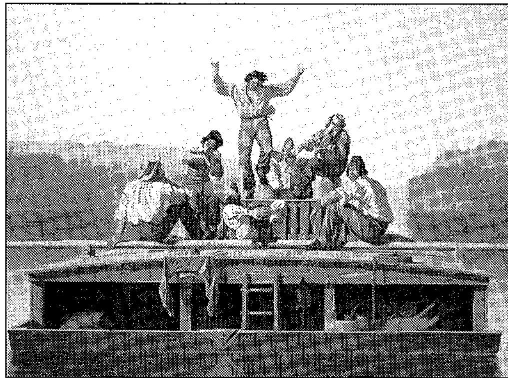
do not *look* like an underclass. Indeed, they appear happy, noble, and at times heroic. By considering these (and other) 19th-century paintings not sociologically but iconographically, Wilmerding, an art historian at Princeton University, reaches quite different conclusions. In his collection of 19 essays, he tries to determine what is essentially "American" about American art. At the beginning of the 19th century, European painters ranked subjects in a definite artistic hierarchy: Mythology, religion, and history were considered loftiest or highest in importance, portraiture next, and landscape and still life at the bottom. American painters quickly reversed this order, and in the romantic landscapes of Sanford Gifford, Frederic Church, and Thomas Cole, the "real" and the "ideal" were brought closer together than ever before in art history. In George Caleb Bingham's *The Jolly Flatboatmen* (1845), Wilmerding finds an affinity between Bingham's geometrics (relying on the stable pyramid) and his subject matter: "Bingham, like America in 1850, held moving forces in balance.... His artistic vision of stability, centrality, and equipoise perfectly matched its time and place."



Wilmerding produces a closer reading of the paintings themselves; Johns, a more knowing commentary upon the society on whose walls these paintings hung.

TROLLOPE: A Biography. *By N. John Hall. Oxford. 581 pp. $35*

Anthony Trollope (1815–82) was a prodigious Victorian, if not a Victorian prodigy. His literary output was stupendous: nearly 70 books, most of them on the grand Victorian triple-decker scale. The quality of his writing was remarkably even, and this new biography is no doubt right to suggest that Trollope may have left behind him more good novels than any other writer in the language.

More astonishingly, Trollope accomplished most of this in his spare time while pursuing a successful career in the English postal system. (He invented the corner mailbox.) "Real exertion will enable most men to work at almost any season," Trollope observed. To prove his point, he wrote anywhere and everywhere—in trains, boats, and hotels. This larger-than-life man, whom his friend Wilkie Collins called "an incarnate gale of wind," was the embodiment not only of the work ethic but of English common sense. As Virginia Woolf put it, we believe in Trollope's characters "as we believe in the reality of our own weekly bills."

Trollope's reputation rests largely on his "chronicles" of Barchester and the Pallisers. They are suffused with the essence of Victorian politics, the efforts of the ruling class to adjust the political process just sufficiently to contain the restlessness of modern radicalism without losing its own grip. Trollope was an instinctive conservative, and his common sense was of the kind that dismissed John Stuart Mill's prophetic proposal of Irish land reform (which might, if enacted at that time, have solved the "Irish Question") as "visionary, impracticable and revolutionary."

Politics in Trollope's fiction is the great game, and it was also his great unfulfilled ambition. (He dreamed, in vain, of becoming a member of Parliament.) But, as Hall points out, only the unfinished *Landleaguers* is a truly political story in the narrower meaning of politics—in the way, for example, that American novels about presidential campaigns or even Cold War spy novels are political. But in a larger sense, his novels about the Pallisers, aristocrats dedicated to public service, reveal how the structure of politics duplicated the structure of social life in his England. The Palliser novels amply demonstrate that personal contact was the machinery that controlled the impact of ideals. The grand sweep of these novels, however, is in reverse proportion to the narrowness of the elite they portray, and since the

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disappearance of that limited world, no subsequent novelist has attempted a political *roman fleuve* on the scale of Trollope's. It is Trollope's realized picture of social life resonating with political significance that has ensured that those studying Victorian politics do so in part through his eyes.

FORESTS: The Shadow of Civilization. *By Robert Pogue Harrison. Chicago. 288 pp. $24.95*

The word *forest* derives from the Latin for outside, and in literature the forest is usually an alien place where customary distinctions lose force. Under cover of the woods, "Rosalind appears as boy, the virtuous knight degenerates into a wild man, the straight line forms a circle, the ordinary gives way to the fabulous." Harrison, a professor of comparative literature at Stanford, takes such examples from medieval romance and Shakespeare—as well as others from classical mythology, the Grimm Brothers, and Thoreau's *Walden*—to fashion a history of the forest in the Western imagination.

The Gamekeeper of Waltham Forest, the appropriately named John Manwood, expressed the premodern attitude toward the forest in his treatise of 1592: Forests were sanctuaries, ruled by their own sacred laws (thus allowing outlaws like Herewald, Fulk Fitzwarin, and Robin Hood to be honest men and heroes there). Two centuries later, the modern idea of the forest was conceived when the Warden of the Park of Versailles, Monsieur Le Roy, gave it a quantitative definition in Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. Instead of a sacred domain ruled by gods and spirits, the woods were defined as simply so many acres of certain kinds of trees. The use of such places should be determined, Le Roy wrote, not by a religious or otherworldy ethic but only by *l'utilité publique*, the public interest. Today even the most sentimental ecologists speak this language and justify preserving forests by arguing for their social usefulness.

Yet despite using Le Roy's language, contemporaries are hardly filled with sanguine Enlightenment rationality as they watch the remaining great forests being cut down. Harrison takes stock of contemporary anguish, arguing that it is a peculiar anxiety that cannot be entirely explained by the loss of nature or wildlife habitat alone. "Forests mark the provincial edge of Western civilization, in the literal as well as the imaginative domain," he writes. "Underlying the ecological concern is perhaps a much deeper apprehension about the disappearance of boundaries. . . . Without such outside domain, there is no inside in which to dwell."

Contemporary Affairs

THE COMMUNISTS: The Story of Power and Lost Illusions, 1948–1991. *By Adam B. Ulam. Scribners. 528 pp. $27.50*

Why did communism—a survivor of military defeats, famine, and unprecedented bureaucratic incompetence—finally fall with hardly a shot fired in its defense? Ulam, director of the Harvard Russian Research Center, would have us remember Lord Keynes's dictum that it is ultimately ideas that count. The ideology of communism, Ulam argues, was almost untested before 1950. The revolutionary faith of Lenin and his compatriots quickly succumbed, under Stalin, to a cult of personality, "partly military, partly religious." Stalin's regime survived by brutal dictatorial means that made the ideology nearly irrelevant. (The only foreign communists who successfully rebuffed Stalin