

# The New Criterion

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## Week in review

by Hannah Niemeier

### Recent links of note:

“The complexities of Laura Ingalls Wilder”

Terri Apter, *The Times Literary Supplement*

For more than seventy-five years, *The Little House on the Prairie* series has introduced children to reading through the saga of a family who pack up their wagon and decide to go it alone in the great American Midwest. Although Laura Ingalls Wilder’s novels are revered for their depiction of childhood, family, and the hardship of life on the plains, they also speak frankly of the pioneers’ clashes with Native Americans (the word “savages” is occasionally invoked). On June 23, the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) decided to change the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award to the more cautious and securely content-free “Children’s Literature Legacy Award.” In her response in this week’s *Times Literary Supplement*, Terri Apter sees this as a misreading of the way literature both expresses and challenges the biases of characters and readers. While the ALSC insists that the choice is not an act of censorship, in *The Wall Street Journal*, Michael Taube asks how this scrubbing squares with the ALSC’s celebration of Banned Books Week, and Dedra McDonald Birzer argues in *National Review* that the decision ignores Wilder’s formative role in developing the genre of children’s literature.

“The many deaths of liberalism”

Daniel H. Cole & Aurelian Craiutu, *Aeon*

In response to a concerned *New York Journal* reporter’s inquiries in 1897, Mark Twain supposedly quipped, “Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated.” If ideologies could speak, one could imagine American liberalism saying something similar. Though it is popular to lament its death, Daniel H. Cole and Aurelian Craiutu attempt to take the pulse of “liberalism,” a term that has been thrown around loosely for centuries. The authors conduct a valuable survey of the term’s frequent use over the past hundred years, classify the political theories that fall under its umbrella, and attempt to distill its core meaning. Liberalism as a broad term for the attempt to cultivate social

progress through institutions, ideally with an eye to human fallibility, lives on in many different strains of American politics. “I can understand perfectly how the report of my illness got about,” reads Mark Twain’s response. “I have even heard on good authority that I was dead.” Not so, say Twain, Cole, and Craiutu. Liberalism will live to see another (and perhaps more accurately defined) day. For a diagnosis of the blind spots of liberalism, read Roger Scruton’s September 2006 *New Criterion* essay.

“Grilling with Homer”

Valerie Stivers, *The Paris Review*

Anyone who attempts to read Homer on an empty stomach discovers that while the world’s greatest poet feeds more than the soul, it fuels the appetite, as well. *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* are laden with a banquet of descriptions of feasting and festivity that inspire ruminations on the meaning of our social ties and customs. Valerie Stivers encourages readers to take *The Iliad* literally this summer—not by reliving the war, but by recreating the epic array of edibles described in the poem and by bringing people together around a common table. Stivers provides instructions for grilling goat, lamb, and pork using a “Homeric grilling-and-skewering technique,” along with recipes and recommendations for wine, cheese, bread, tzatziki, fig tarts, and more. Homer himself provides the dinner entertainment (and consider a new translation of *The Iliad*, reviewed in *The New Criterion*).

**From our pages:**

“The downward spiral”

James Piereson

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