



Making the Past Present: David Jones, the Middle Ages, and Modernism

Robichaud P

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The importance of David Jones (1895-1974) as a major modern poet has been increasingly recognized during the past few decades through a growing critical appreciation of *In Parenthesis* (1937), *The Anathémata* (1952), and *The Sleeping Lord* (1974). Praised by poets as diverse as T.S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Hugh MacDiarmid, Seamus Heaney, and W.S. Merwin, Jones is a writer whose work challenges established critical boundaries between periods, styles, and genres. In *Making the Past Present*, Paul Robichaud offers an innovative exploration of Jones's poetry that aims to help readers overcome challenges to a fuller appreciation of his work.

A persistent challenge for readers has been Jones's turn to the Middle Ages for inspiration and example. Although Jones's medievalism has hindered his acceptance into the academic modernist canon, the Middle Ages are central to his modernism as a continually questioned and constructed source of cultural values. *Making the Past Present* explores the significance of Jones's medievalism in its modernist contexts, while providing readers with detailed information on central, but often unfamiliar, allusions.

Robichaud charts the growth of Jones's medievalism from his earliest Pre-Raphaelite influences, showing how his commitment to modernist aesthetics transformed his vision of the Middle Ages. In considering his obsession with medieval Wales, this study shows how Jones engaged with contemporary Welsh and Arthurian scholarship to construct a vision of Wales that is both a modernist symbol of cultural wholeness and an "imagined community" in tandem with the development of Welsh cultural nationalism. Robichaud argues that the tension between vernacular and Latin cultures in Jones's poetry reflects his concern over the modern relationship between national and European cultural interests, an intellectual context shared with T.S. Eliot and the historian Christopher Dawson. The impact of medieval on modernist aesthetics receives a sustained analysis in a reading of Jones in relation to James Joyce, Jacques Maritain, and Wilhelm Wörringer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Paul Robichaud is assistant professor of English and director of the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies Program at Albertus Magnus College.

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK:

"Paul Robichaud's impressive monograph is... a timely addition to the Jones critical canon. *Making the Past Present* demonstrates convincingly how Jones's interest in medieval culture, especially its Welsh avatar, intersected with his commitment to modernist poetics to forge a hopeful counterstatement to modern, post-Christian civilization. This focused, erudite exploration of an important facet of the poet's outlook is thus a valuable contribution to Jones scholarship. *Making the Past Present* is a skillful blend of intellectual history and literary criticism. Robichaud is keenly attentive to Jones's historical and intellectual context." -- Adam Schwartz, *Christianity and Literature*

"Making the Past Present leads the reader through a strange and forbidding poetic landscape, but one for which author Paul Robichaud offers frequent signposts to orient the hesitant.... Reading Jones's difficult, allusive poems -- with Paul Robichaud at one's side -- may help the reader to realize how far we have accepted an empty -- because merely instrumental -- understanding of language. It may also help us realize how much we accept a ruthlessly utilitarian set of values, uninformed by the richness of the Christian tradition that it was Jones's vocation and passion to trace from the language, artifacts, history, and literature of the early and late Middle Ages into the twentieth century." - *Collegium*

"Robichaud proves repeatedly to be an astute and knowledgeable critic of Jones' poetry. He hears Jones well.... Robichaud also talks well of Jones' sense of rupture, t

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