History, geography, poetry: David Jones’s late modernism

Until relatively recently everyone seemed to agree that modernism came to an end with the twin disasters of *Finnegans Wake* (1939) and the outbreak of the Second World War. What came next is a matter of disagreement, but it wasn’t modernism. This account of modernism’s end now seems less than persuasive, especially given the critical attention that has been paid during the past decade and more to modernism’s legacies, afterlives, and late manifestations.¹ This is particularly true for those scholars, including myself, who seek to account for the achievements of late modernist poets on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, I would argue that the three decades between 1945 and 1975 marked a major new phase of formal and linguistic experiment in Anglophone modernist poetry. This period saw the publication of such important late modernist texts as William Carlos Williams’s *Paterson* (1946-1958), Lynette Roberts’s *Gods with Stainless Ears* (1951), Melvin B. Tolson’s *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia* (1953), W.S. Graham’s *The Nightfishing* (1955), Hugh MacDiarmid’s *In Memoriam James Joyce* (1955), Louis Zukofsky’s “A” 1-12 (1959), H.D.’s *Helen in Egypt* (1961), Basil Bunting’s *Briggflatts* (1966), George Oppen’s *Of Being Numerous* (1968) Lorine Niedecker’s *North Central* (1968), Charles Olson’s *The Maximus Poems* (1960-1975), and Brian Coffey’s *Advent* (1975). Nor should we forget that the first collected edition of Ezra Pound’s *The Cantos* was published by New Directions in 1964. Given this remarkable late flourishing of modernist poetry in the decades after the Second World War, the more interesting critical question is not when modernism came to an end but rather how modernism persists and transforms itself during the second half of the twentieth century.

In this article I want to offer some answers to that question through a focused critical engagement with the work of David Jones, which is arguably central to the resurgence of
modernist poetry in the three decades after the Second World War. Born in 1895, Jones had already established a career and reputation as a visual artist when he published *In Parenthesis* (1937), a book-length poem in verse and prose that is widely-regarded as the most important modernist depiction of the First World War. Less widely-known but also highly significant are two later texts, *The Anathématata* (1952) and *The Sleeping Lord and other fragments* (1974), both of which extend modernist aesthetics well beyond the “end” of modernism proper. The latter volume in particular, which gathers together several texts that were begun in the 1930s then revised and published in the 1960s, can be regarded as an example of what Edward Said calls “late style”, a mode of writing characterised by anachronism, “intransigence, difficulty, and unresolved contradiction”. Moreover, Jones was preoccupied with the historical and aesthetic implications of “lateness”, describing himself in the preface to *The Anathématata* as someone who writes poetry “in a late and complex phase of a phenomenally complex culture”. Lateness and complexity go together in Jones’s work, and the late style of his oeuvre is of further interest because of the way in which it serves to both illustrate and complicate some influential critical accounts of late modernism.

Simplifying a little, there are two ways of describing late modernism: one relates a story of decline and obsolescence that is usually keyed to larger narratives of historical change; while the other tells a tale of survival and persistence long after modernism is supposed to have passed on. The first kind of account is exemplified by Tyrus Miller, who defines late modernism as a phenomenon of the late 1920s and 1930s, “a distinctly self-conscious manifestation of the aging and decline of modernism” that eschews the “strong symbolic forms” of high modernism through self-reflexive laughter and the erosion of individual subjectivity (7, 20). In Miller’s influential account, then, late modernism belongs to the interwar years and fits within the conventional period boundaries ascribed to modernism as a whole (roughly, 1900-1940), though it also constitutes a sort of counter-
tradition that brings modernism to an end. The second account of late modernism offers a more radical challenge to conventional periodization by suggesting that modernist aesthetics survive as an active cultural force well into the second half of the twentieth century. For instance, Tim Armstrong calls attention to “the afterlife of modernism” when he notes that several modernist poets – Bunting, Coffey, Niedecker, and Oppen – had interrupted careers, publishing their first texts in the 1920s or 1930s, then disappearing for decades before resurfacing in the 1960s or 1970s with what became their major works. Anthony Mellors adds further weight to this revisionist account of modernism’s literary history in his Late Modernist Poetics (2005), where he argues that late modernism refers to “the continuation of modernist writing into the war years and until at least the end of the 1970s” (19). Mellors focuses in particular upon late modernist poems such as Pound’s The Cantos, Olson’s The Maximus Poems, and J.H. Prynne’s The White Stones (1968) in which hermeticism and myth play significant parts, although his periodization also has wider applications. Following Armstrong and Mellors, then, we might understand late modernism as the way in which modernist writing persists after the end of modernism proper, remaining a significant, though marginalised mode of writing throughout much of the second half of the twentieth century.

It should be clear that I favour the latter understanding of late modernism as the survival or living on of modernist aesthetics into the post-war period. More particularly, I argue that, in poetry at least, the three decades from 1945 to 1975 can be regarded as a major phase of late modernist experiment and achievement – a second wave of modernist poetry – in which Jones’s work plays a central, even representative role. Although his writing is distinctive and idiosyncratic, Jones’s The Anathémata and The Sleeping Lord exemplify three key features of late modernist poetry. Not all of these features are present in every late modernist poem, though they often appear together.
Firstly, Jones favours longer forms, including versions of epic and the extended sequence, as well as a number of mid-length poems he presents as “fragments” of some larger, absent whole. There is a strong link to an older modernist tradition here, for Robert Hampson and Will Montgomery observe that “the non-narrative long poem” has been “central to modernism from Pound and Eliot through to the present day”. Although Eliot’s *The Waste Land* remains iconic, it is Pound’s *The Cantos* that arguably figures as the most important example for other late modernist poets, both because of its open-ended construction and its conflicting impulses towards coherence and fragmentation. Secondly, like many other late modernist poems – including Bunting’s *Briggflatts*, Olson’s *The Maximus Poems*, and Williams’s *Paterson* – Jones’s texts are informed by an unusually intense geographical imagination that finds expression in an original poetics of place. Late modernist poems typically disclose a conception of place as open and in process, subject to the changes wrought by time and always entangled with other places at a range of spatial scales from the local to the transnational. Andrew Thacker has called for a more detailed “spatial history of modernism” that would give “an account of the precise historical fashion in which particular spaces and places were conceptualised and represented”. The significance of late modernist poetry for such a critical project is considerable, and yet it remains largely unrealised. Thirdly, although Jones regarded himself as primarily “a Londoner” and spent most of his life in or near the metropolis, his poetry tends to foreground the cultural significance of peripheral or non-metropolitan places. In this, Jones is again representative of a broader trend in late modernist poetry: where modernism has been described as essentially ‘an art of cities’, deriving its cultural energy from the metropolitan milieux in which it was formed, late modernist poems tend to foreground local and regional places: Bunting’s Northumbria; Niedecker’s Black Hawk Island, Wisconsin; Olson’s Gloucester, Massachusetts; Williams’s Paterson, New Jersey. None of these places is
conceived as bounded or self-sufficient, and in their texts these poets typically bring the local
and particular into focus through perspectives that are informed by travel, displacement, and
contact with other cultures. “The province of the poem is the world”, writes Williams in
Book III of *Paterson*; and this dialectic between the province and the world is central to the
geographical imagination of much late modernist poetry. Consequently, in what follows, I
examine Jones’s poetry in detail, with a particular emphasis upon his later work and the
complex poetics of place to which it gives expression. Throughout, I will seek to demonstrate
the various ways in which history and geography, territory and myth are intermeshed in his
late modernist texts.

**Historical sense and geographical imagination**

Jones’s distinctive historical sense – his perception “not only of the pastness of the past, but
of its presence” – is grounded in and given expression by a geographical imagination in
which the concepts of place, site, and locality are of central importance. Jones explicitly
characterises the poet’s role as that of a “rememberer” whose business is “to keep open the
lines of communication” with the past, and describes poetry itself as an act of “recalling” or
“anamnesis”. This act of anamnesis, by which history is both recalled and re-presented, is
predicated upon an engagement with the material and symbolic qualities of particular places.
Indeed, Jones conceives of the poet as a kind of archaeologist and bricoleur, whose
synthesising creative imagination draws upon the cultural materials that “happen to be lying
about the place or site or lying within the orbit of [his or her] ‘tradition’” (*Anathémata*, 34).
The particular places and cultural traditions with which Jones’s poetry is most deeply
cconcerned are those of Britain, and especially Wales; although his aesthetic sensibility is
broadly congruent with that of European modernism. Neil Corcoran argues persuasively that
Jones’s major literary achievement derives from his success in “localising, or domesticating, in a specifically British context, a modernist sense of the relation between a poet and his ‘tribal’ history”. However, it is worth noting that Jones’s imagination is also temporally and spatially expansive, taking in the whole of Western Europe from the time of the Roman Empire to the middle of the twentieth century, and ranging from Jerusalem and the eastern Mediterranean to the continent’s north Atlantic archipelago. Jones’s most ambitious long poem, *The Anathémata*, reaches back into prehistory and geological time in its exploration of the fundamental links between art and religion, culture and place.

Although he claimed to be a poor scholar, Jones’s formidably erudite and allusive long poems are informed by wide-ranging and eclectic research, including a keen amateur interest in the disciplines of geography, oceanography, and geology. His library, now held at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, includes volumes such as John Gorton’s *Topographical Dictionary of Great Britain and Ireland* (1833), Halford Mackinder’s *Britain and the British Seas* (1902), L. Dudley Stamp’s *The World: A General Geography* (1940), and A.E. Trueman’s *Geology and Scenery in England and Wales* (1961), among many others. Jones owned eighteen maps (mostly of Wales and England), five atlases (of Britain, Palestine, and the classical world), and a sea-chart showing the Bristol Channel and Lundy Island. Moreover, he annotated his Ordnance Survey *Map of South Wales showing the distribution of long barrows and megaliths* (1936) to delineate the course taken by the hunt for the giant boar, Twrch Trwyth, in the medieval Welsh tale “Culhwch and Olwen”, which is a key inter-text for his poem, “The Hunt”. This instance of practical “literary cartography” underlines a more fundamental point about the character of Jones’s geographical imagination. His modernist poetics of place is underpinned by a longstanding interest in and knowledge of geographical terms and concepts; while the topographical and toponymic
exactitude that distinguishes many of his texts derives from his habitual use of maps, charts, and atlases.

Jones spent most of his life in various London suburbs and districts – Brockley, Chelsea, Kensington, and Harrow – with only occasional periods outside of the city. The most notable of these is the three years that he served as a private in the Royal Welch Fusiliers in France, Belgium, and Ireland during the First World War. However, from an early age Jones strongly identified with his father’s patria, Wales, and developed a life-long interest in Welsh culture and the Welsh language. “From about the age of six,” he writes in an autobiographical essay, “I felt I belonged to my father’s people and their land, though brought up in an entirely English atmosphere” (Dying, 23). This identification was profound and life-long, but also willed and therefore precarious. The sporadic periods that Jones spent living in Wales, at Capel-y-ffin in the Black Mountains and on Caldey Island off the Pembrokeshire coast, from 1924-1927 were arguably crucial for his career, marking “a new beginning” (Epoch, 28) both personally and artistically. And yet, Jones was also painfully aware of his own cultural, linguistic, and geographical alienation from his imaginative homeland for much of his writing life, describing himself as “an English monoglot” and, at best, a writer “of Welsh affinity” (Dying, 35, 30). There is, then, in Jones’s work a pervasive tension or contradiction between his intense imaginative engagement with Wales and his sense of irremediable displacement or alienation from the land, people, and culture with which he identifies.

Another major contradiction arises from the relationship between form and content in Jones’s poetry, which is experimental and linguistically innovative but articulates a politically conservative worldview. Like T.S. Eliot, Pound, and W.B. Yeats, Jones might be regarded as an “anti-modern” modernist, one who values tradition, idealises rural communities, and regards the “megalopolitan technocracy” (Epoch, 82) of the modern age as a baleful agent of
social and cultural decline. In this regard, Jones shares and amplifies Eliot’s bleak perception of contemporary history as an “immense panorama of futility and anarchy” (Selected, 177). His critique of modernity is frequently undertaken via an extended historical analogy with the dominating force of the Roman Empire in the Celtic world. Jones’s attitude towards the Roman heritage of Britain is notably ambivalent, though, and he tends to regard the Roman influence on British culture as formative as well as destructive. Commenting on the tension between his “tradition-oriented ideological convictions” and “experimental, even avant-garde, poetic practice”, Elizabeth Ward argues that Jones’s imagination is characteristically “mythopoeic”, gravitating towards “pre-existing archetypal patterns” that are inherently dualistic in nature. However, Ward exaggerates the extent to which such dualities or oppositions harden into static dichotomies in Jones’s work. Rather, Jones’s poetry bears out Theodor Adorno’s contention that every artwork is “a force field, a dynamic configuration of its elements”, which are constellated in relations of tension or contradiction with one another. Consequently, it is crucial to attend not just to the ways in which Jones’s poems establish symbolic oppositions between Romans and Celts, modernity and tradition, metropolis and locality, but also to the ways in which their formal and linguistic complexities render such configurations dynamic and liable to change.

**Waste lands**

Perhaps the most striking confluence of Jones’s historical sense with his geographical imagination is to be found in his recurrent use of the spatial trope of the waste land, which he adapts from Eliot, Jessie Weston, and J.G. Frazer. There are, however, two further literary sources upon which Jones draws for his distinctive versions of the waste land trope: Thomas Malory’s account of the desolation of King Pellam’s land in *Le Morte D’Arthur* (1485); and “Culhwch and Olwen”, one of the Welsh Arthurian tales collected in *The Mabinogion*, which
depicts the destruction caused by the boar Twrch Trwyth in Ireland and Britain. In his preface to *In Parenthesis*, Jones alludes directly to Malory in order to characterise the battlefields of the First World War as “the Waste Land”, remarking that “that landscape spoke ‘with a grimly voice’”. Moreover, the central section of Jones’s text is titled “King Pellam’s Launde” and in the formal Boast that is its centre-piece, Dai Greatcoat affirms: “I was the spear in Balin’s hand / that made waste King Pellam’s land” (79). Dai here assumes the role of the aggressor’s weapon, but he is a victim too, and his performative role in the context of the Boast is that of the archetypal soldier, in all times and places. Jones also depicts his Welsh and cockney soldiers of the Western front as suffering inhabitants of a strange “wilderness” they have not willed into being, but in which they are “pent like rodents all the day long; appointed scape-beasts come to the waste-lands” (70). The connotations of sacrificial ritual here, combined with a network of literary and mythic allusions, indicate that Jones’s use of the spatial trope of the waste land is not simply apposite in the context of modern mechanised warfare but also a crucial means by which to articulate his broader historical vision of modernity.

Jones’s conception of history is at once pessimistic, cyclical, and – in at least some of its articulations – apocalyptic. In Jones’s view, the modern age has effected a disastrous “break” with “past shapes of society” (Dying, 156) and is experienced as a thoroughgoing “metamorphosis” in “the liaisons with our past” (Epoch, 139). In particular, modernity is characterised by a technological and bureaucratic prioritisation of the “utile” over the “gratuitous”, and a corresponding waning in the potency of symbolic forms (Epoch, 181-2). Accordingly, the sign-making capacities that Jones regards as a defining existential trait of humankind are threatened, and with it all human culture of any value: in modern life, “Technological Man” is alienated from his “creaturely” nature and from “the thought-modes of Man-the-Artist” (Dying, 174). Jones’s views on history and modernity were strongly
influenced by the thought of Oswald Spengler, whose *The Decline of the West* (1926-8) he read, annotated, and re-read in the early 1940s (Dilworth, *Engraver*, 221). From Spengler, Jones derived an essentially cyclical conception of history where the vitality of local cultures is gradually displaced by metropolitan civilization, which in turn grows decadent and enters into a phase of decline. Although he rejected Spengler’s positivistic determinism and racist overtones – “his cheapness and brutality and inhumanity” – Jones echoes Spengler’s negative characterisation of modernity as a period of dissolution and decay. For instance, in his essay, “The Myth of Arthur”, Jones adopts an explicitly Spenglerian vocabulary to lament the abandonment of “long-standing cultural ways of life”, then goes on to remark:

> We do not know what songs may yet be possible or what shape our myth will take, but it looks as though the waste land before us is extensive; and it is certain that in our anabasis across it we shall have reason to keep in mind the tradition of our origins in both matter and spirit. (*Epoch*, 242)

The allusions in this passage are not only to Spengler, but also to Malory, Eliot, and Saint-John Perse, whose *Anabasis* was translated into English by Eliot in 1930 and influenced Jones deeply (Dilworth, *Engraver*, 129). Notice that the spatial trope of the waste land is here explicitly linked to Jones’s historical vision of modernity, but that Jones retains a degree of optimism, in spite of his pessimistic historical diagnosis, that both “songs” and “myths” will remain possible for inhabitants of the modern waste land, even if their forms of expression remain unforeseeable.

Critics of Jones’s work have noted the significance of the waste land trope to his depiction of modern war in *In Parenthesis*. For instance, Thomas Dilworth argues that it is a key feature of the poet’s “secular mythos”, symbolising “the degradation of human life” in both social and personal terms (*Shape*, 63). What is less widely recognised, however, is the extent to which this trope recurs in Jones’s later work, often in new contexts and with
different shades of meaning. The opening pages of The Anathémata provide a good illustration, focusing on the figure of a priest celebrating Mass, which for Jones is the most potent of humankind’s sign-making rituals. Crucially, the rite occurs in a spatio-temporal situation that threatens both religion and art with insignificance:

The cult-man stands alone in Pellam’s land: more precariously than he knows he guards the signa: […] the tokens, the matrices, the institutes, the ancilia, the fertile ashes—the palladic fore-shadowings: the things come down from heaven together with the kept memorials, the things lifted up and the venerated trinkets. (50)

The allusion to Malory provides a strand of intertextual continuity with In Parenthesis, but here the representative inhabitant of the waste land is not the figure of the soldier but that of the artist-priest, who “guards the signa” and struggles to transmute the “dead forms” (50) of modern civilization into “anathémata”, “the profane things that somehow are redeemed” (28-9). As Kathleen Henderson Staudt observes, The Anathémata is a characteristically self-reflexive modernist text that “repeatedly displays itself as material and sign shaped by the history of humanity as a sign-making species” (Turn, 69). Indeed, through the ambiguous figure of the “cult-man” in the waste land – who is both artist and priest – Jones’s poem dramatises at its outset its own conditions of possibility, placing the question of the poem’s origins at the beginning of its ambitious historical and geographical enquiry into origins and beginnings. Moreover, where Spengler’s philosophy of history underscores the inevitable subordination of art to “technics”, The Anathémata both acknowledges present decline – “the stream is very low” – and affirms the continuing relevance and durability of art: “This man, so late in time, curiously surviving” (50).

The matter of Britain
If the trope of the waste land knots together Jones’s twin concerns with history and geography, then the cultural history of Britain is arguably at the affective centre of his poetics of place. Four key features of Jones’s abiding concern for British cultural paradigms and traditions are worth foregrounding. Firstly, Jones tends to regard pre-modern Britain as embodying a source of cultural vitality that might be revisited by the artist and opposed to the mortifying displacements of modernity. Hence his preoccupation with the half-forgotten “heritage” of Britain, which is preserved in “the actual land itself, its sites and rooted communities”; and his affirmation that “the unity of the island” remains to be discovered on its “Celtic fringe” (Epoch, 16, 220). In this way, Jones characteristically translates history into geography, regarding the peripheral spaces of the island of Britain (particularly Wales) as repositories of the cultural forms of the past. Secondly, in spite of his concern for “unity” and identity, Jones also conceives of British culture as intrinsically diverse and heterogeneous, a mixed inheritance that is at once multi-lingual and multi-ethnic in character. Tracing the word “Britain” back to its etymological roots in the Old Welsh “Priten”, which he glosses as “speckled, mottled, variegated”, he goes on to remark: “Not only is our land a most mottled, dappled, pied, partied and brindled land, but so is our character,” and “so also in a curious way is our art” (Dying, 59). There is, then, a profound and productive tension in Jones’s conception of Britain between its projection as a cultural unity and its constitution by “things of very mixed derivation” (Epoch, 48). Thirdly, Jones’s Britain is radically eccentric in the sense that it displaces the dominating centrality of England within the wider matrix of Britishness in favour of Wales and medieval Welsh culture, thereby imaginatively reconfiguring existing relations between core and periphery. Indeed, Corcoran argues that Jones’s pervasive use of Welsh words and forms in his poetry, as well as his extensive allusions to Welsh history, mythology, and literature lend his work an “alienating otherness” that makes the reader “painfully aware of the cultural, political and linguistic diversity” that
the concept and polity of Britain comprehends. Finally, Jones tends to focus upon the geographical fact of Britain’s insularity, rather than the political unions upon which the modern British state is founded, as the source of its cultural wholeness and integrity. So, in the preface to *In Parenthesis*, he describes the mixed group of Londoners and Welshmen among whom he served during the First World War as representatives of “the genuine tradition of the Island of Britain” (x). And in his preface to *The Anathémata*, he describes the poem itself as “necessarily insular” because it is the creation of “a person whose perceptions are totally conditioned and limited by and dependent upon his being indigenous to this island” (11). Simplifying a little, we might say that Jones’s emphasis on the insular character of Britain reinforces his tendency to posit an occluded cultural identity, whereas his prioritisation of Wales within the British context is of a piece with his affirmation of cultural diversity and internal difference.

Jones’s poetic figurations of the matter of Britain are informed by a dialectic of identity and otherness that manifests itself both at the level of content and in the language and forms of his texts. Up to a point, Jones’s poetry participates in the wider “anthropological turn” that Jed Esty identifies in the work of Anglophone modernists during the 1930s and 1940s whereby faith in the radical autonomy of art is replaced by new interest in and enthusiasm for “national culture”. Esty characterises this anthropological concern for national culture and native customs on the part of modernist writers as a response to the waning of the British Empire and a related “crisis of European cosmopolitanism”, the combined effects of which stimulated a process of “national retrenchment” and enabled an imaginative transformation of “insular culture” (7, 10, 19). Jones’s poetry, with its profound concern for the culture, folk customs, and native myths of the island of Britain, might be regarded as a particularly intense and complex expression of the anthropological turn in late modernism that Esty describes – though Esty fails to mention Jones’s work in his otherwise
wide-ranging study. Moreover, Jones’s stress on the significance for Welsh culture of “the whole tie-up of ancient duration with site and locality” (Dying, 38-9) has obvious affinities with the process of “demetropolitanization” that Esty sees at work in texts such as Eliot’s Four Quartets (1943) and Virginia Woolf’s Between the Acts (1941), whereby “place” is affirmed as “a sign of cultural unity” (Esty, Shrinking, 17-18, 49). But here a major difference also emerges, for while Jones affirms the centrality of Wales to the cultural tradition of Britain as he conceives it, Esty is almost exclusively concerned with England and English national culture in late modernist writing. Consequently, Esty’s critical paradigm cannot fully account either for the deliberate eccentricity of Jones’s preoccupation with the matter of Britain, nor for the fundamental tension between unity and diversity, identity and difference that is crucial to the meaning of “Britain” in his texts.

Of course, as Jones himself was painfully aware, by birth and by virtue of the language in which he writes, he is an English rather than a Welsh writer. Indeed, René Hague dismisses Jones’s “attempts to Cambrianize his work” as superficial and unconvincing, arguing that he is best understood and evaluated within the context of “the English tradition” (Jones, Dai, 23). However, this is to radically underestimate the extent to which not only the content of Jones’s texts, but also their distinctive forms and modes of linguistic expression are fundamentally bound up with Wales and Welsh cultural traditions. Jones consistently affirms that the forms and materials used by the poet derive from “the particular cultural complex” to which he or she belongs, and the poet’s art entails “the embodiment and expression of the mythus and deposits comprising that cultural complex” (Anathémata, 19). Moreover, although he acknowledges that readers may find his Welsh historical and cultural references obscure, he is explicit in regarding Wales as the repository of “the more venerable culture in that hotch-potch which is ourselves” (Parenthesis, xiii).
The “hotch-potch” that is British culture finds its formal correlative in the densely macaronic character of Jones’s language, in which a weft of Welsh and Latin words or phrases, with the addition of some French, German, and Greek terms, is interwoven with a warp of supple English that is by turns formal and colloquial, descriptive and figurative. Corcoran observes that the “densely allusive language” of Jones’s poetry “is a constant, living reminder, in the very texture of the work, of the metamorphoses of our linguistic inheritance” (*Song*, 91). Consider, for example, the following passage from the “Angle-Land” section of *The Anathemata* in which an anchorite (“ancra-man”) in the fenlands of Lincolnshire hears the speech of native Britons as a Babel of unfamiliar and incomprehensible tongues:

Past where the ancra-man, deeping his holy rule
in the fiendish marsh

at the Geisterstunde

on Calangaeaf night

heard the bogle-baragouinage.

Crowland-diawliaidd

*Waelisc*-man lingo speaking?

or Britto-Romani gone *diaboli*?

or Romanity gone *Waelisc*? (112)

In these lines, Jones both illustrates and thematises the mixed linguistic inheritance of Britain, its bewildering “complex” of different cultural forms of expression and perception: Welsh (“*Calangaeaf*”, “diawliaidd”), Roman (“*diabolic*”), Anglo-Saxon (“*Geisterstunde*”, “*Waelisc*”), and Norman-French (“*baragouinage*”). The promiscuous intermingling of different linguistic cultures in these lines – which is underlined by the prevalence of hyphenated words, often straddling two languages – provides a formal analogue for the
historical transition in Britain from Roman rule to the establishment of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in the fifth and sixth centuries (and looks ahead to the Norman invasions of the eleventh century). Jones himself remarks that the “fractured and fused forms” of these lines are an attempt to approximate in language something of the “historic situation” he describes.30 But the complexity and obscurity of this passage also serves to defamiliarise the English language itself by bringing it into dialogue with the heterogeneous sources from which it has historically emerged. In this way, the English monoglot poet masquerades as a “Waelisc-man lingo speaking”.

A crucial source for Jones’s conception of British culture as hybrid and multi-lingual is the shared complex of Welsh and Arthurian myth, which also inspired two important paintings, Guenever (1940) and The Four Queens find Launcelot Sleeping (1941). In the preface to In Parenthesis, Jones describes “the Celtic cycle” of myths and legends that finds its most important expression in The Mabinogion as “a subterranean influence” lying “under every tump in this island” (xi). And elsewhere, he claims that the Arthurian legends may be regarded as “an Iliad-Aeneid of the Celtic-Germano-Latin Christian medieval West”, the definitive epic of “the matter of Britain” (Epoch, 204). As Jones’s rather cumbersome hyphenated adjective seeks to acknowledge, the Arthurian tales are a composite body of texts written in a variety of medieval languages, including Latin, Welsh, Breton, and French, as well as English. Indeed, Jones is careful to stress that the “composite weave” of the Arthurian myth complex “is its essential characteristic”; yet he also claims that Arthurian myth is culturally significant because it is “equally the common property of all the inhabitants of Britain” (Epoch, 232, 216). Jones’s understanding of Arthurian myth is informed by the same dialectic of unity and diversity that I have argued is central to his conception of British culture as a whole. This dialectic is given concrete expression in the figure of Arthur himself.
in Jones’s poem “The Hunt”, which depicts the hero-king both as a living embodiment of the land of Britain and as a wounded shape-shifter whose identity is over-determined:

Like the breast of the cock-thrush that is torn in the hedge-war when bright on the native mottle the deeper mottling is and brighting the diversity of textures and crystal-bright on the delicate fret the clear dew-drops gleam: so was his dappling and his dreadful variety

the speckled lord of Prydain

in his twice-embroidered coat

the bleeding man in the green

and if through the trellis of green

and between the rents of the needlework

the whiteness of his body shone

so did his dark wounds glisten. (Sleeping, 68)

The identification of Arthur’s wounded body with the landscape and natural environment is developed still further in “The Sleeping Lord”, but what is striking about these lines is the way in which they bring together both Christian and pagan analogues in the multi-faceted figure of Arthur, who is at once a scourged and bleeding Christ and a primal nature spirit or fertility god – “the bleeding man in the green”. Moreover, in keeping with the motif of mottled or dappled hues and textures, Jones weaves together his retelling of “Culhwch and Olwen” with a range of other intertextual allusions, most significantly to Gerard Manley Hopkins’s “Pied Beauty”, which also celebrates the divinity of “dappled things”.31

 Appropriately, then, Jones’s Arthur is a composite textual figure of “diversity” and “dreadful variety” as much as he is a unifying mythic figurehead for the island of Britain.

**Seas, islands, coasts**
Jones’s favourite epithet for Arthur is “the Bear of the Island” (Parenthesis, 82; Anathémata, 196; Sleeping, 76; Epoch, 233), recalling the origins of his name in both the Greek “Arktouros” (“Guardian of the Bear”) and the Welsh “arth” (“bear”), but also emphasising the specifically insular character of the myth complex for which he is the focus. This is something of a strategic simplification, for it side-lines the Breton and French Arthurian tales, though it is consistent with Jones’s geographical conception of Britain as an island and with his stress on its ancient cultural unity. The geographical qualities of islands are ambiguous, however, providing a further instance of the dialectic of unity and diversity that I have described. Pete Hay notes that, as distinctive kinds of places, islands are bounded on all sides by a continuous shoreline, and this characteristic of boundedness enables the formation of strong “island identities” and unified communities. Nonetheless, because islands are of necessity integrated into wider circuits of human intercourse, travel, and trade, their boundaries are permeable: “Connectedness describes the island condition better than isolation”. Despite his tendency to conceive of Britain in terms of a lost or occluded cultural unity, Jones’s work also acknowledges the connectivity of insular spaces through its pervasive concern with rivers, waterways, and sea voyages.

In the preface to The Anathémata, he remarks that: “In Britain, ‘water’ is unavoidably very much part of the material poetica” (17); and in a 1952 letter to Jim Ede, Jones claims that “one cannot begin to consider Britain without being straight away involved in the sea and all the sea meant both in the domain of fact and in our whole poetic tradition” (Dai, 156). This preoccupation with the sea is apparent in a series of paintings that Jones made at Portslade and Caldey Island during the 1920s and 1930s, including Manawyddan’s Glass Door (1931) and The Open Bay (1931) (Bankes and Hills, Art, 96-7). Even more revealing is a remark he makes in his essay, “The Myth of Arthur”: “The folk tradition of the insular Celts seems to present to the mind a half-aquatic world – it is one of its most fascinating
characteristics – it introduces a feeling of transparency and interpenetration of one element
with another, of transposition and metamorphosis” (Epoch, 238-9). What is striking here is
the way in which Jones simultaneously grounds his image of Britain in the “folk tradition of
the insular Celts” and associates it with fluidity, metamorphosis, and inter-relatedness.
Jones’s geographical conception of Britain as an island (among islands) and his emphasis
upon the social and cultural significance of the sea suggests strong affinities with what John
Brannigan calls “archipelagic modernism”. In Brannigan’s definition, archipelagic
modernism refers to writing from the Irish and British archipelago in the period 1890-1970
which “prioritises a locational focus upon islands, coastlines, and the sea”, by contrast with
the metropolitan orientation of high modernism. Moreover, archipelagic modernism
foregrounds the cultural diversity and hybridity of the north Atlantic archipelago,
acknowledging that it is “plural, diverse, and abounds in local particularities” (17).

*The Anathémata* is the most extensive and important instance of archipelagic
modernism within Jones’s oeuvre. No fewer than five of this long poem’s eight sections –
“Middle-Sea and Lear-Sea”, “Angle-Land”, “Redriff”, “The Lady of the Pool”, and “Keel,
Ram, Stauros” – feature ships and sea voyages among the islands, coasts, docks, and seaports
of Britain and Europe. In “Middle-Sea and Lear-Sea”, Jones dramatises the historical
emergence of a specifically British cultural identity by way of a voyage narrative, which
begins in the eastern Mediterranean of the classical world and culminates off the south-
western coast of Britain. Jones refers to this voyage proleptically as a “wanderers tall tale to
tell / anabasis / by sea, by land” (85); but the tale he goes on to tell concerns at least two
different journeys: that of a Greek ship sailing towards Phaleron, the ancient port of Athens,
in the fifth century BC; and that of a ship manned by Phoenicians and Phocaeans sailing from
Phaleron to the coast of Cornwall, part of the ancient trade in tin, perhaps in the second
millennium BC (Dilworth, *Shape*, 161-2). The conflation of these two sea voyages, with their
different trajectories and time-frames, allegorises the transmission of classical culture from
the Mediterranean to the island of Britain and the wider archipelago of which it is a part.
From the perspective of the Phoenician sailors, this process of cultural transmission and
interfusion entails a near-miraculous journey “out of our mare / into their See” (97); not just
the passage from one sea to another but also a linguistic and cultural encounter with others
and otherness on the far side of the known world. Jones’s voyage narrative becomes
particularly allusive and linguistically complex as the Phoenician ship nears the storm-swept
coast of southern Cornwall, plunging his mariners into a turbulent confluence of
mythological currents – Greek, Celtic, and Scandinavian:

Now north by east

over the nine white grinders

riding the nine daughters of the quern of islands

kouroi from over yr eigion

making Dylan’s mòroedd

holding on towards

Igraine’s dylanau

the eyes of her

towards the waters

of the son of Amblet’s daughter. (99)

In these lines, the ship passes by a group of skerries (“the quern of islands”) battered by the
nine daughters of the Norse sea-god Ægir, while the crew of the ship are transfigured as
Greek “kouroi”, marble statues associated with Apollo, from over the deep seas (“yr eigion”).
Their course is set for the seas (“mòroedd”) belonging to Dylan, the Welsh sea-god who
appears in the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi and whose name aligns his nature with that of
an ocean wave. Hence the subsequent reference to “Igraine’s dylanau”, the waves of Igraine,
the mother of Arthur, who is in turn referred to obliquely as “the son of Amblet’s daughter”. Just as the waters of the Bay of Biscay, the Celtic Sea, and the English Channel mingle off the south coast of Cornwall, so in Jones’s lines a variety of languages, mythologies, and cultural imaginaries are brought into constellation with one another without eliding their differences or distinctive origins.

By the end of “Middle-Sea and Lear-Sea”, the Phoenician ship has sighted “Bolerion” (Land’s End) and is steering toward its “port of call”, St Michael’s Mount; but whether or not it ever arrives is left an open question as though to emphasise the dynamic process of voyaging itself rather than its ostensible end (107, 108). Several critics have remarked on the pronounced allegorical or archetypal character of sea voyages in Jones’s poem, whether as a figure for “the experience of the Church in the world” (Dilworth, Shape, 234) or “the journey of the human soul”. Certainly, there is evidence for such a reading, particularly in Jones’s depiction of the scurrilous, drunken ship’s captain as a kind of thalassic Christ-figure – “Ischyros with his boots on” (97) – and, in “Keel, Ram, Stauros”, his merging of this figure with that of the artist-priest: “Pious, eld, bright-eyed / marinus” (182). However, Jones’s archipelagic modernism is most engaging and successful when such archetypal or symbolic elements are grounded in, and modified by nautical, topographical, and historical particulars. For instance, “Angle-Land” begins by describing another sea voyage along the southern and eastern coasts of Britain during the early middle ages, when those regions where being settled by Jutes and Angles. Employing a series of interrogative sentences, Jones tracks the ship’s progress eastwards through the English Channel, naming landmarks and topographical features that would enable navigators to chart their position and direction: “Vecta Insula” (the Isle of Wight), “South Sand Head”, “the Flats and the Brake”, “the Gull”, “the Foreland”, “the Elbow”, and so on (110, 111). Jones’s notes gloss many of these toponyms and thereby aid the reader in grasping the text’s shifting literary geography, which combines detailed
topographic description with layered mythological and historical allusions. Crucially, the sea voyage once again functions as a means to represent the process of social and cultural change in a multi-ethnic Britain. For instance, as the ship passes the fog-bound coast of the Thames estuary, Jones views the history of the British landscape from the perspective of the sea, describing how the field systems of the invaders (“broad Angle hidage”) are displacing those of the native Celts, “the lightly furrowed erwau / that once did quilt Boudicca’s royal gwely” (111).

“Angle-Land” culminates in one of those “scale-bending” representations of space that Jon Hegglund regards as characteristic of the modernist geographical imagination, moving abruptly from a local, situated perspective to an aerial or “cartographic overview that places the narrative scene in a new, disjunctive context”. Following the course of an imagined ship up the east coast of Britain, Jones’s narratorial consciousness enacts a sudden shift of scales to evoke a panoramic vision of Britain’s eastern rivers meeting and merging in the North Sea:

all our easting waters are confluent with the fathering river and tributary to him: where Thamesis, Great Ouse, Tyne from the Wall’s end, de-marking Tweed, Forth that winds the middle march, Tummel and wide looping Tay (that laps the wading files when Birnam boughs deploy toward Dunsinane—out toward the Goat Flats). Spey of the Symbol stones and Ness from the serpentine mere all mingle Rhenus-flow and are oned with him in Cronos-meer. (114-15)

Moving gradually from south-east England to north-east Scotland, this passage is at once dense with local particulars – the names of rivers, places, and topographical features – and
geographically expansive, describing how the waters of British rivers mingle with those of
the Rhine (“Rhenus-flow”), the mightiest of all western European rivers, in the sea of Cronos.
In this way, Jones depicts the sea as a common and connective element for the peoples of
Western Europe and the north Atlantic archipelago, a “Brudersee” (115) and an “arena of
transnational interchange”. 37 However, as The Anathémata was largely written in the years
immediately following the end of the Second World War, Jones’s poem also refers explicitly
to “the fratricides / of the latter-day” (115), when the North Sea was patrolled by German
submarines. Such recent instances of international conflict are, in turn, closely linked to the
strategic use of cartography in modern warfare, for “the greyed green wastes” of the North
Sea are represented by grids and numbers and quadrants “on the sea-green Quadratkarte”,
thereby reconfiguring it as a battlefield (115). A tension remains, then, in Jones’s poem
between its imaginative effort to conceive of the relations between local places and
transnational spaces, taking the sea as a medium of connections rather than a barrier, and the
geometrical abstractions of cartography, which are associated with violent attempts at world
domination and the obliteration of local differences.

**Known-site and world city**

Jones’s later poetry is preoccupied to a remarkable degree with the threat that is posed to
local places, cultures, and communities by modern capitalism, especially in its urban,
industrial, and technological manifestations. His distinctive mode of poetic localism or
particularism also finds expression in a politicised antipathy towards all forms of
authoritarian rule and exploitation. As Paul Robichaud observes, Jones’s poetry is
“consistently anti-imperialist and antitotalitarian” (Making, 107), despite his political
conservatism and ambivalent attraction to fascist ideas during the 1930s. 38 Jones strongly
objects to what he regards as the levelling and homogenising influence of modernity and
modern technology, which elides or ignores the differences specific to each site and culture. In correspondence with Aneurin Talfan Davies, he bemoans the “subordination of the things of site & locality” to “the requirements of the new technocracy”. And, in his preface to The Anathémata, Jones argues that the creative power of the artist is vitiated by the contemporary destruction of local places and cultures, and their replacement by “terra informis” (25). Through its pervasive concern with locality and place, Jones’s poetry exhibits what Adorno calls art’s inherent “tendency toward radical particularization”, though his comments on art also suggest a highly-developed awareness of the “dialectic of the universal and the particular” (Aesthetic, 267, 264). In this regard, Jones considers the work of James Joyce – and particularly Finnegans Wake, which he greatly admired – to be exemplary. Not only is Joyce’s work intrinsically bound up with his imaginative attachments to “place, site, and locality”, but his writing succeeds in making “the universal shine out from the particular” (Epoch, 304). Indeed, Jones contends that it is precisely because Joyce’s work entails “absolute fidelity to a specified site, and the complex historical strata special to that site” that it is able “to express a universal concept” (Dying, 46). Of course, in discussing Joyce, Jones is also describing his own aesthetic project, which foregrounds the importance of “the contactual and the particular” in conveying the reality and meaning of experience (Dying, 31).

In several respects, Jones’s prioritisation of place, site, and locality within his wider poetics bears resemblance to certain features of the contemporaneous thought of Martin Heidegger – though there is no concrete evidence of any direct or indirect influence. Certainly, Jones and Heidegger are in broad agreement about the extent to which the displacement and objectification consequent upon technological modernity alienates humankind from its own nature and authentic being. For instance, where Jones critiques modern technocracy for obliterating the differences and differentiation that make local
cultures meaningful, Heidegger charges “technological production” with “level[ling] every ordo, every rank, down to the uniformity of production” so that “the holy, the hale and the whole, seems to be effaced”. Elsewhere, Heidegger describes the modern predicament as one of being “unfree and chained to technology”, which, in its instrumental and utilitarian guise, treats nature itself as no more than a “standing-reserve” of energy for human exploitation. Jones and Heidegger also concur on the central importance to art (especially poetry) of close attachments to intimately known places. In his 1955 “Memorial Address”, Heidegger asks rhetorically: “does not the flourishing of any genuine work depend upon its roots in a native soil?”; and he goes on to warn that modernity threatens “the rootedness, the autochthony, of man […] at its core”. Heidegger’s explicitly chthonic vocabulary of “roots” and “soil” renders his place-based ontology vulnerable to criticism because of its perceived affinities with the “Blut und Boden” ideology of the Nazis. Jones has also been criticised, in similar terms, for what Jeremy Hooker calls “the limitations of his idea of blood and soil”.

Less controversial and more widely influential is Heidegger’s conception of “dwelling” as a fundamental mode of authentic being. In “Building Dwelling Thinking”, he explores the etymological links between “dwelling” and “being”, and elaborates an essentially sedentary conception of the relationship between people and places. To dwell, Heidegger affirms, is “to remain, to stay in place”: “To say that mortals are is to say that in dwelling they persist through spaces by virtue of their stay among things and locations” (Poetry, 144, 155). Dwelling concerns the kind of rooted being that may overcome difference and disparity, promoting a mode of belonging and coexistence that is founded upon primal oneness. Yet, here an important difference between Jones and Heidegger becomes clear, for Jones’s profound imaginative attachments to place and locality do not proceed from a secure and intuitive sense of belonging but rather from a condition of dislocation and self-division of which he was painfully aware. As Jonathan Miles remarks, Jones’s veneration of place and
site in his poetry is deeply at odds with the humdrum reality of his “nomadic” life in various suburbs of London. Hooker goes a step further, arguing that it is precisely this state of “uprootedness” that gives rise to his intense engagement with “the matter of Wales” (22). In this regard, Jones more closely resembles the exile Joyce writing obsessively about Dublin from Trieste, Zurich, and Paris than Heidegger, the philosopher of being, dwelling in his Black Forest hut.

Jones’s later poetry, particularly the shorter poems and fragments collected in The Sleeping Lord, repeatedly explore the unequal and uneven relationships between local cultures and global powers – or, in Jones’s vocabulary, “known-site” and “world city”. Jones’s use of these terms, and their several variations, is idiosyncratic and potentially misleading, so a brief gloss may be helpful. Edward Casey remarks that, by contrast with the relational depth and dynamic character of “place”, “site” connotes simplicity, fixity, and isolation: “Site is place reduced to being ‘just there’”. Jones’s use of the term “site”, which probably derives from his reading in archaeology, is less precise and is not clearly distinguished from “place” or “locality”, with which it is often roughly synonymous. At most, “site” is differentiated from the more encompassing “place” by its reference to specific topographical features such as hills, tumuli, and river valleys; but even this usage is not consistent. “World city” is adapted directly from Spengler, referring both to the metropolitan hub of an imperial system (usually Rome and/or London) and to the global reach of that system’s institutions and power structures. For instance, in the “The Wall” a soldier patrolling the city walls of Jerusalem at the time of Christ’s passion reflects on the malign influence of Rome by describing how he walks “in the shadow of the labyrinth of the wall, of the world, of the robber walls of the world city” (Sleeping, 13-14). As this example illustrates, there is a pronounced positive-negative polarity to the distinction that Jones makes between the local and the global, sometimes amounting to a structural antagonism or opposition. Ward argues that “London
and Wales, metropolis and hinterland” figure in Jones’s work as “paradigms of opposition”
(Mythmaker, 10); and Dilworth similarly identifies a pervasive symbolic antithesis between
“rural place”, which Jones associates with cultural vitality, and the destructive influence of
the “engulfing, dehumanising city”. Nonetheless, while Jones’s imaginative and political
sympathies are almost always with place and locality, such archetypal oppositions are never
wholly reified in the poems themselves but rather dynamic and open to deconstruction.

The antagonistic or antithetical relationship between the local and the global, “known-
site” and “world city”, is dramatised most fully in “The Tutelar of the Place”, which
approaches the problem from a position that is aligned with the geographical and cultural
margins of empire. The central opposition dramatised in “The Tutelar of the Place” is that
between a Celtic culture of place and locality, defined in terms of its “holy diversities” and
presided over by a female tutelar or guardian spirit, and a Roman civilisation characterised by
the “rootless uniformities” of imperial rule, which are embodied in the figure of a male
dictator known as the Ram (62). The poem begins by invoking and celebrating a goddess of
place and “known-site” who is at once a universal figure and a profoundly local deity known
by different names in different places:

She that loves place, time, demarcation, hearth, kin, enclosure, site, differentiated cult,
though she is but one mother of us all: one earth brings us all forth, one womb
receives us all, yet to each she is other, named of some name other … (59)

This maternal, protective spirit of place is depicted as “a rare one for locality”, capable of
shielding her children and devotees “against the world-storm” of modern technocracy (59,
60). Accordingly, the second half of the poem takes the form of a sustained prayer for
intercession, pitting the familiar milieus of local communities against the global ambitions of
an alien and despotic imperium:
Queen of the differentiated sites, administratrix of the demarcations, let our cry come
unto you.

In all times of imperium save us when the mercatores come save us
from the guile of the negotiatores save us from the missi, from the agents
who think no shame
by inquest to audit what is shameful to tell
deliver us. (62)

Here, the military, legal, and bureaucratic power of a metropolitan civilisation is conceived as
an immediate threat to the vitality and continuity of local traditions – “the diversities by
which we are” (63). Repeatedly, the poem’s speaker equates locality with difference,
diversity, and otherness, addressing the tutelar (with another echo of Hopkins) as “patroness
of things counter, parti, pied, several / protectress of things known and handled / help of
things familiar and small” (62). By contrast, the world of urban, industrial modernity is
conceived in terms of its deadening uniformity and materialism, crystallised in the image of
displaced villagers populating “the rectangular tenements” of an anonymous city and
labouring “in the houses of the engines that fabricate the ingenuities of the Ram” (63).

“The Tutelar of the Place” illustrates with stark power the antithesis between rural
place and urban deracination that Dilworth describes; and this antithesis runs in parallel with
several other oppositions, including those between the Roman Empire and the Celtic world,
modern civilisation and traditional culture, and masculine and feminine principles. However,
a close reading of the poem and its contexts shows that these oppositions are undermined, or
at least rendered dynamic, by its formal and thematic concerns with difference and diversity.
For instance, Jones describes the speaker of the poem’s dramatic monologue as “a Celt in the
Roman army who is thinking of his homeland”, thereby implying that experiences of
displacement and divided loyalties inhabit the very voice that utters its hymn to hearth and
home-place (Letters, 37). This dramatic situation makes it possible to understand the poem’s idealised depiction of rural communities and local customs as arising from the psychology of exile and self-estrangement. It is also worth noting that the form of the poem – its rendering as a complex soliloquy or dramatic monologue – complicates the antithesis between masculine and feminine principles that its imagery and themes establish. At the poem’s centre, its speaker ventriloquises the part of a grandmother (“our gammer”) calling children to bed and leading them in a prayer to “Sweet Jill of our hill” (61-2). Dilworth describes him as “psychologically androgynous”, a persona who combines the symbolically masculine qualities of objectivity and analysis with the feminine attributes of subjectivity and intuition (Shape, 311). Indeed, we might regard “The Tutelar of the Place” as an example of the “blending of male and female personages” that Anne Price-Owen argues is characteristic of Jones’s poetry and art as a whole. Finally, and most importantly, it is clear that the feminine tutelar who is described and invoked repeatedly in the poem is a thoroughly hybrid, composite figure, embodying elements of Celtic mythology, Roman religion, and Roman Catholic iconography. Among her many aspects are those of an earth goddess or mother earth, a genius loci or spirit of place, and the Queen of Heaven or “Mother of Flowers”, names given to the Virgin Mary (63). The sheer number of names and identities by which she is known – “sweet Jill of the demarcations / arc of differences / tower of individuation / queen of the minivers” – underline her protean character and the diversity-in-unity for which she stands (63-4). But, because the tutelar’s identity derives in part from the mythos of the very imperial civilisation against which she is invoked, she actually bridges the opposition between metropolis and locality, Roman and Celtic worlds.

This complex and contradictory expression of localism is further evident at the level of the poem’s dense linguistic texture and self-conscious exploration of the language of place. Like that of several other late modernists, Jones’s poetry strongly emphasises “the materiality
of the signifier”, both through the inclusion of inscriptions or engravings and through its
macaronic, multi-lingual forms (Corcoran, *English*, 28). However, as I have argued above,
what is distinctive about Jones’s linguistic experiments is the way in which they illustrate the
diverse linguistic and cultural inheritances of Britain at the level of form and expression. In
his preface to *The Anathémata*, Jones argues that the poet’s imagery, meanings, and
perceptions derive from the “mythus and deposits” comprising his “particular historical
complex”, and that this entails “the employment of a particular language or languages […] at
an especially heightened tension” (19, 20). Consequently, his English-language poems are
studded with untranslated words from Latin and Welsh; and in “The Tutelar of the Place”
many of these non-English words refer to particular kinds of places, settlements, or
landforms. As, for instance, in the following passage:

Yet, when she stoops to hear you children cry

from the scattered and single habitations

or from the nucleated holdings

from towered *castra*

paved *civitas*

treble-ramped *caer*

or wattled *tref*

stockaded *gorod* or

trenched *burh*

from which ever child-crib within whatever enclosure
demarked by a dynast or staked by consent

wherever in which of the wide world-ridings

you must not call her but by that name

which accords to the morphology of place. (61)
In these lines, the morphology of place is manifested through the morphology of the English language and its various precursors. “Castra” and “civitas” are both Latin terms, referring to military camps and the Roman city-state respectively; “caer”, “tref”, and “gorod” are all Welsh words, meaning “fort”, “hamlet”, and “hiding place”; while “burh” is the Old English name for a fortified settlement. At the level of content, this passage posits a singular relationship of correspondence between language and place through acts of naming – which is ironic enough, given that the poem includes no place-names whatsoever. Indeed, Jones himself remarks that this poem in praise of the local and the particular “belongs to no special time or country”, for “such suffrages may go up from so many different sorts of habitations and under so many differing circumstances” (Letters, 120). At the level of form, however, the very fluency with which the speaker moves between the language of metropolitan power (Latin) and that of local resistance (Welsh) implies a sophisticated linguistic cosmopolitanism, and calls into question the opposition between Roman and Celt that its rhetoric and imagery constructs. This multi-lingual texture and the finicky exactitude of the poem’s language are intrinsic to its effects, and “The Tutelar of the Place” ultimately gives expression to a powerful but internally contradictory mode of late modernist localism.

Ward has argued, controversially, that “The Tutelar of the Place” is only the most explicit example of the deep political conservatism informing Jones’s poetry, arguing that its “commitment to idealised values of primitivism and irrationalism” is broadly compatible with the blood-and-soil ideology of fascism (Mythmaker, 188, 190). However, the poem is more persuasively read as an attempt to voice the resistance of colonised peoples to imperial rule from within a specifically British historical and cultural context; or as a prescient critique of the homogenising effects of economic and cultural globalization in the mid-twentieth century. Fredric Jameson has described two distinct positions on globalization: “a postmodern celebration of difference and differentiation” and a more pessimistic apprehension of
“increasing identity (rather than difference)”, which is most clearly evident in the “standardization of culture” and “the destruction of local differences”. Jones’s poetry, which perceives both modernity and empire as levelling, homogenising forces, tends very strongly towards the latter position. Indeed, there are even some striking affinities between Jones’s poetics of place and the politics of the left-wing “place-based” movements described by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, in which “the boundaries of place (conceived either as identity or as territory) are posed against the undifferentiated and homogeneous space of global networks”. For Hardt and Negri, such a position on globalization is inadequate because it “rests on a false dichotomy between the global and the local”. Ward argues that Jones’s poetry suffers from a similar tendency towards dualistic thought and simplifying abstractions. However, as I have sought to demonstrate, Jones’s sophisticated experiments with form and language significantly complicate the rhetoric and imagery of his poems, rendering their oppositions between local cultures and metropolitan civilization, difference and deadening uniformity dynamic and liable to reconfiguration.

Conclusion

Part of my purpose in this article has been to argue that Jones should be read and understood as a late modernist poet, rather than as primarily a Catholic poet or a war poet (though, obviously, he is these things too). In doing so, however, I have also sought to suggest how serious critical engagement with Jones’s poetics of place might reconfigure our existing understandings of late modernism itself. It is certainly notable that Jones’s work has been given scant notice, and is usually ignored entirely, by recent critical studies of late modernism. This absence is all the more striking given the praise his poetry received from T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden, among others, during his lifetime; and the pervasive influence
Jones’s work has had upon a younger generation of British poets for whom, in Marjorie Perloff’s words, “the modernist challenge […] remains open”. Eric Mottram acknowledges Jones’s importance for the poets of the British Poetry Revival, most of whom began to publish in the 1960s; while Richard Caddel and Peter Quartermain regard Jones, Bunting, and MacDiarmid as significant “forebears” of the contemporary avant-garde. Jones is also represented in Iain Sinclair’s controversial anthology, *Conductors of Chaos* (1996), as one of four “significant figures from previous generations” whose work remains an important touchstone for experimental poets. Although he has long been marginalised within literary histories of modernism, then, Jones can be regarded as a central figure in the resurgence of late modernist poetry during the middle decades of the twentieth century.

The belatedness of Jones’s career as a modernist poet, which stretches from the 1930s to the 1970s, is clearly at odds with conventional periodizations of literary modernism but is by no means unique among late modernists. Samuel Beckett, Bunting, H.D., and Williams all had careers that began in the era of high modernism but also stretched well beyond it. This characteristic untimeliness is captured well by Jameson when he describes late modernism as “the last survivals of a properly modernist view of art and the world after the great political and economic break of the Depression”, naming Beckett, Olson, and Zukofsky as writers “who had the misfortune to span two eras”. I have already suggested that Jameson’s metaphor of “survival” is more apposite to late modernist poetry than those of decay or senescence because of the way in which it implies that lateness can be a mode of continued vitality rather than merely a corollary of decline. It is also particularly apt with regard to the work of Jones, who was a combatant-survivor of the First World War and whose career as a poet and artist was frequently blighted by periods of acute mental illness.

The other reason why Jones should be regarded as central rather than peripheral to late modernism as a whole has to do with the way in which his work brings together a
profound historical sense and an unusually intense geographical imagination. As I have shown, Jones’s experimental, allusive texts articulate a poetics of place that is both spatially expansive and topographically exact, informed by detailed geographical knowledge and a love of the local and particular. Moreover, Jones’s late modernist poetry is remarkable for the sophisticated and prescient manner in which it explores the vexed relationship between local cultures and global empires in the post-war period. In many ways, Jones’s geographical imagination is idiosyncratic, even unique; but my larger point is that the priority his texts give to exploring the cultural, historical, and political significance of place is a shared feature of the work of many late modernist poets. As Eric Falci has recently observed, late modernist poets such as Jones, Bunting, and MacDiarmid “assert the validity of [their] particular places” and seek “to revalue the peripheral”.57 I would add that this is also true of the work of several American poets, including Niedecker, Olson, and Williams, who do not share the fascination with “Celtic or Gaelic materials” that Falci discovers in that of their British contemporaries (434). The critical challenge, then, is to find some way of grasping the transatlantic, international character of late modernism while remaining attentive to the passionate localism of its varied poetics of place.


2 Thomas Dilworth goes as far as to claim that In Parenthesis is “certainly the greatest literary treatment of war in English”. Thomas Dilworth, The Shape of Meaning in the Poetry of David Jones (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1988), 368. On Jones’s career as a painter and engraver, see Ariane Bankes and Paul Hills, The Art of David Jones: Vision and Memory (Chichester/Farnham: Pallant House Gallery in association with Lund Humphries, 2015).


6 Jones refers to the sequence of Roman poems in *The Sleeping Lord* as “interrelated fragments”; and he even describes his longest poem, *The Anathémata*, as “a series of fragments, fragmented bits” that have been shaped into a poetic whole. David Jones, *The Sleeping Lord and other fragments* (London: Faber, 1995), 24; David Jones, *The Anathémata: fragments of an attempted writing* (London: Faber, 1972), 34.


49 The gammer’s prayer in Jones’s poem bears more than a passing resemblance to ALP’s prayer for her children at the end of Book II, Chapter 1 of Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*; though the “gammer” herself is adapted from Book I, Chapter 8. See James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* 3rd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 258-9, 215.


