

THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS & CULTURE



Vladimir Petrov from Mexico won the Gold award at the 2019 NTD International Piano Competition in New York.

TRADITIONAL MUSIC

## Piano Repertoire Broadens With an Expansive, Virtuoso Composition

‘The Sacred Journey’ challenges pianists of the NTD International Piano Competition

CATHERINE YANG

After interruption by a global pandemic and a war, the 6th NTD International Piano Competition is fast approaching, and participating pianists have received the much-awaited commissioned piece that serves as the centerpiece of the competition.

On Sept. 15, pianists saw the work “The Sacred Journey” for the first time. By Oct 31, they will have had 45 days to prepare for this monumental challenge, which they will play in the semifinal round.

Since 2016, the competition has made a special effort to commission a piano ar-

**In traditional cultures of both the East and the West, faith and hope are intertwined.**

range of a piece by D.F., the artistic director of Shen Yun Performing Arts, which is a world-renowned music and dance company that has led the way in the revival of traditional Chinese culture through the arts.

The piano piece was arranged by Qin Yuan, a composer and piano accompanist with Shen Yun. Qin is a prolific composer with notable expertise in delivering the melodies and rhythms of ancient Chinese music through the language of classical music as it was established in the West.

*Continued on Page 4*



# 2022 NTD 8<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL CHINESE VOCAL COMPETITION



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## This Foundation Remains: Christian Poetry in a Post-Christian Society

JEFF MINICK

In his Introduction to "The Oxford Book of Christian Verse," Lord David Cecil writes that "Religious emotion is the most sublime known to man," but in the same paragraph adds that "a large proportion of religious verse is poor stuff" and that "those poets who have invoked both the sacred and the profane must have, with some striking exceptions, found themselves more comfortable with the profane."

Some might offer as a rebuttal that, in all the realm of rhyme and rhythm, we find many more huts and shacks made of words than castles. Yet, Lord Cecil has a point. Much of what we might call religious verse is secondhand in its quality, fit for a greeting card perhaps, but forgotten as soon as it's read.

And so, before considering the work of some devotional poets, let's take a quick look at the obstacles faced by poets in attempting the communication of divine truth and beauty through verse.

**The Things of This World**  
Lord Cecil himself briefly undertakes this investigation. He writes, for instance, that few poets possess the power of a William Blake to "forge new and living symbols for the cosmic mysteries of spiritual experience."

Lord Cecil compares the "spontaneous expression of the spirit" of the Hebrew psalmists to our own age, when a writer, rather than saying what he really feels about God and faith, puts down on paper "what he thinks he ought to feel; and he speaks not in his own voice but in the solemn tones that seem fitting to his solemn subject."

In other words, sophistication stands between modern poets and the faith they seek to express. Moreover, since the Enlightenment, Western civilization has turned away from theology in favor of more materialistic philosophies. These schools of thought range from the pragmatism of William James to the communism of Karl Marx, a spectrum leaving little room for religious faith.

Poets reflected this shift in their own work, expounding on nature and concrete realities. As Alexander Pope wrote nearly 300 years ago: "Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;/ The proper study of mankind is man."

**The Things of the Next World**  
Nonetheless, the English language boasts poetic works with subjects and themes derived from that same faith which produced cathedrals and universities, mystics and Puritans.

For example, the anonymous 14th-century author of the dream-vision poem "Pearl" beautifully renders the death of a child and her father's dream of heaven. Geoffrey Chaucer gave us a panorama of the people, mindset, and heart of that same century, as in "The Prioress's Tale," in its religious devotion. John Milton's "Paradise Lost," his epic covering Lucifer's fall from heaven and the banishment of Adam and Eve from the Garden, is accounted one of the great works of world literature.

Even in more recent times, when the candles of religious fervor have guttered, English-speaking poets have produced verses based on faith, scripture, and theology. Critics in the 20th century heaped praise on T.S. Eliot's song of despair, "The Waste Land," but Eliot himself believed that his exploration of faith and spirit in "Four Quartets" was his highest achievement. And William Baer, in his fine collection "Formal Salutations" includes some selections from a previous volume, "Psalter," in which he weaves modern sensibilities into stories from Scripture.

**Some Voices in the Choir**  
Some composers of verse have written so deeply and prolifically of their spiritual beliefs that critics and readers have since identified them as religious poets. Most anthologies describe George Herbert in this fashion, and rightly so, and the metaphysi-

cal poet John Donne, whom Lord Cecil describes as taking "first place among English Christian poets," stands alongside him. Then there is that far more numerous company who, though less remarked on for their religious verse, nonetheless display a keen sensibility toward the divine. "Because I could not stop for Death," wrote Emily Dickinson, "He kindly stopped for me;/ The carriage held but just ourselves/ And Immortality."

In "L'Envoi," Rudyard Kipling, bard of the barracks, war, and empire, wrote of heaven as being a sort of grand atelier:  
And only the Master shall praise us, and only the Master shall blame;  
And no one shall work for money, and no one shall work for the fame;  
But each for the joy of the working, and each, in his separate star,  
Shall draw the Thing as he sees It for the God of Things as They Are!

Christina Rossetti, a favorite of mine, is noted both for her religious poetry and for her verses for children. Particularly lovely for its rhythm and subtlety is "Uphill," in which she describes, in question-and-answer fashion, a journey to heaven. Here are the beginning and ending stanzas of this simple, sweet poem:

Does the road wind up-hill all the way?  
Yes, to the very end.  
Will the day's journey take the whole long day?  
From morn to night, my friend.

...  
Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?  
Of labor you shall find the sum.  
Will there be beds for me and all who seek?  
Yea, beds for all who come.

And often, of course, the passage of time and fashion conceal or erase some commendable religious poems. In the now out-of-print "Masterpieces of Religious Verse, 2020 Poems by 900 Poets," which I obtained from the public library before beginning this article, I stumbled across Marguerite Wilkinson's "Guilty." I'd never heard of Wilkinson or her poem, but what she wrote hit home with me. Here's the piece in its entirety:

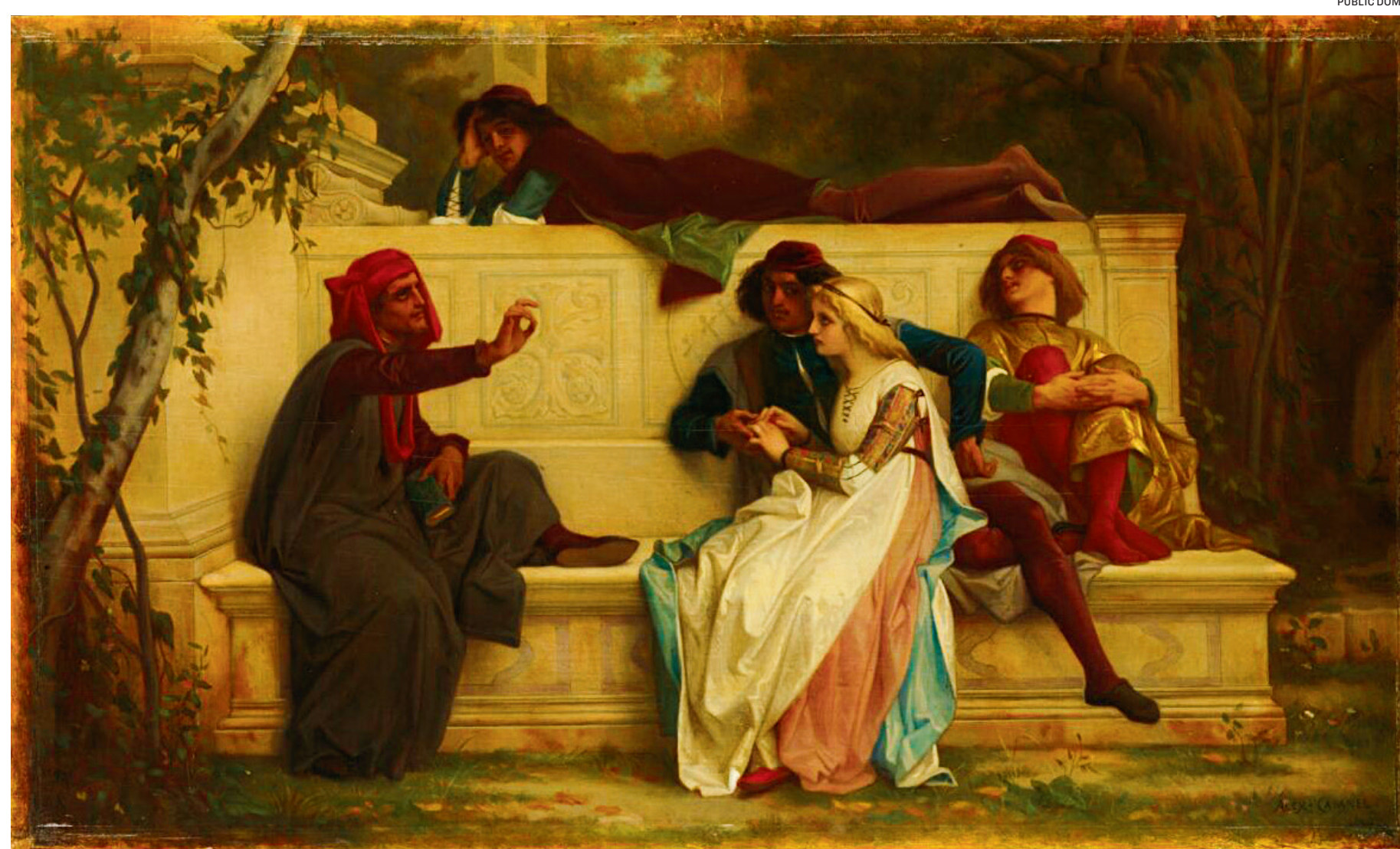
I never cut my neighbor's throat;  
My neighbor's gold I never stole;  
I never spoiled his house and land;  
But God have mercy on my soul!  
For I am haunted night and day  
By all the deeds I have not done;  
O unattempted loveliness!  
O costly valor never won!

Great work? Probably not. Sentimental? Definitely. Yet, for me Wilkinson connected, and in poetry that is absolutely crucial.

**A Misconception**  
Academics and social commentators assert that we in the West are living in a post-Christian culture. That assertion is only partially true. We no longer tell time by church bells, as did our medieval ancestors; we have ceased as a society to care much about religious strictures, unless



"Six Tuscan Poets," 1544, by Giorgio Vasari, shows the outstanding poets of the Renaissance. The poets are (L-R): Cino da Pistoia, Guittone d'Arezzo, Petrarch, Giovanni Boccaccio, Dante Alighieri, and Guido Cavalcanti. Minneapolis Institute of Art.



"Florentine Poet," 1861, by Alexandre Cabanel. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

we deem them threats to our politically correct niceties; and church attendance has declined for decades.

In fact, churches themselves have contributed to this demise. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, for example, the government deemed places of worship as nonessential. Nearly all churches went along with this argument without protest, closing their doors and thereby rendering themselves "nonessential."

But "post-Christian culture" is a sloppy and careless description. The West may be a post-Christian society, but culture has no place in that equation. The roots of our culture are found in the soil of antiquity, in the tribe of Abraham and Moses, the Athens of Socrates, and the Rome of Cicero.

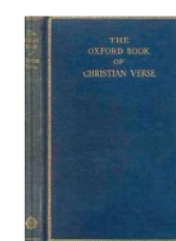
The trunk and branches of that tree grew and flourished in the sunlight and waters of Christianity. Cut down that tree, and the only culture left will be a dead stump and

the sawdust in the grass. And so far, despite the efforts of some, the tree of culture still has resisted the axes and chainsaws of radicals.

**Our Christian-Haunted Culture**  
Those who declare that Western civilization is dead, as some have said of God, put me in mind of Francis Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven," in which a man is pursued by "I am He Whom thou seekest!" Here are the opening lines:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;  
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;  
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways  
Of my own mind; ...

Culture pursues us in the same way. We can deny it, seek to destroy 4,000 years of history, run from it—but real escape is im-



**'The Oxford Book of Christian Verse'**

**Author**  
Lord David Cecil  
**Publisher**  
Oxford University Press, 1940  
**Hardcover**  
594 pages

possible. The poets cited here, and a thousand more, pay homage, however subtly, to a Christian culture, and they are only the tip of the iceberg of our Western heritage.

We don't need to profess a creed, attend church, or even be a person of faith to acknowledge and appreciate that historical reality. When we read the classic religious verse of the West, just as when we marvel at the Book of Kells, Handel's "Messiah," Chartres Cathedral, or the paintings of the Sistine Chapel, we immerse ourselves in the beauty and mystery of art that belongs not just to a particular faith or civilization, but to the entire world.

Jeff Minick lives and writes in Front Royal, Virginia. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust on Their Wings," and two works of non-fiction, "Learning as I Go" and "Movies Make the Man."

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Shen Yun composer and pianist Qin Yuan arranged the commissioned piece for the 6th NTD International Piano Competition.

TRADITIONAL MUSIC

## Piano Repertoire Broadens With an Expansive, Virtuoso Composition

‘The Sacred Journey’ challenges pianists of the NTD International Piano Competition

Continued from Page 1

Many musicians around the world have tried their hand at combining the musical traditions of the East and West, but none so successfully as Shen Yun, which has wowed millions the world over with its unique compositions and orchestrations.

In past years, jury members have advised pianists to study Shen Yun’s music as they prepare the commissioned piece, since the work is given special weight. Classical music with a Chinese flavor is not common in competitions, at least not nearly as often as the French, Russian, Polish, and Austrian schools—so established in the repertoire that a general listener can recognize the origin after a few bars, and a musician can explain why exactly that is so.

The special works commissioned by the NTD International Piano Competition receive acclaim from listeners and pianists alike; during the semifinal round, both are often moved to tears. Perhaps it is also stirring to hear new, serious literature for

the piano. When Beethoven expanded the repertoire with the “Hammerklavier,” he wrote that this could occupy pianists for the next 50 years, underestimating the zeal of composers of future centuries. Yet too few composers, even great ones, have added to the canon of great classical piano literature, but today the NTD International Piano Competition is making the effort.

“The Sacred Journey”—vast, virtuosic, and pianistic—is a work well worth the effort and study. Like other works commissioned by NTD, it serves to promote the pure authenticity, pure goodness, and pure beauty of traditional arts, and showcase the glory of piano masterpieces from the 250-year golden period of piano literature.

“There’s a common saying that the piano itself is a small orchestra. With its expansive range, expressivity, and dynamics, it’s a very fitting instrument for this undertaking,” Qin said.

### A Message of Universal Relevance

Qin’s advice to the interpreters is this: “You must mind the details meticulously, carefully study it, and also—be bold.”

“I can’t give too many spoilers away, lest we encroach on the pianists’ imagination and freedom as they approach this work for the first time,” she said.

At the forefront of her mind when she began to compose was that the music would face an international audience. The competition has historically drawn scores of contestants from scores of different countries around the world, and Qin wanted to deliver a message of universal relevance. This would be a work that artists would contemplate for many hours, and she wanted it to be well worth that deep reflection.

“How can I let them contemplate something meaningful?” Qin thought.

It’s an ancient Chinese belief that mind and matter are one; every thought of the artists’ would appear in their works. For example, ancient China produced a great number of landscape paintings, Qin said, and these landscapes were not depictions of a view the artist saw. Rather, when viewing such a painting, you are experiencing the artist’s state of mind.

Qin had to first calm her mind, clear it of any stray thoughts, and keep only the pur-



Winners of the 2019 NTD International Piano Competition (L-R): Shih-Yeh Lu from Taiwan, outstanding performance; Nicolas Giacomelli from Italy, silver; Vladimir Petrov from Mexico, gold; Sanghie Lee from South Korea, bronze; Olena Miso from Ukraine, outstanding performance; and Maxim Anikushin from New York, outstanding performance.

**‘The Sacred Journey’—vast, virtuosic, and pianistic—is a work well worth the effort and study.**

est of intentions before she wrote a single note.

In the end, her thoughts turned toward the three essential questions of life.

“Where do we come from? What is the purpose of life? Where do we go after death?” Qin asked. “To think about the spirit is meaningful. As a human being, we live a few decades, and then we pass. What we will leave behind for others? I found this important to contemplate as well.”

Shen Yun’s mission is the revival of 5,000 years of Chinese civilization, a culture believed to be divinely inspired, Qin explained. The entirety of this traditional culture was passed down by the divine, she said, “and what God has always given people is hope.”

In traditional cultures of both the East and the West, faith and hope are intertwined. Hope, as Thomas Aquinas examined thoroughly in his “Summa Theologica,” is only virtuous if one first has faith.

It is Qin’s wish that this piece brings a little hope to pianists and listeners alike.

“We human beings should preserve the kindness and goodness in our hearts, no matter the external circumstances—whether a pandemic or a war. Whatever chaos arises in the world around us, the one thing we can maintain is what is our hearts, our goodness and dignity,” Qin said.

### The Myth of Pentatonic Music

Any casual listener can tell if music sounds as if it is Chinese, but the technical and structural components of Chinese music—traditional, ancient Chinese music—are beyond most of us.

“A lot of people think it’s based on a pentatonic scale, but it’s actually not. In ancient China, there were three scales most commonly used, but all three of these were seven-note scales,” Qin said. “They really used the same notes as the ones you find in Western classical music. But what’s different is how the notes are used and arranged; the musical rules are then entirely different.”

Qin spoke of studying ancient Chinese arts the way pianists study not just Bach’s scores but also his life, in order to understand what the devout Lutheran had left behind in his music. It meant looking at those landscape paintings and knowing what poems were composed in tandem with the paintings. It was reading the Chinese classic “The Journey to the West” while understanding what the author had gone through in life before he penned the story. Being immersed in this culture is part of what makes Qin one of the foremost composers of music that seamlessly blends East and West. Her works include the music heard in dance performances, where ancient Chinese melodies are brought to life with the arrangement and grandeur of a classical orchestra.

“The pipa and the erhu—both of which we include in our orchestras—are two of the most distinct Chinese instruments,” Qin said.

These two instruments are very characteristic of Chinese music, and so understanding them a bit is key to understanding how to express the music appropriately.

“The pipa is an instrument that is strummed and plucked. Many individual and separate notes are played, but the effect is a long unbroken line—it’s very interesting, and I like this instrument a lot,” Qin said.

“The erhu is the instrument closest to the human voice. It has only two strings, which are bowed to be played, but the expressive range and power is tremendous,” Qin said. Many have made a comparison between the instrument’s two strings and the two bands that form our vocal chords. It is an instrument often used to express distinct emotion, from sorrow to mischief, longing to exaltation.

“There’s probably a lot of different ways to interpret the music, but I tried to leave very clear directions,” said Qin, who pored over the score with the publisher again and again, minding even the amount of space printed between two notes. “So the interpreter has a lot of freedom, but can still find their way.”

The 6th NTD International Piano Competition will take place in New York with the semifinal round on Oct. 31, final round on Nov. 1, and the awards ceremony with concert on Nov. 2. All three days will be livestreamed. For more information on NTD Competitions, visit [Competitions.NTDTV.com](http://Competitions.NTDTV.com)



Let’s spend a day at the quarry where Michelangelo found some of his best marble. Carrara marble quarries in the mountains of Tuscany, Italy.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

## A Day in the Life: The Marble Quarries With Michelangelo

ERIC BESS

Every day, we wake up and we hurry to our jobs or to school. We become part of a routine that seems to encapsulate us. In this series, “A Day in The Life,” we take a moment from our hectic, fast-paced world, step outside of our routine, and imagine what life may have been like across cultures and eras.



Unfinished portrait of Michelangelo, circa 1545, by Daniele da Volterra. Oil on wood. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Michelangelo Buonarroti was one of the greatest Italian Renaissance artists to ever live. He was great not only because of the artworks he produced but also because of what he was willing to endure to produce them. One of the things he endured was the dangers of the marble quarries in the mountains of Italy, where artists acquired the marble for their sculptures. Most artists would arrive at the quarries to select the marble they wanted and then leave.

Michelangelo, however, sometimes stayed at the quarry and helped the workers during the dangerous and difficult job of separating the marble blocks from the mountain itself, and he ensured the marble’s safe passage to the bottom of the quarry where it would be shipped to Rome or Florence.

### Michelangelo sometimes stayed at the quarry and helped the workers during their dangerous and difficult job.

William Wallace’s book “Michelangelo: The Artist, the Man, and His Times” helps us imagine what it would have been like to work with Michelangelo at the marble quarries in Renaissance Italy.

### A Day at the Quarry

Let’s imagine this: We traveled here months ago by mule, so we’ve already been here awhile; selecting the marble, separating it, and lowering it down to the valley is a long process. This isn’t the first time we’ve done this, since our patron, Michelangelo, is one of the most famous and busiest artists of our time.

Michelangelo is always working on grand projects required by cardinals or popes. We are unsure if anyone has ever extracted marble blocks as large as he desires them. With that being said, we are doing our best to accomplish his wishes as safely and as quickly as possible.

He has already selected the cleanest and purest marble to his liking, and now we separate it using the ancient Roman method of chopping fissures into the marble and then inserting wet wood, which, when expanded, splits the marble from its source.

After the marble is separated, we shape it and carefully place it on a sled that we made. Some of these slabs of marble are over 30 feet high and could easily injure one of us if we are not careful, which is why Michelangelo

is there to monitor our every movement.

He not only supervises us but also selects and inspects all of the materials he ordered to make sure the process goes as smoothly as possible. He often takes notes and draws diagrams to make sure we are undertaking the best way to complete the journey ahead of us.

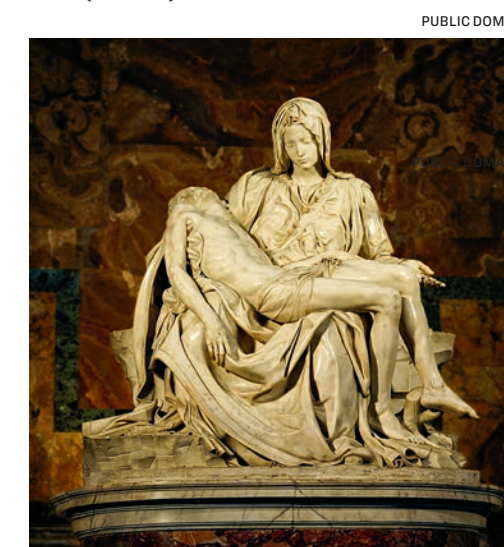
The next part of the journey is very important and most treacherous. We know of people who’ve lost fingers, limbs, or died in this part of the process. We tie the marble to a large sled that has been placed on a track and tie ropes all around the marble.

Then all of us, including Michelangelo, grab a rope, take a deep breath, and descend very slowly, one step at a time, down the side of the mountain. Gravity is not on our side; we might damage the marble if we descend too quickly. Our muscles ache and we are out of breath, and it feels like we are only moving about a dozen yards an hour!

We will do this every day until we reach the bottom of the valley, where the marble will begin a 150-kilometer journey to Florence. It will be taken to sea by an oxcart and shipped to Pisa. From Pisa, it will travel up the Arno River to Signa, where it will be transferred to oxcart again to be delivered to Florence.

I’m sure we all hope that our hard work will pay off and that this great sculptor of our time will create works of art that will endure for centuries to come.

Eric Bess is a practicing representational artist and is a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA).



In 1497, Michelangelo made his first trip to the Carrara marble quarries in the mountains of Tuscany, Italy. There, he carefully selected the block of marble that would become the “Pietà,” one of his most admired statues. “Pietà,” 1497, by Michelangelo. Carrara marble. Saint Peters Basilica, Rome.



## BOOK REVIEW

# ‘The Great Passion’: A Youth’s Introduction to the World of Bach

Historical fiction that brings the goodness and genius of Johann Sebastian Bach alive

ANITA L. SHERMAN

Classical music fans will relish this read. Anyone who has suffered the loss of a loved one will understand the depths of grief portrayed.

Together, the two major themes of glorious sound and unbearable sorrow fuse to create a heartfelt and moving narrative. Readers will be refreshed and renewed by this inspiring and faith-filled story set in Germany during the 1700s.

## A Child’s Grief

Heartstrings will immediately be pulled at the book’s beginning, where we find the grieving 13-year-old Stefan Silbermann. An only child, he has lost his mother. Stefan’s father, no doubt grieving himself, sends his son to a distant school, St. Thomas in Leipzig, advising him not to dwell too heavily on his mother and to embrace a new environment where he can study and learn.

However, Stefan is haunted by her absence. With his shock of red hair setting him apart, matters are made worse by bullying classmates. He feels unwelcome and unloved. His soul aches for comfort and sanctuary. He wonders how he will survive this place.

But St. Thomas is a place of religion and music. There is singing and the playing of instruments, and young Stefan is in the choir. His spirit is lifted.

Author James Runcie’s graceful and lyrical text is a treat. Here’s a sneak peek at Stefan soaking in a musical score along with a row of other young choristers:

“There were so many different entries, and it came in a rush of sound, as if the singers couldn’t wait to tell us the news of Christ’s resurrection. The prefect, Schmid, sung a tenor aria accompanied by an oboe played with such beauty and longing that I had a moment of hope, in which I imagined that nothing could harm me while this cantata lasted; not the fear of my new school, nor the loss of everything I had known and loved.”

## Bach’s Benevolence

Stefan catches the attention of the school’s cantor, Johann Sebastian Bach. This new pupil has a beautiful singing voice. Bach sees so much promise that he quickly elevates him from the choir to a soloist position.

Stefan’s life dramatically changes. As a strong disciplinarian, Bach literally forces the best from his young protégé while introducing him to a world of music that envelops him with promise and joy.

Being singled out as a stellar soprano brings with it envy from his classmates, most notably from David Stolle, the son of one of the area’s most famous bass singers. Their relationship seems doomed to failure, marked by constant harsh confrontations and little solace for Stefan.

Under Bach’s caring but firm tutelage, Stefan’s musical prowess blooms and grows ever bolder. In addition to singing, he begins working as a copyist for the pro-



St. Thomas Church, in Leipzig, Germany, where Bach served as the choir master, is the setting for “The Great Passion” by James Runcie.

lific Bach and his many musical works.

A saving gift for Stefan is when he is drawn into Bach’s immediate family and away from the cruelty of dorm life. Here, he finds comfort in Bach’s wife, Anna Magdalena, who becomes a surrogate mother figure, musical mentor, and friend. Bach’s eldest daughter from his first marriage, Catharina, invites Stefan on butterfly-collecting excursions in the nearby lush forests.

Much of Bach’s psyche remains a mystery in the novel, but as oboist Gleditsch remarks:

“He speaks in music. Always remember that about musicians. German is not their first language. Music is. That’s why it’s sometimes difficult to understand what we’re saying.”

The more Stefan works with Bach, the more he appreciates the man’s genius. The more Stefan sees him with his large family, the more he appreciates the musician’s wisdom as a father. He is grateful to be in Bach’s presence and works hard to please him.

Then, tragedy strikes when a member of Bach’s family dies. Faced again with the horror of death, Stefan takes solace in religion. Eventually, he witnesses that beauty can spring from the most profound losses.

## An Analysis and Forecast of Global Collapse

DUSTIN BASS

If you are looking for a nice pick-me-up book, this is not the one for you. However, if you want to know what is going on in the world, what is going to happen around the globe, and why those things are going to happen, then this is the book to pick up.

Peter Zeihan’s “The End of the World Is Just the Beginning: Mapping the Collapse of Globalization” is as sobering as its title. Thankfully, he has an endearing sense of humor; otherwise, it might be difficult to stomach all the bad news. Yes, this is a book about impending bad news, and calling it “bad news” is definitely an understatement.

Zeihan is one of the nation’s leading geopolitical strategists. He is dedicated to understanding what has happened in the world of geopolitics among neighbor-

**The book pinpoints many, many, many reasons why the end of globalization is here.**



ing countries as well as cross-Atlantic and cross-Pacific nations. If you pay attention to the news, then you might know some of what is taking place in various regions of the world but not to the extent of Zeihan’s assessments and predictions.

The author discusses every region from the Americas to the Middle East to sub-Saharan Africa to Europe to Southeast Asia to Australia, and more. He details what makes them successful and what makes them unsuccessful (that is, their imports

**Readers will be drawn into the frenzy of the creation of the ‘St. Matthew Passion.’**



## ‘The Great Passion’

**Author**  
James Runcie

**Publisher**  
Bloomsbury Publishing

**Date**  
March 15, 2022

**Hardcover**  
272 pages

## Building to the Crescendo

As Easter nears in 1727, Bach launches vigorously into a new work: the “St. Matthew Passion,” a sacred oratorio for solo voices, double choir, and double orchestra, complete with libretto by poet Picander. This monumental undertaking sets the 26th and 27th chapters of the Gospel of Matthew to music with interspersed chorales and arias.

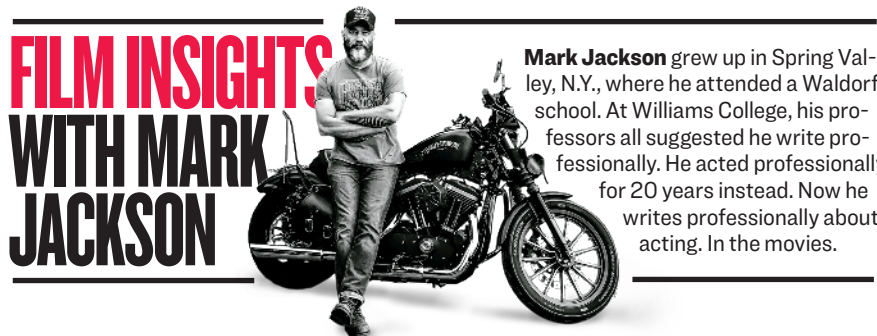
Readers will be drawn into the frenzy of its creation, the chaos for all those involved, and then the glorious and deeply moving performance that lifts everyone’s souls and calls forth salvation for young Stefan.

In “The Great Passion,” Runcie has created an imaginative and thoroughly compelling tour de force. Singing, playing, and hearing Bach’s music will be significantly enhanced from this read.

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

CHRISTIAN DRAGHICI/SHUTTERSTOCK

ALL PHOTOS BY GRAVITAS VENTURES



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

## FILM REVIEW

## ‘The Swearing Jar’: A Sweet but Somewhat Confusing Meditation on Love

MARK JACKSON

Carey (Adelaide Clemens) and Simon (Patrick J. Adams) are very cute, married soul mates with a bit of a swearing problem. But they’re going to fix that—when anybody curses, five dollars comes out of their wallet and goes in the Swearing Jar. Life is good.

But at some point, both Carey and Simon have some big news to tell each other. One has good news, and the other has bad news. But what happens if the good news comes first, and has the effect of causing the bad news never to be revealed? That’s the movie’s premise.

Simon probably should have spoken first. Carey’s revelation? She’s pregnant. And Simon’s always wanted a child. And so he puts the lab report he got from the doctor back into his pocket before doing a victory dance. He doesn’t want to rain on Carey’s parade; his news can wait.

You can guess what it is, though. It’s hard to find a romance these days without this particular theme. And so in almost pretty much every following scene, we see Simon’s smile and happy talk start to fade toward melancholy.

## Ticking Clock

Carey still doesn’t know; she does sense that something is off, but not that it’s about him trying to stick around long enough to hold his baby. They’re vacillating between the name Rachel (Carey’s choice) or Gretchen (Simon’s), because Simon has suggested that if it’s a boy they should sell it, which roughly sums up their sense of humor.

And the stranger that Simon starts acting, the crazier Carey’s assumptions get. He must be either having an affair or doesn’t love her anymore. If he would just come out and say it, life would be much simpler, but by avoid telling Carey about the state of his health, Simon enters a state of nonstop gaslighting.

## Balancing Act

“The Swearing Jar” walks a narrow tight-roppe, which gets even more tricky when local bookstore clerk Owen (Douglas Smith) becomes smitten with Carey. It turns out that he plays a mean guitar, and Carey’s singing-songwriting creativity could use a good guitar player.

So on the one hand, it’s hard to pity Simon’s situation, and on the other, the mere fact that he’s being incredibly frustrating to Carey—because she doesn’t really know anything for sure—doesn’t really allow us to be supportive of her starting to get flirtatious with Owen.

The filmmaker plays with the timeline

to constantly keep us off balance, and so the whole movie is somewhat confusing. The story culminates with Carey throwing Simon a posthumous 40th birthday party at a bar, where she invites friends and family to film individualized greetings, and sings a bunch of songs onstage with Owen playing guitar. When Carey is onstage, up until her last sung word, she doesn’t get clarity that she’s still totally in love with her dead husband, and the guy on guitar, whom she’s involved with, has had the effect of making that fact unclear.

## Isn’t This a Spoiler?

If you don’t have a clear-cut understanding of what’s going on, the tension that builds due to all this manipulation is most likely going to get too annoying to continue watching. It’s so easy nowadays, with the myriad streaming choices we all have, to just cut and run, click on something else, and sample that for three minutes. It’s like the royal family having 500 exquisite gustatory choices, prepared by the royal chef and kitchen staff, to nibble on at all times, which can quickly lead to world-weariness, ingratitude, and entitlement. Anything that doesn’t immediately deliver a happy taste experience will get spit out.

“The Swearing Jar” features a series of omission that intend to optimize the ultimate emotional punch. Which is a ploy that works. But it asks a lot of the viewer: to tolerate this degree of dissonance for most of the film.

## Why It’s Worth a Watch

Carey and Simon’s relationship is wonderful—two people who enjoy profanity immensely; who’ve made a pact to curb their vulgarity as preparation for becoming parents. Then there’s the cutely awkward courtship between Owen (who looks like Dane DeHaan’s twin) and Carey—two kind souls who despise secrets despite the fact that she’s carrying a big one herself, which she doesn’t even really understand.

The payoff, or the moral of the story, is to witness how both Simon and Carey are caretaking and manipulating: him not admitting he’s dying, and her not admitting she’s allowed herself a crush due to Simon’s codependently caretaking her feelings and her interpreting it all to mean he must be cheating.

The resulting anger, rage, and feelings of betrayal warrant a tiny bit of eye-rolling: People! Just tell the dang truth! The reality is, life is complex and messy. To lose something like love in an instant is one of life’s unfortunate curveballs. Does grief ever end? Do I get to indulge in a fling due to



Carey (Adelaide Clemens) is the heart and soul of “The Swearing Jar.”

**The filmmaker plays with the timeline to constantly keep us off balance.**

## ‘The Swearing Jar’

**Director:**  
Lindsay MacKay

**Starring:**  
Adelaide Clemens, Douglas Smith, Patrick J. Adams, Matilda Legault, Kathleen Turner

**MPIAA Rating:**  
Not Rated

**Running Time:**  
1 hour, 52 minutes

**Release Date:**  
Sept. 23, 2022

★★★★☆

unfounded feelings that I might be getting cheated on? It turns out, the lie Carey tells Owen—that she’s married (three years after that’s no longer the case)—is adorable. And heartbreaking.

Can “The Swearing Jar” be called uplifting? Clearly it’s “bittersweet.” What’s the takeaway? To have a look at how when they don’t have some overarching, spiritual context, people try to reconcile death; how they cope, heal, and find happiness again. Or perhaps a better metaphor is when they don’t have a magic bat of boundless horizons and spiritual explanations with which to smack the curveballs of life and hit home runs.

“The Swearing Jar” is a truth and lies sandwich. One the one side is Adams; he’s great at depicting a man who can lie to himself for only so long about his mortality before it comes flooding back. In the middle is Smith as the guitar player, who’s a sweet, near Tourette syndrome level truth-teller, along with the great but somewhat miscast Kathleen Turner (“Romancing the Stone,” “War of the Roses”) as Adam’s mother who does a good job of unflinching truth-trumping. And the other piece of bread sandwiching these two truth-tellers is Clemens as the confused Carey. She’s the film’s heart and soul, who via stellar acting and singing, helps us all try to make sense of the unknown.



Simon (Patrick J. Adams) and Carey (Adelaide Clemens) are a cute married couple who swear too much.



The titular swearing jar.



Owen (Douglas Smith) tunes his guitar.

ESB PROFESSIONAL/SHUTTERSTOCK

Peter Zeihan’s book “The End of the World Is Just the Beginning: Mapping the Collapse of Globalization” lays out reasons for being concerned about the collapse of society as we know it.

much of the blame on: credit financing and the decline of population growth.

Many countries have become depopulated rather than repopulated. He makes the case that as the older generation (like America’s baby boomers) retires, there are not enough younger bodies to fill their spots. This greatly diminished labor force—especially but not solely in the Asian region—is a problem across the globe. The fallout is that the global economy will break down.

The other problem that Zeihan identifies is the hyperfinancing conducted by so many countries in the world. The author hammers away at China, which is far and away the worst culprit.

Zeihan gives a very brief explanation of the history of financing via currency. From bartering to crops to gold to credit, the end result has given way to a world of untenable debt. Free money is never free, but so many nations have been playing with the equivalent of Monopoly money as if that practice had no strings attached. According to Zeihan, those strings are about to snap, and those reverberations will be felt like a financial global earthquake.

The utter lack of preparation for these events

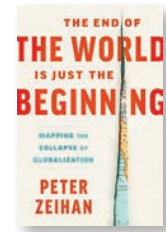
will eliminate what he calls the Order and will result in the world’s undoing. Therefore, the nations of the world will have to grapple toward a redoing, and Zeihan suggests that some of the nations won’t be able to.

## The Post-War Stability Provided by America

Speaking of the Order, Zeihan credits America with establishing it after World War II. The Marshall Plan was instituted to rebuild war-torn Europe. That, along with the Cold War struggle against the Soviet Union, opened up the seas, allowed for free trade, and allowed nations to benefit from each other. The world’s most powerful navy—the U.S. Navy—made that possible.

As America played police for the world for the past 70 years, those nations that once were belligerent toward each other were finally in good standing (even if they had no choice). These friendly relationships benefited both first-world and third-world countries. The collapse that is coming, however, will end all of that.

As much as the world has had its troubles over the past 70 years, according to Zeihan, what has been in picture-perfect compared



**‘The End of the World Is Just the Beginning: Mapping the Collapse of Globalization’**

**Author**  
Peter Zeihan

**Publisher**  
Harper Business

**Date**  
June 14, 2022

**Kindle**  
51.2 pages

to what will happen in this decade and in the following decades. There are countries that will fare much better than others. There are others that will do dramatically worse. Some national or regional relationships will strengthen and bind out of necessity.

Others will not. Though Zeihan doesn’t mention it much, if at all, wars are inevitable with this type of disruption. At the end of it all, however, no nation will come out unscathed. And there is a good chance, at least according to Zeihan, that some nations or peoples will be lost forever.

His is a powerfully stated and convincingly argued premise. The world as we know it is unraveling. What comes after is not pretty, but it would be best to know what will happen (sans a throng of miracles) in the days, months, and years ahead. Zeihan has written a thoroughly engaging and highly important book. Thank goodness he possesses a spirit of good humor, or else you may find yourself weeping through the pages.

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



REACHING WITHIN: WHAT TRADITIONAL ART OFFERS THE HEART

# Cherishing Our Lives: ‘Soap Bubbles’

PUBLIC DOMAIN



ERIC BESS

Do you remember when you were a child, and you wanted to know about everything?

Children have a sense of wonderment with the world. They approach it with an innocent curiosity, and they question everything with a sincere interest in understanding the things around them.

As we get older, we get stuck in a routine, losing this sense of wonderment. Our routines become monotonous and seem to hypnotize us into complacency. Over time, we lose the purity of our innocent interests for the distractions of self-interest.

How might we break through these distractions and regain our innocent sense of wonderment with the world?

## Chardin’s ‘Soap Bubbles’

Around 1734, French painter Jean Siméon Chardin created a composition called “Soap Bubbles,” which was one of several paintings depicting the same theme. This painting might give us insight into how we can break through the distractions of our self-interests and regain our sense of wonderment.

The painting is composed in a square format. Two young boys and a plant occupy the space.

If we squint our eyes at the image, almost all of the information disappears except for the pot and the boy in the middle, and this lets us know that these two elements are focal points. The pot sits on the ledge to the left of the composition, and it contains a plant that grows up and out of the left side of the picture plane.

Back in the center of the composition, the boy’s illuminated skin stands out against the harmoniously muted browns and grays surrounding him. He blows a soap bubble as he leans over the edge.

The little boy in the background peeks over the stone ledge to watch the central figure blow a bubble.

## Memento Mori Painting and the Transience of Life

What does Chardin’s painting mean? At first glance, it’s just a boy blowing a bubble. According to The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s website, “soap bubbles were then understood to allude to the transience of life.”

If Chardin’s painting has to do with the transience of life, we can associate it with a genre called “memento mori” painting. Memento mori means “remember death.” Paintings in this genre remind and warn their audience that death is the great equalizer and comes for us all. Life is over in the blink of an eye, so we must be sure to cherish our lives; otherwise, we will die with regrets.

How does Chardin’s painting remind us to remember death and to cherish life?

The soap bubble represents our lives and the transience of life. Knowing this, we can imagine the children as teenagers, middle-aged, and elderly. Chardin captured their whole lives at this moment despite their youthful features eternalized by the oil paint.

Though their youthful appearance is

eternal, the soap bubble is ephemeral: It can pop anytime. Maybe it won’t pop immediately but will be carried by the wind before it pops. Maybe the little boy behind the ledge will blow it and cause it to pop. Maybe either boy will pop it by trying to catch it with his hands. Or maybe it will pop before it leaves the straw it’s attached to. No matter the scenario, however, the bubble will eventually pop.

And so it is with our lives: No matter how our story unfolds, our bubble will pop.

## Cherishing Life Is the Key

Our self-interest can distract us, but we can’t take anything with us when we die. What we can do, however, is cherish every moment of our lives. We can look in on our lives; we can reflect on our moments with childlike innocence and wonderment, like the little boy in the background looking at the blown bubble.

To return to our original question, might it be the case that the picture plane’s boundary represents the distractions caused by our self-interests? To me, this

is why the plant is relevant. It’s interesting how the plant leaves the picture plane. The picture plane is the boundary that frames the image, and here the plant breaks through that boundary.

Does the plant represent our lives when we live with wonderment? Does this suggest that a life filled with pure and innocent curiosity is not delimited by usual boundaries? Is recognizing the transience of our lives truly enough to recapture the wonderment we once had for being alive?

*Have you ever seen a work of art that you thought was beautiful but had no idea what it meant? In our series “Reaching Within: What Traditional Art Offers the Heart,” we interpret the classical visual arts in ways that may be morally insightful for us today. We try to approach each work of art to see how our historical creations might inspire within us our own innate goodness.*

*Eric Bess is a practicing representational artist, and a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA).*

“Soap Bubbles,” circa 1733–1734, by Jean Siméon Chardin. Oil on canvas; 24 inches by 24 7/8 inches. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

No matter how our story unfolds, our bubble will pop.

For more arts and culture articles, visit [TheEpochTimes.com](http://TheEpochTimes.com)

JORGE SALCEDO/SHUTTERSTOCK



BOOK REVIEW

## Exposing the Lie of Higher Education

LINDA WIEGENFELD

The idea that college is a scam and not worth the steep price has been hotly debated for years. Now, it is in the forefront of the news with Biden’s new student loan forgiveness plan. Many people believe that the plan is morally and fiscally wrong.

Canceled student debt will not stop universities from charging more tuition in the future. By continuing to back loans without schools being accountable for their pricing or for the practicality of their degrees, the federal government will be allowing universities to recklessly shell out more loans to students. Canceled student debt will wind up increasing the cost of tuition since payment will be guaranteed.

With Big Brother involved, students will not need to take their personal responsibility seriously. The student loan system might be abolished completely since it may grow to have no meaning.

Charlie Kirk addresses these topics and other problems with colleges and universities in his new book, “The College Scam: How America’s Universities Are Bankrupting and Brainwashing Away the Future of America’s Youth.”

## Debilitating Costs

Kirk did not go to college. Instead, he became the leading voice across American college campuses standing up for conservative students. Today, Kirk is an American conservative activist and radio talk show host. He founded Turning Point USA with Bill Montgomery in 2012, and has served as its executive director ever since.

Kirk feels that only students who seek a professional degree should go to college, such as doctors, lawyers, or engineers. The other 95 percent of students would be far better off in terms of finances, career goals, and lifestyles to get more technical training. He thinks college is a scam.

In the past, one powerful check against wasteful government and educational bloat was the fact that, in America, students had the responsibility to pay for their own higher education.

Today, the government’s blank check for

higher education in the form of federally backed student loans has affected its cost.

The federal government has unleashed a flow of cheap, easy-to-get college loans that has enabled universities to raise their prices. Universities needn’t worry if students cannot afford to go. Besides raising tuition, college accountability is reduced and the academic administration regimes have become bloated.

Also, to get higher rankings, public and private colleges have been pouring a huge amount of money into merit scholarships, which disproportionately benefit more affluent students at the expense of students who desperately need financial help. This is because the higher a school scores in the rankings, the more a college can jack up its tuition.

Kirk labels universities as schools with hedge funds attached. Some endowments exceed the budgets of some of the smaller states. For example, endowments for the 2020 fiscal year were around \$41.9 billion at Harvard University, \$31.1 billion at Yale University, \$29 billion at Stanford University, and \$26 billion at Princeton University.

Kirk asks if students really want to impoverish themselves to enrich the “corrupt, exploitive, education cartel.”

## The Failures of College

Most students feel that the cost of college is worth it if they have an enriching experience in college and/or enter a good-paying career afterward. “Yet in reality, four out of ten college dropouts left school with a GPA of 3 or higher. And 39 percent of dropouts said that their college didn’t give them their money’s worth,” Kirk states.

Kirk believes that colleges do not teach the skills needed in the working world. Also, colleges no longer teach students how to think. Teaching has morphed, in many cases, into pure indoctrination of communist ideas. Many professors don’t even care if students show up for class.

In addition, Kirk believes that the college experience makes students less likely to behave responsibly. They’re away from home and unaccountable to their parents. The environment tolerates and even promotes bad moral behavior.

He denies the argument that, in most cases, the college experience will lead to a rewarding career. Many employers are no longer impressed by college degrees, as they’ve become so common and do not prepare students for the real world of work.

As a result, college winds up being a net-negative for most young people.

Kirk quotes an article written for The Wall Street Journal by Russell Ronald Reno III, the editor of First Things magazine, saying, “I’m not inclined to hire a graduate from one of America’s elite universities.” According to Kirk, Reno also stated that these students are too easily triggered, too quick to “panic over pseudo-crises,” and too eager to make “inflammatory accusations.”

## Wokeism

Conservative parents should think twice before sending their children to a college where their children’s values will be targeted. Students may be harassed, intimidated, or bullied because of their conservative identity. Today’s wokeism (which many believe is communism) is recognizable by intolerant behavior, censorship, and the denouncement of traditional ideas.

The indoctrination process for wokeism on campus begins with the suppression of the free exchange of ideas. Students can feel pressured to give answers in class or on examinations that they do not believe in, just to placate the political or social leanings of their professors. Intolerance is everywhere on many campuses. In fact, colleges and universities are becoming known for violence and hatred toward conservatives.

Students ready for college face a dilemma. What if they don’t want to be a part of the repressive atmosphere of these college campuses, but feel that they need to go to college to get ahead? Kirk gives options about how to succeed without a college degree. Part of the solution is to just overcome what Kirk feels is the outdated stigma of not going to college.

He says that we need to break the radical leftist stronghold on institutions. We need to remove federal guarantees granted to colleges. We should encourage donors to give to charities and not to colleges. He encourages readers to help build America up, not allow universities to tear it down.

This is a terrific book loaded with well-researched information in a clear, concise form. Even if you are a reader with no direct connection to college at the moment, I believe you will enjoy this book as it takes a fresh look at the problems of attending college.

*Linda Wiegenfeld is a retired teacher. She can be reached for comments or suggestions at [lwiegenfeld@aol.com](mailto:lwiegenfeld@aol.com)*



**‘The College Scam: How America’s Universities Are Bankrupting and Brainwashing Away the Future of America’s Youth.’**

**Author**

Charlie Kirk

**Publisher**

Winning Team Publishing

**Date**

July 26, 2022

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288 pages



A poster for 2010’s “Karamay,” a film about the disastrous fire that killed 288 children in China.

REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

## Chinese Communist Officials Saved Themselves as Children Died

JOE BENDEL

Even before the Uyghur genocide currently underway, Xinjiang was the site of terrible human suffering. On Dec. 8, 1994, 323 people died when fire broke out in the crowded Friendship Hall, where school children were entertaining visiting officials.

The city’s Communist Party cadres escaped with only minimal injuries, but 288 children died. In contrast to recent Party crimes against humanity in Xinjiang, roughly 80 percent of those victims were Mandarin-speaking Han.

Since then, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has heavily censored news of the incident and vigorously cracked down on protests. However, Xu Xin fully documented the tragic events and the Party’s efforts to whitewash the resulting suffering, in his nearly six-hour documentary “Karamay.”

The city of Karamay in Xinjiang was founded to service the nearby oil fields. Ever since, the local Party officials often hold dual positions in the city government and in the state petroleum company. As a

‘Karamay, is one of the most important documentaries ever produced.

result, they were doubly privileged.

The Friendship Hall (ironically, built with money from the USSR, before the Sino-Soviet split) had recently been renovated, naturally by contractors closely linked to the Party. Groups of model students had been assembled there to perform for the city cadres and a group of visiting regional officials, but the assembly started two hours late, when the visibly drunken dignitaries finally arrived.

## A Preventable Tragedy

By that time, the heat of the stage lights ignited the highly combustible drop curtains. As the fire spread to the substandard ceiling material, the local cadres were ushered out, while the principal at the podium instructed the children to remain seated.

What followed was a horror story of preventable errors. The steel-shuttered doors to the hall were all closed and locked, except for one, which became unpassable as the panic ensued. Firefighters arrived without adequate material to mount any rescue operations, so they had to return

to their station to resupply.

Kuang Li, the deputy secretary of Karamay, locked herself in the fireproof ladies’ room and Zhang Huatang, the vice chair of the Karamay Party Conference, did likewise in the men’s facilities, where both refused to open up for anyone else.

In the aftermath, the Karamay cadres strong-armed parents to consent to funerals two days after the tragedy. They moved quickly to demolish the Friendship Hall, keeping only the façade for posterity. In subsequent weeks, whenever news reports mentioned the fire, it was only to admonish parents to be compliant and not make trouble.

## An Indictment of the CCP

That all sounds bad, but the full ramifications were even worse, as Xu patiently reveals through extended interviews with the surviving parents. In long, unedited takes, he gets their testimony regarding the pain of losing a child and the CCP’s unkept promises.

It is important to remember that this occurred while China’s one-child policy was still in full effect. Although the Karamay parents were granted special dispensation for a “replacement” child, many were too old to conceive again by that time.

Regardless, their testimony is absolutely damning and painful to witness. These are not sound bites. Xu immerses the audience

in their homes, letting them pour out their raw emotions in clearly unscripted monologues. He also incorporates all of the immediate news coverage and amateur film shot on the scene, much of which confirms the parents’ accounts.

The archival video is sometimes horrifying, but it is the plain-spoken indictments of the grief-stricken parents (and one survivor, who remains permanently scarred by her burns) that make “Karamay” such a threat to the CCP. The oral history that Xu assembles is just too consistent and too anguished to dismiss on any remotely reasonable pretext.

Arguably, “Karamay” is one of the most important documentaries ever produced.



A parent featured in the documentary “Karamay,” which immerses viewers in the grim aftermath of a preventable disaster.

It directly compares with Claude Lanzmann’s nine-and-a-half-hour Holocaust documentary “Shoah” in terms of length, scope, authority, and meticulousness. Yet, Lanzmann was documenting crimes that are now accepted by all people of good conscience, whereas Xu exposed an incident that the CCP is still actively covering up.

Many of the parents Xu interviewed in 2007 were indeed CCP members. Consequently, they often took pains to narrow their criticism very specifically to the local cadres. Nevertheless, when parents make statements like “Without question, we have no legal tradition, just imperial orders” and “Only cadres can commit gross negligence or dereliction of duty,” it is easy to see why the film is considered metaphorically radioactive in the People’s Republic of China.

Admittedly, Xu’s documentary is an exhausting viewing experience because it is so quietly devastating. Streamers might need a few sittings to work through it, but it is worth the time commitment. It is a courageous exposé of the CCP’s moral rot and a heartfelt elegy to the victims of the Dec. 8 fire. Very highly recommended.

*“Karamay” is currently streaming on OVID.tv*

*Joe Bendel writes about independent film and lives in New York. To read his most recent articles, visit [JBSpins.blogspot.com](http://JBSpins.blogspot.com)*



REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

# An Early Portrayal of War's Effects on Mental Health

IAN KANE

There was a concerted effort to move toward more realism in war movies during the years following World War II. This is not to say that all Hollywood films became more realistic, but many of the top productions embraced a more sobering perspective of war and eschewed many of the tropes of earlier films. "Twelve O'Clock High," from 1949, is one film that led the charge into this new, more realistic era.

"Twelve O'Clock" bucked many of the trends of previous war movies, such as including numerous action scenes—in fact, most of the action in this film is played out among the characters and their motivations, hopes, and shortcomings. Their actions aren't motivated by the conventions of that time, but rather imbued with fascinating depth and nuanced connotations.

This film earnestly delves into how war takes its emotional and psychological toll on both enlisted men and the officers who command them. It thoroughly examines the pressures and anxieties of giving "maximum effort" day in and day out.

Based on a 1948 novel of the same name by Sy Bartlett and Beirne Lay Jr., the film is about a World War II bomber squadron that carries out precision daylight bombing sorties over high-value German industrial targets. The certain grittiness to it is due to the fact that both Bartlett and Lay Jr. served in bomber squadrons and had witnessed firsthand the effects of chronic fatigue and all manner of trauma.

**Told in Retrospect**

The film's first scene opens in 1949 London and is haunting. In an antique shop, a tall, lean middle-aged American named Maj. Stovall (Dean Jagger) spots a Toby Jug that he remembers from an airfield he was assigned to a decade ago in Archbury, not far from London. After having the jug carefully packaged, he takes it with him by train to the airfield.

When Stovall reaches his destination, he wanders the airfield runway area, which has been long-neglected and is choked with weeds. As men's voices eerily sing a military hymn in the background of his mind,

he suddenly casts his eyes skyward and the loud mechanical sounds of a bomber plane can be heard sputtering to life.

The score becomes ominous as the scene shifts back in time to 1942, and we see a flock of bombers coming in for a landing on the same English airfield. Archbury airfield is home to the 918th Bomb Group, the so-called hard-luck group on account of all the super-dangerous missions they fly.

The bombers land, and as one crashlands without having its landing gear out, the 918th Bomb Group's commander Col. Keith Davenport (Gary Merrill) rushes out to the scene along with some medics. They find the crew shuffling out of the damaged plane in a daze, having just experienced some grueling combat. They witnessed their cohorts being killed inside the bomber, which has shaken them to their cores.

Since Davenport has bonded with the men under his command, particularly the bomber crews, he has become protective of them. His attitude toward decisions by the Air Force high command becomes rather pessimistic since already exhausted crews keep getting ordered to fly back out on German bombing runs—sometimes the very next day, despite having obvious symptoms of mental fatigue and what today we'd called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Brig. Gen. Frank Savage (Gregory Peck) and Maj. Gen. Pritchard (Millard Mitchell) of the VIII Bomber Command, which oversees the 918th Bomb Group, begin to investigate the 918th because of its unusually heavy losses. They surmise that Davenport has become too caring for his men and as such, doesn't discipline them properly.

Davenport is swiftly relieved of duty and replaced by Savage, who is his polar opposite. Where Davenport was approachable and caring, Savage is distant and demanding. From that point on, the local bar is closed, three-day passes are severely limited, and crews must be on their best behavior at all times. Will this solve the issues of lax past leadership, or drive the men further into mental fatigue and eventual despair?



MGM

**Gregory Peck gives a multilayered and nuanced character portrayal.**

**Excellent Performances All Around**

Gregory Peck turns in a commanding performance as an officer determined to whip his men into shape and does so harshly, yet he is still concerned about them. It's a multilayered and nuanced character portrayal for which he deservedly earned his fourth Oscar nomination.

The rest of the cast is superlative as well, including Dean Jagger as Maj. Stovall, a "retread" assigned to a desk job who utilizes the civilian skills he acquired as an attorney to his advantage. Paul Stewart is also brilliant as the base doctor who is trying to determine the difference between a crew's "maximum effort" and their psychological breaking point.

Fortunately, "Twelve O'Clock High" was both a critical and commercial success. It is one of the first war movies to accurately portray the effects of war on both rank-and-file members of the military and their leaders while under fire ... and beyond.

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

Brig. Gen. Frank Savage (Gregory Peck) takes over the 918th Bomb Group, in 1949's "Twelve O'Clock High."

**'Twelve O'Clock High'**

**Director:** Henry King

**Starring:** Gregory Peck, Hugh Marlowe, Gary Merrill

**Not Rated**

**Running Time:** 2 hours, 12 minutes

**Release Date:** Dec. 21, 1949

★★★★★



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