

When nothing else avails, one returns to the old methods of chiromancy, the art of reading the future from a hand. It seems to me that these four lives are lines on the mysterious hand of Russia. They can tell us not only four life stories, but also much more of the past and the future of the country.

H. S. EDE

DAVID JONES

DAVID JONES is probably the best water-colourist in Britain today and certainly the best engraver. He is of Welsh blood and a most imaginative artist. His touch with reality, as much as any living artist I know goes back to that absolute which is the unchanging reality underlying the changing actuality of the world which at clear moments our quickest apprehensions see.

For a long time his pictures may seem to the observer muddled, childish and often tortured but as they are lived with they will, I think, surprise that same observer by their real comprehension of a living world. He paints a picture entitled 'Cows' and at first there are no cows—it is a surface of pale colours, a mist, unfocussed. Then as a proper focus is obtained the picture springs into life—his cows become tremendously cows, in innumerable ways the artist has caught the essential cow movement; each one says 'cow' as it were. The movement of the space between them has a strange aliveness too. His field is no ordinary field, and yet it is an ordinary field, the usual which holds always the unusual. It is a field at all times and in all times; a place of animals, a place subject to night and day, to dew on the grass and to bird-song. Monet painted his haystack a dozen times, each time for a different light; Jones paints all the lights in the same picture. The cubists have a variable perspective point, Jones has a variable time point. Such things are details; what is of real importance is that the artist is aware of and sensible to the things represented in his pictures. I remember an anecdote in connection with his painting of trees which illustrates this. He was staying at Rock Hall in Northumberland and had gone to his room to paint the trees of the park, seen from his window. They looked like

cabbages—a great green mass of endless foliage. How *could* anyone paint them. Then almost in a rage he cried ‘but they are trees—trees—trees—they *must* make a picture’, and in an agony of realization, of reaching to the actual and thrilling tree-life, he found an expression in paint. This wrestling to achieve expression is, of course, not unusual since every work of art is the victory out of struggle. I am reminded of El Greco and I sometimes think that David Jones, in his very British way, has some affinity with El Greco. Actually at the age of 24 he was profoundly moved by Greco’s ‘Agony’ which was at that time acquired by the National Gallery in London.

Many years ago I asked Jones for details of his life and in this article I quote much of what he wrote to me at that time and at later dates. He was born on November 1st, 1895, at Brockley, in Kent—his father being James Jones, by profession in the printing trade, son of John Jones, master plasterer, of farming stock from Ysceifiog, in Flintshire. His mother, Alice Ann Bradshaw was daughter to Ebenezer Bradshaw, mast and block maker of Rotherhithe in Surrey, of an English family of Thames-side ship-builders and of Italian extraction on her mother’s side.

In his childhood he was backward at any kind of lesson and was not strong physically; he had no enthusiasm other than drawing. He received from his parents every possible encouragement within their power to foster this inclination. One of his earliest recollections is of looking at three crayon drawings of his mother’s, one of Tintern Abbey, another of a donkey’s head, and the third, a Gladiator with curly hair. Among the childhood things he remembers is his father singing a Welsh song; and through his father he has always cherished a sense of belonging to the Welsh people. Also his father would read aloud out of the Pilgrim’s Progress on Sunday evenings, which left a lasting impression.

The first drawing he can remember making was of a dancing bear in the street at Brockley. At the age of 8 he exhibited at the Royal Drawing Society; work confined to animals; lions, tigers, wolves, bears, cats, deer; mostly in conflict. He wrote that ‘only the very earliest of these show any sensitivity, or have any interest whatever’. Then under the influence of boy’s magazines he did drawings of imaginary mediæval Welshmen on hill sides with wolf hounds; of Russians surrounded by wolves in

snowstorms, but he considered that the vitality of his drawings, done at the age of seven to eight, rapidly became vitiated under the influence of these magazine illustrations, of old Royal Academy catalogues and the general dead-weight of outside opinion, until it was quite destroyed by this pressure as he reached the age of eleven. He shows, however, in these drawings, an interesting power of observation.

At fourteen he became a student at the Camberwell School of Art, where A. S. Hartrick and Reginald Savage were masters. To Mr. Hartrick in particular he feels himself indebted for 'counteracting the baleful vulgarian influences of the magazines, etc., and the current conventions of the schools—in short, for reviving and fanning to enthusiasm the latent sense of drawing for its own sake, manifest earlier, and for an introduction to certain European painters.' From Mr. Reginald Savage he derived a civilizing influence through coming to know the great English illustrators of the nineteenth century: Pinwell, Sandys, Beardsley, etc. and the work of the Pre-Raphaelites. This had the result, however, of making him ambitious to illustrate historical subjects, preferably from Welsh history and legend; alternatively, to become an animal painter. He remained completely muddleheaded, he says, as to the function of the Arts in general.

On 2nd January 1915, he enlisted in the Royal Welch Fusiliers and served as a private soldier with them on the Western Front from December 1915 to March 1918. He was demobilised at the end of 1918, aged 23. The experience of all this period began to assert itself in 1930 and has been always a potent influence.

In 1919 he obtained a government grant to attend the Westminster School of Art under Mr. Walter Bayes, and it was with great keenness that he thought of starting to paint again, with, as he supposed an open mind. He became very interested in the ideas and work of the various English artists associated with the movements theorized in Paris, and began to respond to and be influenced by, these ideas. He became at this time excited by Blake, and the English water-colourists, and it was now that he first came to know the work of El Greco.

Mr. Walter Bayes, was, in his own way, with his insistence on the workman's attitude to painting and on the science of the thing, of further help.

In 1921 he was received into the Roman Church.

He had views about the futility of all art school training, and in 1922 he decided to leave the Westminster School and work with Mr. Eric Gill in Sussex. Here he attempted to learn the trade of carpentry, and at the same time learned the use of the engraver's tools. He proved no use at carpentry, but gradually became an efficient engraver. Occasionally he did a small water-colour drawing.

His work at this time was stylized, conventionalized and heavily influenced by theory, and imitative of primitive Christian art. Nevertheless, the discipline of engraving, of doing jobs, however badly, the sharpening of tools and the atmosphere of workshops rather than studio; and above all the clarifying ideas of Mr. Gill, were of great and permanent value to him. In referring to this period he wrote: 'The *unity* of all *made* things became clear. A picture, no less than a candelabra, or a hay-wain must be a "thing", with its own life and way of living, dependent on its own due proportion, proportion due to its own being . . . From the doctrinal definition of the substantial Presence in the sacramental Bread, I learnt by an analogy, which could not in any way be pressed, that a tree in a painting or a tree in an embroidery must not be a re-presenting *only* of a tree, of sap and thrusting wood; it must *really* be "a tree", under the species of paint or needlework or whatever . . . Certain ideas explicit or implicit in Catholic dogma had a clarifying and a considerably liberating effect. The Catholic Church's insistence on the reality of matter and spirit, that both are real and both good, acts obliquely, in the most surprising connections. It weds form and content, and demands that in each particular the general should shine out, and that without the particular there could be no general for us men, and most important of all is the Church's assertion, against the moralists, that God made and sustains everything *gratuitously*. It is, similarly, this gratuitous quality, its less or greater presence, that makes a painting good or bad . . . This "thing-ness" of a painting has been my sheet anchor in times of bewilderment, that is, at all times.'

He returned to London in 1924 and from 1925 to 1927 went again to live with Mr. Eric Gill and his family, who were then at Capel-y-ffin in the Ewyas in the wilder part of the Black Mountains, a few miles from Llanthony Abbey. It was here,

and on Caldy Island, where he spent some months with the Benedictines, that he first began to have some idea of what he personally would ask that a painting should be; and from this period there is a recognizable direction in his work.

Most of the year 1927 was spent engraving illustrations for the mediæval Chester Mystery Play dealing with the Deluge, a book published by the Golden Cockerel Press.

His awareness of the life of animals and of trees and of the subtleties of darkness and light is very clearly emphasized in the variety and detail of these engravings and it is of course only our own ability to respond to these things which will enable us to perceive what the artist himself had already seen and experienced; thus bringing to the event of seeing the picture some understanding of what went to make the picture. There is a continuity in the procession of these animals, so that although only very few are shown it is easy to imagine that, sooner or later, all the animals in the world will appear. This is because the artist, instead of thinking photographically of a particular moment, certain animals stepping into the Ark, thought of the whole process of gathering all animals into shelter. It is this comprehensive view which brings such startling liveliness to his water-colours. Perhaps I can come more closely to this by thinking of one in particular. 'Cat in an Armchair', reveals much of Jones' attitude to life, his awareness of surface confusion and his ability to canalize this confusion into essential Order. In this picture to begin with there is indoors and outdoors—the quiet peacefulness and fundamental shelter of a house looking out on to the world. The outside penetrates the inside, yet the inside remains an interior; the trees, seen through the window, springing so naturally from their natural soil could never by any stretch of imagination live on the near side by the window; from which it can be seen that for all the sameness pervading the picture there *is* a difference. Jones has no need to define it with the precision of an Academician, nor would he do so, for indoors and outdoors, town and country, are not so grossly different; an accident has changed their aspect. So recently trees grew where now a cat sleeps in the shelter of an armchair. Windows and walls are, to a certain extent an abstract idea, as the surrealists have endeavoured to manifest. I have lived in a room which edged a busy street full of movement and hurtling lorries.

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But for the glass of the window and the thin courses of the wall, I should all the time have watched that no vehicle side-tracked over the breakfast table. Yet, with this protection, which is in reality no protection, so proved by a bus going through the garden wall which continued that of my room, I sat in total peacefulness and complete unawareness of the outside world, as though I had been in the heart of the country. The window and the wall in Jones' picture retain that sense of substance being insubstantial. The Academician would have made a conflict between his glass and his no glass—his bricks and his air. He would have needed to hold tightly to the convention of these things in order to convey the shelter of indoors; but David Jones can fuse the two and still retain his shelter and also the less limited openness of the outside. His curtains, too, have their own particular nature; they blow in the wind, they are a barrier against the light, they can enclose the room from an outside gaze and shut off the outside from the inside; yet there is no change, for the outside is still close-touching the inside. They are made of thread, fine almost as air, which by the subtle process of the loom, gives them substance—but for all that substance the artist does not forget their essential delicacy. His consciousness of the actual life and nature of all that he draws is intense. The cat, for instance, is not of the same nature as the chair. The chair is of wood and has indeed some affinity with the trees outside, but the sap no longer thrusts itself upward; the wood has been cut to conform to a certain shape, it is quiescent. Not so the cat, for all his sleeping he is intensely alive, almost quivering in anticipation of alarm, his feet so forceful and so violent are suspended movement and vitality. Potential alertness is in every line of this cat which sleeps so peacefully until disturbed by our thought. But the chair remains impassive for all our reasoning. Surely *this* is drawing, but I have heard it said by the pundits that David Jones can't draw. They said it of a water-colour he did of Lourdes, and I remember once passing through Lourdes in a train, not knowing I was there, and at once I knew where I was because of the picture. The whole atmospheric proportions were the same, the tempo, if I might so call it, of river and buildings and mountains was the tempo of the picture, and yet there was everywhere a visual difference so different as to be almost unbelievable that it was the same place. Now that years have

passed since then, I can no longer, even visually, distinguish the Jones picture from the town of Lourdes. It fits it like a glove the hand.

During the years 1928-1932 Jones did many landscapes and seascapes in water-colour, some portraits and drawings of animals and some oils. In connection with his landscape painting he wrote: 'I always work from the window of a house if it is at all possible. I like looking out on to the world from a reasonably sheltered position. I can't paint in the wind, and I like the indoors outdoors, contained yet limitless feeling of windows and doors. A man should be in a house; a beast should be in a field and all that'.

There is a rare aliveness in his portraits which, were he to develop this direction, may be to the twentieth century what Gainsborough's are to the eighteenth. More than other portraits of today they hold the continuity of a life and vision of their own time. In his 'Human Being' drawn from himself seen in a mirror, though never intended as a self-portrait, there remains even in reproduction, the feeling of a personality; of someone sensitive to an outside world, material and spiritual, of someone with a strange force which comes, not out of the strength of his body, but from the strength of his intention; eyes which collect things inwardly, a body, still yet alert, and fingers which are sensitive instruments at his commanding.

In 1929 he did a series of engravings for the *Ancient Mariner*. A pictorial illustration which is at the same time a work of art in itself, is difficult; but when it illustrates so vital an expression as the *Ancient Mariner* or the *Morte D'Arthur*, this transposing of one medium into terms of another becomes rare indeed, for the engraver must have an effectual response to what the poet has written and in his illustration present it with new living fire. In this series Jones has achieved success. His pictures are no crude rendering of the story, not do they in any way encroach upon the story. They have a life of their own nature, but one which lies so closely in sympathy with the poem that it becomes a vibrant commentary.

'The Bride hath paced into the hall
Red as a rose is she'.

The old man in the corner detaining the wedding guests; the others—so festive with their feathered hats and frilled clothes.

It is a fantastic and lovely decoration which does not hide but amplifies this event, this almost daily event, of being a Bride. It is the Bride eternal, and I know of no wedding scene which conveys better the pageantry of this occasion.

Another of this series is the death of the Albatross—the falling of an overwhelming disaster, which parallels Melville's amazing description: 'A regal, feathery thing of unspotted whiteness . . . At intervals, it arched forth its vast archangel wings, as if to embrace some holy ark. Wondrous flutterings and throbbings shook it. Though bodily unharmed, it uttered cries, as some king's ghost in supernatural distress. Through its inexpressible strange eyes, methought I peeped to secrets not below the Heavens . . . the white thing was so white, its wings so wide and in those for ever exiled waters, I had lost the miserable warping memories of traditions and of towns.'

David Jones, in attempting to define some of the things necessary to a good artist, has spoken of 'a certain affection for the intimate creatureliness of things—a care for, and appreciation of the particular genius of places, men, trees, animals and yet withal a pervading sense of metamorphosis and mutability. That trees are men walking, that words "bind and loose material things".' He once wrote to me that Carroll's Alice books and the *Hunting of the Snark* have in some respects an affinity to his outlook, but which outlook, in his case, may possibly derive from his Welsh connections. The sense always of something other in each thing. He wrote: 'Interestingly enough, the English song commencing "There were three jovial Welshmen" seems to pay tribute to this. In any typical English hunting song, the huntsmen meet to hunt a fox, they hunt a fox and they kill a fox. But the three jovial Welshmen went to hunt a mortal creature, but at the "view" the thing hunted turns out to be a "ship a-sailing", which turns out to be the moon, which turns out to be made of cheese—I forget the sequence and the detail, but it is interesting as marking a quite definite difference of outlook'.

In all David Jones' work is this sense of change, of movement—life perpetual in its ever varied development. It finds kinship in Paul Claudel's 'Satin Slipper' for which he made a drawing. This was done just after the *Ancient Mariner* series and is

therefore greatly a continuation and consolidating of the ideas found in those engravings.

Paul Claudel says in his note to the Reader: 'Ideas from one end of the world to the other are catching fire like stubble'; and again, 'The trees all over the world are different, but it is the same wind a-blowing. I, the painter, have drawn the picture whose subject is everything.' That's it—to make a picture whose subject is everything; and Jones has always this in mind and in no way neglects local accuracy. I was very interested in a note he wrote me on the *Satin Slipper* drawing. 'The ship is a fairly accurate rendering of a ship of the period, even the steel half-moons that the sixteenth-century pirates used to fasten on the yards of their masts with which to cut the enemy's rigging and sails, are shown and they seemed to be interesting when related to the moon and eclipsed sun in the sky. The Scottish sailor lying dead over the gunwale indicates the whole business of the mercenary mix-up of the time (all the races on different sides on the high seas)—the little cannon on the left is reminiscent of a certain kind of light trench-mortar which used to be used in the European War (1914-18) and yet it is a correct sixteenth-century gun. Always there is an interweaving of periods and thoughts. The action of the picture is imagined in some wide sea in the southern hemisphere—where you feel that there is only sea and the sky full of night and day at the same time. I had rather a job to get the full sense of the inside of the ship, decks, etc., and the guns showing from the port-holes of the lower decks outside.'

In this drawing may be felt too, another force underlying his work, a force which comes through the Roman Catholic Church, about which he wrote '*I don't, of course, mean that any amount of true philosophical or metaphysical definition will aid one bit, necessarily, the painting of a picture. The ability to paint a good picture does not come through philosophy or religion in any direct manner at all. They could only have indeed a damaging effect on the making of things if thought of as providing some theory to work by—a substitute for imagination and direct creativeness; and would so sadly defeat their own object—which is to protect the imagination from the slavery of false theory and to give the perfect law of liberty to our creativeness. To protect in fact, what is natural to man.*'

In his painting of briars and flowers called 'Thorn-cup', he speaks of these same things in pictorial form rather than in words. His skies are full of other skies, his birds sing the songs of all birds. Teapots and cups are emblematic of the meeting together of people, the breaking of bread as it were; his compotière is almost the Sacred Grail, the cup of communion held as it is in thorns, impossible to dissociate from the crown of thorns; flowers are not portraits of particular flowers but the idea of flowers, their delicacy and persistence.

These things come from the picture itself and many others, and I am shy of expressing them in words for fear that something too insistent in what I say may obscure rather than clarify.

David Jones came to a full period of painting in 1932, producing in the spring and summer of that year over fifty large water-colours and some oils, of which 'Thorn-cup', 'Human Being' and 'Cat in Chair' are examples! Then came a sudden stop.

Since 1933 he has painted little, largely on account of ill-health. He has, however, produced some writing. His first book *In Parenthesis* has been generally claimed by the leading critics in Great Britain as the finest war book we have yet produced, and in 1938 it was awarded the Hawthornden Prize. It is also a valuable contribution to Anglo-Welsh writing.

It has, I think, resolved for the first time, the war emotions to a core of truth so that it is not a book about the particular war of 1914-18, but of any war or, for that matter, of any coming together of people under conditions of extreme stress. It has made a thing in words, a new life, born of that other life which was war. His great power of observation as a painter is in no way lost as a writer; the smallest casual details making each its clear-cut effect upon the mind. His prose, his words, have a way, as have his paintings, of quickening the perceptions. With the awareness of the artist he has penetrated beneath the outward form to disclose the essential beauty of true living and the eternal need so to live in spite of every obstacle. He speaks of 'ritual words made newly real'. He was telling how simple words of command, a seeming abracadabra in England, assumed real meaning in the trenches. 'The immediate, the nowness, the pressure of sudden, modifying circumstance—and retribution following swift on disregard; some certain, malignant opposing, brought intelligibility and effectiveness to the used formulæ

of command, the liturgy of their going-up assumed a primitive creativeness, an apostolic actuality, a correspondence with the object, a flexibility.' These last words express much of the impression made by Jones's recollection of that period—'an apostolic actuality, a correspondence with the object, a flexibility'.

During the ten years since 1933, David Jones has been able to continue with some writing, but he has never looked upon himself as a writer. It is always his hope to get back to painting in the full sense, that is the medium he feels to be most native to him. In 1936 a few water-colours were done which show the same general characteristics as those of 1932, and again a few were done in 1940. Two pictures illustrating the *Morte D'Arthur*, recently purchased by the Tate Gallery, were painted: one gradually, in 1939-40, and the other in 1940; and I have seen a third drawing by him which, though now only in process, shows promise of ranking with his best work.

There is a Self Portrait in words by David Jones written at the time he sent me details of his life. 'If you would draw a smith's arm, think of the twisted blackthorn bough—get at some remove from your subject. If you would paint a wedding group, concern your mind with the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. If you would draw a bruiser, don't neglect to remember the fragility of "this flesh", or you will be liable to make only a vulgar tour de force and to obscure the essential humanity of your gross man. There should be always a bit of a lion in your lamb.

The successful work of art is one where no ingredient of creation is lost, where no item of the *Benedicite Omnia Opera Domini, Domino* is denied or forgotten.

This is not easy.

It was, I believe, a Welsh poet of the fourteenth century, who remarked of the falling snow, that the angels were at their white joinery in heaven, that the saints were plucking their geese. It is important to be anthropomorphic, to deal through and in the things we understand as men, to be incarnational.

To know that a beefsteak is neither more nor less "mystical" than a diaphanous cloud. God loves both. The painter more than any man must know that the green grass on the hill and the fairy ring are both equally real. He must deny nothing, he must

integrate everything. But he must deal only with what he loves, and therefore knows, at any given time. He will come a cropper if he tries to be more understanding, or inspired, than he really is. Let him love more and more things. "It is better to love than to know" is his golden rule.'

AUGUSTUS JOHN

FRAGMENT OF AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY—X

TICK, tick, tick, goes my alarming clock, and when I look outside I find the sprawling candelabrum of the great fig-tree has been decorated with innumerable jets of bright green flame. In the distance the minarets and cupolas of Westminster reflect the passage of the hours and always seem a little in advance of my own labouring chronometer. Although the sky is brilliant blue and white, the sun gives no heat and the wind seems to blow fresh from far-off Siberian tundras. In fact, it is the Spring, and it was on such a morning in 1926 that Horace de Vere Cole and I set out on an expedition to Provence. The plan was to walk from Avignon to Marseilles. Horace was a famous walker in the heel and toe tradition and, with his unusual arithmetical faculty, was a great breaker of records, especially when alone. A bit of a poet, his motto might well have been 'Motion remembered in tranquillity'. Perhaps his greatest exploit was the ascent of Etna, and return to the coast within a matter of five hours. In my company the going was not up to this standard, for with my absent sense of time, defective arithmetic and a tendency to linger here and there, our mileage was reduced, though actually when it came to stepping out seriously, Horace could not begrudge me full marks for my footwork. The main thing was to get somewhere in time for dinner. As for lunch, since Horace rarely appeared before mid-day, we used to defer our start till after that function. This suited me very well, for the morning was thus left free for solitary contemplation, the exploration of fresh scenes or more often the renewal of acquaintance with old ones. We had