

The New Criterion

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Week in review

by Isaac Sligh

Recent links of note:

“An Enterprise of Solid Gold”

Robert Darnton, *Lapham's Quarterly*

Voltaire's polemical and controversial books were best-sellers in the waning days of France's *ancien régime*. Predictably, pirated editions abounded. But as Robert Darnton writes, the unfazed and ever-canny Voltaire played both sides, communicating with bootleggers behind his publisher's back to push more copies and release ostensibly “unauthorized,” button-pressing material to the public.

“Imagining a future for John Keats—the novelist”

Philip Hensher, *The Spectator*

“Critics are later judged,” William Logan wrote in 2012 for *The New Criterion*, “not by the book they failed to pan, but by the book they failed to praise.” Many a critic failed to praise John Keats's work—and indeed panned it—upon its initial publication in the early nineteenth century. We might scoff and go back to reading our copy of *Odes*, but there could be something to gain from putting ourselves in these detractors' shoes: a perspective on the impact of Keats's poetry on fresh eyes, before two centuries of scholarship and mythmaking intervened. So wonders Philip Hensher in a review of a new book on Keats that searches for the murky figure behind the legend.

“Museums need to refocus on their collections”

Hugh St Clair, *The Critic*

For *The Critic*, Hugh St Clair reviews a new book on curation and takes a pulse check on museums, including Britain's regional institutions, in the pandemic era. Running a small museum can be a thankless task. It's a more extreme example, but I think of the many tiny museums I visited and passed by in the former Soviet Union, even in small cities. More than once I fortuitously came across a little outpost of culture, ensconced in the former home of an obscure poet or artist on the upper floor of a towering, crumbling apartment building. Inside sat an old man or woman, reading

a book or knitting away, waiting for the first visitor of the day.

Podcasts:

“Music for a While #41: Well-tempered and Catalan.”

Jay Nordlinger, The New Criterion’s music critic, talks music—but, more important, plays music.

Dispatch:

“New variations on the theme of Ab Ex,” by Dana Gordon. *On “John Mendelsohn: Color Wheel + Tenebrae Paintings” & “Stephen Pusey: Strange Attractors,” at David Richard Gallery, New York.*

Isaac Sligh is Associate Editor of *The New Criterion*.