
for *chétives marchandises*—shoddy consumer goods. Hirschman, an economist at Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study, offers some fresh explanations. Beginning in the 18th century, Western societies challenged the Renaissance ideal of power-seeking as *the* public virtue and instead identified the public interest with the private pursuit of wealth. But the Western "consumer-citizen" has been repeatedly disappointed by the goods and services his recent affluence has enabled him to buy; while providing comfort, they fail to provide enough psychic "pleasure." He may then seek the very different satisfactions of the public arena. There, as Hirschman writes, he may escape, at least temporarily, our "imperious bottom-line mentality." When large numbers of people undergo parallel experiences (a rising middle class, for example), their disappointment with private consumption—their sheer boredom—may lead to political activism. Alas, says Hirschman, politics also entails disappointments. Progress may be too slow and results unexpected. Among its virtues, Hirschman's essay helps to explain why America's children of affluence for a time embraced wide-ranging social change and then beat such a hasty retreat toward the world promised by Ronald Reagan.

Arts & Letters

**THE BARBARIANS
ARE COMING**

by J. M. Coetzee
Penguin, 1982
156 pp. \$3.95

This is a fable of moral awakening, a story set in a nameless Empire at a time that could be any time. Its protagonist, the aging Magistrate of a frontier town, has unquestioningly served his state for decades. But when interrogation experts of the Empire's Third Bureau arrive to root out information about a rumored barbarian uprising and senselessly torture innocent natives, the scales begin to fall from the Magistrate's eyes: "I know somewhat too much; and from this knowledge, once one has been infected, there seems to be no recovering." Coetzee, a South African novelist, sets this Kafkian theme of one in-

dividual's resistance to an inhuman order in a severe yet beautiful landscape—a small agrarian community situated precariously between a brackish lake and an encroaching desert. He also manages, while guarding the universality of his hero, to endow him with real flesh (sagging), nerves (unsteady), interests (amateur archaeology), and appetites (for young women). The guardians of the Empire are obsessed by historical time—the intermittent rise and decline of their domain. Their fears drive them to cruelty. But if the Magistrate suffers punishment and humiliation for his protest, he earns precious wisdom: an awareness of a more fundamental temporal order, tied to nature and felt by those who live close to it. Coetzee stands with his fellow South African writers Nadine Gordimer and Alan Paton in his vision of a truth that endures beneath the disorder of states.

1789: THE EMBLEMS OF REASON

by Jean Starobinski
translated by Barbara Bray
Univ. Press of Va., 1982
294 pp. \$24.95



Pierre-Paul Prud'hon (1758-1823),
Liberty, engraved by Copia
(Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris).

The instigators of the French Revolution and the artists of the period—Wolfgang Mozart, William Blake, Francisco de Goya, Jacques-Louis David, and others—drew upon a common set of Enlightenment ideas. Starobinski, a professor of French literature at the University of Geneva, shows how these ideas emerged and were transformed in the arts and in the events of the revolution. Artists and revolutionaries alike tried to replace the oppressive frivolity of the *ancien régime* with reason, justice, and order. The earlier baroque and rococo artists agitated the senses with endless ornamentation. This was an art for the aristocratic libertine, whose fate was a weariness of entertainments and a knowledge of the emptiness that lay beyond. The new artists announced the dawn of a brilliant light that would banish the darkness of oppression. The sun was a recurring image. Artists such as David expressed the triumph of reason by replacing the "chaos" of colors with "rational" lines and forms. They slavishly imitated the styles and subjects of the Roman Republic, where man's condition as a free and equal citizen seemed closer to