

irony and irreverence run at flood tide on our campuses. Within the literary canon, writers such as Spenser, Milton, Johnson, Walter Scott, and Tennyson have either disappeared into the hands of specialists or are mined and exploited for bizarre qualities or views.

The single remaining literary exception to this discarding, revision, and reinterpretation of texts is the work of Shakespeare, whose piety and traditionalism somehow retain a unique, and uniquely moral, force. Of the villains in *King Lear*, for instance, Alfred Harbage said that "even that curious product of our times, the liberalism-gone-to-seed which automatically defends anything from treachery to sadism providing it savors of non-conformity, has found little to say for these insatiable" figures. Shakespearean drama remains a perennial morality play that reaffirms the Natural Law to tens of thousands of readers and spectators each year, despite radical teachers, directors, and "gay" actors. It was a supreme imaginative stroke of genius for Aldous Huxley to use the writings of Shakespeare as the last evidence of spirituality in his "brave new world." Yet our current immoralism was already evident in Shakespeare's day: it can be seen in Machiavelli and Marlowe. How did Shakespeare transcend and critique it then?

That Shakespeare was an Aristotelian and a Natural Law thinker and dramatist has been argued by many scholars. But it is the contention of John Henry de Groot's *The Shakespeares and "The Old Faith"*—first published in 1946 and now available again, with a new postscript by Stanley L. Jaki—that Shakespeare's particular loyalty, spiritual and moral, was to Catholicism. The argument is compelling for a number of reasons: De Groot was not a Catholic, but a learned Presbyterian minister; his book was a dissertation based on exhaustive research and done under the distinguished Shakespearean O.J. Campbell at Columbia; and his summary and analysis are painstakingly careful and definitive.

It is Stanley Jaki's contention that, despite its initially favorable reviews in 1946, De Groot's book has not gotten the attention it deserves because its argument about the "recusant" Catholicism of the Shakespeare family is distasteful or troubling to prevailing scholarly tastes. From Santayana to Walter Kaufmann to "modernized" productions of the plays, it has long been fashionable to portray

Shakespeare as an "existentialist," preparing the way for the modern, liberated self.

To be sure, there have been exceptions to this view of Shakespeare. The perception of Shakespeare as an orthodox Christian writer has been argued for many years by Professor Roy W. Battenhouse of Indiana University, most recently in his anthology of criticism, *Shakespeare's Christian Dimension* (1993). Yet the importance of Catholicism in the life of John Shakespeare and in the life, family, and writing of his son William have been given most judicious treatment by De Groot in this outstanding book. Among other points that De Groot argues convincingly are that John Shakespeare "was a Catholic throughout his life and that his household was infused with the spirit of the Old Faith"; that in school in Stratford, William studied under Simon Hunt, who eventually became "a Catholic, then a Douay Seminary student [in France], and finally a Jesuit"; and that John Shakespeare's "Last Will and Testament" is authentic and is modeled on that of the famous Milanese Cardinal, saint, and Counter-Reformation polemicist Carlo Borromeo, something mainline Shakespeare scholarship (as in Stanley Wells's *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Dictionary*), has conceded, though usually without crediting the pioneering research of Father Herbert Thurston, S.J., and De Groot.

Specifically, De Groot shows how Shakespeare's poems and plays reflect his religious assumptions, views, and loyalties. Though he is by no means alone in documenting "positive indications of esteem for the old faith" in the Shakespearean corpus, his account is unusually thorough and persuasive. Shakespeare lived at a time when it was illegal and dangerous to adhere to the Roman Church, when many suffered harsh penalties or death for doing so. De Groot's view is that Shakespeare covertly kept alive his loyalty to "the Old Faith" while outwardly conforming to the state church of Elizabeth and James. (We also know that Shakespeare's sister and elder daughter were both cited as recusant Catholics.)

The nonspecialist may wonder if and why any of this matters or has contemporary relevance. It does because Shakespeare's work is the classic example of how traditional literature can conserve, "realize," and transmit values and beliefs which philosophers and teachers may

have "lost the art to verify," in John Coulson's phrase. Today, a variety of influences have combined to erode the credibility not only of religious doctrine but of moral behavior itself. Shakespeare's dogged if covert loyalty to "the Old Faith" in combination with his loyalty to its Natural Law morality makes his genius an enduring source of "decent Godly order" in an age in which the faith is again embattled.

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Jungle Excursions

by Gregory McNamee

Green Cathedrals

by Brian Alexander

New York: Lyons & Burford;
224 pp., \$22.95



Certain frontline soldiers in Vietnam, Michael Herr has written, went off to battle in the jungle whistling the themes to the television shows *Combat* and *The Mickey Mouse Club*, making Vietnam the first television war in more ways than one.

Brian Alexander, a journalist, carries a different television talisman into the jungle in *Green Cathedrals*, one of the first books in the genre of so-called literary travel to skirt literature entirely. His inspiration for traveling to seven of the world's rain forests—was, he writes, the old *Tarzan* serial, its half-hour episodes full of rushing rivers and crocodiles agape, of savage natives and scantily dressed jungle goddesses. None of the usual bookish precedents for adventure travel—Kipling, Masters, London, Hilary—figure in his pages, which bear the stamp of their electronic origins, all short attention span and superficiality, but with bursts of intelligence and interest nonetheless.

Alexander makes no grand claims for the program of travel that underlies *Green Cathedrals*. Inspired by Ron Ely's onscreen antics though he may have

been, Alexander apparently felt the need, as a travel writer, to add the tropics to his résumé. "I felt I could never win the game," he offers in a sole literary allusion, "if I did not, at some point, move my token into a jungle square and follow Joseph Conrad into the Heart of Darkness, where life would be reduced to its essentials, written in sharp contrasts." Just why Alexander undertook his travels to the rain forest we are never sure, apart from the homage to *Tarzan*. Careening about in places like Malaysia and the Amazon, Panama, and the Tongass of Alaska, he offers sketches of faraway, exotic destinations, never linking one place to the next except to point out the obvious: big trees grow in rain forests, and big trees are falling as the world develops.

These sketches are modest in every way. They are also honest, without the usual posturing and chest-beating. When Alexander is uncomfortable, he says so. When the locals displease him, he says so as well, and without the studied sneer of Paul Theroux. When he eats something unpalatable—like the durian fruit of Malaysia, "with its onion-like flavor and athletic-supporter aroma"—he confesses to wanting to wretch.

LIBERAL ARTS



STRANGE WAYS

According to the January 31/February 6 issue of the *London Weekly Telegraph*, the British Home Office has decided to award £35,000 to seven inmates at the Strangeways prison who suffered high levels of stress while participating in a prison riot in 1990. The prisoners won the lawsuit by claiming "that their personalities changed because of the Strangeways riot." One of the prisoners, Terence Jeggo, complained that he had changed from "a happy-go-lucky person to a time bomb about to go off."

He takes no foolish risks for the sake of a mere paragraph; résumé-building goes only so far.

Grown out of magazine articles, the writing seems hurried and pinched as if by deadlines and considerations of space, full of ellipses and sometimes maddening reductions. Describing a forest sanctuary called Taman Negara, meaning "national park" in Malay, for instance, Alexander observes, "It was preserved on the cusp of World War II. Then Britain was asked, politely, of course, since that's the way Malaysians do everything, to go home." This is perfect travel-magazine formula, jocular and pleasantly informative. It is also wrong, brushing aside a war in which thousands of Malays and British soldiers alike died, few of them politely. In Alexander's hands, again following formula, the people who wander among Taman Negara's tall trees, the Orang Asli, are extras on a set; about them we learn little more than that "they are roughly equivalent to animists"—whatever that means—and that Alexander finds it amusing that they should throw away their cassette recorders when the batteries die, thinking the machines themselves done for.

Alexander is better when he takes on the pieties of the rain forests' would-be champions, "conservationists reminiscent of weeping religious seers," whose efforts to make the rain forests part of the heritage of all humankind too often displace the people who live and work there. When he describes the jealousies and intrigues that are played out among the multi-acronymed agencies scrambling to stake out their bit of tropical turf, he produces some wonderful writing. There are few better send-ups in the literature than his skewering of the "eco-warriors and social development gurus who had met in Bolivia or Ecuador or Peru, people who travelled the Third World, freelancing for NGOs [nongovernmental organizations], carting their Jackson Browne song collections from one tiny town to another, living in rented houses all complete with computers and maps and a local girlfriend and maid service, places where First World cash made them the biggest man in town."

His account of the Guatemalan rain forest, which now lies at the center of world attention, is a case in point. Alexander writes accurately and affectingly of an old *chiclero*, don Lanzas, a collection of chicle from gum trees; his account of don Lanzas's hard life, spent

in murderous circumstances and now-changing times with "thirty-two separate organizations in the Petén all trying to help," and all getting in the way, is sympathetic and seemly. Alexander is also strong in his reportage from the little island nation of Dominica, which has been wrestling with the hard questions of how to convert its economy from the traditional extractive industries to ecotourism while averting the perhaps inevitable flood of Club Med types, travelers who enjoy cheap holidays in other people's misery. Foreign agencies, Alexander writes, have again been unhelpful—notably our own USAID, which has lately been pouring money into restoring an old Rose's Lime Juice factory for the Dominican tourist itinerary. As Alexander suggests, such intervention can lead only to jungly places becoming "Heart of Darkness with Hollywood cachet and amenities."

But these high points, fine and well-meaning as they are, do not save *Green Cathedrals*, which seems at root an aimless, unfocused book. As often as he gets things right, Alexander misses or brushes aside the real stories gleaned from his wanderings. Intertribal conflicts among, say, traditional Alaskan Natives and their "progressive" kin, who agitate for mines to open in their stretch of old-growth rain forest so that development dollars can roll in, are left unexplored, although the outcomes of such conflicts will determine the fate of huge swaths of forest the world over. Alexander does not tell us that the planet's rain forests are being ripped apart for Copenhagen furniture and Japanese stockpiles, for the supposed drugs—including a bark tea from one of Dominica's thousand-odd species of vascular plants that makes LSD pale by comparison—and sexual stimulants and other wondrous stuff they contain. Neither does he tell us that those rain forests are being ripped apart because the people who live in them are poor and hungry, ready to sell their birthright for a moment's respite from the troubles of this world.

In such matters lie the real story of the modern Heart of Darkness. We will have to wait for another, more purposeful book to get at it.

Gregory McNamee's most recent books are *The Sierra Club Desert Reader* (Sierra Club Books) and, with Art Wolfe, *In the Presence of Wolves* (Crown Publishers).

Letter From England

by Derrick Turner

Television's Taste Terrorists



British television, like television almost everywhere, is dominated by left-wingers masquerading as liberals. As a consequence, British television often denigrates those traditions and institutions held in most affection by the indigenous inhabitants of this country. In the interstices, it finds time to celebrate and promote everything that is not British, or at any rate not integrally British, such as "documentaries" vindicating various bad things. To take two particularly bad examples, there was a famously biased BBC program called *Death on the Rock*, which criticized British security forces for defending themselves against IRA terrorists, and thereby earned the BBC the undying disrespect of all Unionists. In a part-mawkish, part-splenetic program called *Justice for Joy*, leftists attacked Britain's already overgentle deportation procedures and hinted that there should be no immigration controls, by using Joy Gardiner—a Jamaican who outstayed her visa by eight years, ignored three requests to leave the country, and then died inopportunely while she was biting a policeman—as an exemplar of saint-like womanhood, and as a symbol of outraged "human dignity" and inalienable immigrant "rights."

Although there are many worthy television programs, too much broadcasting time is taken up by films legitimizing violence or sexual perversion, by chat and game shows, deliberately multicultural children's programs, social-realist soap operas gritty with typical working-class lesbian intellectuals with mathematics degrees, confessional and sermonizing programs of different kinds, trashy comedies, emotive depictions and impertinent examinations of what should be private, doctored news bulletins and excitable talking heads who jump to conclusions and would like to involve

Britain in every war, every movement of refugees, every famine, every plague, every earthquake, every human rights abuse, every political or religious controversy in the world. I am sure this description will sound familiar to civilized Americans.

These tendencies are especially noticeable on Channel 4, one of Britain's independent channels. Some examples of recent programs give the general flavor—*Dyke TV*, for the gratification of militant lesbians (the programmer concerned is herself one of the sorority); *Drugs R Us*; *Hookers*, *Hustlers*, *Pimps and Their Johns*; *Dusky Sapphos*; *Silent Porn*. Although Channel 4 was set up to cater to minority tastes, and although they also show many fine programs and avant-garde films that would not be shown elsewhere, Channel 4's programmers seem overly concerned with those seamy and sordid things that should either not be discussed at all, or only with great care.

This process has been going on since Channel 4's inception. Its previous program director was once editrix of the left-wing newspaper, the *Guardian*. She is now managing director of BBC Radio, which shows that "Auntie" is not far behind. To take just one example, BBC 2 television has just begun *~aytime TV*, which, editor Neil Crombie promises, will "be so glamorous and exciting that straight people will love it too." The BBC has always been regarded as "Red," and it seems to be still true (although the BBC is always outraged whenever anybody points it out). But some enthusiasts do not think the BBC is left-wing enough; the ghastly Janet Street-Porter, former director of youth programming at the BBC, recently said that television executives were all "male, middle-class and mediocre," and asked why "those with 'willies'" predominated in the industry.

All in all, conservatives should not, and most do not, expect much from the television screen. But a recent episode of *The Word*, a "yoof" program on Channel 4, must have surprised even many blasé right-wingers. *The Word* (possibly inadvertently) fosters everything that tends toward social dissolution. It glorifies minority aspirations (at any rate, the ones which conflict with majority aspirations), even to the extent of deliberately

hiring presenters with strong regional accents or unusual tastes. One presenter was a bald lesbian from Newcastle with a strong Geordie accent. The less standard or middle English, the better, so far as *The Word* is concerned.

Previous episodes of *The Word* have featured a performer named "Mr. Power-tool," who pulls people across the room by means of a rope attached to his genitalia, and "Santa Claus" vomiting over a child. Encouraged by the ratings occasioned by "Mr. Powertool" and Co., *The Word's* writers decided to introduce an even better viewer attraction. Although the program's audience is a generally "right-on" group, this did not protect them from the contempt of the producers who deliberately released the contents of a colostomy bag all over them while they were laughing.

This occasioned much hostile press coverage, even from normally bland newspapers like the *Times*, none of which, however, had any effect on Michael Grade, the chief executive of Channel 4. "I am in no way answerable to the public," he said when challenged. He feels only contempt for the Broadcasting Standards Council, whom he has described as "highly unrepresentative, middle-aged, middle-class busybody dogooders"—a description reminiscent of Street-Porter and which might, with equal justice, be applied to Grade himself (except, of course, that he is instinctively lower-class). Only the *Guardian* stood up for Grade and Channel 4, and said that it didn't matter if older people were offended, as they were not one of the minorities being catered for. Only certain groups deserve consideration, after all, and society at large deserves none whatever.

What next for television's schlock-and sleaze-merchants? Every descent into baseness must be succeeded by another, even lower descent in order for momentum to be maintained. After condoms, vomit, and bags of excrement have fully penetrated popular culture, we are almost inevitably bound for guts. We already have horror films full of gore, and programs showing hospital operations; we are really getting too close to the "snuff movie." In a world where truth has been inverted, where evil has become good, where male has become fe-