Bridging the Breaks: David Jones and the Continuity of Culture

Jasmine Hunter-Evans

For now the artist becomes, willy-nilly, a sort of Boethius, who has been nicknamed "the Bridge", because he carried forward into an altogether metamorphosed world certain of the fading oracles which had sustained antiquity. My view is that all artists [...] are in fact "showers forth" of things which tend to be impoverished, or misconceived, or altogether lost or wilfully set aside in the preoccupations of our present intense technological phase, but which, none the less, belong to man.

So that when asked to what end does my work proceed I can do no more than answer in the most tentative and hesitant fashion imaginable, thus: Perhaps it is in the maintenance of some sort of single plank in some sort of bridge.[1]

In his 'Statement to the Bollingen Foundation, 1959', David Jones declared that it was the role of the artist to revivify the cultural past in the modern world. Works of art were therefore created with the aim of sustaining a continuous and unbroken link between the past and the present: in Jones's terminology, the Bridge.

Conceptualising culture in this form gave Jones, as an artist, a fundamental role in countering the destructive impact of modernity, symbolised by 'the Break', against which the artist must strive to preserve continuity. For Jones, the Bridge represented the entire cultural inheritance of Britain and so an analysis of it will engender a deeper, nuanced, understanding of 'the past' that Jones was striving to preserve. Jones's vision of this past was inexorably intertwined with his own heritage; the works he created were, in his view, 'conditioned by and dependent upon his being indigenous to this island [...] within which insularity are the further conditionings contingent upon his being a Londoner, of Welsh and English parentage'.[2] This article draws together Jones's discussions of the Break and the Bridge and uses these to explore his distinctive vision of British culture, with its foundation in Wales, the continuity of which he spent his life trying to protect.

The Break is a well-established concept in Jones's works and has attracted a great deal of attention from scholars. While Jones continued to explore the Break throughout his career, in 1962 acknowledging his 'endless cognition on this tricky business of – well, of our old friend "The Break" –

---

[1] David Jones, 'In a Statement to the Bollingen Foundation, 1959', *The Dying Gaul* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 17.

[2] Jones, 'The Preface to *The Anathemata*' (1951), *Epoch and Artist* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959) 107-137(108-09).

the endless ramifications of which seem *more and more* difficult to determine',[3] the best description is to be found in the 'Preface to *The Anathemata*':

> . . . most now see that in the nineteenth century, Western Man moved across a rubicon which, if as unseen as the 38th Parallel, seems to have been as definitive as the Styx. That much is I think generally appreciated. [...]
>
> When in the 'twenties we spoke of this Break it was always with reference to some manifestation of this dilemma *vis-à-vis* the arts – and of religion also, but only in so far as religion has to do with signs, just as have the arts.
>
> That is to say our Break had reference to something which was affecting the entire world of sacrament and sign [...] owing to the turn civilization had taken, affecting signs in general and the whole notion and concept of sign.[4]

The establishment of this 'phenomenon' has been linked by critics to various writers including William Morris, Hilaire Belloc and Eric Gill, with Jones himself seeing similarities between his Break and the transition from a young Culture to a declining Civilisation in the works of Oswald Spengler.[5] In whatever form, the Break symbolises the segregation of the cultural, religious, traditional past from the mechanised, industrial, capitalist, commercial and secular society of the modern world.[6] Jones, in

---

[3] Jones, 'Letter to Harman Grisewood 7th March 1962' in *Dai Great Coat: A Self Portrait of David Jones in his Letters*, ed. René Hague (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), 186-88 (186). For others examples see, 'Letter to Harman Grisewood 12th March 1960' in *Dai Greatcoat Papers: CD2/7* David Jones Papers, National Library of Wales; 'Letter to Harman Grisewood 22nd of May 1962', in 1980, 188-192 (191); 'Letter to Harman Grisewood MCMLXVII' in *Letters to Friends: CF1/16* David Jones Papers, National Library of Wales, 36-38.

[4] Jones, 'The Preface to *The Anathemata*' (1951), in 1959, 113-14.

[5] See, Colin Wilcockson, 'David Jones and "The Break"*', Agenda: Special Issue on Myth* Vol. 15 Nos. 2-3 (Summer-Autumn 1977), 126-131 (126-27; 130-31); Hague, 'Note on the Break' in 1980, 192; Jones wrote in a letter of March 1973, 'I think Spengler's distinction between a "culture" and a "civilization", for all its complexities in any given case, is a much neglected notion; in a sense it corresponds to or has affinity with the business of what we used to call "The Break"': quoted in Jonathan Miles, *Backgrounds to David Jones: A Study in Sources and Drafts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990), 55. Similar reconstructions of cultural breaks were also expressed by Jones's contemporaries in works Jones read, in particular by Christopher Dawson. See, *Progress and Religion: an historical enquiry* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1929), 173; 215; *Medieval Essays* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1953), 28; 30; 40; 54; for one example, Dawson stated 'so for me the last year of the century was indeed the end of an age and marked a break in the unity and continuity of my experience', in 'Tradition and Inheritance: I. Wales and Wessex' *The Wind and the Rain* Vol. V, No. 4 (Spring 1949), 210-17 (218).

[6] For examples of two descriptions by critics see, Wilcockson 1977, 127-28: 'I think it probable that the image is of a broken link – and the very length of the chain, stretching back to the earliest traces of man, makes even more appalling the severance of a link in the chain that connects us all in our sharing of the artistic impulse. All men have been declaring – "showing forth" is the phrase David Jones prefers because of its religious, sacramental implication – the godlike, and God-attesting, ability to create what is beautiful, and to make beautiful what from a purely utilitarian point of view needs only to be serviceable.' Elizabeth Ward, *David Jones Mythmaker* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 125: 'Its first and most important element is the belief that contemporary Western civilisation is – or was – experiencing a cultural crisis of apocalyptic proportions. This belief is despondent upon the separate but, in David Jones's mind, related notions of a "break" between the past and the present, technology having modified the very

particular, establishes his own vision of the Break in terms of its impact on the creation and maintenance of culture. In previous cultural phases the whole of humanity had been connected by the fundamental nature of Man, who was, Jones believed, a sign-maker, a sacramentalist, an artist.[7] The Break was directly affecting the ability of mankind to create and understand these signs by damaging the continuity of culture, segregating the past from the present, and negating the validity of the cultural past to the modern world. This Break was not a single phenomenon but an ongoing 'metamorphosis':[8] breaks in British culture had occurred previously but the scale of the current crisis, the obsession with progress over tradition, was envisioned by Jones as one which could destroy access to the past forever.[9] As Jones said of the 1950s, 'the whole of the past, as far as I can make out, is down the drain. The civilizational change in which we live has occasioned this'.[10]

It was therefore the role of the artist, whatever his medium, to preserve the continuity between the past and present. As Jones explains,

> the poet is a 'rememberer' and […] it is a part of his business to keep open the lines of communication. One obvious way of doing this is by handing on such fragmented bits of our own inheritance as we have ourselves received. This is the way I myself attempt.[11]

Yet this raises a particular conundrum, since Jones argued in 'Use and Sign' (1962) that the 'potency' of the art created was based 'on the continued validity of a whole unbroken past, as parti-coloured as Joseph's coat, as seamless as the *tunica*'.[12] The artist must preserve culture in his works so as to re-establish continuity with the past but these same works cannot be truly valid or understood if that continuity has been broken beyond repair. Jones specifically lamented this problem in relation to Welsh culture, which, as we shall see, plays a central role in his development of the Bridge. He wrote in a letter to Vernon Watkins in 1962:

> It is this "break" with a whole extremely complex, cultural, religious and linguistic tradition that is the real buggeration for those of us who while able only to use English have our deepest roots (in some way or other) in the Welsh past.[13]

---

nature of human life by altering its material basis, and of the cyclic character of history, in accordance with which analogous crises may be seen to have occurred in the past and also to darken the future.'

[7] For two essays which explore the belief in Man as fundamentally an artist, a sign-making, and culture-making, creature see, Jones, 'Art and Democracy' (1942-43), in 1959, 85-96 and 'Art in Relation to War' (1942-3), in 1978, 123-166.

[8] Jones, 'Art and Sacrament' (1955), in 1959, 143-179 (144).

[9] For further discussion by Jones see, 'Past and Present' (1953), in 1959, 138-42 and 'Art and Sacrament' (1955), in 1959, 144-5.

[10] Jones, 'On the Difficulties of One Writer of Welsh Affinity Whose Language is English' (1952), in 1978, 30-34 (33-34).

[11] Jones, 'Past and Present' (1953), in 1959, 141.

[12] Jones, 'Use and Sign' (1962), in 1978, 177-85 (181).

[13] Jones, 'Letter to Vernon Watkins April 11th 1962' in *David Jones: Letters to Vernon Watkins*, ed. Ruth Pryor (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1976), 55-65 (58).

This was not simply an awareness of a linguistic divide on Jones's part, but attests to a wider social issue: Welsh cultural inheritance had reached a stage of fragility – through historic penalisation by the English, the destructive effects of modernity and lack of concern by various elements of Welsh society – which, if broken, would sever the continuity of Jones's 'past'.[14] In the same letter, Jones explained:

> If one writes the proper-name "Aphrodite" the undertones and overtones of that name incant *something* for the English reader […] because a general understanding of the Classical images was part & parcel of the English tradition.
>
> But supposing one used the proper name Rhiannon. What then? Not only has it no meaning *at all* for the average Englishman (educated or otherwise) but little meaning (so I have discovered) for the average Welsh-speaking Welshman.[15]

It is through attempting to rescue Welsh culture from the effect of the Break that Jones develops the concept of the Bridge. In unifying British culture into a holistic symbol Jones establishes Welsh culture as integral to the continuity of the whole, not least because his vision of the Bridge is one which claims for Wales a unique position as the sole inheritor of Rome.

Jones's Bridge was at once a development of, and an answer to, the problem of the Break. There was by no means a single interpretation of the Bridge yet in the various contexts in which it is used by Jones, the Bridge always symbolises cultural continuity.

In a number of cases, Jones reimagines the artist's role through the actions of other bridge-builders, whether divine, mythical or historical. In 'Art and Sacrament' (1955), he states that the artist must

> partake in some sense, however difficult to posit, of that juxtaposing by which what was *inanis et vacua* became radiant with form and abhorrent of vacua by the action of the Artifex, the Logos, who is known to our tradition as the Pontifex who formed a bridge 'from nothing' and who then, like Brân in the *Mabinogion,* himself became the bridge by the Incarnation and Passion and subsequent Apotheoses.[16]

---

[14] For further discussion by Jones see, 'Letter to Aneirin Talfan Davies October 10th 1962' in *David Jones: Letters to a Friend*, ed. Aneirin Talfan Davies (Swansea: Triskele Books, 1980), 70-77 (75; 76-77); 'Letter to the Editor of the Times August 20th 1951' in *Draft Replies 1939-64 CF1/18* David Jones Papers, National Library of Wales; 'Unpublished fragment on the Government' in *LO2/1: Wales and Religion* David Jones Papers, National Library of Wales, 47; 'Welshness in Wales' (1957), in 1959, 51-53; 'George Borrow and Wales' (1954), in 1959, 66-82 (82).
[15] Jones, 'Letter to Vernon Watkins April 11th 1962' in 1976, 57.
[16] Jones, 'Art and Sacrament' (1955), in 1959, 160.

Jones here describes how God forms the bridge when he creates the world from nothing, and Christ, in human form, becomes the bridge by his sacrifice on Earth for mankind.[17] In this sense, God is envisaged as the archetypal artist, a point Jones makes clear by quoting, in the lines preceding the passage, the creedal clause '*per quem omnia facta sunt*'[18] (by whom all things were made). Through God's transition from making the bridge to becoming it, Jones saw a parallel in the story of Brân the Blessed – a figure of Welsh legend who appears often in Jones's works. Jones recalls, in the accompanying footnote, the Welsh proverb, '"He who would be head, let him be the bridge", *A fo ben bid bont*'.[19] He then goes on to state:

> It derives from the myth of Bendigeidfran who bridged the Irish Sea with his own body for his army to march upon. It seems a startling foreshadowing of what was achieved by the Incarnation. At the same time it offers from remote Celtic antiquity a theme familiar to us in the Roman title Pontifex Maximus.[20]

Jones clearly sees leadership and bridge-making as deeply entwined. He uses 'Pontifex Maximus' both in terms of its literal meaning as 'greatest builder of bridges' and in its use as a title in pagan Rome and in the Catholic Church for a leader who ritually connects man and god.[21]

This emphasis on religious continuity, and its relationship to the Bridge, can also be seen in a passage in which Jones cites Boethius (c.475-526). The Roman philosopher is 'nicknamed "the Bridge"' because his literary works acted to protect pagan culture and reveal its centrality to the continuance of a Christianised civilisation:[22]

---

[17] Jones, 'Art and Sacrament' (1955), in 1959, 160.

[18] Jones, 'Art and Sacrament' (1955), in 1959, 160. For a poetic example see, Jones, *The Grail Mass*, ed. Thomas Goldpaugh (forthcoming), 174: 'These may well screech to the gods who have destroyed the vicar of the gods. They perforce tread the torturous ford when the bridge of the bridge builder is down.'

[19] Jones often used this phase in his works and marked it in texts in his library. For an example from Jones's poetry see, 'In the mabinogi the blessed Bran said "He who would be the head let him be the bridge" and ynys yr Eia man know the name/ I know that I hang on the windy tree/ pierced by the spear/ sacrificed to the God/ myself to myself' in *CF 1/1: Welsh History* David Jones Papers, National Library of Wales; for an example from Jones's library see, *The Mabinogion*, trans. Lady Charlotte Guest (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1913), 42. Christopher Dawson also discussed Brân as a bridge and used the concept of the Bridge to represent the role of religion and religious thinkers in establishing cultural continuity. For examples see, 1949, 214; 1953, 28; *Religion and Culture* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1948), 20; 22; 193.

[20] Jones, 'Art and Sacrament' (1955), in 1959, 160.

[21] In all probability, Jones's definition of 'Pontifex Maximus' resulted from reading his close friend Jackson Knight's *Cumean Gates* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936). Within his own copy, Jones heavily marked a passage describing the origin of 'the Roman pontifices' as those who built the 'bridges across the magical confines' (the etymology perhaps deriving from 'pons' and 'facere' meaning 'builder of bridges'). The term Pontifex, Knight explains, later came to mean 'builder of the bridge between God and man' in both pagan Rome and indeed the Christian world through its acceptance as a title for the Pope, 103. For further discussion of 'Pontifex Maximus' see, Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome*. Vol I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 57-58. It is also interesting that the Welsh word for bridge 'pont' comes from the Latin 'pons'.

[22] For analysis of Boethius as a Christian writer who read the Greek Neoplatonists, translated works by Aristotle, and used pagan literary and philosophical tropes, see Louis Markos, 'How Boethius Built a

> With regard to the Church and non-Christian cults […] it has always seemed to me reassuring rather than the reverse to recall that when in our liturgies we give to Mary the Virgin Mother of God such epithets as <u>Virgo Potens</u> or <u>Sedes sapientiae</u>, we are using precisely the same "language of expression" that was addressed to the <u>parthenos</u> Athena. And when we think or speak of the ecclesia as a vessel shipping heavy seas, or the spume-hidden "barque of Peter," to the mast of which is made fast the Incarnate Word, it is a positive deprivation, not to recall that which the patristic writers recalled, the self-binding of Odysseus to the cross-yarded mast of the Argo.

> All that is unific, all that maintains or re-establishes or furthers liaisons (as Boetheus knew – it was not for nothing that he was called "the bridge") is salutary to warming the spirits of us in our several cut offnessess. The desire and pursuit of the whole is connatural to us and what does the term "hell" connote but separation?[23]

Jones praises Christianity specifically because it holds within itself the signs of older religions, signs which Boethius maintained in his works. The artist is therefore a 'sort of Boethius' in his role as the conserver of cultural continuity. Like Boethius, the artist must carry 'forward into an altogether metamorphosed world certain of the fading oracles' which would otherwise be lost to contemporary society. In all these examples, Jones's focus has been on the nature of the bridge-maker, who can use his actions, body, or works, to create and strengthen the cultural connections between the past and the present. The modern artist's role is foreshadowed by God, Brân and Boethius, and so the expectation for Jones is that his works will act to preserve the continuity of Britain's culture.

If Jones's role was to maintain, in his own words, 'some sort of single plank in some sort of bridge', it is exactly the 'sort' of bridge that needs to be defined. Jones's vision of Britain's cultural heritage was, in a sense, highly personal – it was his own inheritance within which Wales was central. In our examination of the Break we have seen how Jones was specifically worried about the effect it had on Welsh culture in the modern world, yet Jones also saw other breaks as having occurred in the Welsh past which had already placed cultural continuity in jeopardy.[24] The particular break which obsessed Jones, and to which he would consistently return in his writing, occurred on the death of the last Welsh prince Llywelyn, killed by the English on 11 December 1282.[25] In 'Wales and the Crown' (1953), Jones describes the effect upon the Bridge:

Bridge from Ancient Pagan to Medieval Christian', in Scott Goins and Barbara H. Wyman (eds.), *Boethius: The Consolation of Philosophy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012).

[23] Jones, 'Undated fragment' in *LO2/1 Wales and Religion* David Jones Papers, National Library of Wales, 44. For another example of Jones using Boethius, this time as a Bridge in a time of war, see, 'Art in Relation to War' (1942-43), in 1978, 147-8.

[24] For another example see, Jones, 'The Myth of Arthur' (1942), in 1959, 212-259 (219).

[25] For examples of Jones's discussions of Llywelyn in his published essays see, 'Welsh Poetry' (1957), in 1959, 56-65 (61-62); 'Wales and the Crown' (1953), in 1959, 39-48 (41); 'The Myth of Arthur' (1942), in

> That anonymous stroke broke down the solitary remaining detached plank of a bridge, the further spans of which reached back, across the whole of the Dark Ages, to piles driven into the alluvium of Britain by the *pontifices* of antiquity. Over that bridge had infiltrated a very mixed company bearing the tokens not of one past but of several. Not forgetting the token of Troy.[26]

The Bridge, the passage implies, is at once a symbol of the entire cultural inheritance of Britain and the connection between the distant past and the present through which diverse pasts become integral elements in the formation of British culture. This inheritance was deeply damaged by the loss of Llywelyn who, in Jones's estimation, held within himself the 'mixed company' of cultural heritage which stretched back to Roman Britain, and indeed to Troy.[27] It is through investigating this claim that we can come to understand Jones's formulation of the ancient past of Britain, an integral section of the Bridge which he saw as inherently bound up within the heritage of Wales.

For Jones, Wales preserved the only direct link to Britain's ancient past, and indeed Britain's cultural connection to the classical civilisations, because of its unique relationship to Rome. He argued in essays and letters to newspapers:

> The Welsh alone among all the peoples of this land, represent the last, fragmented, attenuated link between the world of to-day and the world of the later Caesars.[28]

> Quite unlike the Scottish, Pictish, Saxon and Angle kingdoms which arose as forces exterior to and as invaders of the disintegrating provinces of the Empire, Wales arose from within that disintegration.[29]

Jones also explored the emergence of Wales from the Roman and Celtic cultures in *The Anathemata* (1952):

> Combroges bore us:
>
> Tottering, experienced, crux-signed

1959, 221-23; in unpublished fragments see, *LO2/1: Wales and Religion*, 17 and *LO2/3 Wales and Religion*, 27 David Jones Papers, National Library of Wales; in notes on Jones's library see, John E. Morris's *The Welsh Wars of Edward I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), 194-195; 306.

[26] Jones, 'Wales and the Crown' (1953), in 1959, 47.

[27] For another example of Jones alluding to the Trojan heritage of Wales see, Jones, 'The Myth of Arthur' (1942), in 1959, 223.

[28] Jones, 'Draft Letter to Newspaper' in *CF1/15: Draft Letters and Articles* David Jones Papers, National Library of Wales.

[29] Jones, 'Wales and the Crown' (1953,) in 1959, 45. For another example, Jones wrote: '"Wales" began when Britannia was still a province of the Roman West. She came into being from within the Empire' in 'Draft Letter to Newspaper' in *CF1/15: Draft Letters and Articles* David Jones Papers, National Library of Wales.

<div style="text-align:center">old Roma</div>

the yet efficient mid-wife of us.[30]

The Welsh people were born from the Celts but brought into life by Rome, an Empire 'tottering', Christian, in decline, but nonetheless essential for the creation of Wales.[31] Jones viewed this unique Romano-British culture as having been transferred directly through the lineage of the Welsh rulers – from Cunedda, in Jones's phrase '*conditor noster*'[32] or founder of the Welsh people, to Llywelyn the Last.

> Between the, so to say, *terminus a quo* of Cunedda and the *terminus ad quem* of Llywelyn the entity we now call Wales together with its unique tradition came into being. A people calling themselves the Cymry emerged during that period.[33]

In Jones's estimation, Cunedda, 'son of Padarn Red Pexa, son of Tacitus', was the Romanised Briton who along with his many sons established the line of Romano-British princes in the fourth century AD which continued unbroken until Llywelyn's death in 1282.[34] It is the cultural continuity of this line which Jones stresses: in 'Wales and the Crown' (1953) he wrote, 'nowhere else in this island was there a line of medieval princes that stemmed straight from Roman Britain,'[35] and in 'Welsh Poetry' (1957) that 'Llywelyn's Gwynedd was the last remnant remaining of the pattern of a Britain known to Cadwaladr, known to Arthur, known to Cunedda and to the Caesars.'[36] While Llywelyn's death constituted a central break in the Bridge, Jones believed that the Roman and Brittonic Celtic inheritance had lived on in the language, land, religion, mythology and traditions of Wales.

Jones claimed that the Welsh language was 'devolved from the Brittonic Celtic of the Roman period. During which time great numbers of Latin words had been loaned into that language'.[37] Due to this foundation, Jones argued that Welsh was 'the last unbroken link connecting Britain to-day with the Roman Provinces of Britannia'[38] and 'the oldest living thing in Britain, connecting us, as it

---

[30] Jones, *The Anathemata* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952; 1972), 71-72.

[31] Jones explains in a footnote that 'Combroges' was an ancient Celtic word meaning '"men of the same *patria*" from which word, Cymry, the Welsh people, derives' in *The Sleeping Lord* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), 66, fn. 3.

[32] Jones, *The Anathemata* 71-72. Translates as 'our founder'.

[33] Jones, 'Wales and the Crown' (1953), in 1959, 41-42.

[34] Jones, *Anathemata* 71. Also see 71, fn. 1 and 72, fn.1. For further examples of Cunedda's special Romano-British heritage in Jones's prose and artwork see, 'Wales and Visual Form' (1944), in 1978, 70; Jones's watercolour of Cunedda entitled *The Lord of Venedotia* (British Council Collection, 1948).

[35] Jones, 'Wales and the Crown' (1953), in 1959, 41.

[36] Jones, 'Welsh Poetry' (1957). in 1959, 62.

[37] Jones, 'Letter [to unnamed recipient] *anno at Incarnatione xti, mcmlxxiv*' 1966' in *CF 1/5: Letters to Friends (1941-1974)* David Jones Papers, National Library of Wales, 66.

[38] Jones, 'Draft Letter to the Times' in *CF2/27: Letters to Newspapers* David Jones Papers, National Library of Wales, 139.

does, with Late Romanity, and the formation age of the British people.'[39] Likewise, the Welsh landscape, with its traditions and place names, offered 'links with the Britain known to Germanus of Auxerre and with echoes of a Britain far anterior again.'[40] This special Roman inheritance of Wales was also visualised by Jones in relation to religion. Welsh culture provided links back to early Christianity, as the Welsh were 'signed with the Cross from their very beginnings because the Empire was already signed with that Sign'.[41] Moreover, since Jones believed that the Christian tradition had, through cultural amalgamation, incorporated within itself direct links to paganism, the mythical inheritance of Greece, and beyond into pre-history, these elements necessarily became part of the heritage of Britain. Welsh mythology too represented a mixture of Roman influence with the Celtic and pre-Celtic traditions: in Jones's words 'the mingle of two currents of mythos, legend, quasi-history and history, one of the Celtic and pre-Celtic and the other of Roman provenance.'[42] This amalgamation was, Jones believed, exemplified by the Welsh tale of the Roman emperor Magnus Maximus, and his Welsh wife Elen, or Helena, entitled 'The Dream of Mascen Wledig'.[43] Within all these areas of culture, whether linguistic, physical, religious or literary, Jones strove to reveal the Roman inheritance of Wales and to justify its importance to the wider British tradition.

The continuity within Welsh culture was therefore unparalleled in Britain. While Welsh culture preserved its Roman, and indeed Brittonic Celtic foundations, the harm caused by the 'Teutonic invaders'[44] to the cultural continuity of Britain as a whole is explored by Jones in the 'Angle-Land' section of *The Anathemata*:[45]

Out from *gens Romulum*

into the *Weal*-kin

dinas-man gone *aethwlad*

---

[39] Jones, 'Draft Letter to the Times' in *CF2/27: Letters to Newspapers* David Jones Papers, National Library of Wales, 51.

[40] Jones, 'Welshness in Wales' (1957), in 1959, 52.

[41] Jones, 'The Welsh Dragon' (1966), in 1978, 108-16 (115).

[42] Jones, 'unpublished fragment' in *L01/11 (AV/22): Manuscript Drafts 1937-74* David Jones Papers, National Library of Wales, 20.

[43] Jones, 'undated letter' in *CD1/15: Rene Hague Letters* David Jones Papers, National Library of Wales. For the use of Maximus or Elen (Helena) in Jones's essays see, 'The Viae: the Roman Roads in Britain' (1955), in 1959, 189-95 (195);'Wales and the Crown' (1953), in 1959, 44; 'The Myth of Arthur' (1942), in 1959, 220-1; for poetry see, *The Anathemata* 131-2; 131, fn. 3; *In Parenthesis* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), 80-81; for Jones's notes and marks in his library texts see, Emrys George Bowen, *The Settlements of the Celtic Saints in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1954), 21; Arthur Wade Wade-Evans, *Welsh Christian Origins* (Oxford: The Alden Press, 1934), 54.

[44] Jones, *The Anathemata* 113, fn. 1.

[45] Rene Hague explained that the bridge allusion in 'Angle-Land' was concerned with 'the problem of Romano-British survival in the areas of primary Anglo-Saxon settlement' in *A Commentary on the Anathemata of David Jones* (Wellingborough: Christopher Skelton, 1977), 141; Joe Moffett stated that Angle-Land was 'concerned with the 'history' and 'influx of the Angles in England' in 'Anglo-Saxon and Welsh Origins in David Jones's *The Anathemata' North American Journal of Welsh Studies,* Vol. 6, 1 (Winter 2006), 1-18 (12).

> *cives* gone wold-men
>
> . . . from Lindum to London
>
> bridges broken down.[46]

Although these invasions and their aftermaths brought new cultural traditions to Britain, Jones focuses here on the damage to Britain's links to Rome and visualises them as a succession of breaks.[47] That these bridges are 'broken' rather than falling, as we would find in the modern version of 'London bridge is falling down', is at once an example of Jones's need for authenticity – as 'broken' was the original word in 'London bridge is broken down/ Dance my lady Lea' – and a testament to his interconnected vision of bridges and breaks.[48] Jones's attempt to establish Welsh culture as the only remaining link to the pre-history of Britain, through the exceptionality of its Roman heritage, is both a political and social statement with wide ramifications. He was by no means the only writer to use Rome in this way: the Welsh nationalist movement of the early twentieth century reveals a great many notable figures who justified the individuality of Welsh cultural identity, and defended its place within British culture more broadly, through the medium of Roman inheritance. Saunders Lewis,[49] Arthur Wade Wade-Evans,[50] Gwynnfor Evans,[51] and H. W. J. Edwards,[52] are just a few prominent examples.

---

[46] Jones, *The Anathemata* 113. For closer analysis of the 'Angle-Land' section see, Anna Johnson '"Wounded Men and Wounded Trees": David Jones and the Anglo-Saxon Culture Tangle', *Anglo-Saxon Culture and the Modern Imagination*, ed. David Clark and Nicholas Perkins (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010), 89-110 (100-102).

[47] Jones did not believe either in the complete destruction of Brittonic-Celtic society in England, or that the Anglo-Saxons forced all the Britons back into Wales. He saw it as a process of cultural amalgamation but believed that the Britons, in Wales, deliberately preserved their Christianity and Roman identity while in England they did not. For further details from Jones's marks and notes on his library see, Wade-Evans, *Welsh Christian Origins* 301; R. G. Collingwood and J. N. L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 308; 317-19; Gilbert Sheldon, *The Transition from Roman Britain to Christian England A.D. 368-664* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1932), 88; see also Jones, 'undated notes on Wade-Evans' in *CF1/1: Welsh History* David Jones Papers, National Library of Wales.

[48] Jones alludes to this earlier version of the lyrics in *The Anathemata* 167, fn. 3.

[49] For example, Saunders Lewis wrote in *Canlyn Arthur* (1938): 'The Welsh are the only nation of Britain who have been part of the Roman Empire, who, in childhood, were weaned on the milk of the West, and who have the blood of the West in their veins. Wales can understand Europe, for she is one of the family', quoted in Dafydd Glyn Jones, 'His Politics' in *Presenting Saunders Lewis*, ed. Alun R. Jones and Gwyn Thomas, intro. David Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1983), 23-78 (33).

[50] For just three examples, Wade-Evans wrote: 'There was no Welsh nation, not even a semblance of a Welsh Nation, till imperial Rome laid the foundations. In short, Rome is our mother' in 'The Welsh Mind' 1945, 72; '*Romanitas* triumphed in Wales […] the word "Welsh" being the common Teutonic term, found all over Europe, for "Romans"' in *The Emergence of England and Wales* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1959), 108; '"Welsh national history" […] began in Wales itself and nowhere else, on a small scale, and within the Roman empire' in *The Historical Basis of Welsh Nationalism – A Series of Lectures for the Plaid Cymry Summer School 1946* (Harrison: Harrison Press, 2011), 1-41 (40). Jones read and owned many of Wade-Evans's works which had a clear influence on his reimaging of Wales's Roman inheritance.

[51] For example, Gwynfor Evans wrote: 'Wales remained the principal if not the sole heir of *Romanitas* on the island' in *Land of My Fathers: 2000 years of Welsh History (Aros Mea)* (Swansea: John Penry Press, 1974), 42; see also 25; 37; 39-40. Evans sent Jones a copy of this text.

[52] For example, H. W. J. Edwards wrote: 'Wales emerged as a nation from the wreck of Rome and became a bastion of Romanitas' in *Sons of the Romans: The Tory as Nationalist* (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1975), 22.

Jones's reimagining of Wales's position within Britain's culture as a whole, and his emphasis on continuity, are therefore part of a much wider social reconfiguration of what constituted British culture.

While Jones's positive vision of Rome as the progenitor of the Welsh culture may come as a shock to those readers who are well acquainted with the negative vision of the Roman Empire portrayed in the majority of Jones's Roman fragments, both receptions of Rome are an intrinsic part of Jones's defence of culture.[53] In the positive formulation, Jones utilises the Roman inheritance of Wales, stressing its uniqueness and continuity, to directly challenge the destructive effects that the modern Break was having not only on the Welsh culture but also, inevitably, on British culture as a whole. Without the Welsh culture the section of the Bridge from pre-history, through Rome, to medieval Britain would be lost; the continuity of the whole Bridge relying on a living link surviving back through the entire heritage of Britain. This conviction was highlighted in the televised BBC interview between Saunders Lewis and Jones on 15 March 1965:

> L: And you still get a great deal of your inspiration from Roman antiquity and Roman art?
>
> J: Roman antiquity and Welsh antiquity.
>
> L: And Welsh antiquity. In fact, it is because you think the Welsh are Romans that you recognise the Welsh?
>
> J: Yes. But that's what I don't understand – why, you know, why it isn't recognised.
>
> L: I think you have […] done a great deal to help to get it recognised, and that that is a great contribution of yours, not to Wales so much, as to the whole of the British Isles and its memory of its own past.[54]

In essays and letters, Jones repeatedly stressed his conviction that Welsh culture was of central importance to the 'whole of the British Isles'. In 'Welsh Wales' (1958), Jones stated that the continuance of the Welsh language was 'by no means a matter for the Welsh only, but concerns all, because the complex and involved heritage of Britain is a shared inheritance which can, in very devious ways, enrich us all.'[55] Moreover, Jones wrote openly of his 'life-long interior love of and an anxiety for the things, the deep things, which belong specifically to the Cymry (and hence are an

---

[53] 'Roman Fragments' collectively implies the poetic fragments set in, or concerning, Rome in *The Sleeping Lord* and the majority of the poetry collected in *The Roman Quarry*, ed. Harman Grisewood and René Hague (London: Agenda, 1981).

[54] 'David Jones: Writer and Painter' in *Writers World* 15.03.1965 (BBC), in Jasmine Hunter Evans (ed.) 'Your awfully unorthodox, David', *New Welsh Review* 104 (Summer 2014), 24-31 (29).

[55] Jones, 'Welsh Wales' (1958), in 1959, 54.

integral part of the inheritance of Britain)'.[56] In defining British culture as a 'shared inheritance' Jones reveals that if a final break occurred, through the loss of the Welsh culture, then the Bridge between past and present would be broken for the entirety of British culture.

In stressing the importance of cultural continuity through his use of the Bridge as a symbol of British culture, Jones acted to protect his own vision of the past. In his defence of the cultural inheritance of Britain Jones rejected Anglocentrism and deliberately promoted the Welsh element as providing Britain's sole link to Rome and to all the religious, cultural and mythological connections that entailed.[57] Jones's vision of British culture was thus at once insular, based as it was on his own personal attachment to Wales, and also inclusive, as the underlying intention in his defence of Wales was to draw together all the people of Britain by reminding them of their 'shared inheritance'. The Bridge proved to be a rewardingly malleable concept for Jones because it allowed him to explore his vision of British culture, to challenge the breaks that had occurred with a renewed emphasis on continuity, and to redefine his own role as an artist, a bridge-builder, who could protect and potentially regenerate culture. By creating works which proceeded towards 'the maintenance of some sort of single plank in some sort of bridge',[58] Jones intentionally and consistently challenged the Break. Jones's conceptualisation of the Bridge was just one part of his wider attack on the culturally destructive nature of the modern world, and indeed only one part of his answer to the increasingly problematic impact this had upon his role as an artist. Yet, for all its specificity, a study of the Bridge provides intriguing and valuable insight into Jones's defence of cultural continuity in the face of destruction.

A final example from 1940 – in which the physical devastation of the war mirrors the cultural devastation of modernity – stands as a testament to the power of the Bridge to symbolise not only Jones's fear of the Break but also his hope, however uncertain, for renewal:

> But now, beyond the fullness of time, at
> the thirteenth hour, when the glass towers
> shiver and the shrouds of the plutocracy look
> very far from fine […]
> The gas sinks in the damaged plant,
> the sewage will soon, no doubt, contaminate

---

[56] Jones, 'draft letter to Gwynfor Evans on winning the Caerfyrddin seat for Plaid Cymru in 1966' in *CF1/12: Letters to Welsh Correspondents* David Jones Papers, National Library of Wales.

[57] Jones's joint heritage can perhaps be elucidated through a comment by his friend Christopher Dawson who had a similar cultural background. Dawson claimed that, 'even from childhood I belonged equally to several different regions, so that I do not feel myself to be a northerner or a southerner or an Englishman or a Welshman, but a Britton', in 1949, 212.

[58] Jones, 'In a Statement to the Bollingen Foundation, 1959,' in 1978, 17.

the filtered water. The boasters vary their

excuses (the blind who led the uninformed).

The tactical withdrawals are explained at

considerable length, the jokes wear thin,

the truth is poking here and there.

Perhaps

     London Bridge is

     broken down, broken down

     broken down.

To-night I do not know

                    ('Epithalamion', II.211-32)[59]

---

[59] Jones, 'Epithalamion' in *The Wedding Poems*, ed. Thomas Dilworth (London: Enitharmon Press, 2002), 34-41 (40). Dilworth argues that the bridge section is a reference to Eliot's *The Waste Land* (in which Eliot uses 'London bridge is falling down' in 'V. What the Thunder Said', l. 427) and that the bridge is 'broken' because Jones wrote the poem during the bombing of London, 59. While this interpretation goes some way to unravelling Jones's reasoning, I believe that his choice of 'broken' also reveals a purposeful decision, as he made in *The Anathemata*, to highlight the relationship between the Bridge and the Break.