

The book cover features a cream-colored background with three horizontal blue bands. The top band is at the top, the middle band is between the title and subtitle, and the bottom band is at the bottom. The title 'Introducing DAVID JONES' is printed in a large, bold, black serif font, with 'Introducing' on the first line, 'DAVID' on the second line, and 'JONES' on the third line. The subtitle 'a selection of his writings' is in a smaller, bold, black sans-serif font, followed by 'edited by' in the same font. Below this, the editor's name 'JOHN MATTHIAS' is in a bold, black serif font, followed by 'with a preface by' in a smaller, bold, black sans-serif font, and finally the preface author's name 'STEPHEN SPENDER' in a bold, black serif font.

Introducing DAVID JONES

**a selection of his writings
edited by**

**JOHN MATTHIAS
with a preface by
STEPHEN SPENDER**

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INTRODUCING DAVID JONES
A Selection of his Writings

Edited by John Matthias
With a Preface by Stephen Spender



Some would say that David Jones, poet and essayist, painter and draughtsman, needs no introduction five years after his death. His reputation has continued to grow during that time, but there are still many who find his major writings difficult to approach on account of their allusive and highly individual style. It is for these people, and also for students who are taking their first steps towards an understanding of contemporary literature, that this introductory volume has been prepared.

In addition to extracts from *In Parenthesis* and *The Anathemata*, showing David Jones' unique vision of war, there is material here from his later poems. John Matthias, Professor of English at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, who is himself a poet, has edited the book and provides an illuminating introduction. In a moving preface Stephen Spender reveals what David Jones means to him personally.

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ISBN 0 571 11525 X

INTRODUCING DAVID JONES

works by David Jones

IN PARENTHESIS

THE ANATHEMATA

THE SLEEPING LORD AND OTHER FRAGMENTS

EPOCH AND ARTIST

THE DYING GAUL

Introducing DAVID JONES

a selection of his writings

edited by John Matthias

*with a preface by
Stephen Spender*

FABER AND FABER
London • Boston

*First published in 1980
by Faber and Faber Limited
3 Queen Square London WC1N 3AU
Printed in Great Britain by
Ebenezer Baylis & Son Limited
The Trinity Press, Worcester and London
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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Jones, David, b. 1895
Introducing David Jones
I. Title II. Matthias, John
821'.9'12 PR6019.053
ISBN 0-571-11526-8
ISBN 0-571-11525-X Pbk

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NOTE: Extracts from David Jones' books are in every case taken from the latest printing.

The publishers are grateful to the Trustees of the Estate of David Jones for permission to publish this selection of David Jones' writings. Thanks are also due to the editors of *Poetry* for permission to reprint a portion of the Introduction which first appeared in that magazine; and to David Blamires and the David Jones Society, whose lists of corrigenda for *In Parenthesis* and *The Anathemata* were consulted in preparing these extracts for publication.

PREFACE

by Stephen Spender

I first met David Jones in the mid-1930s when he was one of a group of friends—nearly all of them Catholics—who would meet for lunch in the rooms of Tom Burns. He was small, boyish-looking, slight, nervous, easily laughing, gaily argumentative. He had the air of someone who had come to learn, and was never in the least arrogant or overbearing. He was greatly attached to Father D'Arcy who was always at these gatherings.

From his friends I learned that he suffered from terrible migraines and led for the most part a secluded life. I did not as yet know of his writings but after I had seen some of his water-colours I thought of him staying in a lodging house on the south coast in a room which had a bay window overlooking the sea. I imagined him sitting at a table with a bowl of flowers on it, and also a large sheet of paper on which he drew in pen or pencil and water-colour the sea with its boats and the pale green hills beyond, or perhaps a harbour.

He gave the impression of Blakean innocence and his water-colours, more than his poems perhaps, recalled the lines:

And I plucked a hollow reed
And I made a rural pen,
And I stained the water clear
And I wrote my happy songs.

After this superficial impression followed the far deeper one that David Jones' real inner life was that of a poet who had been an infantryman in the trenches during the First World War.

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Nearly all survivors who were at the Western Front for any length of time (I think particularly of poets—Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden, Ivor Gurney) were, I should say, men apart, in some way dedicated by that tragedy, afflicted by an inner wound from which they never wholly recovered (perhaps this is the true cause of the wound of the Fisher King in *The Waste Land*). In the lives of these former soldiers this wound was sacred, tragic and singing.

Later, reading *In Parenthesis*, I felt that David Jones belonged to a company of men whom, through this poem, he had mythologized and made holy. His letters show that he thought constantly about the war, even up to the last week of his life. The war meant to him the Western Front and the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in which he was a private. In his poetry (or prose poetry) the men of his regiment, their words, deeds and accoutrements become absorbed into the 'signs' of the Celtic culture, as also into the patterns of living of soldiers in Roman times and in Shakespeare's historical plays.

In his essays David Jones is greatly preoccupied with the idea that the past culture of local places is in the process of being irremediably destroyed by the irreversible 'progress' of modern world civilization. This, of course, is a view that has been put forward by many writers, from Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold and others in the last century to T. S. Eliot in this, but it has a special poignancy in the writing of David Jones, because whereas Arnold, Eliot and the other great critics seem to regard the destruction of the culture as a matter primarily of concern for the poet, Jones regards it as the fate of ordinary men who were, in the ancient local culture, all makers. Viewed in this light one can see that he also regards his Welsh fusiliers of *In Parenthesis* as makers, exalted by their courage, suffering, laughter and comradeship into the company of the people of the past culture. If the fate of the soldiers on the Western Front becomes a metaphor for the destruction of the Roman, Celtic and Shakespearean-historical culture, that culture also becomes a metaphor for the modern soldiers. David Jones is not just a

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highly conscious 'rememberer' and 'shower-forth' of the past, dragging it up precariously into the garish and ruinous light of the present, and giving the reader the feeling that he is one of the last for whom such a salvage operation is possible—all traces of the past culture being doomed to obliteration on the morrow: he is one of those, like Eliot and Joyce, his literary heroes, who attained in his work a fusion of his vision of the past with his vision of the particular anguish of the twentieth century.

As a man, and perhaps as a writer, he does not seem to fall into the category of literary man, man of letters, poet even. My wife and I once had occasion to take Igor Stravinsky to see him in the room where he lived towards the end of his life in a convent at Harrow. When we left, Stravinsky remarked that it had seemed to him like visiting a holy man in his cell. David Jones would sometimes fish out from under his bed a very old gramophone of the kind that winds up with a handle, and play on it a worn record of plain-song Gregorian chant, almost inaudible to us through the rasp of the steel needle, while with hands clasped across his knees and an expression of bliss on his face, he swayed to and fro to the imagined music.

He was doubtless an artist who entered into, almost obsessively, the suffering of a century which has produced the most terrible wars in history, yet the memory of him that remains in my mind is of a man loving and happy.

INTRODUCTION

by John Matthias

There is a house in Cambridge called Kettle's Yard where, if you should want to look at several representative examples of David Jones' visual art, you can ring a bell and meet a Cambridge undergraduate who will show you, along with pieces by Gaudier-Brzeska, Ben Nicholson, Henry Moore and others, H. S. Ede's collection of Jones' woodcuts, drawings and water-colours, including the extraordinary *Vexilla Regis* of 1948 and the *Flowers* of 1950. The house is a visual, tactile equivalent for David Jones' accumulating written works. It is not exactly a gallery (are David Jones' writings exactly 'poems'?) but, as Mr Ede says in his introduction to the handlist of paintings, sculptures and drawings, 'a continuing way of life from these last fifty years, in which stray objects, stones, glass, pictures, sculpture, in light and in space, have been used to make manifest the underlying stability which more and more we need to recognize if we are not to be swamped by all that is so rapidly opening up before us'. These stones, pictures, sculptures and objects which he has assembled in his house are Ede's *anathemata*. He felt strongly, he says, a need 'to give to others these things which have been given to me; and to give in such a way that by placing and by a pervading atmosphere one thing will enhance another, making perhaps a coherent whole'. He has given his house and his collection to the university and now lives in a small cottage in Scotland. The handlist, set in Monotype Perpetua, a typeface designed by Eric Gill, has for a cover David Jones' inscription *Qui Per Incarnati*. . . . In this house and in this context, if anywhere, the author of *In*

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Parenthesis, *The Anathemata* and *The Sleeping Lord* does not appear to be, as the *Guardian*'s poetry critic had it a few years back, 'an eccentric figure on the periphery of English poetry'.

Which is why I went there to think about what I should say about this book. The temptation in writing these notes for new readers of David Jones, a temptation to which I think I ought to succumb, is to be wholly partisan, to acclaim—simply to point and praise. And why not, given my admiration for the work? Only because that kind of thing always has its strident side, and because stridency is pretty alien to David Jones' sensibility. As if one should stand outside Kettle's Yard and shout to passers-by: go inside and look at the *Vexilla Regis*! But what if no one does? And only because the artist may be considered an eccentric figure on the periphery of English painting? One of the great lessons we can derive from David Jones' career will come from the thought of his nearly infinite patience.

All of the pieces in this selection have been known to David Jones' admirers at least since the 1967 special issue of *Agenda* magazine in which most of the poems from what would become *The Sleeping Lord* appeared, along with reproductions of his visual work and essays by several hands on both his earlier books and what was then called his 'work in progress'. *In Parenthesis*, of course, has been in print since 1937, and *The Anathemata* since 1952. 'The Tribune's Visitation' first appeared in 1958, 'The Tutelar of the Place' in 1961, and 'The Hunt' in 1965. The poems, having been known for some time at least to a loyal band of readers, have occasioned useful commentaries. David Blamires' *David Jones: Artist and Writer* (Manchester, 1971; Toronto, 1972) is a fine book-length introduction both to the writings and the visual work, while excellent shorter studies are available in Kathleen Raine's *David Jones and the Actually Loved and Known* (Ipswich, 1978), Jeremy Hooker's *David Jones: An Exploratory Study* (London, 1975), and René Hague's *David Jones* (Cardiff, 1975) in the Writers of Wales series. *Poetry Wales* published a special David Jones number in 1972, *Agenda* produced a second Jones issue to coincide with the publication of

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The Sleeping Lord in 1974, and Roland Mathias edited papers delivered at the David Jones Weekend School at Aberystwyth in 1975 under the title *David Jones: Eight Essays on His Work as Writer and Artist* (Llandysul, Dyfed, 1976). More specialized are René Hague's invaluable *A Commentary on The Anathemata of David Jones* (Wellingborough, Northants, and Toronto, 1977), the recently published introductory guide to *The Anathemata* and *The Sleeping Lord* by Henry Summerfield (Victoria, B.C., 1979), and Thomas Dillworth's *The Liturgical Parenthesis of David Jones* (Ipswich, 1979).

I mention these publications for two reasons. I want to call attention to work done by the best critics of David Jones and at the same time acknowledge the considerable difficulty of many of Jones' finest texts and suggest where to go to find help. A good deal of help is provided in Jones' own notes and glosses, and still more in his collections of essays brought together under the titles *Epoch and Artist* and *The Dying Gaul*. The notes and essays, in fact, are an organic part of the corpus of his work. It is all one: *In Parenthesis*, *The Anathemata*, the *Vexilla Regis*, the late water-colour drawing *Trystan Ac Eyllt*, *Epoch and Artist*, *The Sleeping Lord*, the note on the Catuvellaunian King Cunobelinos and the note on the pronunciation of the Welsh word *gwaundir*—all the poems and essays, all the drawings, etchings, water-colours, inscriptions and notes—'part of a continuing way of life from these last fifty years'.

How does this continuing way of life touch ours? 'As far as I can see,' Jones writes in a letter to René Hague, '“man-the-artist” and “man-the-priest” become increasingly, in a sense, Ishmaels, or men of a kind of diaspora, within our technological set-up.' Living in what Jones calls our 'megapolitan twilight', it is not everyone who can say with Stuart Piggott, the archaeologist, that Jones' emotive referents are his own—'from Mesolithic to Mabinogion'. Much of our response to Jones, in fact, is conditioned by an encounter in his work with sheer *otherness*, things otherwise opaque made numinous by the craft of the maker. There is something in the quality of his wonderful inscriptions—two of which are included here—that extends to

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many of his texts. The later work in particular is not only richly allusive, but is studded with words like *trefydd* and *pentan*, *palasau* and *arglwyddi*, along with the more familiar Latin and Anglo-Saxon. In general, Jones would stress (he does so in his Preface to *The Anathemata*) the impossibility of achieving in English an identity of content and evocation for such words, before going on (as he does in a headnote to *The Sleeping Lord*) to consider their musical function, or a desire for a rich and dense texture, or a craftsman's determination to use a word as a *thing*, as an object to be moved here or there, to be seen in relationship to this or that. But his willingness so often to think out his music in terms of the nominative, of the word-as-a-noun, produces a texture which is wonderfully knitted with the stuff of otherness: we want to run our finger over the page.

But, along with materials deriving from the 'unshared backgrounds' which Jones painstakingly opens up for us in his essays and notes—notes which are often themselves short essays and which he rightly insists are *not* pedantic, but 'only mere politeness'—are those deriving from certain backgrounds which he can still assume are shared by many readers, North American as well as British, and which, as the strange therapy of his language works against our amnesia, we begin to remember. In 'The Wall', one of the Roman poems from *The Sleeping Lord* not included here, there occurs this embroidery of sound:

Did the empyreal fires
hallow the chosen womb
to tabernacle founders of
emporia?
Were the august conjoinings
was the troia'd wandering
achieved
did the sallow ducts of Luperca
nourish the lily white boys
was Electra chose
from the seven stars in the sky