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EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED: DAVID JONES'S ECOPOETRY IN *THE ANATHEMATA* AND 'THE SLEEPING LORD'

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ABSTRACT

David Jones (1895–1974) is best known for his works on the Great War and the Catholic religion. However, this article explores Jones's two environmentally focused works and posits that they complement each other, as examples of ecopoetry. Although the term 'ecopoetry' did not exist in Jones's time, he wove ecological issues into his literary works. In his long poem *The Anathemata* (1952), and in a shorter work entitled 'The Sleeping Lord' (1974), Jones explores the idea of a complex microorganism of nature, where environment and culture are two elements indistinguishable from each other. In both texts, the environment is described as a macrostructure on which human civilisation depends. *The Anathemata* presents the development of the Earth through different geological epochs but focused on the Anthropocene, the human presence, and the impact of civilisation on the planet. This poem emphasises the integration of culture and science into two different but complementary categories. It draws on Aristotelian thought and advocates breaking the artificial division between nature and culture. *The Anathemata* presents human civilisation as the latest stage of natural development, rather than as a self-contained system. In contrast, 'The Sleeping Lord' explores the human impact on the environment, both animate and inanimate, and calls for change to stop detrimental processes triggered by the development of civilisation. Despite the flourishing interest in the modernist explorations of human connections with nature, David Jones remains in the shadow of other modernists. This article aims to draw attention to the ecocritical aspect of his writing.

Keywords: Modernism; ecopoetry; David Jones; interconnectedness.

1. Introduction: David Jones in the context of ecopoetry

David Jones was a modernist artist and poet best known for his visual works and two long poems, *In Parenthesis* (1937) and *The Anathemata*. He also wrote theoretical essays on culture now gathered in a collection *Epoch and Artist* (2008). Jones was deeply religious and was influenced by his experience

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as a soldier during World War I. Although he is predominantly discussed in the context of his Catholic faith and his criticism of modern warfare, both themes are contained within his poetic environmental perspective. Over time, Jones gradually turned towards ecopoetry, which became most prominent in *The Sleeping Lord and Other Fragments* (1974), his last collection of texts. This ecological perspective is evident in the depiction of themes central to his writing, including technological progress, war, and religion. Therefore, the academic focus on Jones should be broadened to include his work as an ecopoet. Despite being a modernist, Jones adopted a postmodern "environmental consciousness" and an "evolved sense of the material interconnection of all life, anxieties about annihilation and extinction, and humanity's impact on place in geological time and history" (Hume & Osborne 2018: 4).

The impact of human activities on the environment has been so significant that the boundaries between the environment impacted by civilisation and those not influenced by it are difficult to detect. In *Unnatural Ecopoetics: Unlikely Spaces in Contemporary Poetry* (2017), Sarah Nolan argues that the divide between culture and the environment has become largely non-existent. Nolan postulates that 'unnatural ecopoetry' is poetry that expresses this breakage of the boundaries between nature and culture caused by the constant development of humanity. Discarding the term 'ecopoetics' and inventing a new term that encompasses a wider range of modern poetry and experimental and lyrical language might appear to be a simpler option than introducing the term "unnatural ecopoetics" (Nolan 2017: 'Conclusion'). However, this approach overlooks the ecological importance and involvement with space, which are defined as characteristics of ecopoetry (Nolan 2017: 'Conclusion'). The type of ecopoetry discussed by Nolan is prominent in David Jones's *The Anathemata* and 'The Sleeping Lord'. Jones's poetry intermingles natural and cultural elements, showing how closely they are connected.

Ecopoetry is a form of poetry that highlights the impact of human activities on the environment. Although the term 'ecopoetry' was coined in the late 20th century, there were modernist poets who addressed environmental themes in their work before the term was created. David Jones was one such poet who was aware of the impact of humans on the environment and challenged the distinction between nature and culture. He was critical of the human belief that humans can control nature (Griffiths 2017: 26). Other modernist poets, such as Wallace Stevens and Basil Bunting, also addressed environmental issues in their writings. However, the ecological aspect of modernist writing has been overlooked in literary studies because of the belief that modernism is opposed to environmental thought (Griffiths 2017: 10). This perception has changed in recent years. Griffiths argues that modernist writers were concerned with environmental issues caused by humans, and this aspect of their writing is increasingly recognised and studied.

Lawrence Buell is considered a pioneer in the field of eco-criticism, and in his book *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* he presents eco-criticism as a growing field without a "definitive map" (Buell 2005: 17). He argues that a text can be considered ecological even if it does not explicitly depict the natural environment. This paves the way for an ecocritical analysis of modernist literature. However, while a chapter in Griffiths' book examines *The Anathemata* by focusing on its first chapter titled 'Rite and Fore-Time' (*Anathemata*, 49–82), David Jones has not been extensively discussed in this context.

Although interest in the modernist explorations of human connections with nature has been flourishing, David Jones remains in the shadow of other modernists. For instance, Black (2018) explores the poets' attempts to reconnect with nature after the First World War, the military conflict that strongly influenced David Jones's writing. Although Black's analysis is based on the fact that the Great War was a catalyst for profound changes in culture and society, which had a significant impact on poetic representations of nature (Black 2018:14), it does not mention Jones. Neither is he found on the pages of other significant publications on ecology and modernist literature, such as *Exhausted Ecologies: Modernism and Environmental Recovery* (2020) by Andrew Kalaidijan, *Modernism and Its Environments* (2020) by Michael Rubenstein & Justin Neuman, or *Eco-Modernism: Ecology, Environment, and Nature in Literary Modernism* (2023), edited by Jeremy Diaper. Even *British Modernism and the Anthropocene: Experiments with Time* (2023) by David Shackleton does not mention Jones, even though the poet experimented extensively with the depiction of time in his poetry.

David Jones was an ecopoet who addressed the topic of breaking the boundaries between nature and culture and was heavily influenced by the philosophy of matter developed by Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Jones opposed Platonic thought and believed that Aquinas's promotion of nature as inherently good was one of the most important teachings influencing his work (Dilworth 2017: Chapter 5). He also opposed moral claims of spiritual and bodily duality. For Jones, the Thomistic form was the guiding principle of the body and the works of art, science, and humanities (Dilworth 2017: Chapter 5). Jones's poetry is fundamentally rooted in the Aristotelian concept of blurred divisions and the interdependency of all things that exist, including humans. This concept is central to eco-criticism (Murphy 2009: 1–3).

Jones's poetry features numerous Catholic allusions, but he believed that not "all good poetry must hold up a clear bodily image" (Dilworth 2017: Chapter 7). In his essay 'Art and Sacrament' (1955), Jones describes what he understands as a sacrament, and instead of 'people' or 'humans', he uses the words "creatures" or "human creatures", terms which are commonly used by researchers in

ecological studies[2] (Jones 2008: 144, 145, 147–8). *Epoch an Artist* includes Jones's understanding of a sacrament, which he perceives as the human ability to create signs (Jones 2008: 143–79). He believes that this sign-making ability differentiates humans from animals, but he does not claim that it is of divine origin. Instead, he believes that art and sacraments belong to the same category as what makes humans unique. According to Jones, this sign-making quality does not separate humans from the complex system of nature, because it is one of nature's many interdependent mechanisms.

2. The sacred and the profane duality broken

The title, *The Anathemata* refers to the concept of "anamnesis", which means the act of bringing an event or experience from the past into the present (Ramsey 2017: 81). The poem covers the entire history of the Earth, from before the existence of human civilisation to after its decline, with a particular focus on the Anthropocene period. The title opposes the categorisation of human history as merely a by-product of nature's structure, acknowledging that it is both a remarkable development and a source of destruction. The word "anathemata" is a plural form of "anathema", which means something disliked, but in ancient times, it was used to describe "devoted things" (*Anathemata*, 27–8). Therefore, *The Anathemata* highlights the paradox of human existence and simultaneously classifies it as either disliked or adored.

The Anathemata is not written chronologically. Jones, who was a devout Catholic, chose the Catholic Mass as the focal point of the poem. It is structured as a series of associations that the lyrical 'I' experiences during the liturgy. Jones himself called the poem "fragments of an attempted writing", which serves as *The Anathemata's* subtitle. Although the poem appears chaotic, Dilworth argues that it has a parenthetic structure (Dilworth 2017: 177). The "lyric moment" at the centre of the poem, can be found in the chapter 'The Lady of the Pool' (Dilworth 2017: 156–7). Dilworth visually depicts this mirroring pattern as "(((((((O)))))))" with the lyrical centre focusing on the figure of Jesus Christ[3]. However, Griffiths challenges this reading and suggests that the first chapter, which explores the subject of geological history, should be viewed as *The Anathemata*'s thematic and formal starting point (Griffiths 2017: 139). This perspective reorients the poem's interpretation from predominantly religious to ecological.

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[2] See e.g.: *Nested Ecology: The Place of Humans in the Ecological Hierarchy* (2009) by Edward Wimberley or Clive Hamilton's *Defiant Earth: The Fate of Humans in the Anthropocene* (2017).

[3] According to Thomas Dilworth, the structure was invented by Jones in the visual arrangement of the illustrations to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of An Ancient Mariner*, a text by which the poet was fascinated (see: Dilworth 2008: 177–178).

In the preface to *The Anathemata*, Jones defines the word anathemata as "things laid up from other things" (*Anathemata*, 28). This definition reflects the ecopoetic meaning of the poem, in which there is no separation between the sacred and the profane. Jones believes that the profane and the holy should be communicated simultaneously. He explains that in his poem, the subject is comprised of "the blessed things that have taken on what is cursed and the profane things that somehow are redeemed" (*Anathemata*, 28–9). He points to "things that are the signs of something other", which enhances the communicated interconnectedness of everything that exists (*Anathemata*, 29).

The poem blends pagan and Christian mythologies. One example of this is the reference to "the Stone" in the first chapter, which symbolises the human practice of building altars throughout history (*Anathemata*, 81). *The Anathemata* thus points to the fact that Christian rituals have roots in pagan culture. The light in the poem is not only associated with Christ but also with the Roman goddess Vesta (*Anathemata*, 85). Jones merges the figures of Jesus and Arthur into one heroic character as for the poet "paganism and Christianity are never at odds, always in harmony" (Dilworth 2008: 120, 140). In the final chapter, titled 'Shethursdaye and Venus Day', Jesus is portrayed as a mythical hero (*Anathemata*, 24; Dilworth 2008: 171). To summarise, *The Anathemata* emphasises that all religions constitute a single structure that changes over time.

Humans and goods are treated in the poem as belonging to a single category. The deities interact with humans and display human-like qualities, thus blurring the lines between the godly and the human. For example, the chapter titled 'The Lady of the Pool' features a Cockney girl referred to as Flora (*Anathemata*, 131), with a connection to Mary, the mother of Christ (*Anathemata*, 137). Dilworth notes that "Flora" is a variation of Aphrodite/Venus, as one of Aphrodite's epithets is Antheia, meaning "Flower-goddess", and Venus is originally a Latin goddess of spring, like Flora (Dilworth 2008: 150). Roman beliefs have influenced British culture as it is today, as exemplified by the list of churches built on Roman sites discussed in 'The Lady of the Pool' (*Anathemata*, 127–9, 160–2). According to Dilworth, "under each doorway ('adytum') the guardian 'fathering figures rest', ancient strong men ('viriles') buried in London clay" (Dilworth 2008: 155). This clay is rich in fossils, so the ancestral lineage extends back through animal evolution, as in 'Rite and Fore-time' (Dilworth 2008: 155).

In *The Anathemata*, the religious is portrayed as corporeal. As Dilworth observes, according to Freudian thought, "religion and sex are linked by longing" (Dilworth 2008: 156). He believes "Freud thinks religion [is] a substitute for sex, as Jones knew, but Jones thinks that sex can also be a substitute for religion, the two being aspects of a single profound desire for happiness" (Dilworth 2008: 156). This idea corresponds with the depiction of religion as one with the Earth, which is clearly communicated in the chapter 'Mabinog's Liturgy' where

Guinevere incorporates Helen of Troy (*Anathemata*, 196–204). Dilworth notes that the fragment about the wife of the legendary Arthur refers to both biological and inanimate life, as well as Christian liturgy (Dilworth 2008: 164–5). In the poem's religious context, the motif of Jesus Christ's death is repeated, representing godly mortality and its 'anamnesis'. The starting point for all the poet's ponderings stems from the 'good' and 'dislikeable' elements that can be found in the story of Jesus, both hopeful and martyrological.

The Anathemata explores the relationship between religion, sacral architecture and sculpture. It suggests that these are products of geological history that provide the various ores and stones used as building blocks for religious construction. Stone-related imagery is often used in text. For instance, the poem is preceded by a sentence featuring an association with stone structure: "It was a dark and stormy night, we sat by a calcined wall" (*Anathemata*, 45). The first chapter, immediately following this introductory fragment, focuses on the stone structure of a church. The chapter, 'The Lady of the Pool', includes a list of churches, and the mention of one of the lady's lovers whose profession is masonry. The poem emphasises the importance of stone as a physical building block of society as well as the non-physical building block of religion, which was a binding force for early communities. Also mentioned are different elements of the physical buildings, such as arches, columns, entablature and triforium, among others (*Anathemata*, 49). Therefore, as *The Anathemata* suggests, stone is vital for humans to create structures that represent and develop culture. As Jones emphasizes, it also provides a home for animals such as birds, serving not only humans but also other organisms (*Anathemata*, 107).

Moreover, Jones's poem indicates that stones were not the only major resource used throughout history. Dilworth highlights that a ship is used as a metaphor for the whole Earth, and the wood of the ship represents Christianity (Dilworth 2008: 168). Wood is also a frequent motif throughout the poem, and together with the motif of sailing, is compared to the wood of Christ's cross. This draws attention to the connection between nature, which provides physical building materials, and non-physical religion, the binding force of civilisation. However, the poem also indicates that wood was the material that brought death to Christ, suggesting that, although wood contributed to the development of civilisation, in human hands, it is also a source of death. Thus, the Christian cross itself is a metaphor for the life-giving and life-taking potential of nature.

3. The poetic and the scientific: *The Anathemata*

Basil Bunting (1900–1985), considered Jones "one of the best poets of the century" and although Bunting was critical of Catholicism, he expressed his impression of how in *The Anathemata* Jones "made the Mass a complex of symbols capable of ordering and interpreting pretty well the whole history of the

world and the whole order of nature" (qtd in Dilworth 2017: Chapter 14). In *The Anathemata*, religion is described through geology and history but is not seen as more important. Griffiths, in his analysis of the poem, writes that the "juxtaposition of scientific data with his Catholic 'mythus' shows that the two serve different functions, which we can characterise as discovery and revelation respectively" (Griffiths 2017: 133). He emphasizes that technological, scientific discourse about climate change has little power to engage the reader in anything other than an intellectual manner (Griffiths 2017: 127). This is why, using the mythical in poetry to talk about the scientific makes it more appealing to many and raises their awareness of environmental perils. The scientific and mythological co-exist on the pages of *The Anathemata*, and although they serve different purposes, there is no tension between them in the poem.

Jones makes it clear that he is not an authority on the data used in the text (*Anathemata*, 42). He refers to various sources "only as a traveller might, in making a song", which comparison alludes to the bardic tradition (*Anathemata*, 42). In this context, it is vital to note that one of the aims of ecopoetry is to be a bridge between the fields of humanities and science (Fiedorczuk & Beltrán 2020: 17), which is precisely what Jones attempts in *The Anathemata*. The poet "suggests that science is a complement of and not an alternative to our mythologising" (Griffiths 2017: 136) because the human propensity to mythologise is exceptionally strong. This is why his poetic response to the rise of civilisation is to express the impossibility of separating "human activity and thought in both the physical and cultural construction of nature", and is unequivocal about the civilisation's "mythical, sacramental status" (Griffiths 2017: 137). In *The New Poetics of Climate Change*, one can read that even now, in a time when humans seem to have convinced themselves that they have "risen above mythology, most environmental, policies, laws, and ideologies" are, a restatement of Judeo-Christian notions about nature (Griffiths 2017: 136). Griffiths argues that although scientific explanations of the world appear authoritative, mythological interpretations such as Jones's are necessary for the existence of civilisation (Griffiths 2017: 136).

The lyrical 'I' refers to the prehistoric cultures of Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome, as well as the Celtic background of human activity shaping the environment. All these cultural influences are simultaneously associated with geology and climate, and the poem touches on the cyclical climate changes observed since Aristotle's time (*Anathemata*, 55). It also ponders the possibility of further climate changes as in 'Rite and Fore-Time', the first part of *The Anathemata*, the narrator wonders about the likelihood of future glaciations that would cover the Mediterranean area (*Anathemata*, 57–8).

The text mentions several times that geological formations were not only used as building materials for the first-walled settlements, but were also chosen for their suitable hillside locations for cities such as Thebes, Troy, and Jerusalem,

as well as for Roman settlements (*Anathemata*, 56–8, 85, 89). Furthermore, the stones were used for art such as stone statuettes or Roman letters inscribed in marble, which are still admired today (*Anathemata*, 91, 92, 94, 89). When describing stone structures, the poem highlights both function and beauty. The main message conveyed is that this functionality and aesthetics are by-products of geological processes that humans cannot control.

Attention is also paid to other Earth resources, such as iron and wood. The former has been used to create various tools (*Anathemata*, 88) which accelerated human advancement. Moreover, iron became an important material for building ships, a form of transportation to which the whole chapter 'Middle-Sea and Lear-Sea' in *The Anathemata* is devoted (*Anathemata*, 84–108). In 'Middle-Sea and Lear-Sea', ships through the ages navigate the seas, but they share a symbolic continuity because of the typological similarities among their respective crews (Dilworth 2008: 131). It should also be noted that in the ecocritical context, sailing relies on natural conditions such as currents and winds. Griffiths observes that "the ship's timbers operate through the poem as a reminder of Christ's sacrifice, bearing humanity across the world's waters through time" (Griffiths 2017:141). He also underlines that by using the term "tree" instead of "wood", Jones points to "the biological constitution of those timbers, alluding to Christ's life-giving power and his vernal resurrection, just as the trees themselves come into leaf in the spring" (Griffiths 2017: 140).

To summarise, in *The Anathemata* there is considerable focus on biology, geology, and climate. The poem tells the story of how nature has played a significant role in enabling human civilisation to develop and spread since prehistoric times (Griffiths 2017: 125). The environment is described, and the workings of the ground, especially the Welsh landscape, are seen as preparing conditions for the development of civilisation. The emphasis is on the fact that it is "the environment that uplifts humanity, rather than the human will itself, giving it a – literally – elevated foundation on which to begin its literary endeavour, which reflexively celebrates the land" (Griffiths 2017: 131). Griffiths argues that Jones subtly emphasises "the permanence of our geological, climatological, and evolutionary contingency' instead of glorifying an environment-independent civilisation" (Griffiths 2017: 132–3).

The poet employs a storytelling technique similar to that used by bards to teach people about environmental change. In the preface to *The Anathemata*, he laments that 20th-century people are too far removed from cultures where poets were custodians and rememberers (*Anathemata*, 21). The text's visual structure is irregular and broken because it is meant to be read aloud (*Anathemata*, 35). This bardic approach places the poem in the tradition of poetry that has been passed down from person to person. For this reason, Jones argues, "you can't get the intended meaning unless you hear the sound". He explains that "[w]hile marks of punctuation, breaks of line, lengths of line, grouping of words or sentences and

variations of spacing are visual contrivances they have here an … oral intention" (*Anathemata*, 35). This poem is meant to remind readers of human dependence on nature and the interconnectedness of all things.

Thus, Jones suggests that the crucial role of a poet is to be a rememberer. Bardic poets have the power to recall something that was once valued by people, especially when faced with new social or political changes, and this recalling, known as anamnesis, is effective in opposing the imposition of new orders (*Anathemata*, 21). This is why, as a source of knowledge and wisdom, poetry can be a valuable tool for recalling and preserving important values and beliefs. An environmental bardic-like poem can create and serve as a lens through which humans can notice nature (Fiedorczuk & Beltrán 2020: 11–15).

It has been argued that ecopoetry should combine both poetic and scientific sensibilities (Fiedorczuk & Beltrán 2020: 17). Despite the common belief that literature and nature are incompatible, it is important to recognise that our understanding of the world is shaped by language, imagination, and metaphor (Bergman 2012: 665). Science and the humanities are often viewed as separate entities and scientists may undervalue the significance of storytelling and imagery as a means to understand nature (Bergman 2012: 665). However, "our relationships with the world are inescapably mediated by language and … we and the world are shaped by our representations" (Bergman 2012: 665). As Fiedorczuk and Beltrán highlight, metaphors make it possible to destabilise the dualism of science versus culture (Fiedorczuk & Beltrán 2020: 21–2). This is what happens in *The Anathemata*, which attempts to connect poetic human sensibility with scientific sensibility. The poem has no scientific ambitions; it is a "self-acknowledged fiction, making phenomena accessible to human imagination through the evocation of the senses while emphasising our coexistence with those phenomena" (Griffiths 2017: 132).

4. The local and the universal

Another key aspect of *The Anathemata* is a local, British setting. Thomas Dilworth considers the chapter titled 'The Lady of the Pool' to be the centrepiece of the poem (Dilworth 2008: 177). It takes place on the London riverfront in the 15th century, focusing on the water that the city relied heavily on. The river was the reason ancient Romans settled in this very place, and the stone structures from their time, which are described in the poem, speak of this long history (Dilworth 2008: 131). In this chapter, a Cockney woman who sells lavender by the Thames warns a ship's captain to set sail before winter because afterwards, it will be too dangerous to sail. Hence, the emphasis of this chapter is on local dependence on the life-giving river and the universal human dependency on water.

Dilworth suggests that the Cockney woman in 'The Lady of the Pool' embodies the mind of London (Dilworth 2008: 146). Her physical body is

associated with the Earth, and her breasts are described as "hills" (*Anathemata*, 132). This suggests that the city and its inhabitants are so closely connected that they shape one another, forming a single structure. She is also "an amalgam of many figures – from a waterside tart of sorts to the tutelary figure of London" (Dilworth 2008: 146). In *The Anathemata*, all the people in the city merge to create an organism that embodies growth and development, as well as the darker aspects of living in a large urban environment. In *The Anathemata*, London serves as an example of the human capability to create complex communities but also as a source of environmental destruction, both ecologically and culturally. The intricacy of London may inspire awe, but it has also consumed other cultures, which is represented in the text by the Siren of Imperialism (Dilworth 2008: 152). Read Eco critically, one may see imperialism as an invasive organism that has impeded growth and impoverished the development of colonised cultures.

Nevertheless, water has not only been a driving force for the development of the British Empire but also for human development in a more general sense. *The Anathemata* indicates that water played a crucial role in shaping the European landscape during and after the last glaciation (*Anathemata*, 66). Later in the text, in the chapter titled 'Middle-Sea and Lear-Sea', the impact of sea navigation on the development of civilisation is explored (*Anathemata*, 83–108). Still, another chapter, 'Redriff', discusses the importance of the river Thames for human settlement and includes a personal story about one of Jones's ancestors, Eb Bradshaw, who was "a shipwright and master mast- and block-maker" (Dilworth 2008: 142). Thus, the impact of water is addressed at both the macro- and microscales, which is typical of ecopoetry.

Among the local British themes in the poem, some are specifically Welsh. The language of the poem is a mix of Welsh, Latin, and Anglo-Saxon, reflecting the cultural blending that has occurred in the British Isles over the centuries. In Jones's poem, this locality is embedded within a larger scheme. Although the poet was not Welsh, he identified with his ancestors' Welsh heritage (Dilworth 2008: 185). In this context, it should be noted that the context of "local" is a classic ecopoetic tool that "enables us to understand global environmental issues" (Reddick 2017: 44). Ecological problems in the Welsh landscape indicate universal environmental threats. Jones considered local and familiar landscapes, ecosystems, and cultures to be vital in his writing. As he claimed, when composing *The Anathemata*, he was "concerned with recalling of certain things" that "he had received, things that are part of the complex deposits of the Island, so of course involving Wales", "the central Christian rite and mythological, historical, etc., data of all sorts" (Jones 2008: 31). Wales, a place with a rich history dating back to ancient times, is the central focus of the first chapter of the poem and throughout the text Welsh myths are referred to. Most notable among them, is the myth about Bran, an enigmatic Welsh raven deity, who could have been originally a "God of mariners" (*Anathemata*, 130; Sax 2007: 64).

Legend has it that Bran, whose name in Welsh means "raven", ordered his own beheading and had his head buried under the Tower of London to protect Britain from foreign invasion (Sax 2007: 64–5). In this way, Bran, the protector of the Isles, symbolises the impact of Welsh culture on London's history.

To conclude, *The Anathemata* delves into the concept of the Anthropocene. The poem explores the interconnectivity within nature that has led to the emergence of human civilisation. It emphasises that culture is not something separate from nature, but is rather a recent development within nature. The poem integrates and explores different aspects of humanity's advancement, such as science, culture, and religion, as according to the text, they all form a cohesive structure.

5. The macro-organism of nature: 'The Sleeping Lord'

'The Sleeping Lord' is the eponymous poem published in 1974, drawn from Jones's Catholic faith intermingled with Roman and Celtic themes and his First World War experience. According to Dilworth, this is the most significant ecocritical poem written in the twentieth century (Dilworth 2008: 218). In the text, geological terms are intermingled with terms describing flora, fauna, and culture.

'The Sleeping Lord' explores a great geographical and geological metaphor and ends with a question about whether the Welsh land is waiting for the lord who sleeps or if the land itself is the sleeping lord (Hinchcliffe 1981: 33). The poem opens with a description of the sleeping lord's bed, metaphorically depicted as a grave (*The Sleeping Lord*, 71–2). Breccia, iron oxide, and gritstone outcrops are suggested as a possible source of disturbance to him (*The Sleeping Lord*, 71–2). His "under/bedding" is "augite/hard", and the lyrical 'I' wonders if the stones discomfort the lord (*The Sleeping Lord*, 72). As one can read: "does his dinted thorax rest | where the contorted heights | themselves rest | on a lateral pressured anticline?" (*The Sleeping Lord*, 72). The sleeping lord's physicality is geological; therefore, the outcrop resembles a sleeping person. Simultaneously, sediments are not just resources; they are animated in the text which describes them as living creatures. For example, the word "dorsal" is used to describe a geological formation, and it also connotes something related to the animal's back (*The Sleeping Lord*, 72). Water is given agency and is called the "conditor" (*The Sleeping Lord*, 72). In the description of the lord's crown, the jewel is not just made from "gold" but is hammered from it and washed out by the river (*The Sleeping Lord*, 77). Essentially, 'The Sleeping Lord' is a poem that gives agency to the inanimate.

For Jones, everything in nature creates a macrostructure: the sediments, animals, humans, and culture, and this is how they are represented in 'The Sleeping Lord'. The legendary figure is imagined as residing harmoniously with the flora and fauna (*The Sleeping Lord*, 96). The lyrical 'I' wonders whether

"the clammy ferns" are the lord's "rustling vallance" and "the stunted oaks his gnarled guard" (*The Sleeping Lord*, 96). He is one of the elements in the intricate jigsaw puzzle of nature. The idea of this structure is evident, among others, in the following fragment: "the pliant bending of the wild elm (that serves well the bowyers) and the resistant limbs | of the tough, gnarled *derwen*[4,5] even | lean all to the swaying briary/tangle | that shelters low | in the deeps of the valley/wood the fragile *blodyn/y/gwynt"*[6] (*The Sleeping Lord*, 74, italics in the original). In 'The Sleeping Lord', the elements of nature do not appear to have any hierarchy. This is evident in the use of the word "limbs" to describe the branches of trees, which places humans and trees in the same category of bodily creatures (*The Sleeping Lord*, 74). Suggested in the same fragment is the possibility that the "gnarled limbs" of the oaks are made strong with the lord's "sap". This depiction tightens the interconnectedness within the environment introduced in the earlier part of the text. Furthermore, one can also find imagery of a food chain where humans are both hunters and hunted in the poem (*The Sleeping Lord*, 96, 86–7). The poem illustrates a universe in which all things are interrelated.

Some might argue that the act of animalisation and anthropomorphising is a way of claiming ownership, which contradicts the ecopoetic theme of 'The Sleeping Lord'. However, this contradicts the poem's overall concept of interconnectedness. The act of claiming possession is mutually beneficial because everything in the poem influences everything else. It is asked, for instance, whether "the season sequence" is "out of joint" (*The Sleeping Lord*, 75), which has immediate animalistic connotations. In the following passage: "at this age of solar year | scarcely descendant as yet | from the apex/house | of the shining Twin/Brothers of | Helen the Wall" (*The Sleeping Lord*, 75), one finds a comparison of the "solar year" to an animal. The solar rhythm is described in an animalistic way as it has age, and the "descendant" bears have connotations with reproduction. Additionally, the mythological element in the placement of the brothers of Helen in the "apex/house" carries geological meanings and evokes connotations with mountains (*The Sleeping Lord*, 75).

The atmospheric phenomena and flora are made human-like, complicated by sailorly motifs. The "wintry Sol" (*The Sleeping Lord*, 75):

> careens on his fixed and predetermined cursus, with the axle/tree of his essedum upward steeved, under the icicled roof of the februal house of The/Fish/with/the/Glistening/Tails, when, still on the climb, he has, in part, his cours y/ronne in the martial house of Aries whose blast is through with

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4 *derwen*: an oak tree.

5 All the translations of the Welsh words in the article follow the ones in the 1995 edition of the poem: David Jones, 'The Sleeping Lord', in *The Sleeping Lord and other fragments* (London).

6 *blodyn/y/gwynt*: flower of the wind or wood anemone.

> a battering drive the thickest *pexa* of closest weave, and Mavors' *petrabula* (artfully virid is their camouflage) are brought to bear for his barrage of steelcold stones of hail, which pelting of this pittiless storme / makes the stripped but green/budding boughs / moan and complain afresh to each other / *yn y gaeaf aer*.[7]
>
> Jones (1995: 75–76, italics in the original)

The sun and boughs are anthropomorphised, pointing symbolically to their interconnectedness. Historically, the sun and other celestial bodies have been used for navigation at sea, while wood has been the primary material for building boats and ships. Moreover, because humans cannot control the wind's direction, they must navigate in accordance with it. Sailing is an activity that strongly demonstrates the connection between humans and the forces of nature because people cannot change the wind's direction or strength.

Apart from the sun, the poem also contains a human-made source of light, the candle that symbolises culture. In Christian symbolism, light has a biblical meaning and represents Jesus Christ and Christianity (John 8:12). However, similarly to *The Anathemata*, in 'The Sleeping Lord' emphasis is also put on non-religious sources of light. In *The Anathemata* this source is sunlight, and in 'The Sleeping Lord' candlelight. A candle bearer accompanies the sleeping lord, and the two can usually be found in the open mountainland (*The Sleeping Lord*, 76). The light bearer in the poem is privileged:

> to hold upright | before the Bear of the Island | in his timer/pillar'd hall | (which stands within the agger/cinctured *meanol*[8]) the tall, tapering, flax/cored candela of pure wax (the natural produce of the creatures labouring in the royal hives but made a true artefact by the best chandlers of the royal *maenol*)
>
> Jones (1995: 76, italics in the original)

The unity of physical, organic and mythological is elaborated upon in the following continuation of the extract: "that flames upward | in perfection of form | like the leaf/shaped war/heads | that gleam from the long/hafted spears | of the lord's body/guard" (*The Sleeping Lord*, 77). However, in the text, the candle bearer is brought into focus to a lesser degree than the Chief Huntsman and Chief Falconer. What seems to be suggested by this belittling is that culture is dependent on nature.

In 'The Sleeping Lord', the motifs from Christian mythology are mixed with pagan motifs. The sleeping lord is interchangeably called Achilles or Arthur and

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7 *yn y gaef oer*: in the winter cold.

8 *maenol*: the whole are of lord's court

is depicted as Jesus Christ. The meeting of men "under the *gafl*[9]/treed roof/tree | … on either side of the wattle/twined *cancelli* | below or above | the centred hearth/stone" (*The Sleeping Lord*, 78, italics in the original) bears associations to an Arthurian-like Christian story of the Last Supper. As one can read:

> His silent … recalling is first of those Athletes of God, who in the waste/lands & deep wilds of the Island and on the spray/swept skerries and desolate insulae where the white/pinioned sea/birds nest, had sought out places of retreat and had made the White Oblation for the living … in the habitat of wolves and wild/cat and such like creatures of the Logos.
>
> Jones (1995: 79)

The last supper takes place in an *addoldy*, which is a place of worship, and "under the green elbow of the hill, which the chief man of that locality has caused to be twined of pliant saplings and lime/washed" (*The Sleeping Lord*, 81). Achilles, Christ, and Arthur, symbolising the Greek, Christian, and Saxon cultures, respectively, are united during the last supper amid the Welsh vegetation.

6. Environmental destruction

Nonetheless, in 'The Sleeping Lord', humans disturb the environmental harmony. In this context, attention should be paid to the destruction of forests by the great hog that ravages "the tendoned roots of the trees":

> It is the great *ysgithrau*[10] of the *porcus Troit* that have stove in the wattled walls of the white dwellings, it is he who has stamped out the seed of fire, shattered the *pentan*[11]/stone within the dwellings; strewn the green leaf/bright limbs with the broken white limbs of the folk of the dwellings, so that the life/sap of the flowers of the forest mingles the dark life/sap of the fair bodies of the men who stood in the trackway of the long-tusked great hog ….
>
> Jones (1995: 88–90, italics in the original)

According to Dilworth, the hog's destruction of dwellings and trees symbolises the decline of Celtic culture and the extensive deforestation for charcoal in Wales that began during the Tudor times (Dilworth 2008: 218). The downfall of the trees coincides with the decline of the people who opposed the Tudor activity; the sap of the people mixes with that of the trees and sinks into the landscape.

Deforestation was not the only form of environmental degradation in this part of the British Isles. According to Dilworth, the poem refers to coal mining in

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9 *gafl*: fork
10 *ysgithrau*: tusks
11 *pentan*: hearth

Wales since the 19th century (Dilworth 2008: 218). In Jones's text, Wales becomes a land where mining is called a "dark pall" over the landscape (*The Sleeping Lord*, 92). During the Industrial Revolution, Wales transformed from being agricultural to being an industrial region that provided coal and metals for industrialisation in Britain (Gooberman & Curtis 2019: 182). In the 1850s, large coal deposits were discovered in the valleys of South Wales, initiating an era in Welsh history comparable to the gold rush in the United States (Wanhill 2000: 60). The areas surrounding the mines have been degraded and the Southern Welsh landscape now often stands for the "rape of a fair country" (2000: 60). The despoliation of the land impacted the lives of the Welsh people who, facing a life of labouring every day in the mines and living among the degraded landscape, are described in the poem as dreaming "bitter dreams" (*The Sleeping Lord*, 91).

The poem highlights the environmental impact on both the land and water, describing the degradation of local waters (*The Sleeping Lord*, 93). It draws attention to the gradual decline in marine life resulting from human activities by posing a series of questions.

> Does the blind & unchoosing creature of sea know the marking and inedible
> balm from flotsomed sewage and the seaped valley's waste?
> Does the tide/beasts' maw
> drain down the princely tears
> with the mullocked slag/wash
> of Special Areas?
> Can the tumbling and gregarious porpoises
> does the aloof and infrequent seal
> that suns his puckered back
> and barks from Pirus' rock
> tell the dole/tally of a drowned *taeog* from a
> Gweledig's golden collar, refracted in Giltar shoal?
>
> Or, is the dying gull
> on her sea/hearse
> that drifts the oily bourne
> to tomb at turn of tide
> her own stricken cantor?
> Jones (1995: 93, italics in the original)

In addition, the land's decline represents the decline of Welsh culture, which is despoiled along with the landscape and organic matter. The Welsh words embedded in bardic tradition in 'The Sleeping Lord' mirror "in some strange way, the rhythms of the landscape that are so clearly in evidence in the author's paintings of Welsh scenery" (Hinchcliffe 1981: 33). The Welsh environment is described in such a way as to educate the reader about the Welsh language, about

using it to prevent it being forgotten. This approach is an example of modernist thinking in terms of linguistic ecology that compares the evolution and decline of languages with those of biological species.

During the Welsh last supper, Arthur/Jesus is described as a person who "loved the things of the Island" (*The Sleeping Lord*, 82). The poem expresses a "sense of the local, the physical, the love of the fenced-in and familiar, and affection for what is known" (Godwin Phelps 1982: par. 10). In the poem, Arthur is Jesus Christ and becomes a sacrifice, a symbol of the Welsh landscape, flora, fauna, Welsh people, and Celtic culture. Among the destruction, the lord is asleep and does not wake up to bring rescue, which can be read theologically as a lack of expected divine intervention. Alternatively, Jesus can be seen as the helpless Welsh environment facing destruction. Dilworth notes that Arthur's legendary association with the Celtic saints justifies the relationship between Arthur and Jesus, with the Celtic saints representing heroic military defenders conducting a spiritual fight against the world's principles of greed, selfishness, and domestic will (Dilworth 2008: 218). Despite the conflict in the poem, there is also hope expressed for Wales and the modern world (Godwin Phelps 1982: par. 11). The source of this hope is the sleeping lord, who is depicted as both Christ and Arthur (Godwin Phelps 1982: par. 11). Godwin Phelps observes that both the story of Christ and the one of Arthur contain an element of "betrayal, defeat, and subsequent resurrection" offering hope for "new leadership" (1982: par. 11). According to one of the Welsh folklore stories, Arthur was a hero without a grave who would return when Wales needed help (Godwin Phelps 1982: par. 11). Godwin Phelps argues that "[f]or Jones, a resuscitated Arthur means a renewal of Welsh tradition, a resurgence of respect for the land and for the worker, all of which would counterbalance the dire effects of technology" that pose a threat to the macro-organism of nature (Godwin Phelps 1982: par. 11). Jesus Christ represents a sacrifice for environmental destruction, and, as he is associated with the landscape, 'The Sleeping Lord' can be read as a pantheist poem.

However, 'The Sleeping Lord' is not only about Wales. In the text, the concept of 'local' represents the universal. Eric Gill, Jones's artistic mentor, spoke of Jones's visual work as communicating the all-embracing expression of the Welsh setting (Miles & Shiel 1995: 108). Although he referred to Jones's art, the analysis of 'The Sleeping Lord' indicates a similar perspective. Godwin Phelps highlights that "[t]he condition of contemporary Wales depicted in 'The Sleeping Lord' represents the modern world" experiencing a clash between pre-technological times and the technological era, "old culture patterns and the new technological schematisation" (1982). According to Jones, the old cultural patterns are based on the assumption that humans are makers, but that developing technology opposes this approach, which he explains in *Epoch and the Artist* (2008). The making is related to the Aristotelian definition of art as, "a state of mind, conjoined with true Reason, apt to Make", which is also called "poiesis"

(Aristotle 1911: 134, Jones 2008: 172). Jones believes that "making"/"poiesis" is "the sole intransitive activity of man" that opposes "doing" represented by technocracy which leads to environmental destruction (Jones 2008: 172, 149).

Not without reason, Dilworth claims that 'The Sleeping Lord' is the most crucial ecological poem ever written. The text contains descriptions of nature woven with history, among which Christ is compared to Achilles, Arthur, and the landscape itself. It depicts animals, flowers, stones, and humans as elements of an intricate structure, which is damaged by human activities. Jones's criticism of instrumental thinking about the environment makes him a post-Romanticist who "seeks to revivify rather than rationalise our experience of the world" (Griffiths 2017: 145).

7. Conclusions

As this analysis tried to demonstrate, in David Jones's two poetic works, *The Anathemata* and 'The Sleeping Lord', nature and culture are described as integral parts of one larger structure. Therefore, any human actions that disrupt this structure will inevitably affect all its components. This is why Jones speaks of his literary work and art in terms of interrelationships which is evident in his poems (Jones 2008: 31). Reading the poems can be compared to navigating through a dense forest, as the poems are heavily connotative and require close attention. His writing is often allusive and lacks an easily discernible structure, creating the impression of a totality constructed from hardly definable interpenetrating elements.

In *The Anathemata*, the realms of science and poetry are blurred. The text attempts to break the duality between the two by utilising the bardic tradition of storytelling. In the poem, the poetic insight is inseparable from the notion of culture wherein a mixture of myths from pagan and Christian traditions were classified into one category. This was despite the fact that Jones was a practising Catholic and, according to Dilworth, structured the poem around the central description of Christian rites. The mythic amalgamates into one with the corporeal, merging the cultural with the biological.

Jones's most ecological poem, 'The Sleeping Lord', focuses on the damage inflicted on the environment by humans. The text emphasises the interconnectedness of all things – animate and inanimate – and how human actions have devastating effects on the environment. Moreover, similar to *The Anathemata*, it also contains a fusion of pagan and Christian motifs. Overall, the poem complements *The Anathemata* as they both present similar themes. 'The Sleeping Lord' serves as a reminder of the need to respect and protect the environment and to value the poetic and spiritual dimensions of life alongside its practical aspects.

It is evident that both *The Anathemata* and 'The Sleeping Lord' convey an ecological message as they emphasise the interconnectedness of nature and

culture. Through their allusiveness, the poems reveal their core meaning: everything is contained within the web of connections that constitutes nature. This allusiveness, which draws from religion, culture, history and science, is a core ecopoetic notion in David Jones's poetry that may paradoxically hinder its reading. The above analysis of *The Anathemata* and 'The Sleeping Lord' merely covers a fraction of his texts. Further research into Jones's poems and theoretical essays on culture will reveal the complex body of his challenging work, which constitutes an intricate form of ecopoetry.

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