

person equivalent to a medic with direct experience of the war, a fellow a GI wouldn't mind sharing a foxhole with."

The most recent of the anthologies, *I Hear America Singing: Poems of Democracy, Manhattan, and the Future*, published by Anvil Press in 2001, makes no explicit reference to the attacks of 9/11, but the epigraph leaves no doubt: "I am the mash'd fireman with breast bone broken, / Tumbling walls buried me in their debris." And these words appear on the back cover: "This selection of courageous and consoling poems focuses on Whitman's vision of democracy, his love of

Manhattan, his sense of the future—and of the community of peoples of this earth." The publisher (no editor is named) calls Whitman "as much a poet for our time as he was for the time of the American Civil War and its aftermath."

Price believes that "American culture has been in an incessant conversation with Whitman ever since he imbued his art with the political vision of the founders, making freedom and equality the guiding principles that literally shaped the form and content of *Leaves of Grass*." The voluble poet never tires of holding up his end of the conversation.

Republican Art

"From Royal to Republican: The Classical Image in Early America" by Caroline Winterer, in *The Journal of American History* (March 2005), 1215 E. Atwater Ave., Bloomington, Ind. 47401.

In the 1770s, as the 13 colonies drew closer to war with England, neoclassical images began to flood the consciousness of Americans. Prints and engravings were filled with temples, eagles, and triumphal arches. Pictures of the Roman goddesses Liberty and Minerva appeared everywhere—in journals and broadsheets; on coins, currency, seals; in fashion and architecture; on wallpaper and

furniture and even punch bowls. Was the wide distribution of these images a deliberate effort at political spin?

Clearly yes, says Winterer, a Stanford University historian. "Classical imagery in and of itself did not point to revolutionary ideology," she writes, "but that imagery was reinvented to suit the ends of a new political program." By using the symbols of the classical world to

EXCERPT

Arthur Miller's Mission

Reservations about [Arthur] Miller, whether expressed by a critic patronizing his lack of avant-garde aspirations or a Broadway producer unwilling to finance anything but yet another revival of Salesman, seem to me to reflect a deeper unease with his notion of what theater is. For more than half a century, everything he wrote and said glowed with the belief that theater is a public art with a mission to bring people together in a public place to speak to them about matters of common concern. That is an old-fashioned idea, and not just because commercial theater is now so ridiculously expensive that its increasingly gray-haired and well-heeled patrons are wary of anything except guaranteed entertainment. It's more fundamental than that. We live in an age when public libraries and public schools, for example, are too often regarded as institutions of last resort for those who can't afford anything better, and when people can't walk down a street or through a park without isolating themselves in a private space via their cell phone conversations. Theater is a beleaguered outpost of collective life, an activity that cannot take place in your living room, online, or over a headset. That is why Miller's old-fashioned idea is eternally relevant and spiritually indispensable.

—Wendy Smith, author and theater critic, in *The American Scholar* (Spring 2005)

convey the moral authority of Greek and Roman antiquity, artists, craftsmen, and writers were able to foster the impression that a new Rome was at hand. Paul Revere, who created many engravings of revolutionary iconography, was one key promoter of the new republican imagery. Another was Thomas Hollis, a radical English Whig who never left the mother country but who contributed to revolutionary fervor in the colonies by publishing and shipping to America books, prints, and medals that exalted the republican ideal.

Interest in the ancient world was hardly new among the educated American elite. In inventories of colonial libraries, the titles of classical texts appear almost as frequently as those of popular works of Christian devotion. Homer's *Iliad* turns up often, along with two standard reference books on antiquities: John Potter's *Archaeologiae Graecae* (1697) and Basil Kennett's *Romae Antiquae Notitia* (1696). Charles Rollin's *Ancient His-*

tory (first published in 1729) was a colonial bestseller.

Such books, and the illustrations that accompanied them, emphasized the Baroque aspect of classicism, especially the glories and plunder of war. But the neoclassical style of late-18th-century America transformed the bellicose images into ones of inevitability and harmony. Minerva and Liberty, for example, were no longer depicted as warlike and authoritarian but as peace-loving symbols of reasoned republicanism, allied with literature, science, and the arts. Ancient virtue was represented not by military action but by serene poise and balance. By adapting classical iconography in this manner, the image makers of the emerging nation were able to address some of the troubling questions raised by revolutionary struggle against the mother country and to present the upstarts with a flattering vision of themselves. A modern political consultant could not have done better.

The Inaudible Poet

“Is That a Poem? The Case for E. E. Cummings” by Billy Collins, in *Slate* (April 20, 2005),
www.slate.com.

Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but it also has a more pragmatic use: Its practice by lesser lights keeps a luminary's work refracting through the poetry canon. Pity poor E. E. Cummings, a poet so inimitable that his fame is fading, writes Collins, a former U.S. poet laureate.

Cummings changed the rules by breaking nearly all of them. “In the long revolt against inherited forms that has by now become the narrative of 20th-century poetry in English, no poet was more flamboyant or more recognizable in his iconoclasm than Cummings,” writes Collins. “By erasing the sacred left margin, breaking down words into syllables and letters, employing eccentric punctuation, and indulging in all kinds of print-based shenanigans, Cummings brought into question some of our basic assumptions about poetry, grammar, sign, and language itself. . . . Measured by sheer boldness of experiment, no American poet compares to him, for he slipped Houdini-like out of the locked box of the stanza, then leaped

from the platform of the poetic line into an unheard-of way of writing poetry.”

Cummings came up hard in the poetry world. Born in 1894, he had, by age 25, placed poems in avant-garde magazines and published two books, *The Enormous Room* and *Tulips and Chimneys*. However, as late as 1935 he was driven to self-publish a poetry collection titled *No Thanks*, dedicated to the 14 publishers who had turned down the manuscript. For much of his life his poetry paid very little, and “well into his fifties, he was still accepting checks from his mother.”

But in the decade before his death in 1962, several major collections were published, and he once read to 7,000 people at the Boston Arts Festival. Today, Cummings is variously denigrated for spawning the “desiccated extremes” of so-called language poetry, and lauded as “the granddaddy of all American innovators in poetry.” Despite this influence, he is no longer much read.

“Because he is synonymous with sensational typography,” writes Collins, “no one