

The New Criterion

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The Critic's Notebook

by The Editors

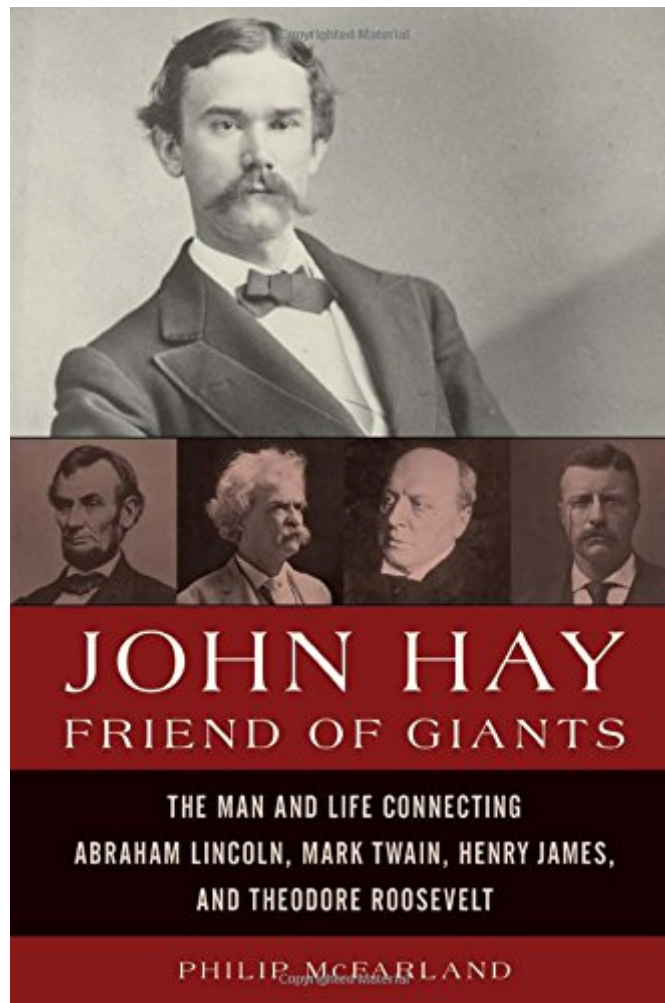
Sign up to receive “Critic’s Notebook” in your inbox every week—it only takes a few seconds and it’s completely free! “Critic’s Notebook” is a weekly preview of the best to read, see, and hear in New York and beyond, compiled by the editors of *The New Criterion*.



*Obverse of “Leonello d’Este, Marquess of Ferrara” by Pisanello, ca. 1445,
Scher Collection of Portrait Medals, on display at the Frick Collection, New York.*

This week: A trio by the shore & Dickinson galore

Nonfiction:



***John Hay, Friend of Giants: The Man and Life Connecting Abraham Lincoln, Mark Twain, Henry James, and Theodore Roosevelt*, by Philip McFarland (Rowman & Littlefield):** In a given age, one can always identify certain values and styles that seemed to arise simultaneously from every corner of the culture; the Romanticism of post–Civil War painting and poetry was mirrored in the high rhetoric of the Reconstruction presidents and the increasingly humanist preaching of Mainline Protestant churches. In *John Hay, Friend of Giants*, the historian Philip McFarland has woven a profile of the statesman and author who seemed to have inhabited every corner of this world, drawing a thread between such titans as William McKinley and the publisher-turned-politician Whitelaw Reid. In composing the book, McFarland—whose previous titles include *Mark Twain and the Colonel* and *Theodore Roosevelt and the Arrival of the New Century*—endeavored not only to revive the story of John Hay, but to illuminate the human connections that tie together the greater story of late-nineteenth-century America. —*MU*

Art:



“The Pursuit of Immortality: Masterpieces from the Scher Collection of Portrait Medals” at the Frick Collection (through September 10): “The Pursuit of Immortality: Masterpieces from the Scher Collection of Portrait Medals” is the kind of perfect little exhibition for which the Frick Collection deserves a big award. Curated by Aimee Ng and Stephen K. Scher, the show brings to light the most significant private collection of portrait metals, gifted to the Frick last year. With over one hundred examples displayed in upright clear cases, allowing for equal appreciation of both sides of these miraculous miniature sculptures, “The Pursuit of Immortality” tracks the regional and historical variations of the finest medal makers, while also expanding on the processes of casting and striking. The revelatory exhibition gives new appreciation to the role that portrait medals played in honoring their subjects as physical tokens of culture and society. —JP

Music:



The Masterworks Series at Bargemusic (May 19): The idiosyncratic venue Bargemusic presents concerts year-round, but there is no better time to enjoy a floating recital than late spring. This Friday, the violinist Stefan Jackiw, the cellist Jay Campbell, and the pianist Anna Polansky offer a pair of piano trios as part of Bargemusic’s “Masterworks Series”: Haydn’s “Gypsy” trio alongside Schubert’s Piano Trio No. 1 in B-flat, a keystone of the trio repertoire. Written between 1827 and 1828 it is perhaps the most unapologetically sunny piece from Schubert’s prolific final year. —ECS

Poetry:



Emily Dickinson: My Letter to the World at the Morgan Library & Museum (May 18): Last Winter, *A Quiet Passion*, a biographical film on the life of Emily Dickinson, was widely praised for its accurate and restrained portrayal of the taciturn New England poet. One year later, the producers behind that film have stretched their success with another worthy entry: a documentary on Dickinson with the same careful approach, titled *Emily Dickinson: My Letter to the World*. The documentary will be screened this Thursday at the Morgan Library as part of a pairing with their running exhibition on Dickinson, poignantly titled “I’m Nobody! Who are you?” One can’t help but wonder what the reclusive poet herself would have made of this fit of exposure, but regardless, her many admirers will probably not feel too guilty about the chance to become even more familiar with her engrossing life story. —*MU*

From the archive: “Is the symphony orchestra dead?” by Samuel Lipman: On the diminishing culture of classical performance.

From the current issue: “Sinners in the hands of an angry buddha” by Joseph Rago: A chronicle of recent fiction, on *Lincoln in the Bardo* by George Saunders, *Universal Harvester* by John Darnielle, *Ill Will* by Dan Chaon, & *I’d Die For You* by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Broadcast: The Pillars of Liberty: Andre Roberts’s presentation on the building blocks of a free society, at the annual conference of *The New Criterion* and London’s Social Affairs Unit.



Each week the editors of *The New Criterion* offer recommendations on what to read, see, and hear in the world of culture in the weekly Critic's Notebook. To get it first, subscribe to the free Critic's Notebook email by [clicking here](#).