Lionel Trilling Seminar

By Mary-Lea Cox

At first, it does not compute: what is a stock market spe-
cialist doing on the faculty of SIPA, the School of In-
ternational and Public Affairs? Some may wonder, but for
everyone who is familiar with the work and thought of
Professor Ailsa Röell, it is a question that makes perfect
sense. Professor Röell, who is the Alva O’Way University
Professor and a professor of history at Brown University,
was delivering the 2006 Lionel Trilling Seminar in Low Library,
hosted annually by the Heyman Center for the Humanities.

For information on Heyman Center events, go to:
www.worldcimestep.org

The Dutchborn Alisa Röell spent much of her childhood in South America and Africa, where her father worked on UN irrigation and drainage projects, and she has studied and made her career in the Netherlands, Belgium, England and now the United States. She has yet, however, to be strand-
ed on a desert island. If that were to hap-
pen, what books and music would she like to have with her? Would she like to have as her conversational companion? What would she miss most and least?

BOOKS: I’d combine work and pleasure by bringing the next book on my to-read list, Joel Seligman’s Transformation of Wall Street, a history of the United States. Many of today’s most debated issues in financial regulation have been around for at least century—let his-
tory be our guide. Then, I’d like to re-read all of George Orwell’s nonfiction (I will skip Animal Farm and 1984, which were force-
fully fed to me in high school). And I love travel books of any kind, so a good supply would be needed... And if life on the island is suf-
ficiently languorous, I would like to immerse myself further into Proust. Lots of time to read is what I’m looking forward to most about this desert island sojourn! MUSIC: I love music from the West African Sahel zone. I would bring music by Ali Farka Touré, and mourn his recent death. PEOPLE: Jane Austen, I expect her to sweer the manners and mores of the 21st century. MISS LEAST: E-mail and cell phones. MISS MOST: My family. The New York Times op-ed page. Snowstorms.

Lionel Trilling Seminar

Are There Lessons in History?

According to historian Gordon Wood, history teaches only humility, not how to achieve more just societies

By Elizabeth A. Cole

A mericans are famously resistant to analyzing the mistakes of their past, as many critics noted at the time of the Iraq War, invoking the famous quotation “Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” If that were the case, one could ask how the nation’s entanglement in Vietnam some 40 years earlier—well after the death of historian Gordon Wood—is, some historical movements have
resulted in progress and improvement in the lives of groups of people even while
demonstrating the disasters inherent in
ambitious attempts at social engineering. Wood responded that he was not opti-
mistic enough to share Ferguson’s belief in history’s mixed messages However, he said, he believes in using history to obtain an accurate sense of where we have come from, which can help us appreciate the complexity of human affairs. Despite its lack of specific les-
sions, history gives us the best guide for how to cope with the uncertainty of the future, he maintained. Nelson Trilling Seminar events, go to: www.heymancenter.org/