

two decades later, however, a conservative U.S. Supreme Court took a more permissive view. In a 5-4 decision, the Court held that burning the flag was an allowable form of free speech. "We do not consecrate the flag by punishing its desecration, for in doing so we dilute the freedom that this cherished emblem represents," said then-Justice William J. Brennan, Jr.

That 1989 decision (reaffirmed last year when the court struck down a new federal law making it a crime to burn or deface the American flag) was "the end result of a cultural revolution" that began in the mid-1950s, according to Boime, an art historian at the University of California at Los Angeles. Jasper Johns fired the revolution's first shot, with *Flag* (1954) and other images of the Stars and Stripes. "Sometimes painted monochromatic gray or white or painted on bright backgrounds, Johns's flags served to neutralize the grand metaphor of Old Glory by holding it up to close scrutiny in the secularized space of [an] art gallery," Boime says. With the flag's image "completely divorced from those sites in which the ritual of respect or

decorum is normally played out," it became possible to see the flag "as a depersonalized, flat image," like the Campbell's soup cans that Pop Art later immortalized.

Soon Claes Oldenburg and other Pop artists were using the flag as an element in their collages, montages, monoprints, and other creations, and thus inadvertently contributing to the "desacralization" of the flag as the era of Vietnam protest drew near. Celebrity protester Abbie Hoffman, perhaps inspired by the work of the Pop Art masters, made a shirt out of the flag in 1968. Many, less "hip" people, however, continued to regard the flag as sacred. Hoffman was arrested in Washington, D.C., for wearing his flag shirt.

It was significant, Boime contends, that Johns, Oldenburg, and other artists whose flag images contributed to the cultural revolution filed a friend-of-the-court brief against flag-desecration laws in the 1989 Supreme Court case. "Once the flag could be viewed as just another object in the visual field," he says, "it could no longer be seen as either a record of conquest or a universally accepted patriotic symbol."

Looking Backward

"Tomorrow Never Knows" by Gail Collins, in *The Nation* (Jan. 21, 1991), 72 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10011.

In 1935, historian Charles Beard, philosopher John Dewey, and editor Edward Weeks were asked to name the 25 most influential books published in the preceding 50 years. Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* topped each man's list, but right behind it, in all three cases, was a utopian novel—*Looking Backward* (1888).

Written by Edward Bellamy (1850–1898), a minister's son from Chicopee Falls, Mass., *Looking Backward* told the story of Julian West, a wealthy Bostonian who went to sleep in 1887 and awoke 113 years later to discover that the world had been greatly changed, and entirely for the better. The novel was all but devoid of action, but late-19th-century readers didn't mind, notes Collins, co-author of *The Millennium Book*. They "were fascinated with

[Bellamy's] picture of society in the year 2000—from the day-to-day practicalities ('Our washing is all done at public laundries at excessively cheap rates, and our cooking at public kitchens') to his grand vision of an economy in which all business has been swallowed up into one Great Trust run by the state and the work force transformed into an eager industrial army of patriotic citizens."

The novel appeared at a time when middle-class Americans were alarmed by labor strife and violence, and by the flood of new immigrants into the country. They also were resentful of the Gilded Age rich, who flaunted their wealth with gaudy displays of conspicuous consumption. Bellamy and his "Nationalist" vision of social organization seemed to offer a solution. Sixty thou-

sand copies of *Looking Backward* were sold in the first year, more than 100,000 the next. "Bellamy Clubs" began to spring up all over the country, their members intent upon turning Bellamy's vision into a reality.

Looking Backward also inspired dozens of other utopian novels. Fictional heroes in increasing numbers began falling asleep and waking up, to their wonderment, a century later. The hero of Paul DeVinnie's *Day of Prosperity*, found himself in New York City in the year 2000 and saw around him "only these 10-story palaces, varied in decoration, surrounded by fruit trees, flower beds, vases, statues, and marble seats." Some utopian authors were provoked by Bellamy's work. British Marxist William Morris pronounced *Looking Back-*

ward "a horrible cockney dream"—and then proceeded to set down, in *News From Nowhere* (1890), his own vision of the future, an arcadian community of artisans and craftsmen.

Bellamy's age, Collins writes, "was the last in which futuristic novels would take such an optimistic bent." Although the 20th century brought far more technological progress than Bellamy and his contemporaries anticipated, it also brought world wars and other previously unimagined horrors that have soured most futuristic novelists on the future. "Looking backward now from Bellamy's future," Collins says, "the saddest thing is not that we have failed to create the utopia he imagined but that we have stopped dreaming up utopias of our own."

Latin Heroes

"Literature and Politics in Latin America" by Mark Falcoff, in *The New Criterion* (Dec. 1990), 850 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10019.

The Latin American writer is often thought to cut a heroic figure. As an independent critic of a corrupt society, he stands up in defense of humane and liberal values against an established order of greed and violence. But that familiar image is much exaggerated, says Falcoff, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. Most writers in Latin America, he says, "have been unusually drawn to power, for reasons both of economic necessity and cultural predisposition," and in this century, they've been especially drawn to non-liberal or anti-liberal ideologies.

Popular indifference has been a more powerful enemy of literature than has censorship, and Latin American writers have often relied upon the state for economic sustenance. Many governments, Left and Right, have kept writers on the public payroll. Successive Chilean governments, for example, rewarded poet Pablo Neruda with minor diplomatic posts in Spain and elsewhere. Short-story writer Jorge Luis Borges was appointed director of Argentina's National Library after having worked for years at the Buenos Aires Public Li-

brary. When individual writers were persecuted or driven into exile, Falcoff says, it was usually "due to their affiliation with the party out of power, not to the allegedly subversive content of their work."

Devotion to democratic principle has not been characteristic of Latin American writers, on the whole. Many older writers were attracted to Marxism at one time, and few allowed any disillusionment with it to lead them to embrace liberal democracy. Since the late 1960s, younger New Left writers, such as Chile's Ariel Dorfman and Uruguay's Eduardo Galeano, have taken as their themes protest, revolution, repression, solidarity, and North American consumerism's threat to the "authenticity" of native cultures.

The literary establishments in Western Europe and the United States, Falcoff says, have encouraged the writers' "anti-liberal bias." Not all of Latin America's writers have responded with political themes, but "the more ambitious (or unscrupulous) among them could not help noting that revolutionary posturing was the most expeditious route to success in the North At-