

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
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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

what nature intended. Architects designed the "geometrical city." Each building was to be a monument of public utility, radiating the simple grandeur of geometry. But as the "Terror" became the third act of the revolution, so too darkness and irrationality reappeared in art. Goya's *Pradera of San Isidro* (1787) typifies the change. It depicts a crowd of people enjoying themselves—"a multicolored murmur." The chance encounters it portrays foreshadow the "essential instability" that marks the artist's later paintings.

**ALL THAT IS SOLID
MELTS INTO AIR:
The Experience of
Modernity**
by Marshall Berman
Simon & Schuster, 1982
383 pp. \$17.50

Nothing could be less fashionable amid the "new traditionalism" of the 1980s than a spirited defense of "modernism." But this is precisely what Berman offers, invoking artists and thinkers (Goethe, Marx) whom he believes have responded most creatively to the social and economic changes of the last two centuries. These are not the modernists of more recent decades—Samuel Beckett or other high priests of despair and alienation. They are, rather, the innovators who preached survival and adaptation—making oneself "at home in the maelstrom." Goethe's *Faust* is exemplary: The epitome of the modern "developer," Faust translates his drive for power and self-aggrandizement into a sprawling corporate empire. Berman does not overlook Faust's tragedy—the human costs of development (which include Faust's own obsolescence)—but he admires Faust as one who never retreats to the "little world" of his origins. He lauds Marx, Baudelaire, and the great St. Petersburg writers, from Gogol in the mid-19th century to Biely in the early 20th, for showing a similar courage. Berman, a political scientist at the City University of New York, approaches literature, philosophy, urban planning, the arts, and architecture with strong biases—reviling, for example, such modernists as Le Corbusier and Robert Moses for designing the life out of cities. His impassioned criticism is engaging even when most outrageous.