



ANTHONY TROLLOPE

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 out-

laws like Hereward, 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 otherworldly 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

were those who established their own personality cults, namely Tito and Mao.)

But after Stalin's death on March 5, 1953, Ulam argues, "it became of great importance for the Kremlin to revive communism as a meaningful creed for its own citizens." For the next 30 years, the Soviet Union's powerful nuclear arsenal, its space program, and its international standing all seemed testimony to a viable ideology. Behind the "Potemkin" posturing, though, the Soviet economy stagnated. By the time Gorbachev obtained power, the Soviet Union could no longer afford to prop up communist regimes in Eastern Europe, much less sustain new expansion in places such as Afghanistan. As a last resort, Gorbachev attempted *perestroika* and *glasnost*, but these involved, Ulam says, "the virtual demolition of the entire edifice" of communist ideology. Once communist regimes had to justify themselves on economic rather than ideological grounds, the handwriting was on the wall.

Ulam has written one of the finer books—and possibly one of the last—in a once-flourishing genre, Kremlinology. With Soviet archives formerly closed to them, Kremlinologists practiced the arcane art by focusing on the top leadership and oversimplifying the complex remainder of society. With the archives now open, Soviet and Russian scholarship could well become as fragmented as the country (or countries) it studies.

THE DISPOSSESSED: America's Underclasses from the Civil War to the Present. By Jacqueline Jones. Basic. 399 pp. \$25

For the past 30 years, when the media or the government reported on poverty, says Jones, a Brandeis historian, they "created the false impression that all black people were poor and that all white people were middle class.... Middle-class Americans in general and policy-makers in particular [have] persisted in defining the nature of social distress in racial terms."

Jones examines the history of poverty in America to dispel the popular misperception of the poor as largely the product of a black "culture of poverty," immune to government remediation. In fact, she argues, poor whites and

blacks have often suffered a common lot. After the Civil War, the changing world market for cotton and other southern products drove the South's white yeoman farmers from their land and closed off opportunities for the 3.5 million newly freed slaves. Both wound up with the same narrow choices—tenant farming or wage-labor in the South's mines, farms, and sawmills—and subject to the same economic forces. By and large, Jones maintains, both reacted the same way. Black tenant farmers were commonly stigmatized as "shiftless" because they pulled up stakes and moved from place to place. Yet the 1910 census showed that 42 percent of white tenants and 29 percent of black tenants had moved within the previous year: Far from reflecting a "roving" instinct, Jones says, this was a product of the farmers' ceaseless effort, against all odds, to better themselves.

Unfortunately, Jones's attempt to extend her argument about racist stereotyping and neglect of the poor today is less persuasive. "Postindustrial America," she maintains, "remains colonial Virginia writ large." How else, Jones asks, can one explain the fact that while 21 million of today's poor are white and only nine million black, the specter of a small black "underclass" dominates popular thinking on poverty? A good question. But Jones's dogmatic insistence that the poor are all alike—all merely victims of larger economic and cultural forces—prevents her from attempting a real answer. She may point out that *in absolute numbers* the majority now characterized as poor are "not black, Northern, or urban," but this fact does not so much refute her social critics as miss their point. What excites alarm today is the other poverty, the existence of an urban "underclass" that seems, unlike the rest of the poor, bound to transmit poverty from generation to generation.

Science & Technology

FROM PARALYSIS TO FATIGUE: A History of Psychosomatic Illness in the Modern Era. By Edward Shorter. Free Press. 419 pp. \$24.95

Even medical doctors often cannot tell whether a strange bodily symptom is caused by organic