

# The New Criterion

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## Week in review

by Andrew L. Shea

### Recent links of note:

#### “What Do We Mean When We Call Art ‘Necessary’?”

Lauren Oyler, *The New York Times Magazine*

In a rare moment of perspicacity, *The New York Times Magazine* published an essay by the freelance writer Lauren Oyler that critiques the vague, facile, and ultimately odious overuse of the word “necessary” to describe political content in art and cultural criticism. Here we find Hilton Als of *The New Yorker* calling *Angels in America* “brilliant, maddening, and necessary”; there we see *Vanity Fair* dubbing the children’s movie *Paddington 2* an “inviting, necessary bit of escapism.” As Oyler points out, the issue goes beyond critical laziness—it points to a more harmful ideology that places the political above the aesthetic. This ideology, in the end, renders art ultimately meaningless: as Oyler concludes, “Why write a novel when a manifesto will do?” Oyler’s takedown of this vacuous exercise in critical blather is certainly welcome.

#### “Political Correctness at Stanford Law”

Martin J. Salvucci, *National Review*

Martin J. Salvucci writes in *National Review* on the growing uniformity of political thought at Stanford Law School, which threatens to push out even the pretense of a heterodox intellectual climate. Salvucci, a third year J.D. candidate at the school, describes a 100-plus faculty that includes no more than three publicly conservative professors, open contempt for conservative viewpoints on the part of the school’s administration, and the kinds of intolerant political positioning one might wish were confined to the undergraduate sectors of our country’s “elite” institutions.

#### “How Do You Solve a Problem Like Oscar Hammerstein?”

Terry Teachout, *Commentary*

In a recent essay for *Commentary*, Terry Teachout grapples with the complicated legacy of Oscar Hammerstein II, undoubtedly one of our nation’s greatest librettists for the popular stage.

Hammerstein's legendary collaboration with Richard Rodgers produced many of the most popular works of the golden age of the Broadway musical, but the unabashed idealism and earnestness of Hammerstein's lyrics have led many to write them off as simplistic or sentimental. Teachout argues that such snobbery ignores the tremendous impact Hammerstein had on future playwrights, and that Hammerstein deserves recognition as a true artist in his own right, rather than as mere second hand to the more esteemed Rodgers.

**From our pages:**

"A symphony in full"

Jay Nordlinger

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