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The Regional Impersonal as a Mode of Dwelling: Structures of Embodiment in David Jones's *The Anathémata* and Basil Bunting's *Briggflatts*

ABSTRACT

The discussion of dwelling in this article focuses on T. S. Eliot's controversial axiom of poetic impersonality as articulated in *The Sacred Wood* (1920) and practiced in *The Waste Land* (1922), and on how this axiom is rearticulated by his two younger contemporaries David Jones and Basil Bunting. I argue that in *The Anathémata* (1952) and *Briggflatts* (1966), their respective masterpieces, they reintegrate the ego absconditus through their distinct geo-aesthetical self-positioning which gives rise to "the regional impersonal" mode of poetic dwelling. This article explores the complex dialectics between the (neo)modernist claim of impersonality and the affective regional identification of the self-projecting consciousness in the two poems. While sharing Eliot's regard for the poetic artifact, Jones and Bunting rehabilitate the notion of the poet's cultural affiliation and representativeness as well as a culturally stimulated consciousness. Their act of self-sublimation is balanced by the material and sensual anchor of their regional allegiance. Further, the Eliotean fissure between the mind that experiences and suffers and the mind that creates resulting in a cascading multiplicity of voices in *The Waste Land*, is healed in Jones's and Bunting's poetic nostos and active mode of dwelling. Also, by giving resonance to numerous names and voices, mostly disembodied and obliterated entities, Jones's and Bunting's poetics introduces unifying strategies of impersonation reflecting their definite geo-cultural positioning. Eliot's original aporia is thus not resolved but re-inhabited.

Keywords: poetic sequence, (neo)modernism, regionalism, impersonality, bard, David Jones, Basil Bunting.

Over a quarter of a century had passed since the publication of *The Waste Land* and its theoretical accompaniment, *The Sacred Wood*, when T. S. Eliot remarked with experienced emphasis: “No man wholly escapes from the kind, or wholly surpasses the degree, of culture which he acquired from his early environment” (*Notes* 115). The very sensibility and intense awareness dictating these lines stimulated the symptomatically distinct yet principally analogous poetics of impersonality characterizing the early endeavours of T. S. Eliot and the later sequences of David Jones and Basil Bunting. Even though Eliot’s aesthetic stance advocating a complete erasure of the traces of authorial presence in the literary work might seem extreme and contrived to elicit “awed confusion” (Ellmann 2), I believe that its deep seriousness and more definite motivation can be revealed in the context of neo-modernist poetry. It is the “early environment” postulated in Eliot’s *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* which alludes to the mode of dwelling as practiced by Jones and Bunting and which ultimately transforms the authors’ respective withdrawal in the sequences of *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* into a most distinct expression of what I term “the regional impersonal.”

“TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT”: ELIOT’S APORIA

The decades following the modernist *annus mirabilis* of 1922 saw an increasing critical resistance to Eliot’s ideal of aesthetic impersonality as a central interpretative imperative. After the initial identification of his contemporaries with the socio-cultural disillusionment of *The Waste Land* (Cooper 94) and a collective embrace of its unprecedented experimental energy (Cowley 163), the poem has been repeatedly reassessed with a growing emphasis on the personal element, which is suppressed yet not fully sublimated. As the echoes of the post-WWI shock gradually subsided, Eliot’s own axiom has been directed as a deconstructive tool against his poetry. This suggestive document of civilizational collapse was re-interpreted in terms of Eliot’s philosophic allegiance to the solipsistic worldview of F. H. Bradley (Allan). The poet’s fascination with the collective unconscious and the anthropological studies shared with other modernists, reflected in the ritual resonance of *The Waste Land* (Brown 109), has been narrowed into a psychoanalytical account of his own “ordeals” (Gordon). The intriguing multiplicity of voices and textual mementos has been redefined, under the psycho-biographical imperative, as a quest and vocal performance of a single protagonist (Bedient).

However, while the discussion of the poem has been thus increasingly gravitating towards a confessionalist view, the explanation of Eliot's possible motives for embracing the impersonal aesthetic stand has been striving towards surpersonal elucidation and consequentiality. The poet's insistent pleading for a non-self-assertive poetic practice has been regarded as a natural reaction against the Romantic excesses of subjectivism, "its seductive artistic 'I'" (Spender 136) and its biographical interpretative reductivism, as well as against Victorian sentimentalism. In the essays collected in *The Sacred Wood*, Eliot argues for an aesthetic discipline of the author's self-effacement from his creation. Identifying his objectivist stand as classicist, he attacks the romanticist sensibility for its troublesome individualism and unprofitable following of the artist's "inner voice," for an attenuated "sense of fact" and self-conscious Titanism (Bornstein 116). For the young poet, Rousseau's heritage was seen as an embodiment of "excess in any direction" (Moody 43). The post-1920 modernist production and sensibility is presented in constant *agon* with Blake's "eccentricity," "shapelessness," and "confusion of thought, emotion and vision" (Eliot, *Sacred Wood* 155–58) as well as Wordsworth's proto-Georgianism (Bornstein 105). While this exegetical polarity seems fully justifiable, and has been supported by the poet's own arguments, in isolation and through re-iteration it intensifies the *aporia* of Eliotean impersonality.

Several critical voices have contested the erroneous presumption of modernist impersonality (Buch-Jepsen 81–87; Schwarz 8–12; Ellmann 197–98). Rather than as a presence/absence dichotomy introducing a line of deconstructing sensationalism, the advocacy of impersonality should be viewed as a degree of authorial withdrawal. The interpreting process should constantly balance the ever-present interplay between the two impulses. In this perspective, the foundational texts of Eliot's poetics, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and *The Waste Land*, will emerge, while emphatically professing authorial self-abnegation, as pieces of highly involved personal dialectics. The special asset of the former piece in this sense can be judged by Eliot's retrospective insistence on misdating this essay. Published originally in 1919, it was subsequently dated 1917 in an emphatic act of historical-cultural visionary self-inscription (Smith 22–41). This essay constantly treads a fine line between modernist poetics and politics following Eliot's "set purpose . . . in the name of explicit modernity" (Adams 130). The boundary between the impersonal creed and personal practice becomes practically invisible; Eliot steps with extreme stealth and caution as an aspirant priest haunting the Sacred Wood (Frazer 29). To ascertain the poet's private engagement in this endeavour, to apprehend the personal impulse behind the aesthetic will to attain "depersonalization" and "continual self-sacrifice" ("Tradition" 154), a point of contrast and reference is necessary.

In the following exploration of modernist impersonality, the regional focus of two neo-modernist sequences, *The Anathémata* (1952) by David Jones and *Briggflatts* (1966) by Basil Bunting will provide this correlative and, to some extent, corrective. It is through analysis and appreciation of the layered affective positionality of these two long poems that the mode of “the regional impersonal” as an expression of late modernist poetic dwelling inspired by Eliot’s axiom will constitutively emerge. Even though neither poet has entered the literary canon as a prominent advocator of impersonality, they both shared, consistently and convincingly, Eliot’s poetics of “ego absconditus” (Ellmann 2). While “Tradition and the Individual Talent” and *The Waste Land* can be regarded as aesthetical propositions, Jones’s *The Anathémata* and Bunting’s *Briggflatts* represent mature testimonies and climactic expressions of both poets’ lifelong allegiances to the practice of authorial withdrawal to the textual margin. Considering the younger poets’ positionality via the regional impersonal mode, we can begin to discern the subtle and persistent strategies of their poetic dwelling, communicating both their presence within their text and within their respective regions.

“MATERIA POETICA”: JONES’S AND BUNTING’S ARTEFACTURE

We should start this corrective reconsideration by pointing to the sheer precarity of Jones’s and Bunting’s aesthetic undertaking when formulating this mode of dwelling. While Eliot’s proposition of impersonality caused a notable critical stir yet enabled him assert his claim of aesthetic ascendancy, the post-WWII years found Jones and Bunting in a much more troublesome position. Their sequences were practically the only poetic works resisting the influx of the self-consciousness and bruised self-expression characteristic of most poetry produced during the 1950s and 1960s. The culturally expansive vision and historical inspiration of their work, a fully assimilated heritage of interwar modernism, did not endear them to proponents of the confessionalist current nor to defendants of the insular exclusivity of the poetic focus. The modernist sensibility of Jones and Bunting resisted the rawness of self-analysis as well as the immediacy of the empiricist experience, constantly pushing back against any close sensual or existential circumscription.

Mindful of Eliot’s emphatic recommendation to focus on the poetry instead of the poet (“Tradition” 154), Jones’s and Bunting’s poetic practice had been constantly re-orienting its interest from the subject to the object of the poetic expression, culminating in the bravura of the steady regard

in their two late sequences. Since their early creative stages, both poets emphasized the ultimate importance of craft, of the perfection of the poetic artefacture taking precedence over the poet's own presence. In *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts*, the perfection of the poets' art finally, and definitely, superseded the perfection of their lives. Both creative endeavours took over a decade of silence and crafting dedication (Jones, *Anathémata* 14–15; Makin 119–25). Without the presence of a discerning editor who could repeat Pound's radical act, the two poets had to adopt the most extreme self-discipline commended by Eliot. The unassuming presence of Jones and Bunting in their works recalls the self-insertion of the Celtic scribes and illuminators in the margins of their texts and, similar to this cultural precedent, serves as an index of their workman's humility and selfless spirit of aesthetic celebration (Rollason 150–51).

Early in his career, David Jones was trained to submit his artistic vision to the expressive technique and material medium during his apprenticeship as a painter and woodcutter (Blamires 35–73). In his subsequent literary work, he developed an analogous (im)personal position regarding his aesthetic object. In *The Anathémata*, the poet's artefacture-oriented archaeological impulse finds its most inclusive expression. In the Preface to his civilizational panorama, Jones's writing echoes Eliot's sentiment: "The workman must be dead to himself while engaged upon the work, otherwise we have that sort of 'self-expression' which is as undesirable in the painter or the writer as in the carpenter, the cantor, the half-back, or the cook" (12). In a letter to Saunders Lewis, Jones emphasizes his exclusive tending to the "materia poetica" and the necessity of self-restriction in the final arrangement in order to let "the facts speak for themselves as *signa*" (Corcoran, *Poetry* 27). Further, even though Jones's poetry is committed to a representationally sacramental and aesthetically transforming personal vision of Western culture, the author's presence driving this particular vision does not manifest itself through an "assertiveness" that would remind one of, for instance, William Blake (Brown 129).

Even though the focus of Bunting's Northumberland sequence seems more intimate and introspectively oriented, the poet's lifelong allegiance to the objectivist creed and practice prevented the hard, sinewy texture of his lines from sliding into nostalgia or pure self-analysis. Writing to Louis Zukofsky, his kindred spirit on the "outer Arctic margin" (Seed 105), Bunting defines a poem as "the desire for what is objectively perfect" (Forde 72). Throughout his life, he repeatedly refuses biography-driven creative and interpretative impulses. In 1932, he insists in one of his reviews that "it is confusing and destructive to try and explain anything in terms of anything else," especially "poetry in terms of psychology" (72). Over forty years later, in his foreword to *The Selected Poems of Joseph Skipsey*,

he reiterates this conviction: “We buy our shirts without asking who the seamstress was, and should read our poems without paying too much attention to the names they are printed over. Things once made stand free of their makers, the more anonymous the better” (Caddel and Flowers 7).

In his lifelong quest for a viable form of modernist lyricism, Bunting finds himself struggling with the major tradition of English poetry. In a repeated poetic exercise, he excises Shakespeare’s sonnets, suppressing traces of the poet’s explicit affective presence in the text (Caddel). Bunting whittles the verse like the Northumbrian mason whose “fingers ache on the rubbing stone” (Bunting 12). Even though a certain similarity between Wordsworth’s “growth of the poet’s mind” and Bunting’s Northern sequence has been noted (Alldritt 152; Forde 208), it is the uncompromising “dwelling . . . on the worth and necessity . . . of things” of the young bard and his tireless “dodg[ing] of the plainest words into the right shape” that primarily fascinates Bunting (Makin 16, 269–72). Even though he subtitles his sequence “An Autobiography,” Bunting refuses any facile biographical equation and insists that “the truth of the poem is of another kind” (Bunting 43).

Professing the aesthetic belief in impersonality with no less conviction than T. S. Eliot, Jones and Bunting did not only preserve the heritage of his high modernist principles, but they also revitalized the non-canonic fringes of “the great English tradition of personal poetry” (Blamires 12–13) by developing their distinct non-subjective mode of creative expression and representation. *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* show the perfect aesthetic poise of two passionate minds whose search for impersonal poetic expression is not motivated by the personal anxiety and anguish (Brown 91–99), and whose act of self-sublimation has been balanced by the material and sensual anchor of their regional allegiance. Contrasting with Eliot’s distressed pacing through the undergrowth of the Sacred Wood, the two “writers in the landscape” developed, through their conscious natal geo-cultural identification, an aesthetic attitude and a mode of dwelling of at once a more astute personal presence and a more genuine, intuitive impersonality than Eliot.

DWELLING IN AFFECTION: TOWARD THE NORTH-WESTERN FRINGE

Neither Jones nor Bunting were so incessantly haunted by the spectre of the historico-cultural displacement and elusive ideal of the “elsewhere community” (Kenner, *Community*) as T. S. Eliot in his transatlantic tension. Confronted by the instinctive bent of their orbit, Eliot’s

theory of impersonality clearly emerges in its geographic causality. The depersonalization of his aesthetic venture appears as a direct reflection and corollary of personal *deplacement*. Juxtaposed with the dynamic yet securely centred cultural and physical experience of Jones and Bunting, Eliot's poetics of impersonality can be interpreted as a reaction to two major stimuli.

First, propelled by his academic confidence, aesthetic ambition, and immense cultural curiosity, Eliot abandons—following the earlier example of Henry James and Ezra Pound—the geo-cultural periphery for the very centre of the historical moment and literary fermentation. Arriving in London in the summer of 1914, a few weeks after the appearance of *Blast* and a few days after the start of the war, Eliot finds himself drawn straight into the politico-cultural vortex of the times. This radical replacement calls for a no less dramatic self-refashioning. Second, striving for a comprehensive literary synthesis of Western culture at the moment of the irremediable fragmentation of the self (Brown; Bradbury and McFarlane 71–93) provokes a further attenuation of the registering subject. The following discussion will address these two aspects of Eliot's ordeal of impersonality and its psycho-aesthetical reflection in the regional discourse of Jones's and Bunting's poetry. The proposed mode of the regional impersonal reflects these two analytical directions in its terminological coining.

Born in “a half savage country out of date” (Pound 49), Eliot had to make the dramatic transfer from the outermost part of the Western circuit to the European metropolis in order to grasp the essence of his time. As he encountered the layered texture of London's physical and spiritual heritage, Eliot also saw his mannered yet historically untested American self culturally re(de)defined. Even before he reached London during WWI, he enjoyed the private spectacle of depersonalization by exploring the disreputable quarters of Cambridge, Boston, and St. Louis as a Harvard undergraduate and, later, as an ambitious expatriate apprentice, the slums of Paris (Gordon 25, 51, 111). His “scavenging” Hydean adventure of urban dissembling (58) reached the climax of ambition when Eliot stepped into the throbbing square mile of the City. Working as a clerk at Lloyds, a leading financial institution of the time cumulating massive capital reserve (Rainey 9), and especially for its Colonial and Foreign Department where he witnessed the monetary procedures following the Peace of Versailles (10), Eliot enjoyed the simultaneous advantage of the expatriate's anonymity and the authority of the *éminence grise*.

This double psychological impulse found its ultimate aesthetic expression in *The Waste Land*, embodied by the withdrawn authority of Tiresias. The blind mantic figure witnessing the nightmarish spectacle represents Eliot's most ingenuous act of poetic depersonalization. His

thickly veiled presence, paying tribute to the dramatic mastery and rhetoric of Jacobean authors (Kenner, *Poet* 22), the troubled magniloquence of the Victorian dramatic monologues, and the ironical, quizzical line of Laforgue (Rainey 4), brings the contemporary performing strategy of the Yeatsian “mask” and Pound’s “persona” onto another level of dissimulating and expressive potential.

The referential scope of Tiresias’ presence offers a practically unlimited number of self-dramatizing scenarios: Tiresias’ legendary androgyny transcends gender boundaries; his protracted ordeal on Earth brings him from Thebes to a London suburb; he walks this world and the other. His textual presence in the Western canon is pervasive. His story inspires, among the most illustrious authorities, Sophocles, Euripides, Ovid, as well as Tennyson. His riddling knowledge, life, and contacts wield power. The ultimate absorption of his negative capability melting the individual fates and characteristics (viz. Eliot’s note to line 218) results in the isotopic anonymity paralleling the international pictorial communication introduced to the public in the same year (North 107).

According to the Greek myth, Tiresias prophesied the death of Narcissus. Adopting the Tiresian sublime as a trope of the authorial presence in his poem, Eliot renounces direct aesthetic self-reflection. Without falling for their own creative self-imprint, Jones and Bunting embrace a less oblique and expansive strategy of authorial self-inscription. The previously discussed supreme attention to their craft has been, since their early poetic attempts, deflecting their individual self-regard. Even though recalling their awe upon reading *The Waste Land*, the two poets, with no will to disguise within the familiar environment, objected to its “fraudulent representations of subjectivity” (Smalley 189). This resistance to self-veiling clearly manifests itself in *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts*; both are sequences of the imaginative and physical homecoming that celebrate a conscious return to and self-authorized dwelling in the places of previously only instinctive identification.

Both poems, throbbing dioramas of life on the north-western fringe of Britain, identify the sincerity of one’s self-presentation and wholesomeness of one’s aesthetic purpose with the immediate allegiance to the native territory. Remaining close to the regional expressive sources and geo-cultural deposits possesses for both the ultimate moral and imaginative value. In his detailed investigation and vivid poetic recreation of the geology and topography of the Welsh peninsula, Jones strives for the authentic imaginative experience of the early medieval Arthurian narratives. Fascinated by the plasticity of their relief, he moulds, with an infinite patience and curiosity, the Welsh terrain before the readers of *The Anathémata*. The ice sheets heave and

slide, hills sink and rise, rivers revert and meander in the panoramic spectacle of the “fore-time” until the geographic “locale . . . incidence . . . deliberations” (Jones, *Anathémata* 53) are conspicuous and definite enough to receive the Briton warriors. Reviving the native tradition of the specific topographic silhouette, Jones resists the “vague[ness] and generalization” of the uprooted adaptations of the Continental Arthurian Romance-cycles foreshadowing the internationalized poetic idiom of modernism in the new “Alexandrian” era (Hague 80; Kenner, *Island* 4; Jones, *Epoch* 273).

The individualized narrative of Bunting’s sequence dramatizes the geo-aesthetic dichotomy between localized affection and outward-bound ambition in even more explicit, experientially focused terms. In many respects, *Briggflatts* can be interpreted as a poignant parable of artistic displacement and immoderate ambition bringing the collapse of the individual inner sphere. Abandoning the native expressive tool and idiom, the Northumbrian artisan toils in vain to shape his words in foreign quarries, “an evasive ornament” to his displaced existence (Bunting 21). Even though “re-enacting the long-standing tradition of the Grand Tour” (Kenner, *Community* 6), he encounters sites of classic memory and sources of high cultural refinement, he fails to produce a lasting form (“It looks well on the page, but never well enough. . .” Bunting 20) unless he embraces the aching toil and patterns of northern masonry. Even though the Apuan marble, “always trickling, apt to the saw” (20), from the quarries at Carrara engendered the robust physiognomy of Michelangelo’s forms (Alldritt 156), the “deserter . . . reproached uneasy mason” (Bunting 21) has to seek immortality in the echo and edge of the Northumbrian stone.

The eastward bound Alexandrian expansion in the third part of the sequence, striving to reach the very end of the world as mapped and imagined by man, fails to achieve cultural and metaphysical transcendence. Ending in a hiatus of strained consciousness (27–28), the quest reverses its course under the renewed imperative of the native territory (29). The poet’s ambition to nudge the cultural polity is chastised by the story of the Northumbrian skald, Egill Skallagrímsson, an implicit presence and the voice of the “Baltic plainsong” (13), in Bunting’s poem tracing the immoderate expansion of the Viking ruler Eric Bloodaxe. Challenging the established power structure, his art suffers humiliation (Rollason 218); joining the violent quest of the “king of Orkney, king of Dublin, king of Orkney” (Bunting 15), his lines perish in the “bale on the fellside” (22). The poetry prospers “lying low” (28), imaginatively and materially involved with its individual territorial origins.

DWELLING IN ACTION: BARDS AND SEERS

Not only do Jones and Bunting avoid any self-concealing strategies, but they also introduce the explicit presence of the poet in their sequences, as if actively reasserting a certain unity and substantiality of the creative mind fractured by Eliot's harrowing journey across the Waste Land. Re-embracing the Aristotelian impression of the mind (Eliot, "Tradition" 156) through self-reflective professional projection, they virtually eliminate the cognitive split between the mind that experiences and suffers, and the mind that creates. Even though still in a way present by indirection and a generalized role-playing in their work, the poets' identity and performance are essentially cognate and region-bound. While both poems are consequently pervaded by the generative spirit of verbal enterprise, the only analogous attempt of this kind to be found in *The Waste Land* is Hieronymo's spectacular revengeful deceit (l. 431).

Thus, even though the explicit pronominal authorial presence in the two regional poems is extremely sparse since their sensibility points towards the pondered object, physical pattern, or cultural artifact, the "pers. pron. Ist sing. nom." (Spender 133) represents a considerably stable referential vector. In *The Waste Land*, "I" becomes a self-proclaiming token of subjective displacement and identity fracture. Similar to the decontextualized Tiresias, the young poet "throb[s] between two lives" (Eliot, *The Waste Land* l. 218). Even though Eliot grants the "old man with wrinkled female breasts" (l. 219) the privileged position of a personage uniting the poem and seeing its "substance" (viz. note to line 218), the circumference of the seer's knowledge and attention does not seem identical to the registering "zone of consciousness" of the poem (Kenner, *Poet* 149).

The identifying apposition "I, Tiresias" (Eliot, *The Waste Land* l. 218) thus presents yet another verbal echo multiplying the poem's signifiers. This pronoun is in its turn subsumed in the final cry of desperate self-defence: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (l. 430). The resounding nominal plural at the end suggests a more pervasive dissolution than suspected. The following line, the last clutch of the European mind, brings the ultimate split of the regard between the subject and the object, "Hieronymo's mad again," after the historicizing orthography conceals the first person, "Why Ile fit you" (l. 431). The Fisher King's inquiry, "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" (l. 425), dramatizes the intriguing dilemma between the poetics and politics of Eliot's modernism, between the self-effacement and personal agency behind such withdrawal.

No such splintering and impulsive ostracization of the self characterizes Jones's or Bunting's poems. As if in response to Eliot's mask of the mythic seer exhausted by his foreknowledge, in *The Anathémata*, Jones adopts the

stance of the native prophet of the emblematic name. His vatic confidence is reflected by the scriptural and classical precedents of the framing inscription: "TESTE DAVID CVM SIBYLLA" (Jones, *Anathémata* 49). In "Mabinog's Liturgy," revisiting an early Welsh sacramental past, the poet challenges the displaced authority of Tiresias: "... then let's prop his lids / p'r'aps he'll see a bit: / he lives to collate phenomena" (192).

If the poet joins his name with that of Sibyll and "place[s] himself in the order of signs" in this process (Jones, *Epoch* 5), such a gesture can be regarded as an instinctive expression of affection and distress rather than as a pivotal point of an impersonating manipulation. While the poet's voice, aware of historical and linguistic affinities, laments at the close of "Angle-Land" the recent mass fratricide in the West (Jones, *Anathémata* 115), it recalls, in uninhibited autobiographical detail, the truce of 1915 in the trenches of "Gallia Belgica" as one of the miracles of the Child (216). From the very beginning, we hear the poet's voice striving for an accurate expression for his unprecedented documentary enterprise: "His groping syntax, if we attend, already shapes. . ." (49). The frequent pronominal fusion of the poet and the priest administering the Mass does not pose, unlike Eliot's discursive concept for his poem ("He do the police in different voices"), essential problems of identity, for in Jones's view they are both participating in "poiesis," the man-defining activity (*Epoch* 13, 90).

Bunting's poem manifests a similar ease within the accepted limits of poetic self-identification and self-inscription. Even though the five-act aesthetic and psychological quest of *Briggflatts* juxtaposes several relatively discreet inquiring impulses and adventures (especially the second and third parts) with dramatic displacing breaks between them, Bunting's poetics ultimately favours an identity juncture. Rather than a kaleidoscope of multiple adventures and personae, his sequence should be regarded as an intensive individual apprenticeship inspired by the example of Sir Walter Raleigh, Bunting's ideal of experiential versatility (Makin 14, 271).

Similar to Raleigh, Bunting's praxis also precedes his poesis: "You can't write about anything unless you've experienced it: you're either confused in your subject matter or else you get it wrong" (Hall 7). The adventurous personal argosy of *Briggflatts* testifies that it was not through academic excellence that Bunting strove for cultural mastery, and that, unlike Eliot, if he occasionally took a break in writing poetry, it was not for the study of "metaphysics, logic, psychology, philosophy, Sanskrit and Pali" (Kenner, *Poet* 39). Even though the poet finds himself in various attires at multiple locations during this anabasis, his personal identity remains unfractured. It gradually emerges as the poet realizes his regional affinity while exposed to the foreign element. Following the inarticulate immediacy of his youthful regional identification in the

opening act, the poet's pronominal assertion signals a high emotional pitch. The intensity of the young expatriate's distress in *Briggflatts* ("You who can calculate the course / of a biased bowl / shall I come near the jack?" 17–18) is equalled and reversed only in the repose of the homing destination ("I hear Aneurin. . . I see Aneurin's. . ." 33).

Similar to *The Waste Land*, the regional mosaics of *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* make a constant claim to impersonality while in fact representing an unfolding individual zone of consciousness (Dilworth 153; Forde 209). The vision and experience of the two sequences is no less intensely internalized than the multitudinous perceptions in Eliot's poem. The panoramic historico-cultural perspective of Jones's embracing the vast mythical and physical deposits of the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts, may, in spite of its geographical and chronological expansiveness, represent a moment of heightened consciousness, a meditative flight of mind, during the Mass celebration. The adventure of *Briggflatts* can be regarded as an experiential retrospect filtered through the mind of the "sailor come home" (Alldritt 150), meditating upon the native shore in a half-hermitic ecstasy similar to the region's early medieval saints (Bunting 33–34).

However, unlike *The Waste Land*, Jones's and Bunting's works do not sing a consciousness irredeemably locked in its solipsist cell (Eliot, *The Waste Land* l. 411–16). Their celebratory note could revive the "broken Coriolanus," loyalty without land (l. 416). Even though meditatively introverted, their sequences do not aspire to the dramatic representation of F. H. Bradley's existentialist perspective. While Eliot's poem self-consciously subscribes to the philosopher's belief that the individual "experience falls within [one's] own circle, a circle closed on the outside," mostly "peculiar and private to [one's] soul" (note to l. 411), Jones and Bunting opt for a more essentialist view of the modern human experience. While Tiresias' expansive and attenuated presence in *The Waste Land* represents the ultimate terror of the existentialist sentence, *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* introduce a more dynamic personal agency as a direct reflection of an active act of dwelling.

In the modern hell of Eliot's poem, Tiresias, who keeps his wit and senses in the mythic inferno (Gantz 528) and whose "intelligence SO ALIVE" fascinated Pound himself in the letter to Basil Bunting (Makin 77), survives only as a passive medium of historical predestination and repetitive collapse. In a conspicuous contrast to his "seeing" presence, the regional sensibility of Jones and Bunting calls for a more involved presence. The voice of Jones's poet constantly inquires about the possible historical outcome and accuracy of the imaginatively transposed events, actively delving into the deposits of the land:

When is Tellus
 to give her dear fosterling
 her adaptable, rational, elect
 and plucked-out otherling
 a reasonable chance?
 Not yet—but soon, very soon
 as lithic phases go. (*Anathémata* 64)

The interrogative cadence curves the lines throughout the poem, the visual disposition reflecting the active search on an archaeological site:

By the uteral marks
 That make the covering stone an artifact.
 By the penile ivory
 And by the viatic meats.
 Who was he? Who? (65–66)

Similar to *The Anathémata*, the inward turn of *Briggflatts* reflects the poet's strenuous journey for aesthetic form and meaning, ceasing only when "the sheets are gathered and bound, / the volume indexed and shelved. . ." (Bunting 38).

While the observing notoriety of Eliot's Tiresias reflects the ideal of anonymity and authority of the poet, the native impulse towards impersonality in Bunting's and Jones's poetry is of a bardic nature. The suppression of the poets' self-consciousness and self-regard in their sequences answering to the call of the land and its memory does not preclude an emphatic reflection of their shaping, performing presence or adventurous participation. After the expository crisis of Eliot's *Waste Land*, Jones and Bunting found an alternative to the long poem based on an "impressionistic or emotional" language and experience (Miles 97) in the regional format of an epic. Through the poets' withdrawal, Jones's and Bunting's compositions express their belief in the possibility of the suprapersonal, culturally representative modern poetic enterprise.

The epic potential of their individual work has been recognized since W. H. Auden's recognition of *The Anathémata* published as "A Contemporary Epic." William Bissett's response, "In Medias Res," has been drafted in a similar spirit. The focus and organization of one of the most complex studies on *The Anathémata*, Neil Corcoran's *The Song of Deeds*, was clearly inspired by the echo of Jones's "gest" (244). In his study of Bunting's poetics, Peter Makin reminds the reader of the poet's predilection for the epic genre, inspiring him to study Persian in order to complete the English translation of Firdusi's *Shahnameh* (75–77). In his companion to *The Anathémata*, René Hague has commented on the

“Homeric spirit” maintained by Jones’s choice of words reviving the epic tradition of resonant compounds (42). Burton Hatlen, analyzing Bunting’s verbal fond, has drawn attention to the resonance of the opening “brag” in *Briggflatts* with the first word of *Beowulf*, “hwæt” (52).

Even though the historical and genre inspiration of Jones’s and Bunting’s poetry has been symptomatically recognized, the broader implications regarding the radically differing geographical identification of the two generations of modernist poets have not been given full critical attention. And yet, while Eliot, behind his Tiresian mask, could only recall in mournful retrospect the unifying potential of Virgil’s opus (Coetzee 1–16), Jones and Bunting revived in their poetry the resonant heritage of the Briton *cynfeirdd*, the “early poets” of the north-western native tradition (Jones, *Epoch* 63; Makin 177–86). Jones’s priest ministers at the altar of a rough stone (*Anathémata* 50); Bunting’s voyager navigates by the strides of “Orion over Farne” (Bunting 37). The seer thrives throbbing in the life of his region. Reaffirming this creative supposition, the poetry of Jones and Bunting connects the visionary tradition of the island (Ackroyd 49–58) with the formalist orientation and experiment of modernist poetry.

DWELLING IN DEMARCATIION: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND LINGUISTIC ISOTOPES

In yet another sense, composition under the imaginative guidance of “the tutelary of the place” (Jones, “Lord” 211) encourages the impersonalist poetics in *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* without sacrificing the sense of a stable authorial identity and without completely eliminating the affective aesthetic element. Adopting the character of the enfeebled guardian of Western prophecy for his ambitious historical-cultural retrospect, T. S. Eliot could hardly prevent the exchange between Tiresias’ consciousness and the disembodied cries of civilizational pandemonium. In the prevailing modernist experience of dislocation, the boundaries of his identity and inner experience have been eroded by the unceasing vocal attacks from the outside. At the moment of the historical crisis of personal identity (Brown 1; Jervis 19–21), the “disorientate[d], shatter[ed] ‘I’” (Spender 134) is not offered much support in the sense of self-defence and self-definition.

Having experienced this collapse during their younger years, Jones and Bunting search for viable aesthetic-psychological alternatives to the crumbling limits of the contemporary self. The decisive return to their native territory in *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* inspires the substitution of the frail boundaries of the expatriate identity and sensibility of *The*

Waste Land with a more solid, geo-historical demarcation and the “inward continuities of the site / of place” (Jones, *Anathémata* 90). Invoking the genius loci, “[her] that loves place, time, demarcation, hearth, kin, enclosure, site, differentiated cult . . . administratrix of demarcations . . . queen of the minivers” (Jones, “Lord” 211–16), in their poetry, Jones and Bunting establish a psychological centre steadying the subjective presence. It is through the imaginative transposition and cataloguing of the regional physical and cultural memory that the individual sensibility is projected and identity asserted in *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* without much explicit authorial intervention.

This implicit self-projection shaped by the regional boundaries results in a more definite control of the registering consciousness over multiple impressions and cultural traces. While in *The Waste Land*, the “filament of platinum” (“Tradition” 154) of individual perception is beaten ever thinner by the “incessant shower” of innumerable words and voices (Woolf 898), the regional foci of *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* withhold this echoing multitude. Even though occasionally giving prominence to the speech and sensibility of other characters, the visionary voice of Jones’s sequence imaginatively unites and rhetorically frames the individual performances. Introducing the extensive monologue of the Lady of the Pool in the heart of the sequence, it celebrates the unadulterated spirituality of the pre-imperialist London. In the idiom and professional pleading of Eb Bradshaw, “Thames-side mast-and-block maker” in “Redriff” (Jones, *Epoch* 26), the visionary voice recalls the ancestral patience of the pre-industrial craft. The repenting beauty of Gwenhwyfar in “Mabinog’s Liturgy” becomes the embodiment of the island’s early bounty and spirituality.

The regional orientation of Bunting’s sequence inspires an even more pronounced univocality. The multiple biographical traces marking the Northumbrian territory converge in the subjective centre of the aesthetic expression. The fragmentary memory of the northern saints and rulers of the Northumbrian heroic age becomes vividly embodied in the instinctive identification and psychological projection of the central consciousness. The region’s behavioural gamut runs from the expansiveness of the Norse pretender to the meditative containment of the saints.

The regional foundation and demarcation of the individual consciousness in Jones’s and Bunting’s poetry are intensified by clearly marked linguistic isotopes. While the territorially marked verbal expression in *The Waste Land* signals a general cultural uprooting and social decontextualizing of the post-war world (“Bin gar keine Russin, stamm’ aus Litauen, echt deutsch”—Eliot, *The Waste Land* l. 12) culminating in the incomprehensible echo of the east-bound linguistic *nostos* (l. 400–31), the dialectal precision in *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* represents crucial

means for individual expressive authentication. The two sequences draw their mental and spiritual vigour from their author's conviction that "Tellus of the myriad names answers to but one name" which, "gently bend[ing] her head from far-height," she "whispered on known-site" (Jones, "Lord" 211). The visionary sensibility in Jones's poem constantly seeks and reasserts its geo-linguistic definition:

And where:

West horse-hills?
Volcae-remnants' crag-carneddau?
Moel of the Mothers? /
the many *colles Arthuri*?

...

Terra Walliae!

Buarth Meibion Arthur! (*Anathémata* 55)

263

The limits of consciousness in *Briggflatts* emerge through a similar pattern of contrasts: ". . . becks ring on limestone, / whisper to peat" (Bunting 13). The poet adds an afterthought emphasizing the psycho-linguistic demarcation: "We have burns in the east, BECKS in the west, but no brooks or creeks" (43). These geo-linguistic limits mark the sphere of an affective identification of the self-projecting consciousness.

FROM DWELLING ON APORIA TO DWELLING IN APORIA

While Tiresias' presence in *The Waste Land* documents a complete personal detachment from the knowledge passed and possessed, the regional poetics of *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* signals the return of individual sensitivity with the renewed veneration of "the *numina* of localities and differentiated traditions" (Jones, *Epoch* 270). In Jones's sequence centred on post-Roman Celtic Britain culminated the poet's conviction that poetry is to be seen as "a kind of *anamnesis* of, i.e. an affective recalling of, something loved" (*Anathémata* 21). Bunting's poem celebrates and materializes the imaginative return to England's most northerly county envisioned since the schoolboy's letters home bewailing "great underlying difference between North and South" (Alldritt 3,15)—"a visit postponed for fifty years" (Bunting 38).

In *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts*, Eliot's dictum of impersonality is revealed in its aesthetic irreducibility and experiential truth: "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality; but an escape from personality. But, of

course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things" (Eliot, "Tradition" 156). Identifying the regional impersonal as a mode of geo-poetical dwelling in Jones's *Anathémata* and Bunting's *Briggflatts* allows us to contemplate and appreciate the complexity of Eliot's original proposition within the unifying gesture of the two sequences. Through these, the full truth of Eliot's dictum can finally be brought home. It can, at last, emerge as an aporia which has never been meant to be resolved but (re)inhabited. It is the self-positioning strategy of the regional impersonal that allows both Jones and Bunting to "live in" (Eliot, "Tradition" 156) the tradition of their respective regions while also locating their individual talents.

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