

# The New Criterion

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## Week in review

by Andrew L. Shea

### Recent links of note:

“The Short, Sad Story of Stanwix Melville”

Christopher Benfey, *The New York Review of Books*

Despite the upsurge in Herman Melville’s literary celebrity in the early twentieth century, which spawned an enormous body of scholarship on both his work and life, many figures who were important to the writer remain on the periphery of our collective remembrance. Of Melville’s four children, for instance, his second, Stanwix (named after Fort Stanwix, the upstate New York site of Peter Gansevoort’s—Melville’s grandfather—heroic defense against Redcoat forces in the Revolutionary War), has been largely disregarded by Melville biographers. This week for *The New York Review of Books*, Christopher Benfey penned a brief history of Stanwix’s turbulent life, which was filled with even more thrill-seeking adventure than that of his seafaring father, and which could have fit into one of his father’s novels or short stories. In this exciting age of innumerable frontiers, Stanwix traveled to such disparate locales as Shanghai, Havana, Limon Bay, and Nicaragua, before settling in California, where he died of tuberculosis in 1886 at the early age of thirty-six. Benfey’s digest is a probing look into an little-known relation of one of America’s literary heroes.

“The Berserk Battle Over the Berkshire Museum and Its Art Collection”

Felix Salmon, *Hyperallergic*

This week brought the latest debacle in an ongoing controversy surrounding the Berkshire Museum’s deaccession of forty valuable artworks from its collection. The Pittsfield, Massachusetts, institution, which plans on selling the works to expand their endowment and fund a lavish “re-invention” project, has garnered consistent criticism since its original July announcement. For more background on the controversy, read our analyses [here](#) and [here](#). Now, as [Andrew Russeth of ARTnews reports diligently](#), we await a Berkshire judge’s decision regarding an injunction against the sale proposed by multiple plaintiffs [as well as the state attorney general](#). In a heated hearing on

Wednesday, lawyers representing both the museum and its critics presented their respective cases, the latter group focusing on the museum's fiduciary responsibilities as caretakers of the county's cultural heritage. The judge, however, appeared skeptical of the legal standing of their case. For a more passionate critique of the museum, read Felix Salmon's *Hyperallergic* editorial, which vigorously criticizes the deaccession and the proposed "re-invention" plan, pointing out that this reckless sale could set a dangerous precedent for other money-strapped institutions across the country.

**From our pages:**

"No easy way out"

Eric Simpson

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