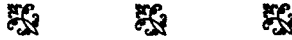


of town dwelling which makes *Unité* less hazardous than it would be over here; for English people have never begun to learn how to live in a city. Nevertheless all peoples without exception have still to discover how to make a full and ordered use of the resources which now overwhelm them. The pity is that the religious tradition, which ought to show the way, in fact renders the task more difficult.



ANATHEMATA

DESMOND CHUTE

IN THE ANATHEMATA (Faber and Faber; 25s.) Mr David Jones has rewarded admirers of his earlier period—that of opaque paintings, taut images, rare incised or rounded box-woods—by presenting them at length with another major work of sacred art.

Anthemata: ‘things patient of being “set-up to the gods”’: for matter, thoughts stirring as often as not ‘in the time of the Mass’; for background, ‘the entire world of sign and sacrament’; for magnet and focus, the Body of the Lord.

Incarnation is here ‘no hint half guessed, [no] gift half understood’. In lieu of Mr Eliot’s ‘hardly barely prayable prayer’ we have an epic conterminous with recorded and unrecorded time, one vast eucharistic symphony, whose *tempo* is the velocity of thought; its music ‘unmeasured, irregular in stress and interval, of interior rhythm, modal’, moves stately as in breves, its tone akin rather to woodwind than to strings: ‘reeds then! and minstrelsy’. Great play is made with the more sombre vowels—‘the stone/ the fonted water/ the froned wood’. Sharps are not to seek—‘if fifth the fire/ the cadence ice’, nor clash of consonants—‘skirted, kilted, cloaked, capped and shod’.

‘The *Vorzeit*-masque is on/ That moves to the cosmic in-troit/. . . At these Nocturns the hebdomadary is apt to be

vested for five hundred thousand weeks./ Intunes the Dog:/
 Benedicite ignus . . / . . The Respond is with the Bear:/ Bene-
 dicite frigus . . / . . When is Tellus/ to give her dear foster-
 ling/ . . a reasonable chance?/ . . very soon/ as lithic phases
 go./ So before then?/ . . But who or what, before these?/ . .
 For all WHOSE WORKS FOLLOW THEM/ among any of these
 or them/ *dona eis requiem*./ (He would lose, not any one/
 from among them . .).'

I have quoted somewhat freely from this passage in section I, RITE AND FORE-TIME as characteristic of the author's manner—rhythm, rhyme, assonance, polyglot—and of his mood—homage to the Creator; reverence for the created; respect for all manner of making; thanksgiving in the form of *Anamnesis*. This last is the poem's core: not so much a remembrance or memorial, as the "representing" before God of an event in the past so that it becomes here and now operative by its effects' (quoted from G. Dix, n. p. 205). So pregnant here is his thought that no Catholic can afford to overlook its implications. For we cannot 'obey the command "Do this for a recalling of me", without artefacture . . . Something has to be made by us before it can become for us his sign who made us . . . The muse then is with us all the way—she that has music wherever she goes' (Preface, p. 31). For Mr Jones—and who shall gainsay him?—making is the hall-mark of mankind: 'the extra-utile or the gratuitous' in man bespeaks his destiny to be human, divine his origin and end.

Poetry itself 'is a kind of anamnesis of, i.e. an effective re-calling of something loved', and as such 'inevitably propaganda' and hence 'to be diagnosed as dangerous' (wherefore the Pisan prisoner's 'Down, Derry-Down/ Oh let an old man rest'). Man's handiwork glozes the Divine Comedy: fraught with 'palladic foreshadowings', his shaping remembers and foretells: *Teste David cum Sibylla*. And so from the primeval Lauds banded between Great Summer and Great Winter to 'the mammal'd Pliocene . . he brights his ichthyic sign:—Upon all fore-times/ From before time/ his perpetual light/ shines upon them'. Peace to 'the proto-maker . . . By the uteral marks/ . . By the penile ivory/ and by the viatic meats/ . . Whoever he was/ *Dona ei requiem*

sempiternam'. With the Lady of the Pool 'let's say *requiescant* upon all precursors—as knowed their ropes—that have gone before us under the regimen of the ship-star and sleep the sleep with father Ulysses' (p. 141). For not only 'the dear arts as well as bread', but every *disciplina* is semantic: every myth homes in the City *dicta pacis visio*.

And so through recorded time. 'Six centuries/ . . . and a new wonder under heaven:/ man-limb stirs/ in the god-stones/ and the Kouroi/ are gay . . . and the Delectable Korê:/ . . . all parthenai made stone/ . . . Not again . . . / until on west-portals/ . . . will you see her like/ if then/ . . . till . . . under West-light/ the Word is made stone./ And when/ where, how or ever again?/ . . . Never?/ . . . Down we come/ quick but far/ . . . to the skill-years/ and the signed and fine grandeurs./ O yes, technique—but much more: / . . . but it's a nice thing/ as near a thing as ever you saw.' (pp. 92-94.) (Mr Jones is scrupulously just even to what he deems a solvent.)

'And suddenly: / the build of us/ patterns dark the blue-ing waters/ . . . Up she looms!' Off with 'us argonauts and the whole argosy of mankind, and, in some sense, of all sentient being, and, perhaps, of insentient too' (n. p. 106), until four sections later—'For certain this Barke/ was Tempest-tost'—'Ship's master:/ before him, in the waist and before it/ the darling men,/ Cheerily, cheerily/ with land to leeward/ known-land, known-shore, home-shore/ home-light/ . . . He would berth us/ to schedule' (pp. 181-2).

'For: / who d'you think is Master of her?' Who indeed? At times 'the old padrone' stands for the sea-god, at times for St Peter, at others for our Lord. As the images shift and shimmer, we see the author's hand draw the line closer, firmer, tighter round his concept; graving, unveiling, leading, leaving us to discover through the tremulous shapes the immutable form.

'The intersection of the timeless with time' suggests a parallelism, more obvious than deep, with the thought of *Four Quartets*. But there is more to it: any writer who shares at all Mr Eliot's conception of the poet necessarily finds himself up against 'the general mess of imprecision of feeling'; face to face with 'the intolerable wrestle with words

and meanings', he must 'fight to recover what has been lost/ And found and lost again and again: and now under conditions/ that seem unpropitious'. Before he can weave his myth, he must, as it were, set up his warp, maybe even fashion his loom. 'The artist deals wholly in signs' (Pref. p. 15); but for a sign to be valid it must be current. This then is the herculean task of the poet in our time: to uncover and convalidate a shared cultural background. Well may Mr Eliot conclude: 'For us, there is only the trying; the rest is not our business'.

But Mr Jones, in these 'fragments of an attempted writing', has dug in a richer mine than his fellows. For, although he aims only to write about his own thing, this '*res* is unavoidably part and parcel of the Western Christian *res* . . . necessarily insular; within which insularity there are further conditionings contingent upon his being a Londoner, of Welsh and English parentage, of Protestant upbringing, of Catholic subscription'. Thus the background he presents to us is essentially Christian, incarnational, eucharistic. How far it is shared remains to be proved. It could hardly be more inclusive: where others pick and choose, he chants in his *exsultet* the whole palimpsest of time and fore-time *sub specie aeternitatis*.

Observant of his own prescription, that 'the workman should be dead to himself while engaged on the work' under penalty of the wrong kind of self-expression, (Pref. p. 12) he lets the words ring under his touch; as he fits them into his mosaic, their facets flash in their own and one another's iridescence. Handled thus with gravity and discriminate deliberation, the simplest words, the most worn tags even, give out unexpectedly moving over-tones and under-tones. Poetry thus objectively wrought may achieve qualities as of a timeless heritage. Can one believe that there ever was a time when even so slender a song as the *Fiddler of Dooney* was not? Or *a fortiori* so solemn a hymn as *Vexilla Regis*? In some not unsimilar way Mr Jones takes us back by sheer connaturality to a Christian *Stimmung* as far from the Gothic world as from the Baroque, from the Reformation as from the Counter-Reform. Nor can his cast of thought be called mystical, except in so far as he sees Christianity as the fulfil-

ment of all mystery religions. Patristic is perhaps the single word which comes nearest to conveying something at once sacramental and liturgical, factual and symbolic, vernacular and hieratic, a collective attitude of worship both impersonal and all-embracing: *Stat crux dum volvitur orbis*.

So purely and constantly formal is his approach that his signs tend to become what they signify—even where this might seem least likely: e.g. such a linguistic tangle as ‘From the *fora*/ to the forests./ Out from *gens Romulūm*/ into the *Weal-kin*/ *dinas*-man gone *aethwlad*/ *cives* gone wold-men’, (described by the author as ‘halting, broken, complicated and Babel-like’) breathes the very essence of the *Völkerwanderung* in fifth-century Britain.

This occurs in the third section, ANGLE-LAND. In the second, MIDDLE-SEA AND LEAR-SEA, we have already seen ‘the bacchic Pelasgian’ bartering ‘where Trystan’s sands run out to land’s last end’, and ‘under West-light/ the Word made stone’. The fourth, REDRIFF, extols craftsmanship as a way of life and of equivalent worship. Eb Bradshaw, Prince’s Stair, asked . . . ‘would he expedite . . . would he, for once, oil an elbow’, replies: ‘If he leaves it to us/ we’ll fix him dandy./ But tell him . . . tell the old Jason: / had I the job of mortisin’ the beams to which was lashed and roved the Fault in all of us, I’d take m’ time and set that aspen transom square to the Rootless Tree/ or dash m’ buttons!’ (pp. 118-121).

The next section is a saga of London as revealed in the rambling reminiscences of the Lady of the Pool, herself an amalgam of many figures, from a light woman of the water-side to a tutelary figure of London; but primarily a woman, a lavender-seller, talking to ‘an ancient mariner’ and telling him about London and its traditions and the voyagers she had met with and especially of the voyage of the *Mary*. Under this barque, limping into port after enduring all that the elements could wreak, ‘hulled SEVEN TIMES’ . . . and ‘water coming from the *right* side’, both our Lord and his Mother are, if only obscurely, implied (D.J.).

An unkindly air from *Cronos-meer* (or from ‘the wasted land’?) springs up towards the end of her amazing monologue (‘T will soon be on us, cap’n/ . . . You’d best be off,

skipper/ You're wrong side the Pillars/ for this tide o' the year') and it blows through the next section, KEEL, RAM, STAUROS, a hymn to Holy Cross: 'the quivering elm on which our salvation sways . . . Lignum for the life of us/ holy Keel'. It is here 'the vine-juice skipper . . . berths her to schedule'.

The last two sections bring the cosmic liturgy round full circle. We assist at midnight Mass with Arthur's Gwenhwyfar in MABINOG'S LITURGY; and in SHERTHURSDAYE AND VENUS DAY we hear 'his desiderate cry:/ SITIO' and 'down the long history-paths/ in the quiet apses/ where it's very still/ the fracture-sound'.

Though the author disclaims any plan for his work, it would cohere by inner organic unity. But it has a shape and 'it has themes and a theme': two themes forming but one return again and again: cross and calix: 'the saving wood' and 'the stemmed cup'. The whole work might be compared to a loosely knit *rondo* in which variations and inversions alternate with a constant *ritornello*: this is none other than 'the recalling of him/ daily, at the Stone'.

The publication of *The Anathemata* seems to have sent readers back to *In Parenthesis*; this will not help them here. Although *The Anathemata* unsays nothing its author wrote twenty years ago, his former book remains what it was: an epic of frustration, a plumbing there and then of the depths of a particular 'whole unlovely order'. The same leitmotifs, it is true, run through both; but now their sweep is incomparably higher and broader: then they threw into darker relief one 'time of our uncharity' in which heartrendingly all befell BY MISADVENTURE; now they blazon the timelessness of creative love, flood-lighting *questo miro ed angelico templo/ Che solo amore e luce ha per confine*.