The New Criterion

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Week in review

by Isaac Sligh

Recent links of note:

"A Political Novel for All Eras"
Michael Dirda, *The Wall Street Journal*

Years after I read Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*, entire passages remain branded in my memory. What sticks with me most is Warren's mastery of what I would call a distinctly Southern form of epigrammatic writing—earthy, humorous, and intricately fashioned observations that reveal less about politics than the human condition itself. Take the narrator Jack Burden's thoughts while watching a stump speech given by his boss, the cutthroat politicker Willie Stark:

> "The end of man is knowledge, but there is one thing he can't know. He can't know whether knowledge will save him or kill him. He will be killed, all right, but he can't know whether he is killed because of the knowledge which he has got or because of the knowledge which he hasn't got and which if he had it, would save him."

Michael Dirda is inclined to agree, likening the aphoristic outbursts of Warren's characters to "coloratura arias" and "sheer vulgar poetry" in a reflection for *The Wall Street Journal*. *All the King's Men* is an unparalleled work of Southern literature and my humble submission for the Great American Novel.

"A mystery in miniature—Isaac Oliver, the Virginia colonists and *The Tempest*"
Alexander Marr, *Apollo Magazine*

The meaning of Isaac Oliver's *A Man Consumed by Flames* (*ca*. 1600–10), a Renaissance miniature depicting the bust of a young man surrounded by hellish flames and topped with the motto "He grows cold, who does not burn," is an enigma for art historians, as heavy-handed as its allegory might seem. I studied Petrarchan sonnets in college, so my first thought upon seeing the miniature was to interpret it within the idiom of courtly love. "I find no peace, and have no arms for war,/ and fear and hope, and burn and yet I freeze," as Petrarch wrote in the fourteenth century in the seminal and widely pilfered Sonnet 134. By Oliver's day, the image of love's consuming flame had

become such a cliché that the poet Sir Philip Sidney mocked those who wrote of "fair storms and freezing fires" in Sonnet 6 of his *Astrophil and Stella* (1591). But as Alexander Marr writes for *Apollo*, new evidence suggests that the miniature depicts William Strachey, a sometime poet and companion of Ben Jonson. Strachey set out on an ill-fated colonial expedition to Virginia in 1609 (a likely inspiration for Shakespeare's *The Tempest*) and may have carried this miniature with him as a symbol of his fiery zeal to spread the religion and industry of England to the New World.

Podcasts:

"Music for a While #36: 'Remember me'," by Jay Nordlinger. *Jay Nordlinger,* The New Criterion*'s music critic, talks music—but, more important, plays music.*

Dispatch:

"Restraint & profusion," by James F. Penrose. *On "Gabrielle Chanel, Manifeste de Mode" at the Palais Galliera, Paris.*

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