]n 1988 Martin Tankleff was convicted of murdering his parents on Long Island. Detectives told Tankleff-who was 17 at the time-that they had found a lock of his hair in his dead mother's hand. They also falsely reported that his father said Tankleff had committed the crime before losing consciousness and later dying. Both assertions were lies. Tankleff initially believed he must

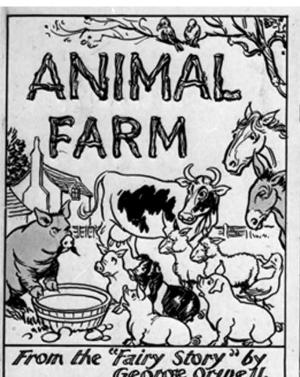
have done it, saying, 'My father never lies.' As soon as I read the line, "My father never lies," I understood what Orwell was getting at. Tankleff's words, implying more trust in authorities than the truth, sound eerily similar to one of the slogans of Animal Farm: "Napoleon is always right." He never lets a good crisis go to waste. If Napoleon can convince the other animals that their revolution is constantly threatened from within and without, then there is no limit to the power he can seize to protect them from these largely imaginary threats.

Napoleon has trained the other animals to trust his propaganda more than their own memories. If he says there was sabotage. then there was, and if no one admits to it, then that's as much as to say that Napoleon was wrong, which is a metaphysical impossibility. Someone must confess. It's easy to imagine a long silence in which any number of animals think to themselves, I don't remember doing anything wrong... but it must have been me!

As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote, totalitarian regimes force ordinary people "to participate in lies," and Orwell shows just where that leads: the corruption of the human soul and eventual death

Fortunately, Solzhenitsyn also offers a way to resist totalitarianism, urging his readers to acknowledge that goodness does not exist in a pure form in any human being or social class and to live by a simple creed: "Let that [lie] come into the world, let it even reign supreme-only not through me."

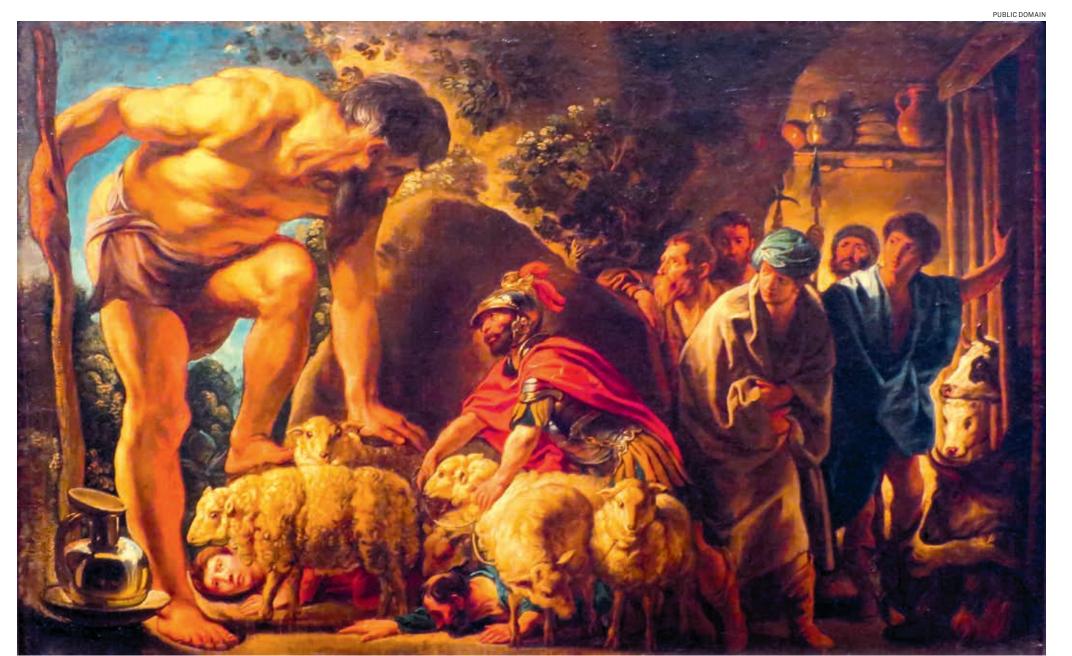
This post, "How Totalitarians Force Confessions From Innocent People," by Grayson Quay was originally posted on Intellectual











"Odysseus in the Cave of Polyphemus," circa 1635, Jacob Jordaens.

# **ODYSSEUS AND THE ENNEAGRAM**

# FINDING THE TRUE SELF

# The Sin

PART 3

**JAMES SALE** 

In this multipart series, "Finding the True Self," we will discuss nine types of personalities and their flaws, and show how Odysseus, through his adventures, overcame them to find his way back home.

n Part 2 of this series of articles, we saw Odysseus barely managing to escape from the land of the Lotus-Eaters, or in Enneagram personalityspeak, from the sloth that can sometimes characterize the type Nine person.

We saw, too, that what seemed fairly innocuous compared with the sort of fighting and warfare that occurred at Troy was anything but innocuous: The addiction to ease and a pleasant, nonconfrontational sort of lifestyle sapped the will to achieve anything and also blocked the crew's ability to find their way home. Home is where the soul of a human being finds its own true beauty and realizes its full potential. In order to break the power of sloth, Odysseus has to exercise tremendous and decisive will power, and force his men (at this point, perhaps, think of these as being his "members," his whole body, metaphorically) to launch almost directionless, but decisively away from this fatal island. And so they come to a totally different kind of menace; indeed, a totally different kind of

personality type, the Eight, on the island of the Cyclops. Here the sin is not sloth, but lust, and not only lust as understood in terms of sex but also, more importantly, lust for power, for domination.

As a reminder, Eights perceive themselves as "I am strong," and they want to be in control. At their best, Eights are high-energy, take-charge, and responsible individuals; at their worst, they are confrontational, reckless, and vindictive.

(Below)

Polyphemus seeks

revenge on Odysseus

and his crew as thev

escape. "Odysseus

and Polyphemus,"

Böcklin. Museum of

Fine Arts, Boston.

1896. Arnold

As we will see, what worked as a strategy to overcome or break free from the Lotus-Eaters on their island would be doomed to fail here.

But notice before we move on to describe Polyphemus, the Cyclops and type Eight, that the personalities are metaphorically separated: They are islands or lands apart, distinctive, separate, and one-of-a-kind. According to the Enneagram, one can only be one type and that does not change throughout one's life.

The Next Leg of the Journey

With Eights, we are dealing with one-eyed giants: self-sufficient, supremely confident ogres, who follow no rules and obey no gods. One of them, Polyphemus, traps Odysseus and his men in his cave, and on being informed of his need to show hospitality lest he upset the gods, promptly de-

vours two of Odysseus's men and falls asleep. This brutality is a gross violation of the laws of the cosmos: Zeus himself rated hospitality as one of the most important of human virtues. And as late as Shakespeare, we find Macbeth agonizing over whether he should kill Duncan because he is Duncan's host, as well as Duncan's being his liege lord. So, here with Polyphemus the root sin is lust for power, strength, and dominance (as it is in "Macbeth," whose titular character is a clear Eight).

Polyphemus's one eye is also highly suggestive: The Cyclopes have single vision, not stereoscopic; they get focused on one thing

and one thing only. They do not see depth or subtleties, and they do not have a meaningful spiritual dimension to their lives. For, it has been observed (by Sir Richard Temple, for example, and his analyses of the differing po-

sitions of the eyes of saints in icon paintings) that one eye looks out on the external world, while the other is for introspection and looking inward. Cyclopes do not introspect or have the ability to review their own actions. Odysseus had to "just do it" to break free from the Lotus-Eaters, but now he is on an island where just-doing-whatev-

er-they-want is the norm. Thus, having eaten (two men!), Polyphemus, satisfied, falls asleep, confident no one can hurt him, although surrounded in his cave by Odysseus and his crew.

This is a classic Eight psychology: When they are at their worst, Eights are aggressive and dominating, fearless even of the gods, and have a profound sense of their own invulnerability.

# **Overcoming Those Who Dominate**

Enneagram.

Of course, given what happens and with hindsight, we know that Polyphemus's single vision of to Poseidon's. himself in the world, this lack of perspective and "in-sight," as well as the hubristic and vaunting ego he displays, is a weakness. But how does Odysseus find that weakness?

Initially, he considers "immediate, decisive action"; he goes so far as to identify exactly the spot where-despite his inferior size-his sharp sword might kill the sleeping Polyphemus: to "stab his chest where the midriff packs the liver." But something holds him back from doing so. With sloth, "immediate, decisive action" was the answer, but here it would be fatal.

Odysseus realizes that such a move would be fatal to his own safety, for not "22 four-wheeled wagons" could move the stone that blocked the exit to the cave that they were now trapped in. (Notice, that 22 x 4 is 88 or the power of Eight doubled!)

Put another way: When dealing with Eights, one must not attack directly, for they are stronger than you are. Here, as in dealing with Troy, Odysseus has to come up with a stratagem that turns the Cyclops's own strength against it. And this is exactly what Odysseus does: The very excessive appetite that fuels the Cyclops's power is now the point of Polyphemus's weakness.

Odysseus seems to befriend Polyphemus when he awakes, so much so that Polyphemus promises to eat him last! And Odysseus, meanwhile, feeds the Cyclops's insatiable appetite a very strong wine, which the giant demands to surfeit. Then, with the Cyclops drunk, Odysseus with four (half of 8, of course, as if reducing the power of Eight) of his men drive a sharp stake into his one eye, thus blinding him.

So, not killing, but wounding and maiming the Cyclops, is the trick to defeat Polyphemus's overwhelming strength. Now the Cyclops cannot see at all; from single vision, he has no vision.

Having done this, Odysseus outwits him further in a series of other small maneuvers. Notice "small" maneuvers, as in links in a chain, each necessary but each small, not like the big decisive step on the island of the Lotus-Eaters. First, Odysseus deploys a false name, "Nobody." Then, he uses Polyphemus's own sheep as a disguise and vehicle to escape, and finally and critically gets Polyphemus to unroll the huge stone that blocks their exit.

The key thing in overcoming the lust for power is not by matching power with power, but by holding back, using guile, hiding's one's true intentions, and taking a middle position between overboldness and resignation to fate. In this way, Odysseus is able to escape.

And the key for Eights to master themselves is to develop that second eye of "in-sight," which is essential if they are to keep a tight rein on their emotional states, whose very intensity will betray

# **Odysseus's Flaw**

Odysseus, however, does make one mistake: Having got away and sailing off, he cannot resist boasting-yelling out his true name to Polyphemus-that it is Odysseus who has "blinded you, shamed you so." In doing so, he allows the Cyclops to pray to his father, Poseidon, the god of the sea, to punish Odysseus and his crew, which Poseidon does with true vengeance.

Without the correct name, of course, Polyphemus could not make that prayer, or would sound ridiculous in praying that his father punish

Poseidon, we see, is the deadly enemy of the man of many stratagems, the sort of stratagems that come from Pallas Athena, the goddess of wisdom and war, who more than any other god supports and sustains Odysseus

It is interesting to note that although Athena and Poseidon are both part of the Olympian 12god setup, they were by their natures in conflict: most famously in the naming of the city of Athens, which was named after Athena because the Athenians judged her gift to the city superior

But the actual conflict occurs deeper. Poseidon is the god of the seas, and the seas are a metaphor for our subconscious, our emotions, and darker aspects. If we veer, therefore, from the logic of the mind in dealing with an Eight, as Odysseus did in taunting Polyphemus-in other words, allowing our sea of more primitive emotions free expression-then we cloud our judgment; and for that, a dreadful penalty will be exacted, including potential defeat.

But just as the threat of the Lotus-Eaters at position Nine (sloth) of the Enneagram is entirely different from the threat of the Cyclops at position Eight (lust), so now an entirely different kind of problem surfaces at position Seven (gluttony), and this is Odysseus meeting with Aeolus, master of the winds, at Aeolia, which is where we journey next.

James Sale is a poet and businessman whose company, Motivational Maps Ltd., operates in 14 countries. James will be appearing in New York to do talks and poetry readings for The Society of Classical Poets on June 17 at Bryant Park and The Princeton Club. To meet James and for more information, go to http://bit.ly/Poetry\_and\_Culture

# CHILD PRODIGIES of Classical Music

Motivated from within or without?

### **JANI ALLAN**

There was always music in our house when I was growing up: operas and piano sonatas and string quartets. I still remember the sound of the needle poised on a record making the noise of hushed applause before the music started.

When I was 4, my mother asked me if I would like to learn to play the piano. I replied that I would teach myself. She immediately set about finding me a teacher. A series of teachers, really, as I was deemed a prodigy;

I moved up the totem pole of tutors.

My mother's ambitions for my concert-pianist future coursed through her veins. My last teacher was Professor Adolph Hallis. Professor Hallis accepted only exceptional pupils.

His other star student was Marian Friedman. Marian was talented, diligent, and dedicated. I could tell. I would be sitting on a tapestry couch in the waiting room, waiting for her to be released.

When I was 10, I played with the Johannesburg Symphony Orchestra. When, at age 14, I was selected to play at the Young Artists Concerto Festival, I started having pre-recital nerves. I also resented the four hours I had to practice the piano every day. Prodigiousness in childhood

does not always predict adult

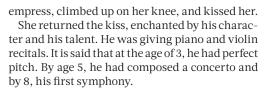
eminence. Marian went on refining her brilliance. She is described as a "connoisseur's pianist" by The Boston reported from Rhode Island that Mark Malkovich III, general director of the Newport Music Festival for 30 years, celebrated his 75th birthday with a present to himself: getting Marian Friedman to

play a recital. She is extremely low-profile.

Stories of child prodigies in the classical genre have a long history and include the greatest composers in Western history

When Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was 6, he performed on the harpsichord for The Empress

Maria Theresa and her family looked at his chubby, dimpled hands moving precisely on the keyboard and were charmed. When he finished



Mozart's father, Leopold, was probably the original pushy parent, forcing him to perform all over Europe. Few know that Mozart's sister, Maria Anna (nicknamed Nannerl), was also a prodigy, but her destiny was marriage.

> Mozart seemed to cope with the great expectations that come with precocious talent.

Others haven't. Violinist Niccolò Paganini was locked in a room and forced to practice, a regimen that, some said, helped him to develop a drinking problem by the time he was 16.

Some prodigies thought to have "the gift" had demandng fathers who doubled as demanding teachers.

Lang Lang is a Chinese concert pianist whose accomplishments include performances with the Berlin Philharmonic at the opening of the Beijing Olympic Games, a White House state dinner, and sold-out shows at Carnegie Hall. From the age of 2, Lang Lang would sit with his father, Lang Guoren, who made his son practice up to

four hours a day. As Lang Lang grew older, he practiced eight hours a day. Growing up in Mao's China, the father's own dreams of musical success were smashed. He wanted his Globe. In the Globe's July 13, 2005 article, it was son to be the musician he was never allowed to be. Did his determination border on psychological or physical abuse? Lang says no. He and his father wanted the same thing: for Lang Lang to become a globally famous musician. "I was never forced

to play the piano," he said in a China Daily article.

# Genius as an Abnormality

Chopin's études, considered some of

the most challenging pieces in the piano

repertoire, are now being played by chil-

dren. Portrait of Frédéric Chopin, 1835,

by his fiancée Maria Wodzinska.

What are child prodigies? Are they completely different human beings? Apart from agreeing that prodigies possess levels of ability that most adults never can, we still don't know where prodigiousness originates from. The debate of nature versus nurture continues to rage.

Writer David Shenk goes as far as to argue that prodigiousness is not in fact genetic.

MARZOLINO/SHUTTERTOCK

1. Mozart the wonder

child, with his father and

sister in 1763, from an

Carmontelle, watercolor,

2. Some child prodigies,

such as Niccolò

Paganini, develop

unhealthy coping

mechanisms to deal

suffer. A portrait of

Dominique Ingres.

3. A poster from

the 1970s of a

performance by child prodigy Marian

with the pressures they

Niccolò Paganini, 1819, by Jean-Auguste-

Magasin Pittoresque, Paris, 1845.

old illustration. After

Scientists continue to debate the origins of prodigiousness. General intelligence, working memory, the performance, the story goes, he ran up to the or even a form of autism could be responsible, they Stories of child prodigies in the classical genre have a long his tory and include the greatest composers in Western history.



Kaplinsky of Juilliard said to The New York Times: "Genius is an abnormality and can signal other abnormalities ... ADD or OCD or Asperger's." Scholars argue that Mozart himself was on the autism spectrum.

classical music genre. Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt,

But in recent years, a growing number of prodigies of increasingly young ages are reaching a global audience. China has an estimated 30 million young pianists and 10 million young violinists, North American music schools and conservatories. Cheltham's School of Music in Manchester, England, the success of the Chinese at music competitions is unsurprising. McLachlan observed, in the Independent, that this success derives from the

younger age than ever before," Kaplinsky said, in Newsweek. "Today kids are recording the Chopin études at age 10," she said. "When I was young, nobody played them until they were adults."

Umi Garrett, who was 8 years old when

an extraordinary desire and dedication. She told Ellen that she would play the piano "all

# **Choosing a Path**

At the last minute, I changed my mind about doing music and enrolled for a degree in fine arts

mond in the dust bunnies of my memory. I've come to understand that the ultimate

being in the world.



argue, as NeuroNation reports. Piano teacher Veda

# **Child Prodigies Today**

There is a long history of child prodigies in the and Mendelssohn are just a few.

The New York Times says. And Newsweek reports that Chinese prodigies are attending European and According to Murray McLachlan, a teacher at rock-solid work ethos of their families.

"Musicians are doing more advanced things at a

It's the Olympic syndrome: Records exist in order

she played Liszt on "The Ellen DeGeneres Show," displayed the commonality of prodigious children:

# day long" if she could.

This begs the question, should I have cut short my own classical music career?

I was 18 when it was decided that I would go to the University of the Witwatersrand to study for a bachelor's degree in music

Wits School of Arts in the 1970s shines like a dia-

achievement of any human being is love. We need to love what we do. If we hesitate, then we need to rock with the waves and invent a new way of

Jani Allan is a South African journalist, columnist, writer, and broadcaster.





Corban Te Aika, curator of human history (Matauranga Maori) with his family hei tiki, the Te Aika Hei Tiki, at the

Canterbury Museum in New Zealand.

Despite it

being very

small, it's a

ple of a

hei tiki.

Museum

superb exam

Corban Te Aika,

curator of human

# The Te Aika Hei Tiki

### LORRAINE FERRIER

THE EPOCH TIMES Week 19, 2019

**CURATOR'S NOTES** 

Corban Te Aika, curator of human history (Matauranga Maori) at the Canterbury Museum in Christchurch, New Zealand, shares how his family reconnected with their ancestral pounamu (New Zealand greenstone), after they nearly lost it in battle, and then did lose it to a European collector.

he Te Aika Hei Tiki (hei tiki is a pendant in human form) has been in my family for around seven or eight generations. Around 1830, Kaiapoi Pa, the fortified village that my family has an association with, on New Zealand's South Island, was attacked by a North Island tribe. The goal of the tribe was essentially to acquire Kaiapoi Pa in order to control the trade of pounamu

It was quite common practice that if you knew you were going to be attacked, any significant carvings or taonga (treasures) were to be retrieved and, more often than not, hidden or taken away to your backup pa or smaller villages.

When Kaiapoi Pa was about to be attacked, my fourth-generation great-grandfather, Aperahama Te Aika, was sent to retrieve the hei tiki that had fairly recently been buried with his grandfather. We've got a watercolor image in the exhibition of the settlement that Aperahama

would have lived in and where he would've kept the hei tiki after he retrieved it and the war had passed.

The hei tiki remained in the family until around 1922, when my second great-grandfather sold it to a European collector of curios because he needed the money to raise his six children, as his wife had died of tuberculosis.

# **Finding the Family**

Hei Tiki In the mid to late 1990s, my greatuncle decided to see if he could find this hei tiki, and he worked with one of my predecessors here at Canterbury Museum, Roger Fyfe,

to track down the hei tiki. They found it in London, of all places; it had made itself a new home on the other side of the world.

It was a joint venture between the National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Roger Fyfe, and my great-uncle to bring the hei tiki home. The family was very fortunate that Te Papa fronted up the cash to help bring it home.

# Holding Te Aika Hei Tiki

Prior to the hei tiki arriving here at Canterbury Museum for the "Kura Pounamu: Our Treasured Hei tiki (pendant in human form). Te Aika whanau (family), Ngai Tuahuriri, Ngai

Stone" exhibition, the last time I saw it and got to museum and having to wear gloves and go behind hold it, I was about 13 or 14 years old. That's 15, 16 years ago now. Te Papa and my great-uncle had essentially purchased it back, and it was here at Canterbury Museum for a number of years when every other day that I work here. it first returned to New Zealand, just to allow the

family to come in and see it, and interact with it. because I had heard my grandfather and my greatgrandfather talking about it for a number of years, and we grew up knowing that we had this hei tiki somewhere, which belonged to our family and which had been sold off.

I remember two of my aunties in particular. They did a karanga-the high-pitched call of welcome history, Canterbury house)—to the hei tiki as it was being brought out that's important. in front of us. It was quite a homecoming ceremony for it in some ways.

young age was quite a pivotal moment in my life. I with the entire family. could see the history of my family in it. And despite it being very small, it's a superb example of a hei tiki. onga (treasures) like that would ideally be returned terbury Museum.com to learn more. or even briefly reunited with us again

It definitely influenced what I decided to do after This interview has been edited for clarity high school. Being a young kid and coming into the and brevity.

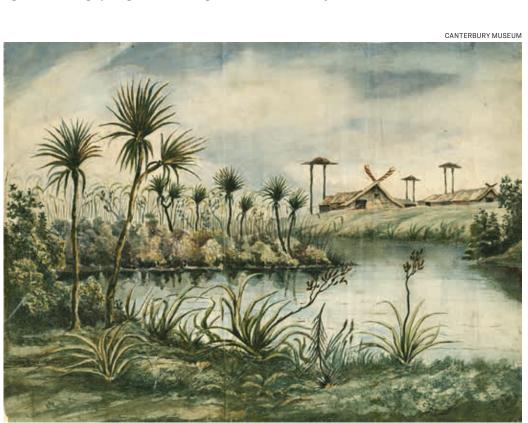
the scenes of the museum, it was like you were going into the deep, dark vaults of the museum, when really it was going into a lab that I walk into

When the "Kura Pounamu: Our Treasured Stone" exhibition opened here just before Christmas last It was quite an emotional experience back then year, a branch of the family had a reunion over Christmas, and one day, about 30 of us came into the museum and got to spend a bit of time with the hei tiki-first and foremost to get our photos taken with it. There were a couple of newborn babies that got to see it for the first time, even though they won't remember it. I think it's just having that living connection and treating the hei tiki as that you often hear in a marae (Maori meeting a taonga, as a treasure, as opposed to just an object

It's been in the family for so long and has had an association with us for seven-ish generations, and I think getting to handle the hei tiki at such a that's something that we want to be able to share

The Te Aika He Tiki is part of the exhibition "Kura Pounamu: Our Treasured Stone," at the Canterbury I wanted to make sure that all of our family's taMuseum in Christchurch, New Zealand. See Can-

FLICKR-JOHN ATHERTON CC BY-SA 2.0



"Scene on the Horotueka (Cam River), Kaiapoi Pa Canterbury," 1855, by Charles Haubroe. Watercolor.

# Old Kindergarten Requirements Suggest Today's Classrooms Are Too Much, Too Soon

# **ANNIE HOLMQUIST**

Once upon

kids didn't

go to pre-

school. Or

kinder-

a time,

received a rather frantic email from a friend when school started last fall. Panicking over the number of parents posting first day of preschool pictures, my friend wondered if she had made a mistake by not sending her 4-year-old to school. "When did preschool become so popular?" she asked in dismay.

She wasn't imagining things. Preschool is very popular. Education is important, argues society, so the sooner a child starts school, the better off he will be. As a result, many little kids are almost expected to read and do simple algebraic equations before starting kindergarten. (I'm kidding on that last one. But, you never know...)

It hasn't always been like this. Once upon a time, kids didn't go to preschool. Or kindergarten. And when they did go to the latter, the expectations were much more kid-friendly and age appropriate. I realized this when I ran across the following

image shared by Sarah Mackenzie, author of "The Read-Aloud Family." Strikingly absent from the list, Mackenzie notes, is any mention of knowing letters or being able to read. Instead, the kindergarten learning ideals from

1954 are play-based, offering experience with reallife activities such as sewing, gardening, and cooking. Singing and interacting with others is also given high priority. And while individual reading is not taught, children interact with books and enjoy being read to aloud.

This agenda is similar to the one followed by the

ancient Greeks, according to Henri Marrou's book "A History of Education in Antiquity":

In a sense, of course, the child's education began in these early years. He was introduced into social life and shown how to behave, how to be well-mannered and polite, and also given some kind of moral dis-

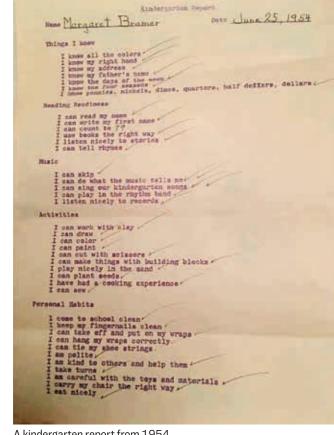
In these early years, too, he began to learn something about his own culture. Like any child today. he entered the enchanted world of music by hearing cradle-songs. ... he came into contact with "literature" through his nurse's tales. ...

These early years were in fact primarily a time

Marrou goes on to say that several of the great philosophers did suggest starting rigorous academics at early ages, but most families ignored such advice. Instead, they kept the child at home doing these play-based tasks and waited until a child was 7 to officially start school

Would it be better for our children to return to a similar practice? Do we need to consider whether the rush to keep little Johnny on par with little Jimmy is really for the benefit of the child? And if we consider this carefully, might we find that the rush for early achievement is more for the pride of parents?

This post, "Old Kindergarten Requirements Suggest Today's Classrooms Are Too Much, Too Soon." originally published on Intellectual Takeout, was written by Annie Holmquist, editor of



A kindergarten report from 1954.

# Rediscovering Our Innate Good Nature in the 'Three Character Classic'

# **DANIEL TENG**

The "Three Character Classic," or "San Zi Jing," is the best-known classic Chinese text for children. Written by Wang Yinlian (1223–1296) during the Song Dynasty, it has been memorized by generations of Chinese people, young and old. Until the 1800s, the "Three Character Classic" was the first text that every child would study.

The text's short, simple, and rhuthmic three-character verses allowed for easy reading and reciting, while the content covered a broad range of topics. It not only helped children learn common Chinese characters, grammar structures, and lessons from Chinese history but also, above all, enabled them to develop an understanding of traditional Chinese culture and the upright ways of conducting themselves as good people.

The very first lesson in the "Three Character Classic" teaches children about their original pure nature:

People at birth

Are good by nature. Their natures are much the same, Their habits become widely different

In other words, people are born innately good. Infants may vary in their personality, but by and large they share similar qualities

of innocence and purity However, as the young grow up and are influenced by different people, environments, and experiences, they develop priorities and habits that can lead them to

become very different individuals. For example, some learn to value family and filial piety as being of the highest importance; others learn to cherish money above all things. Some find gratification through material gains; others find meaning in spiritual pursuit.

### Same Background, Different Values The following anecdote illustrates how two

people who grew up together can turn out very differently. A Chinese writer relates how her father, a carpenter named Jing, was a kind, honest, and respectful man who was well liked by everyone in his village for his good character.

Jing had an old classmate and friend named Wang. One day, Wang invited Jing

As they were chatting, Jing saw that an old man who looked like a servant was cooking for them and serving them tea and wine. He asked Wang, "Who is this elderly man?"

When Wang replied, "That's my father," Jing was shocked.

Jing jumped up and said to Wang's father, "Uncle, please sit down." He helped the elderly man into his seat, poured him a glass of wine, and respectfully said, "Uncle, please forgive my rudeness."

Then, turning to Wang, Jing said, "I am

Chinese children attend preschool in Beijing on April 26, 2012. Until the 1800s, the "Three Character Classic" was the very first text that every child would study.



As people are innately good, even those who have gone astray can rediscover their good nature and return to their original true selves.

no longer your friend. You don't know how to respect your elders." He picked up his tools and walked out the door.

Jing had learned from a young age that one must be respectful to one's elders and teachers. Wang, on the other hand, never learned to take this principle seriously. Despite growing up as old friends, the two had developed widely different characters and values.

# **Kou Zhun Receives a Lesson Beyond**

the Grave So what makes a person become like Jing instead of Wang? The answer lies in the next stanza of the "Three Character

If foolishly there is no teaching, The nature will deteriorate.

The right way in teaching Is to attach the utmost importance in thoroughness.

A person's innately good nature is maintained through teaching and guidance throughout one's life. Without guidance, however, this good nature can become

The story of Kou Zhun, a prime minister who lived during China's Northern Song

Dynasty, offers an example. Kou was born into a family of intellectuals. However, his father died when Kou was young, and he was raised by his mother, who wove fabric to help them get by.

Despite their poverty, Kou's mother taught and urged Kou to work hard so that he could one day make great contributions Kou proved to be extremely intelligent,

nations with outstanding results. He was thus among the few to be selected by the emperor to become a government official. The good news spread to Kou's mother, who was seriously ill at the time. As she lay rediscover their good nature and return to

and at 18, he passed the national exami-

"Kou Zhun will one day become a gov- to change, it's never too late.

ernment official," she whispered. "If his character starts to go astray, please give him this painting."

Week 19, 2019 THE EPOCH TIMES

# **Tempering Extravagance**

Kou Zhun eventually became prime minister, but fame and luxury began to go to his head. To show off his wealth and status, he decided to host an extravagant birthday celebration, replete with a banquet and opera performances.

Noticing that the time had come, the servant presented Kou with his mother's painting. Kou saw that it was a painting of himself reading a book under an oil lamp, with his mother weaving cloth by his side. Written next to the image were these

Watching you endure the hardship of studying under a dim light,

I hope you will become a good person and benefit many others in the future. Your devoted mother has taught you the virtue of thrift

In times of wealth, never forget those who are poor, like we once were.

Reading his mother's words, Kou burst into tears. It was clear he had not lived up to her expectations. He called off the banquet. The reminder from Kou's mother beyond the grave saved him from a downward spiral toward greed and corruption. From then on, Kou lived frugally, treated others generously, and carried out his official duties with high morals and integrity. He eventually became one of the most famous and beloved prime ministers of the Song Dynasty.

This story not only illustrates that guidance and teaching are necessary for grooming one's character, but it also carries a deeper message: As people are innately good, even those who have gone astray can dying, she gave a faithful servant a painting their original true selves. As long as they realize their mistakes and are determined



Communist China's school

Hefei, in East China's Anhui

2010. Until the 1800s, the

"Three Character Classic"

was the very first text that

every child would study.

Province, on Sept. 20,



# Mezzo Solos by Brahms, Elgar, and The Brothers Balliett

### **CATHERINE YANG**

n May 3, The Cecilia Chorus of New York performs an interesting triptych of pieces shining the spotlight on the mezzo-soprano soloist. The concert honors Alice Mandelick Flagler (1872-1918), who was a mezzosoprano, founding member, and benefactor of the chorus. On contemplating the role of altos, conductor Mark Shapiro found that these voices often hold together the chorus, only to have the audience give the glory to the sopranos. In opera, mezzo-sopranos sometimes suffer the same affliction, relegated to a side character.

But digging into an array of works, Shapiro found pieces by Johannes Brahms and Edward Elgar and was "struck by the poetry latent in each composer's choice of a lone mezzo to counterbalance the chorus," Shapiro wrote in a conductor's note. "She embodies nobility, wisdom, tenderness-and a poignant solitariness."

Furthermore, the "Alto Rhapsody" by Brahms and "The Music Makers" by Elgar both give us a deeper look at the journey of an artist. While putting the concert together, the chorus had also commissioned contemporary compos-

ers The Brothers Balliett for a new work, which will be premiered at the same concert. Mezzo soloists Renée Tatum, Naomi Louisa O'Connell, and Amanda Lynn Bottoms will perform with the choir on May 3 for the concert at

### 'Alto Rhapsody

Carnegie Hall.

Out of the three works, Brahms's "Alto Rhapsody" is likely the most familiar to audiences. While it is not often performed in concert, many singers have made recordings of the work.

"It's a jewel of the repertoire, if you're lucky enough to have the opportunity to sing it," Renée Tatum said by phone.

For Tatum, it is a new piece to perform, and an interesting challenge "It's largely emotional. It has a lot of introspec-

tion, and it has a lot of outward, declamatory, emotional life as well," Tatum said. The story is about the inner life of an artist, she

explained. The text comes from a poem about the wandering of a lost soul, urged to give up his suffering and to find spiritual fulfillment. Being able to perform a work that allows a singer to show so much of his or her artistic range

is most rewarding, and Tatum finds that in the

Brahms "Alto Rhapsody."



(Left) Mark Shapiro, music director and conductor of The Cecilia Chorus of New York.

(Right) The Cecilia Chorus of New York will perform works by Brahms, Elgar, and The May 3, at Carnegie Hall.

In these works, the mezzo becomes a Romantic hero isolated in an intimidating landscape.



"You have the opportunity to reveal a lot about yourself as a singer and as a musician," Tatum said.

Elgar's "The Music Makers" is similarly metaphysical. Commenting on the piece itself, he said, "I have written out my soul."

The text, the poem "Ode" by Arthur O'Shaughnessy, might seem lofty at first glance, but "it actually hits quite close to home," said

"It speaks about the role of artists in society, as well as what the life of an artist can be," O'Connell said. So, in fact, it feels personal, and can be so even if you are not an artist. "It talks about inspiration, and this goes beyond artists; I'm sure that the notion of wanting to make a dream become reality will resonate with most people."

Naomi Louisa O'Connell by phone.

"Something to listen out for in the piece is how Elgar set the lines 'We are the music-makers / And we are the dreamers of dreams,' which begin and end the piece. It's otherworldly and gives me

chills every time I hear it," she said. O'Connell most enjoys a piece that lets her plug into a story and find her character, and the way Elgar insightfully sets the text to music allows

"It's gloriously colorful and will stick you to the back of the hall with sound in places, but he also skinnies it down to the barest whisper when the text requires it," she said.



'Fifty Trillion Molecular Geniuses' Identical twins Brad and Doug Balliett wrote

"Fifty Trillion Molecular Geniuses" using text from neuroanatomist Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor's book and Ted Talk "My Stroke of Insight." It is her story about how a stroke took away her brain functions one by one-speech, movement, understanding-but remembering every moment. Amanda Lynn Bottoms says the piece is unex-

pected both musically and as a story. "The things that are said are things we never would think about on a daily basis. We don't consider that a small molecular part of us allows us to breathe and to love and to smell," she

wrote in a statement about the new work, which begins with a fugue. "This is a very elevated experience. It forces me to dive even further into my acting, my interpretation of text." "There are moments of joy and moments of tragedy and fear. I'm excited to dig into my bag

and pull those out," wrote Bottoms, who has experience with acting in musical theater. All three of these works grapple in "search of a

larger purpose," Shapiro wrote. They invoke the universal yearning for meaning, wholeness, and belonging in both place and time." In these works, the mezzo becomes a Roman-

tic hero isolated in an intimidating landscape, Shapiro discovered, making the program an interesting musical journey through which listeners might just come to discover some deeper truth, or something about themselves.

# THE **EPOCH TIMES**

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# The

# Beauty of Artand Nature

Enliven your spirit at the Pacific Bonsai Museum

# KATHERINE WIMBLE FOX

onsai is distinct from other visual arts in that its creative medium—a tree—is alive. Unlike a painting or sculpture, which rarely changes after the artist applies the last brushstroke or chisels the last facet, a bonsai continues to grow and develop over its lifetime. Bonsai is a Japanese word, but the art of growing these trees originates in China, where it is called "penjing."

A bonsai responds to the artist, and to the environment, and the artist responds in turn in an ever-changing dance. The work of art is never finished, always becoming. With proper care, bonsai can live in their containers for hundreds of years and therefore routinely far outlive their original artists. Bonsai often get passed down over generations, becoming imbued with layers of collaborative, artistic expression.

The Pacific Bonsai Museum is one of only a handful of public museums in the world solely dedicated to bonsai. Its bonsai collection includes more than 150 trees from China, Canada, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and the United States–among the finest and most geographically diverse bonsai collections anywhere. When trees are accessioned into the collection of the Pacific Bonsai Museum, they often come with a deep history of artistic intervention–some having been touched by the most revered pioneers in the field. Bonsai created by Xueming Lu, Amy Liang Chang, John Naka (known as the "father of American bonsai"), Ben Oki, Harry Hirao, Vaughn Banting, Nick Lenz, and Melba Tucker are among the most noteworthy in the collection.

Aarin Packard, the museum's curator, who oversees the collection's artistic and botanical direction, is constantly reminded of what an honor it is to care for these living beings: "Bonsai are a touchstone for me; I not only feel connected to each tree, but to each person who has cared for it in the past and even to those who will care for them in the future after I'm gone."

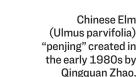
The oldest tree in the Pacific Bonsai Museum's permanent collection—a Korean Yew (Taxus cuspidata)—has an estimated birthday in the year 1500 and has been a bonsai since Su Hyung Yoo began training it in 1986. The museum's largest bonsai is its signature "Domoto Maple," named after the Japanese-American nurseryman Kanetaro Domoto, who cared for the tree after it was imported to America from Japan as a bonsai in 1915. It has endured trauma and war, standing as a testament to the will to live and the power of perseverance.

Bonsai is an art with ancient roots in China from at least the third century. For the past 100 years, the art has been embraced by North Americans who have evolved it in unique and open-minded ways. In America, bonsai is finding new ground, with fewer rules and a range of new "bonsai-able" tree species.

The Pacific Bonsai Museum attracts a world-wide audience by presenting fresh exhibits, the likes of which the world has never seen before. The 2017 exhibit, "Natives," was the first exhibit to exclusively present bonsai trees that are botanically endemic to the United States. "Natives" not only helped make bonsai relatable to American audiences but also celebrated the beauty and diversity of American native trees.

The museum's 2016 exhibit, "Decked Out: From Scroll to Skateboard," also provided points of connection to American cultural references. In place of hanging scrolls—traditionally hung beside bonsai in Japanese bonsai displays—"Decked Out" displayed custom skate decks painted by some of the Pacific Northwest's most talented urban muralists with modern street-art styles. The mash-up

Bonsai is an art with ancient roots in China from at least the third century.





 $The \ Pacific \ Bonsai \ Museum's \ serene \ setting \ in \ Federal \ Way, \ Washington, \ with \ a \ display \ of \ bonsai.$ 



helped visitors see both disciplines differently and attracted new audiences to bonsai.

In the open air, against the backdrop of towering conifers in a wooded area at the heart of the Seattle-Tacoma metropolitan region, the exquisite collection at the Pacific Bonsai Muse-

um is rendered sublime. Upon arrival, visitors walk a wooded trail that transports them from the everyday to the threshold of the magical. As visitors stroll the grounds, they find harmony, grace, and delight. Each bonsai sits on its own table, set within display niches organized as an outdoor art museum with no roof.

# The Pacific Bonsai Museum is one of only a handful of public museums in the world solely dedicated to bonsai.

Visitors come from around the world to admire the bonsai and reap the compounding benefits of time spent outdoors, time spent experiencing beauty, and time spent soothing the soul. "Our hope is that you will feel closer to nature and inspired as you experience the museum," says Kathy McCabe, the museum's executive director, adding, "There's always more to see, in every tree and in every season."

The Pacific Bonsai Museum is open six days a week (Tuesday through Sunday), from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is free, although donations are always appreciated. Don't miss the museum's 2019 special exhibits, "Living Art of Bonsai: Principles of Design," and "Gnarly: The Dan Robinson Retrospective," which are on view May 11 through September 29.

This article was written by Katherine Wimble Fox and is published, with permission, from Elite Lifestyle Magazine. Katherine Wimble Fox is a Seattle-based writer and designer who currently works as the communications manager at the Pacific Bonsai Museum.



Korean Yew (Taxus cuspidata), born around 1500, in training as a bonsai since 1986. Original artist: Su Hyung Yoo.



The "Domoto Maple" in winter, (Trident Maple, Acer buergerianum), in training as a bonsai since at least 1913. Artist: Toichi Domoto.



summer, (Tri-

Acer buergerianum), in

training as a

bonsai since

at least 1913.

Artist: Toichi

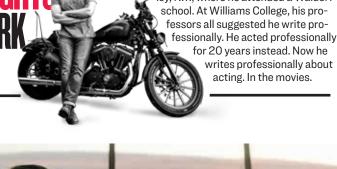
Domoto.

Alaska's Aleutian Range as part of the "Natives" exhibition. Subalpine Fir (Abies lasiocarpa) forest planting and also accent planting by Young Choe, kusamono container by Victoria Chamberlain, and "Alaska" painting by luna Tinta.

Endgame.









# AVENGERS ENDGAME

# It's Really a Movie About Deities

# **MARK JACKSON**

I've never liked the humungous, aaaaall-the-Marvel-superheroes-in-one-place "Avengers"

To me, they're the epitome of our crippled attention spans; everybody gets to do a tiny bit of their particular superhero shtick: throw hammer, throw shield, Hulk-smash, sling web, and so on.

Not to mention the talking tree, and the Brooklyn-accented raccoon. It's a three-ring circus, and there's never enough time to drill down on any one character

Week 19, 2019 THE EPOCH TIMES

Let's be clear: This is simply a personal preference. It's the same reason I prefer to do a vision quest: to sit in the same 10-foot circle in the wilderness for four straight days and look,

> Director Jonathan Levine

Charlize Theron, Seth

Jackson Jr., Ravi Patel, Bob Odenkirk, Andy

Serkis, Randall Park

**Running Time** 

**Release Date** 

\*\*\*

Rated

2 hours, 5 minutes

Alexander Skarsgard

Rogen, June Diane

Raphael, O'Shea







# 'Avengers: Endgame'

Anthony Russo, Joe Russo

Starring Angela Bassett, Dave Bautista, Chadwick Boseman, Josh Brolin, Don Cheadle, Bradley Cooper, Benedict Cumberbatch, Vin Diesel, Michael Douglas, Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans, Jon Favreau, Karen Gillian, Danai Gurira, Chris Hemsworth, Tom Hiddleston, Tom Holland, William Hurt, Samuel L. Jackson, Scarlett Johansson, Pom Klementieff. Brie Larson, Evangeline Lilly, Anthony Mackie, Elizabeth Olsen, Gwyneth Paltrow, Michelle Pfeiffer, Natalie Portman, Chris Pratt, Robert Redford, Jeremy Renner, Paul Rudd, Mark Ruffalo, Rene Russo, Zoe Saldana, Cobie Smulders, Tilda Swinton, Tessa Thompson, Marisa Tomei, Benedict Wong, Letitia Wright

**Running Time** 

PG-13

April 26

for a lengthy time, at a little bit of wilderness. Rather than hike five miles and see a lot of wilderness for a short amount of time I like to keep things simple. I find in movies

that it also makes for more engrossing storytelling. It's more compelling to get involved in the character arc of one character. Most critics despised "Venom." I'd prefer

listening to Tom Hardy's hilarious dialogue with his basso-profundo "Venom" alter ego all day, than watch 50 superheroes mill about

### I Will Make an Exception

I'll make an exception for "Avengers: Endgame." I liked it a lot. Maybe because I know it's the last of the "Avengers" circuses. Actually, I'm pretty sure that's not true. As our collective attention span continues to shrink, Hollywood is going to mash-up the Marvelverse and the DC-verse. Because, can you imagine how much fun Thor and Aquaman could have together?

See, much like splitting the upcoming "Hobbs and Shaw" off from the "Fast and Furious" franchise, I'd actually enjoy a pareddown thing like, Thor and Aquaman. Let those two bozos have an adventure together. It'd be a far richer experience than the whole DCplus-Marvel kit 'n' kaboodle

Especially with the Thor that shows up in "Avengers: Endgame." Much like Aquaman, he's sporting a giant beard and long hair. Unlike Aquaman, he's let himself go-beer belly for days. I appreciate Thor's apparent tribute here to ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons, replete with "Cheap Sunglasses." But I'm starting to digress. My attention span is not what it was.

Writing this review is challenging; the movie is 3:01 long, and packed with tons of things that carry spoiler potential. I almost just spoiled Thor's new fun character twist, but it's already been talked about a lot.

The other twist that's been talked about and available for public consumption is the fact that Bruce Banner (Mark Ruffalo), since we saw him last, appears to have gone on a New Warrior Training Adventure and now refuses to hide, repress, and deny his shadow (his giant green alter ego), and has instead embraced it. The hilarious result is a cardigan-and-glasses-wearing, brainiac Hulk, who takes selfies with kiddie fans and is happy and chill. A chill Hulk! What a dreadful concept. But it works

"Avengers: Endgame" is also largely based on the concept of time travel and has lots of fun listing many movies that have handled the subject. I found I wanted to know exactly how many there actually are. I googled the topic. According to one young lady out there on the interwebs, 67 movies have been made about time travel, not to mention 15 that are still in the works, and many, many TV renditions.

Anyway, "Avengers: Infinity War," as you may remember, left off with the big, bald, rubbery, purple-skinned Thanos finding all of the rainbow-colored infinity stones, putting them in his mighty metal gauntlet, and thereby defeating all the gods.

 Robert Downey Jr. as

2. Thundergod Thor (Chris Hemsworth) in "Avengers: Endgame."

3. Paul Rudd (C) as Ant-Man.

4. Mark Ruffalo

as Bruce

the beings in the old cosmos. "Endgame" continues the saga, five years later. The surviving "Avengers" and "Guardians of the Galaxy" characters, plus the recently introduced Captain Marvel (Brie Larson), are trying in various ways to cope. As mentioned, Thor's

What? Yes, I'm going to start calling Avengers

gods, because that's really what they are, with

all their superpowers and such. Only Thor and

Loki come out of classic Norse mythology and

Maybe not the raccoon from Brooklyn. Or

Groot. OK, maybe Groot is a tree god. Actually,

there could be a raccoon god. Have you seen

that Mesopotamian, winged bull-god with the

ZZ Top beard and the turban? Let's go with the

Anyway, I'm digressing again. Where were

we? In "Infinity War," Thanos disappears half

raccoon being a furry god of small stature.

are recognized as gods. But they're all gods.

gone on a mead-drinking binge. Now, if you remember your "Ant-Man" movies. Ant-Man (Paul Rudd) had been down the ant, er, rabbit hole into the quantum universe. Time is different in those dimensions made up of smaller particles, so he's confused when he gets back here as to where everybody disappeared to. In classic Buddhist lore, the saying goes, "Only one day in the heavens, but a thousand years on earth." Yes. According to Buddhist and Taoist teachings, smaller-particle dimensions are where the heavens are actually located, and this is one of the many reasons why "Avengers" movies are tales that by definition have to

Here's the key to the whole movie: Ant-Man figures out that if the Avengers can time-travel man. But I digress again.

be about gods.

via the quantum universe, they can locate all the infinity stones before Thanos gets his big purple paws on them, then time-hop back to the present, and use them to undo all the havoc Thanos previously wreaked.

See, I think this tale of gods, this saga, this "Ragnarok," is happening right now because we are actually living in the time of Ragnarok (Norse mythology's twilight-of-the-gods story), or as the Chinese call it, "The Time of Last Havoc," or as the Indians call it, "Kali Yuga," or as we Westerners call it, "Armageddon." Everyone's talking about it. All the spiritual paths are talking about it.

Google "the expanding universe." Scientists know the universe is expanding rapidly. Like an overexpanded balloon, it's about to blow! The prophets foretold it! This old universe and everyone in it is going to disintegrate! Just like in this movie! That is, if they don't get saved by gods first. That's apparently what gods do, among other things-they save humans from

"Avengers: Endgame" is going to most definitely become the top-grossing superhero movie of all time. The G.O.A.T. It's a great ending to the long run of 22 Marvel movies. This long tale has

A new tale will soon begin, though. There's much money to be made. What I'm really waiting for is to see how Jason Momoa manages to reconcile his decades-long campaign to play DC's Lobo, now that he's taken on DC's Aqua-

**FILM REVIEW** 

# Charlize Theron and Seth Rogen Have Serious Rom-Com Chemistry

# **MARK JACKSON**

A Jewish, gonzo journalist gets a swastika tattooed on his arm in order to infiltrate a white supremacy group. American History X, Part 2? Nope. It's the attention-grabbing opening scene of the comedic hoot "Long Shot," and it's been years since I laughed this hard at a movie.

It stars Seth Rogen as Fred Flarsky, a fanaticalliberal, Brooklyn journalist (more schlub than hipster) and Charlize Theron as WASP-y U.S. Secretary of State Charlotte Field, who, it turns out, babysat young Fred when he was 12. What kind of story could possibly evolve here?

# **First Things First**

If you've seen the trailer, you know O'Shea Jackson (Ice Cube's son) says to Fred, "It's 'Pretty Woman,' except she (Charlotte) is Richard Gere, and you're Julia Roberts." But before we get to the odd-couple romance, the movie sets about establishing each character separately

Charlotte, the SecState, works for President fixing to jettison the presidency, to–make it in her clown-flag fly. the movies. Yeah. He likes to replay his TV roles

her childhood dream of becoming the first female POTUS. She's a hyperdriven, multitasking career crouching under a war-room table, on the phone woman whose support team constantly reads out (as uniformed military types gawk in horror) while over ourselves and focus her jam-packed itinerary, and who takes mininaps, standing up, on her private jet, with her eyes new level of funny for her. open. So far, this is a Theron power-alley role. She can do that in her sleep.

Fred Flarsky is also right smack in Rogen's power (and loud) confrontational unwillingness to comrecreational-drug-loaded pockets in front of a White want to see it again. House security officer, to getting caught with his pants down, to taking the most spectacular, downthe-stairs pratfall in movies in the last 20 years.

When Fred finds out that the paper he writes for has been bought by Andy Serkis's silver-haired Parker Wembley (basically Rupert Murdoch), Fred spite his face; his integrity is intact, but his ability to pay rent will soon not be.

Luckily, Fred and his best-bud Lance (O'Shea Jackson Jr.) have a time-honored ritual of cheering up whichever of them had a bad-life situation occur. and so they drink all day and eventually end up at a

Fred recognizes his former babysitter. Cue the aforementioned spectacular pratfall. Charlotte's reaction? She offers Fred a job as her speechwriter; she needs the personal touch (from are a number of excellent political parodies: Hillsomeone who really knows her) and some humor to boost her presidential bid.

party where Boyz II Men are playing, live, and where

The two immediately have a ridiculous amount of chemistry, and it starts getting a little too cozy for Charlotte's advisers' comfort level (Ravi Patel from "Meet the Patels"; and June Diane Raphael), because they feel this romance will sabotage her chances.

# Now, About This Romance

What's amazing is how perfectly these two seemingly incompatible rom-com puzzle pieces sync up, both romantically and comedically.

Here's a showbiz truth: The best actors all have serious comedic chops. Theron's one of our best, but Chambers (Bob Odenkirk), a former actor, who's she's such a spectacular beauty, she rarely gets to let

Her foray into comedy kicked off with Seth Macprivately in the Oval Office. (Emoticon with eyes Farlane's "A Million Ways to Die in the West," with the most recent being "Tully." But the scene in "Long" that's quite OK. Fortu-Charlotte jumps at the opportunity to achieve Shot" where she's under the influence of molly (a "recreational" drug), with party confetti in her hair, handling a tricky international hostage crisis is a on what's important.

While this is clearly a male fantasy of epic proportions (beautiful, brainiac, alpha female powerinfluencer, who stands squarely on the world stage, alley; it's quintessential Rogen, from the unwavering falls for a chubby, sartorially challenged, broke-itybroke, flaming liberal, Brooklyn weed-head), Rogen promise his moral stance, to having to empty his and Theron make it work to the point where I actually

And the best part is, at some point they just need to get away and be together, so they leave a party, find a deserted room and, to "It Must Have Been Love" (another "Pretty Woman" reference), do a slow dance. And the adorable, in-their-own-world, little dance that Theron and Rogen come up with makes you imquits on the spot, more or less cutting off his nose to mediately sit up in your seat and go, "Awww! Wow! Look at that! They're soulmates! Totally predestined

I'd love to see how they came up with that bit and whether it was rehearsed, and if so, how much. It's

Furthermore, the movie's a great example of a man who's probably a female spirit in a man's physical body, paired with a woman who's got a male soul. What am I talking about? See, I believe this is a thing that happens. I have a petite, girly-girl female friend, who's inwardly tough as nails and says of her hus-

band, "Yeah, he's my wife." Not to deal in stereotypes, but when, during an apparent attack on an embassy, Fred gets hysterical and starts running around flapping and hyperventilating, and Charlotte starts doing Navy SEAL breathing exercises to focus and calms him down as effectively as putting a towel over a parakeet cage to calm the squawking, you know they've got excellent teamwork.

And, conversely-his yin affect on her yang tendencies-he sees to it that she holds fast to her inner moral compass, the one he saw in her when she was his babysitter. Aww! Traditionally, the wife makes sure the man remains good at heart.

In terms of the rest of the performances, there ary Clinton, Rupert Murdoch, and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to name a few. And while the cast is jam-packed with top-notch comedic actors, the best example is the normally stud-ly Alexander Skarsgard playing the Trudeau-like character.

Handsome Skarsgard has a blast demonstrating how his character's publicity team turned his highpitched, slightly freaky girlish giggle into a tightlipped, staid, toothy, "heh-heh-heh." And his character sucks down oysters with such gross, slurping relish that Charlotte, out on a date with him, knows for sure she wouldn't be missing anything by devoting her life to chubby, not-much-to-look-at Fred.

# Romance Over R-Rating

It's R-rated and rather raunchy. Let's just say it has a common denominator with "There's Something About Mary," and if you don't get the reference,

highlight the fact that, as a nation, we need to get Author Tom Wolfe

nately, these moments

famously equated the American collective subconscious to an "old church lady." We, the American people, love to get publicly morally outraged at the stuff we all do behind closed doors, and point fingers and blame and shame. "Long Shot" is ultimately about following our hearts and dropping the pretenses. And having quite a few belly laughs while do-

The beauty and the schlub: Charlotte Fields (Charlize Theron) and Fred Flarsky (Seth Rogen) in "Long Shot."



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THEATER REVIEW

# When the Unspeakable Is Accepted

### **JUDD HOLLANDER**

NEW YORK-No one's life is worth more or less than any other's is a statement that's the central message of Stephen Unwin's drama "All Our Children." This quietly unnerving work is having its American premiere at the Sheen Center for Thought & Culture.

It's early January, 1941, and as Germany moves into the New Year, the majority of the country's people seem to be roundly behind Adolph Hitler and the National Socialist German Workers (also known as the Nazi) Party. They're convinced that any changes deemed necessary by those in charge are strictly for the greater good of the country.

Yet whispers of something darker can be heard in some quarters. They paint a picture not at all pretty, such as how children judged to be mentally disabled are being secretly murdered in the name of Aryan purity and the economic bottom line.

This is the situation that Dr. Victor Franz (Karl Kenzler) tries desperately to avoid facing. As the director of a clinic charged with caring for such children, it has fallen to him to sign the final orders that will send some of them to their deaths.

This policy is carried out under the approving eyes of Eric Schmidt (Sam Lilja), the clinic's young deputy director, and proud Nazi Party member.

Dr. Franz, wanting nothing more than to stay out of trouble, has convinced himself that what he is doing makes sense for all concerned. More than a few of the children's family members have been only too glad to turn their young charges over to the clinic, as it relieves them of their economic and emotional stress.

Now Dr. Franz has been informed that he is to meet with Bishop von Galen (John Glover). A well-respected member of the clergy, the bishop has begun to suspect what is happening to these children and has started to speak out against the practice. Dr. Franz has been charged with placating von Galen with facts and figures (that is, how the cost of caring for someone unable to look after themselves would be much better utilized elsewhere), so the bishop will stop questioning the new order of things.

Offering an ominous warning about the dangers of not questioning decisions made by the few for the supposed benefit of the many, "All Our Children" reveals, in its most chill-



ing aspect, the matter-of-fact attitudes of the various characters.

This frame of mind applies not only to Dr. Franz but also to Martha (Jennifer Dundas), a maid at the clinic who sees herself as a good German citizen; and Elizabetta (Tasha Lawrence), a woman who comes to find out about her son, who is a patient at the clinic.

There's also Martha's daughter who, at age 15, believes there's nothing wrong if she happens to get pregnant by her new admirer. She understands that having babies is the moral duty of every German woman of childbearing years.

There are also some rather interesting, almost throwaway lines in the show, which serve to show just how few worldwide were totally innocent regarding the events depicted.

In the end, it becomes clear that we must not only learn to question what those in power claim to be true, but also take an active stand against actions we believe to be wrong. For if we don't, we ourselves become part of the

While the bishop understands the importance of following his conscience, it's something many of the other characters have yet to realize. And, ironically, even though von Galen is aghast at what is happening to Germany's children, he's loath to accuse his own superiors. He downplays Dr. Franz's question regarding the Vatican's position on what Germany is doing.

While the show has some excellent points to make, it would have worked better had the piece focused on von Galen. He is the only character in the play who actually lived, and who, according to the program notes, has a fascinating backstory.

However, the bishop doesn't appear until more than twothirds into the show, for a meeting with Dr. Franz that

comes off as little more than overlong verbal volleying. The two men have staked out their positions long before they come face to face. Kenzler's portrayal of Dr. Franz also comes off as far too low-key to be effective.

The rest of the casting is fine, with each of the actors playing their roles with the appropriate amount of gravitas, threat, and/or

### 'All Our Children'

**Sheen Center for Thought** and Culture 18 Bleecker St., New York

**Tickets** 212-925-2812 or

SheenCenter.org

**Running Time** 1 hour, 30 minutes (no intermission)

Closes May 12

A difference of opinion: Bishop von Galen (John Glover, L) opposes the National Socialist German Workers Party's policies enforced by the deputy director of a clinic for disabled children (Sam Lilja), while the clinic's doctor, Dr. Victor Franz (Karl Kenzler), looks on.

denial, but, as with Kenzler, none connect with the audience as deeply as they should.

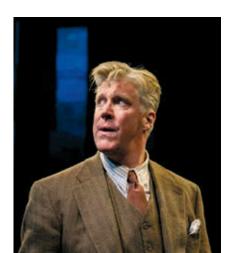
The one exception occurs during Lawrence's scene in which Elizabetta has a final encounter with Dr. Franz. Unfortunately, what happens ends up feeling rather out of place from what has come before, so that the scene seems tossed in to shake up the narrative rather than serve as an integral part of it.

Lee Savage's set of Dr. Franz's office, with what seems to be endless rows of filing cabinets stretching to the ceiling, each drawer containing, one assumes, the various patient histories, helps to bring forth the immensity of what is happening.

"All Our Children" is a play with

quite a lot to say. Regrettably, the story feels more like an academic exercise on ethics and responsibility rather than a piece of theater.

Judd Hollander is a reviewer for Stagebuzz. com and a member of the Drama Desk and the Outer Critics Circle. He may be reached at bnchpeop@aol.com



Dr. Victor Franz (Karl Kenzler) tries to avoid facing the morality of his actions, in "All Our Children."



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