

## **“Acts of *Ars*” in David Jones’s *The Anathemata***

**and W.H. Auden’s *Horae Canonicae***

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A paradigmatic moment for David Jones, one that sheds light on much of his thinking about *poesis* and the Christian tradition, occurs during his service in the Great War in 1917. Out looking for firewood, at the edge of the Western Front, he comes upon a small shack and, looking through a chink in the wall, witnesses part of the celebration of mass for a small group of Catholic soldiers. He describes this experience many years later in a letter to Rene Hague dated July 1973, a letter which includes several important Jonesian ramblings around the role of “the Catholic ‘thing’ in his work.” His account of the incident follows some extended reflections on the theology of the Cross in his work in contrast to that of Wilfred Owen, and also to his own early attraction to Roman Catholic liturgical practices, well before he knew anything of the theology or doctrine of the Church.<sup>1</sup> He recalls this as “my first sight of a Mass.” (248) The vivid visual imagery of color and light in this letter, as he lingers over the details of what he saw, suggests that what he is witnessing here in the mass is what he would later call an “act of *Ars*”<sup>2</sup>

But what I saw through the small gap in the wall was not the dim  
emptiness I had expected but the back of a sacerdos in a gilt-hued *planeta*,  
two points of flickering candlelight no doubt lent an extra sense of

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<sup>1</sup> Rene Hague, ed., *Dai Greatcoat: A Self-Portrait of David Jones in his Letters* (London: Faber & Faber, 1980) 248-259. For another discussion of this encounter, see Adam Schwartz, *The Third Spring: G.K. Chesterton, Christopher Dawson and David Jones* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 293-296.

<sup>2</sup> David Jones, *Epoch and Artist* (London: Faber & Faber, 1959), 167-9.

goldness to the vestment and a golden warmth seemed, by the same agency, to lend the white altar cloths and the white linen of the celebrant's alb and amice and maniple. . . . You can imagine what a great marvel it was for me to see through that chink in the wall, and kneeling in the hay beneath the improvised *mensa* were a few huddled figures in khaki. (249)

The unexpected light and beauty of vestments and altar cloths here and even his use of Latin liturgical language help to identify this encounter as what Thomas Dilworth has called "one of the most numinous experiences of [Jones's] life."<sup>3</sup> We also see the young Jones's astonishment at seeing his fellow soldiers, only a few, he notes, for most were Nonconformist, kneeling at this "improvised *mensa* or altar." They include "a big bodied Irishman and an Italian naturalized Englishman, represented under the forms of Bomber Mulligan and Runner Meotti in *In Paren.* on page 121." This reflects the meeting of Roman and Celtic culture in Christian practice that is such an important theme in all of Jones's work. His use of the Latin word for altar (*mensa* -- table) in this late letter to a fellow Catholic suggests his intuitive sense that in this incident he was encountering a long and rich ritual tradition, witnessing how it was being carried forward in the midst of the war's waste land. His memory of this encounter is of a moment of resistance and continuity, in the midst of the disorder of the front. He recalls being struck by "how close to the Front Line the priest had decided to make the Oblation." Also significant here is the *experience* of oneness between celebrant and "toughs" that Jones

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Dilworth, *David Jones in the Great War* (London: Enitharmon Press, 2012), 152.

recalls, in this letter written some forty years later.<sup>4</sup> At least in memory, that encounter with the mass initiates what amounts to a conversion experience in Jones’s life.



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<sup>4</sup> Rene Hague, *Dai Greatcoat: A Portrait of David Jones in His Letters* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), 249.

A sketch of soldiers kneeling at mass during or shortly after the war years gives formal centrality to the chalice and the soldier kneeling reverently -- it captures Jones's sense that here amid the ordinary and even sordid material world of the front something real is being enacted. Striking in both the visual and verbal renderings of Jones's account of the soldiers at mass is his focus not on the meaning of the event or the doctrine involved, but the human action here. Those participating represent the variety of cultures that come to figure prominently in the world of *The Anathemata* and in Jones's mythos generally: the Irishman and the Italian -- the Celt and the Roman of old. And the thing he remembers is the experience of unity in this gathering around Eucharist. What most interests Jones is the meeting of culture and artifice in this encounter: the gathering of human beings in community around the making of a sign, even the persistence of what might be called a Christian culture in the midst of the conflict at the Front. Not only the meaning but also the act of offering itself is central to his recollection.

In “Art and Sacrament,” written long after this encounter but well before the letter to Hague, Jones finds language to articulate and analyze this experience from his training in post-impressionist theory, where he learned that a work of art is at once a “thing” in itself, part of the world of flesh and form, and a “representation” -- a “showing again” under other forms.<sup>5</sup> Together with this sense of the materiality of the art-work, whether paint or language, he draws on the theology of Maurice de la Taille and his compelling

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<sup>5</sup> David Jones, *Epoch and Artist* (London: Faber, and Faber, 1959), pp.170-3. For further discussion of Jones and post-Impressionist theory, see Kathleen Henderson Staudt, *At the Turn of a Civilization*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 39-49, and Thomas Goldpaugh's essay in these papers. See also Rowan Williams, *Grace and Necessity: Reflections on Art and Love* (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 20-50, 70-81.

suggestion that in the Incarnation and at the Supper and Crucifixion Christ "placed himself in the order of signs,"<sup>6</sup> thus bringing together humanity and divinity in the act of making a sign -- and of offering Himself, in sign, as part of the process of redeeming human history itself. In his poetic style, we see him working this out through a unique poetic voice, texture, and formal strategy that "foregrounds"<sup>7</sup> the surface and depth of the work as "thing" while also connecting it always to the revealed mystery of faith. This mystery is embodied for him in the interconnected narratives of Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection, all re-presented in every celebration of mass.

In the same rambling letter to Hague, Jones has been describing his own early attraction to Catholic religious expression -- to the offering of "bodily latria" he calls it -- in his figure-drawing in art school before 1914. He recalls an urge to genuflect, in church, at the mention of the Incarnation in the creed, and also how even as a child, he once made a cross and carried it around the garden on Good Friday, to the consternation of his very Protestant father. The encounter with the mass at the front, where he feels a sense of presence and "oneness" with celebrant and "toughs," describes the experiential dimension of the Catholic faith and practice that Jones would embrace formally after the war, but it also gives us a sense of his own temperamental attraction to sacramental expression from a very early age.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Mystery of Faith and Human Understanding Contrasted and Defined* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1930), p. 212. Quoted in Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, p.179.

<sup>7</sup> The term "foregrounding" is used by Russian formalist theorist Jan Mukarovsky in his discussion of the "Work of Art as Material and as Sign," an essay that offers a good framework for thinking about the relationship between the categories of "representational" and "abstract" that Jones proposes. See my further discussion in *At the Turn of a Civilization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), p. 40. See also Alejandro Garcia-Rivera, *The Community of the Beautiful: A Theological Aesthetics* (Collegeville MN 1999, Liturgical Press), p. 37

All of this reflection on his own relationship to Catholic liturgical practice begins in a response to Rene Hague's apparent admiration of Wilfred Owen's tendency to conflate the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross with the suffering of the soldiers in the war, responding to a passage from one of Owen's letters<sup>8</sup>. Jones strongly disagrees with Owen's tendency to portray the suffering and death of the soldiers in the Great War as analogous to the suffering of Christ on the Cross (what Jones calls "the Passion of the Incarnate Logos"). Jones rejects this victim-centered theology, and also rejects those critics who want to see his own portrayal of suffering and death in *In Parenthesis* through the same theological lens. "In writing *In Parenthesis*," he insists:

I had no intention whatever in presuming to compare the varied maims, death-strokes, miseries, acts of courage etc. of the two contending forces, ours or those 'against whom we found ourselves by misadventure,' with the Passion, self-Oblation and subsequent Immolation and death of the Cult-hero of our Xtian tradition. For that is a unique and profound Mystery of Faith. (246)

The language in this 1973 letter directly echoes the language of theologian Maurice de la Taille, whose magisterial work on the theology of "Sacrifice" in the mass was foundational for Jones even as it was controversial among Catholic theologians of the time -- including Jones's acquaintance from Ditchling days, Fr. Vincent McNab, and his correspondent here, Rene Hague.<sup>9</sup> Jones's tale-telling instinct returns repeatedly to

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<sup>8</sup> Rene Hague refers the reader to Harold Owen and John Bell, ed. *Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 457-60.

<sup>9</sup> For a thorough exploration of the theology, reception and implications of de la Taille's theology, see Michon Matthieson, *Sacrifice as Gift: Eucharist, Grace and Contemplative*

the connection, in the telling of the Christian story at mass, between the events of the Last Supper and the Crucifixion in the Biblical narrative, and the celebrations of Eucharist that continue "daily, at the stone" (*Ana*, 81) in the midst of life. The poetics of *The Anathemata*, in particular, brings together the whole complex of mysteries: Incarnation-Crucifixion and Resurrection -- which are central to the Christian proclamation, and connects these to the act of "sign-making" carried out by Christ, the Word made Flesh, and engaged again by human sign-makers, who share in a "bodily" way the nature and action of Christ at every celebration of Eucharist.

Thomas Goldpauh points out how important Maurice de la Taille's theology is to Jones's understanding of what is happening, both in the celebration of the Mass and, I would add, in the event of the Crucifixion which is in Jones's mind inextricably tied to the Incarnation (The Passion of the Incarnate Logos). Goldpauh also notes that Rene Hague was troubled by Jones's interest in de La Taille and tended to minimize or dismiss it, but implies rightly that de la Taille's understanding of the Christ of the Last Supper and of the Cross as a sign-maker, offering himself as Sign, is critical both to David Jones's faith and to his poetics.<sup>10</sup> The meaning of the Cross is found, not so much in the sacrifice and death of a victim, as in the active sign-making of an incarnate God, working in the realm of human bodily experience and history that de la Taille calls "the order of signs."<sup>11</sup>

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*Prayer in Maurice de la Taille* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013). See also Schwartz, *The Third Spring*, pp. 343-347.

<sup>10</sup> Goldpauh in these papers.

<sup>11</sup> See de la Taille, *The Mystery of Faith and Human Opinion Contrasted and Defined*, (London: Longmans Green 1930), 212.

Jones's appropriation of de la Taille and his fascination with sacramental practice undergirds his most innovative insights as poet and artist and especially as Christian poet and artist. Indeed, it amounts to an innovative reinterpretation and reshaping of Christian themes in the context of the poet's own cultural moment. In this way *The Anathemata* can be identified, in terms supplied by theologian David Tracy, as a "classic" text, both as an expression of religious experience generally and as a fresh engagement with the Christian tradition.

A "classic" text, for Tracy, is one whose "excess of meaning" calls for ongoing interpretation.<sup>12</sup> Tracy defines a "religious classic" as a work that takes seriously the claim of a religious tradition to ultimate meaning: "Every religious classic expresses an event of a 'limit-of' reality that has the full force of a power finally liberating us from ourselves, summoning us to and by a power not our own." (178) A religious classic offers an *experience* that enables the reader, viewer or listener to engage on some level the way that meaning is made and conveyed in that tradition. In a Christian classic, Tracy suggests, we find in some way a presentation of "the event and person of Jesus Christ."<sup>13</sup> Any interpreter of a Christian Classic, he argues, is engaging the Incarnation-Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus as constitutive and interdependent narratives -- what he calls the "Pauline proclamation," from the letters of Paul, which proclaim the Christ-event of the life, death, and Resurrection of the Incarnate God as a manifestation of divine grace in human history. Also central to any Christian classic, for Tracy, is a fresh affirmation or exploration of the Incarnation. This is what Tracy calls the

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<sup>12</sup> David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 113-115.

<sup>13</sup> Tracy 248-259



"Johannine" dimension of a Christian classic, based on the proclamation in the Gospel of John that "the word was made flesh and dwelt among us." (*John* 1:14)<sup>14</sup>. A Christian classic gives fresh access to what these faith-statements mean. It is not propositional but experiential.

Jones's writing as a whole, and especially *The Anathemata*, engages many of the features of the "Christian Classic" in Tracy's formulation. It at once reflects on the experience of encountering Christ in the Mass and engages the tradition's narrative, in which the three thematic threads of incarnation-crucifixion and resurrection are held together as part of the same proclamation. For Jones this happens in the celebration of Mass, and by extension in all human acts of *poesis* that prefigure and are analogous to that celebration -- *all anathemata* -- "things set up, lifted up, or in whatever manner made over to the gods" (*Ana* 29). The central gesture of offering in *The Anathemata* is elaborated in a different way in Jones's essay *Art and Sacrament*, where he writes of the Crucifixion and the Mass as examples of "artefacture" or "acts of Ars." Here Jones describes the "Victim," Christ, as doing something that can only be characterized as an "act of *ars*" and following de la Taille, suggests Calvary itself involves *poesis*, a "doing that is also a "making." The story of redemption itself, for Jones, relies on an "act of Ars," as he writes in "Art and Sacrament, echoing the words of the Eucharistic liturgy":

But the records describe how the redeemer 'on the day before he suffered' involved the redeemed in an act of Ars. As it was the whole world that he

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<sup>14</sup> Tracy 250-54

was redeeming he involved all mankind, from before Swanscombe Man to after Atomic Man, in that act.<sup>15</sup>

The faithful human response to this divine act of Ars is to participate intentionally in the process of sign-making that has been entered and sanctified by the divine action.

The distinctiveness of Jones's invitation to view the the Last Supper and the Passion through the lens of artefacture becomes clearer if we compare his rendering of the Crucifixion in the "Sherthursdaye and Venus Day" section of *The Anathemata* with W.H. Auden's reflection on the same theme in his sequence of poems on the Passion *Horae Canonicae*, published five years after *The Anathemata* and perhaps partly inspired by Jones's work.

In a review of the American edition in 1963, W.H. Auden famously commends *The Anathemata* as a critically important modernist long poem. In this review Auden responds to *The Anathemata* both as a poet and as a modern Christian believer who is steeped in the skepticism of his time. He particularly appreciates the richness of allusiveness and texture in Jones's poem and the way that so many thematic threads are drawn together into a work whose form belongs to the modernist era but whose effect is "epic." It seems likely that it was in part the reading of *The Anathemata*, which was published in 1951, that inspired Auden to turn to the central story and symbol of the Crucifixion between 1949 and 1955.<sup>16</sup> We see in his sequence of poems *Horae*

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<sup>15</sup> *Epoch and Artist*, 168-9.

<sup>16</sup> This is speculation on my part, but the dates do suggest an overlap between Auden's work on these poems and his reading of *The Anathemata*. For a thorough account of Auden's process in writing the poems in *Horae Canonicae*, see Edward Mendelson, *Later Auden* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1999), 332-359.

*Canonicae* another use of Christian liturgy as a formal inspiration: Auden chooses the canonical, monastic "hours" of prayers as the framework for a series of poems set on a Friday when a victim is being put to death, amid the banality and indifference of modern urban culture. For Auden, the story of the Crucifixion as the testimony to divine mercy remains mysterious and inaccessible to the ego-bound, solipsistic mind of modern humanity; we are too limited by our own indifference to suffering and our complicity in the violence and scapegoating that sustains our orderly political systems, and so the contemplation of the central Christian mystery becomes a reflection on the consequences of human sin, including our callousness and indifference, which is responsible for the Victim's suffering. For Auden, steeped in the work of theologians like Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr, there is no human practice or action that can respond to the victim's self-sacrifice, but only as experience of encounter, the existentialist "leap of faith" that Auden learned from Kierkegaard and embraced in his own identification with Christian faith.<sup>17</sup>

By the time he was reading *The Anathemata* and writing *Horae Canonicae*, Auden was also living in Italy and developing an interest in Catholic sacramental practice. Indeed, David Jones, who met Auden several times during this period, bemoaned Auden's tendency to "hold forth" rather than really participating in a conversation, and also hoped that he wouldn't want to talk so much about "Catholicism" again.<sup>18</sup> The two men were clearly very different in poetic temperament and style as well as in religious orientation -- Auden's a modernist Protestant theology, and Jones's a

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<sup>17</sup> See Jan Curtis, "W.H. Auden's Theology of History in *Horae Canonicae*: 'Prime,' 'Terce,' and 'Sext.'" *Literature and Theology* 11:1 (March 1997), pp. 46-66.

<sup>18</sup> Hague, *Dai Greatcoat*, 167.

profoundly Catholic sensibility speaking into his contemporary "cultural situation."

Jones seems to have read enough of Auden to recognize some "influence" from his own poetry on Auden, but there is no sense of affinity or influence on him from Auden.

Auden, on the other hand, is fulsome in his appreciation of Jones's work, and particularly of *The Anathemata*, which he praises in 1970 as "the greatest long poem written in English in this century."<sup>19</sup>

Auden is interested in the human political and moral implications of the Crucifixion event, especially the complicity and indifference of most people alive at the time of the event. This theme of a great and tragic event happening among people who are not paying attention is sounded in Auden's well-known poem "Musee des beaux Arts."<sup>20</sup> Significantly, for Auden, the Crucifixion and our response to it take place in the historical world, which is both fallen and redeemable. In his essay on poetics and theology, "The Virgin and the Dynamo," he offers these two complementary propositions. First, "the historical world is a fallen world, i.e. while it is good that it exists, the way in which it exists is evil, being full of unfreedom and disorder. But also, "The historical world is a redeemable world. The unfreedom and disorder of the past can be reconciled in the future." This final poem is grounded in the fallen historical world, but looks forward to a future which is not yet, which relies on the work of an undeserved and mysterious grace.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> W.H. Auden, *A Certain World* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), 373

<sup>20</sup> *Collected Poems* (New York: Vintage, 1976, 1991), 179.

<sup>21</sup> *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 69-70. See also Curtis, p. 63.

The voice in Auden's poem is the voice of what another poem calls "the self-observed observing Mind"<sup>22</sup> -- the highly self-conscious modern, who is skeptical and bewildered in the face of mystery, and can only name the human dimension of what it observes, both inwardly and outwardly. In particular, he is focused on the rupture of relationship between the victim on the Cross and the indifferent bystanders, the saving Victim and the representatives of fallen Adam. The supreme freedom of the Victim, held apart from human desire, is captured in the poem's epigraph, "Immolatus Viceret" -- "the sacrificed one triumphs" from Thomas Aquinas's hymn to the cross, the *Pange Lingua* (a poem that is also quoted in Jones's presentation of the Crucifixion).<sup>23</sup> The distance between ordinary humanity and the crucified Savior is captured in "Terce," the second poem in Auden's sequence:

At this hour we all might be anyone:  
It is only our victim who is without a wish,  
Who knows already (that is what  
We can never forgive. If he knows the answers,  
Then why are we here, why is there even dust?)  
Knows already that, in fact, our prayers are heard,  
That not one of us will slip up,  
That the machinery of our world will function  
Without a hitch, that today, for once,  
There will be no squabbling on Mount Olympus,

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<sup>22</sup> See "Friday's Child," *Collected Poems*, 675.

<sup>23</sup> See also Mendelson's discussion of this epigraph *Later Auden*, p. 335ff, though Mendelson mistakenly attributes the quote to Venantius Fortunatus.

No Chthonian mutters of unrest,  
 But no other miracle, knows that by sundown  
 We shall have had a good Friday. (629)

"A good Friday" here stresses the banality and egocentrism of the modern moral sensibility rather than the paradox or mystery of the day's name, and the poem ruefully embraces "the machinery of our world" rather than any supernatural order that might have been suggested by "squabbling on Mt. Olympus" or "Chthonian mutterings." In the event of the Crucifixion, Auden's poem sees the surprising willingness of decent people to accept violence committed on their behalf. The silence following the death of the Victim is a silence, not of prayer or of contemplation, but of *ennui*. So the next poem in the series, *Nones*, complains "we are not prepared/For silence so sudden and so soon; . . . What shall we do till nightfall?" (634)

Despite this resistance to mystery, the sequence as a whole ends with an imaginative leap to an image of supernatural redemption that may even echo the "Axile Tree" at the end of *The Anathemata*, though to somewhat different purpose. Here the divine dance of creation -- the *perichoresis* that the Greek Fathers attributed to the persons of the Trinity in relationship<sup>24</sup>-- becomes the image of an unknowable grace that seems to have no connection to human action but which ultimately, quietly redeems what is inexorably fallen. The voice in the poem speaks with the cosmopolitan's ironic humor, wondering about the possibility of any kind of salvation to a world so clearly fallen. In an ironic echo of the *dies irae* prayer from the Requiem mass, Auden's

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<sup>24</sup> See Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Incarnation: Collected Essays in Christology*. Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp.11-20.

sequence concludes by gesturing toward a future apocalyptic redemption, inconceivable to our fallen humanity, but enacted through divine mercy, and symbolized by the messianic banquet as "picnic" with a dance around the "abiding tree" of the Cross:

Can poets (can men in television)  
Be saved? It is not easy  
To believe in unknowable justice  
Or pray in the name of a love  
Whose name one's forgotten: *libera*  
*Me, libera* (dear C)  
And all poor s-o-b's who never  
Do anything properly, spare  
Us in the youngest day when all are  
Shaken awake, facts are facts,  
(And I shall know exactly what happened  
Today between noon and three)  
That we, too, may come to the picnic  
With nothing to hide, join the dance  
As it moves in perichoresis,  
Turns about the abiding tree. (641)

Even with the Latin liturgical allusions, Auden's poetic style here is typically classical, ironic and transparent. The speaker cultivates the ironist's transparency of voice -- only at the end, in the experience of the dance and the grace it brings does an "I"

appear ("and I shall know exactly what happened between twelve and three") As a poem about the Passion, *Horae Canonicae* stresses the moral dimension of the story, indicting human indifference to suffering and violence, and gesturing toward the grace that might yet save us, though we know it only through faith.

In contrast, the rendering of the Crucifixion at the end of *The Anathemata* presents, not modern, inward looking soul-searching in the face of "unfreedom and disorder," but an incarnational drawing in of as much meaning as possible, "inside time and late in time" (*Ana 53*) of a world that has already been redeemed through the action of the Incarnate Logos. One could say that Auden is a poet of *Prudentia*, the moral sensibility of humanity, while Jones is the poet of *Ars*. Jones contrasts these two faculties in the preface to *The Anathemata*, when he argues, following Maritain and others, that the artist's task is not to make moral judgments but to do what needs to be done to make the work of art.<sup>25</sup> In the poem as a whole, the *act* of sign-making at the altar, connected to Christ's self-offering on the Cross, bears witness to a redemption in which humanity is invited to participate, through the ongoing practice of sign-making that is carried forward at every celebration of Mass. Accordingly, Jones writes in the preface to the poem, "Something has to be made by us before it can become his sign who made us. No artefacture no Christian religion." The moment of the Crucifixion as he portrays it belongs to history and also to its own time, and most important, the poem presents the contemplation of the event in the poem as itself an "act of Ars": The Crucifixion happens, as the poem says, "Here":

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<sup>25</sup> *Epoch and Artist*, pp. 143-151.

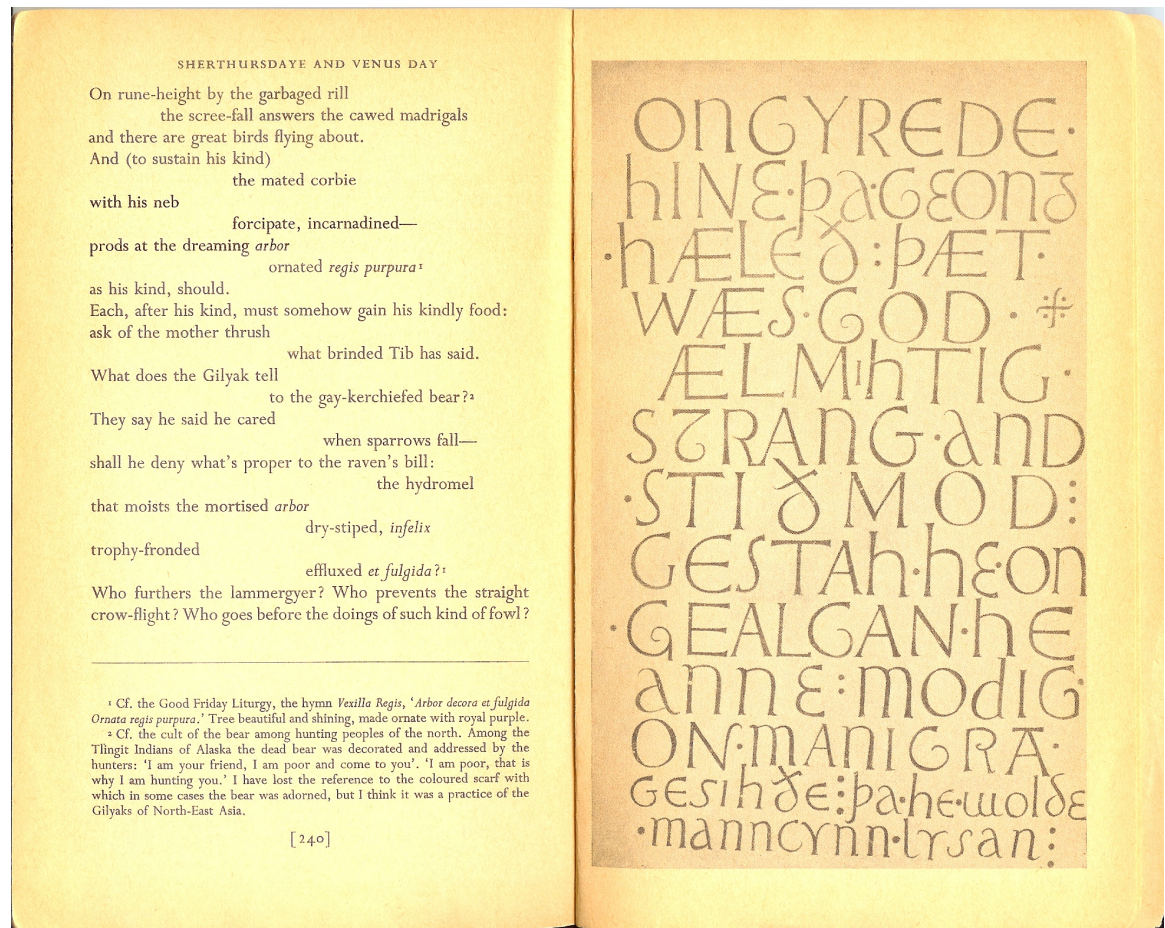


Here where?  
 Here when?  
 Here at the spoil-dump  
 at a war's term  
 where the high-flyer stalls  
 after his concentric  
 and exact reconnaissance.

The note to this passage, typical of Jones, fleshes out the meaning of the event by layers of allusion -- the "high-flyer" evokes the name of the Egyptian God Horus, who in turn evokes the eagles that Jones observed, circling and grabbing their prey, in Egypt. The spoil-dump is Golgotha, and for a moment we are vividly in that middle Eastern setting of the Crucifixion. But though the note doesn't say it the military language of "concentric and exact reconnaissance" also inevitably evokes the buzz bombs that were flying over London during the writing of *The Anathemata*. So the Crucifixion as Jones is describing it is at once the historic event occurring "under Pontius Pilate," and an event having universal meaning that has been owned and interpreted through the ages of Western history, including his own historical moment, "here."

This climactic account of the Crucifixion, coming just a few pages from the end of *The Anathemata*, associates the crucified Christ with the image of birds pecking at the bleeding cross from the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Dream of the Rood*. To this is added an echo of Fortunatus's hymn the *Vexilla Regis*, which like the Anglo-Saxon poem makes explicit the claim that the One on the Cross IS God, the Logos, the Creator. So in Jones's

formulation the vultures and other birds that are pecking at the Cross are His creatures -- and He is their food. Thus the Cross encompasses both Passion and Eucharist in this complex and visibly crafted sequence of poetic images.



Significantly, *The Dream of the Rood* comes up in that same letter to Hague in which Jones recounts his first experience of the Mass. Rejecting vehemently Owen's implicit portrayal of soldiers as Christ-figures, which his correspondent seems to approve, Jones wonders about the Protestant theological framework that may have given rise to this view in Owen. He speculates that some of this theology may be reflected in

the images of suffering and violence that form the heart of *The Dream of the Rood*. So he speculates:

. . . it may well be, that Owen (*lux perpetua luceat ei*) was so sincerely a believer in that particular tradition of "Christ crucified" that has been from the beginnings as far as Wales is concerned in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, its height in the middle or latter part of the nineteenth century, *the* religion of Protestant Wales, for though Owen was born and nourished in the English Low Church tradition of the English shires bordering the Welsh lands and I don't think he ever spoke of his Welsh ancestry in his poetry, but he may well have inherited much of the same religion of Bryn Calfaria, whereby, if he did, he might well however unconsciously, quite naturally, as an infantry officer see in all the mutilation and death an image of the immolated *geong haeled thaet waes God Almihtig* of the A[nglo]-S[axon] poem *Dream of the Rood*.

The 'religion of *Bryn Calfaria*' refers to the Calvinist heritage of Protestant Wales and in large measure of the English Low Church tradition, which emphasizes the world's sinfulness and sees the victim on the Cross as primarily a victim of humanity's fallenness, suffering the worst that humanity can do in order to atone for a sinful world. The more modern theological tradition that Auden draws on, especially the theology of Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr, descends from this strain in Reformed theology with its preoccupation with human depravity and the mystery of evil that leads humanity to seek repentance and redemption. In this strain of Christianity, the contemplation of the Cross focuses on human fallenness and the atoning suffering of the Victim. Jones's view

is more in tune with a Catholic sensibility that stresses the ongoing sanctification of the world through the sacramental practices of the Church, and so his poem celebrates the Cross as a divine act of self-offering which has already transformed and redeemed human history, in ways that continue to invite a human response.

This is where we see Jones's unique insights into art and sacrament reflected in the form of *The Anathemata*. Right opposite the text's evocation of the Crucifixion "on rune-height by the garbaged rill" (*Ana* 240) we encounter an inscription by Jones of a passage from *The Dream of the Rood* that refers to the hero who was God almighty choosing to climb onto the tree in order to redeem humankind. This part of the text emphasizes the divine self-offering, the hero willingly going to the Cross, for the sake of humankind.<sup>26</sup> Jones chooses to set this text apart as an inscription and in so doing he is performing his own sacramental "act of Ars." The inscription points to itself as a "shape in words," a made thing bearing the mark of its human maker. In the context of *The Anathemata* as a whole, and coming at this climactic moment in the poem, this inscription proclaims itself as the poet's *fecit* mark: here is a human sign-maker adding his own act of sign-making to the retelling of this story. In this way, through an "act of Ars" he is affirming his own human connection to the divine act of redemption that the poem celebrates. This page of the poem presents itself as a "made thing" -- the work of the human artist who is pulling these things together in order to re-present the central mystery of redemption that is carried out on the Cross. It is relating the *event* of the Passion but also showing, as it were, "brush strokes" in this art work, marking it as a

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<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of *The Dream of the Rood* and the Christian imagination that chimes with Jones's use of the text, see Malcolm Guite, *Faith, Art and Poetry: Theology and the Poetic Imagination* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 35-51.

made thing. This inscription is in a sense the poet's *fecit* mark on this offering of *anathemata*. So in Jones the poet and his readers are not detached, complicit observers of a violent event (as in Auden) but participants in a redemptive mystery, which involves recognizable suffering, but also is part of a greater whole that makes sense, makes meaning. Their participation constitutes an acceptance of the divine self-offering made on their behalf.

A few pages later the poem comes to its conclusion, drawing together all the threads of the poem in the celebration of Mass with which we began, now recognized as continuous in some way with the poet's action in this poem's assembly of *anathemata*. What Jones is doing in a passage like the one we've been looking at is *packing* the signs with meaning -- so that in the overflow of meaning the reader may have an experience of the mystery -- an experience that is also the poet's in the act of making that creates this poem.

Auden's poem speaks out of the modern moralist's preoccupation with sinfulness and disorder in human affairs, looking ahead to a future redemption when we shall "move in perichoresis about the abiding tree." Jones's poem ends with a celebration of human participation in what "He does" on the Cross and at the Table. The acts of Ars which celebrate and carry forward the mystery of redemption are done on "in many places" and many ways "other." In this sense, artifice itself is, for Jones, a way of celebrating the mysteries of Incarnation, Passion and ongoing redemption, connecting human artists to the ultimate "act of Ars" of Christ who "placed Himself in the order of signs."