

MODERNISM, NOMINALISM, AND THE HIDDEN GOD IN SAMUEL BECKETT, WALLACE STEVENS, AND DAVID JONES

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Abstract

The idea that human language is an inherently inadequate instrument for grasping reality is widespread in modernist literature. While the ‘radical nominalism’ of this position has been recognised, this article argues that a genealogical understanding of its theological roots in medieval nominalism can highlight how modernist writers like Samuel Beckett and Wallace Stevens still wrestle with a voluntarist God of absolute and arbitrary power. By contrast, for a writer like David Jones, the historical choice of nominalism amounts to a theological mistake, and the modern artist needs to rediscover a God who consecrates and redeems the human capacity for sign-making.

Keywords: Modernism, Nominalism, Samuel Beckett, Wallace Stevens, David Jones, Voluntarism

I. INTRODUCTION

The idea that human language is an inherently inadequate instrument for grasping reality—that its concepts and metaphors represent mere anthropomorphic projections—is widespread in modernist literature. While the ‘radical nominalism’ of this position has been recognised, this article argues that a fuller genealogical understanding of its theological roots in medieval nominalism is needed to highlight the ways in which modernist writers such as Samuel Beckett and Wallace Stevens still wrestle with a voluntarist God of absolute and arbitrary power. This genealogical perspective also situates modernist radical nominalism as historically founded upon controversial theological choices, thus challenging its self-understanding as the inevitable end-product of a process of post-anthropomorphic, post-theological disenchantment. By contrast, for a writer like David Jones, the historical choice of nominalism amounts to

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a theological mistake, and the task of the modern artist is to rediscover a God who consecrates and redeems the human capacity for sign-making.

Shane Weller has identified a strain of ‘linguistic negativism’¹ within modernism that responded to the philosophical language scepticism around the turn of the 20th century by developing literary practices of negation intending to expose the inadequacy of language itself: a ‘literature of the unword’, as Samuel Beckett put it.² With reference to Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s *Lord Chandos Letter* (1902), Weller points to the ‘radical nominalism’ that underlies this linguistic negativism: ‘When the habitual, abstracting, universalizing mode of apprehending the world breaks down, there emerge radical singularities that cannot, without distortion, be grasped by conceptual thinking—and thus cannot be captured by language, given its necessarily generalizing nature. From such a nominalist perspective, to use the word *tree* is simply a nonsense because this term captures nothing of trees in their diversity, complexity, and mutability.’³ The Austrian philosopher Fritz Mauthner is another key thinker of radical nominalism for Weller (as for Beckett: the following quotations come from his Mauthner notes). In *Beiträge zur einer Kritik der Sprache* (1901–2), Mauthner expounds ‘the teaching that all concepts or words of human thought are only exhalations of the human voice, logically consistent nominalism, according to which the recognition of reality is just as much denied to the human brain as the make-up of a surface of stone’. He continues:

It would not be nominalism if it pretended to be more than a feeling, than a disposition of the human individual facing the world. And in this frame of mind we are denied even a thinking through to a conclusion of—even a satisfactory submersion of oneself into—this teaching, because all thinking takes place in the words of the language and thinking dissolves into itself when the nebulous nature of words has become clear to us.⁴

Weller characterises the literary project of linguistic negativism that follows in the wake of such radical nominalism as governed by ‘the principles of impossibility, on the one hand, and necessity or obligation, on the other’, since the ‘process of unwording is in principle interminable’ in that the ‘work of undoing necessarily relies upon language and remains a linguistic event’.⁵ It can only keep pointing to, and perpetually enacting, the failure of thought and language, *through* language.

For Mauthner, this radical nominalism is the logical outcome of the history of philosophy considered as the ‘slow self-dissolution of the metaphorical’.⁶ The ur-culprit of his story is Plato, whose independently subsisting Ideas are seen as empty metaphors; Aristotle at least situated the Forms or universals within individual things, but this left a residue of inherent purposiveness in

nature, which medieval thinkers like Thomas Aquinas connected with Ideas in the divine mind. Only with the medieval nominalism of a William of Ockham does the ‘genuine self-destruction of metaphorical thinking’⁷—that will culminate in Mauthner’s own critique—properly begin. The plausibility—such as it is⁸—of Mauthner’s radical nominalism is thus intimately linked with its rhetoric of gradual secularising disenchantment: away from naïve anthropomorphism towards an ultimate self-awareness of the merely metaphorical status of universal concepts, natural purposes, and God.

However, it is equally possible to stand this contentious genealogy on its head. What if medieval nominalism itself were the originating theological mistake, and the sceptical obsession with the ‘self-dissolution of the metaphorical’ its ultimate historical progeny?⁹ What if the modernist literary tradition of ‘linguistic negativism’ identified by Weller represents a kind of *impasse*—locked into an imperative of necessity-and-impossibility that is ultimately self-generated? An arsenal of recent theologically inflected genealogies of modernity and ‘the secular’ as emerging from within the long shadow of medieval nominalism could be deployed to make such an argument.¹⁰ My concern here, though, is not to develop this philosophical-theological perspective further, but more simply to argue that considerable *literary-critical* gains can be made by placing the ‘radical nominalist’ strain of language scepticism in modernist literature against the wider context of the medieval nominalist revolution and its aftermath.

One such gain is the insight that, however ‘post-theological’ the modernist writers within this tradition may superficially appear, their work still remains in key respects motivated by a specifically nominalist (and voluntarist) conception of God. A comparative approach becomes necessary here to tease out the sharply contrasting ways in which this underlying *agon* with the nominalist God can emerge. In Samuel Beckett’s work, what underlies the insistence on the failure of human thought and language to grasp reality is an ethical revulsion against theodicy—the idea that God’s ways towards humankind could ever be justifiable. In *The Unnamable* (1953), the rejection of selfhood, the ‘gift of life’, ‘fellow-creatures’, ‘love’, ‘intelligence’, arithmetic, and reason is the only gesture of rebellion left against an indifferent, imperturbable, speechless and utterly unknowable God. By contrast, Wallace Stevens, in ‘Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction’ (1942) deploys language scepticism to seek an empowerment of the poetic self through imaginative creation and un-creation: a naming and un-naming of reality that at certain epiphanic moments mimics and appropriates the absolute (but precariously arbitrary) will of the nominalist God.

Another gain is the realisation that a competing conception of the ability of human language to grasp reality can and does operate within modernist writing that proceeds from an alternative genealogy of modernity: one that regards

radical nominalism as itself a historical mistake. My example here is David Jones, a writer who explicitly opposed the nominalist trajectory of modernity and drew from that opposition a wide-ranging theory of the ‘sacramentalist’, sign-making, and art-making nature of human beings that he tests in his poetry. Jones’ artistic problem is to rediscover a God who has gifted these sign-making capacities to human beings, and who ‘placed Himself in the order of signs’ through his incarnation precisely in order to redeem them. The central drama of his work is the problem posed by the forgetting or active suppression of the nature of human-as-artist within a nominalist, technocratic and utilitarian modernity. As in the long poem *The Anathemata* (1952), the artist and the priest both stand ‘alone in Pellam’s land’—a Waste Land of ‘utile infiltration’ that can only be redeemed by posing a restorative question to modernity itself.

In all three of these modernist writers, then, God turns out to be hidden, but very far from dead. To recover the specific imaginative qualities of the God they continue to wrestle with, however, we need to revisit the impact of the original nominalist revolution.

II. THE LONG SHADOW OF THE NOMINALIST REVOLUTION

The nominalism of William Ockham (c. 1287–1347) and his followers starts from a denial of the reality of universals, essences or natures as inherent in individual things themselves. As Thomas Pfau points out, the consequences of this are far-reaching, since ‘the singular entity is no longer related to an Aristotelian notion of “form” but to a process of “abstraction”’. It thus constitutes a derivative concept rather than a real existent. Nature has become something alien, not something in which we always already participate but an enigmatic other to be acquired and remade by the kind of human conceptual labour that, for Ockham and his nominalist successors, defines all rational activity.¹¹ Our perceptions of the similarities between things are merely that: individual human perceptions, which we can organise into abstractions and label with names or signs, and which we may or may not agree on amongst ourselves. Thus, for Ockham, ‘in the absence of real universals, names become mere signs or signs of signs. Language thus does not reveal being but in practice often conceals the truth about being by fostering a belief in universals. In fact, all so-called universals are merely second or higher order signs that we as finite beings use to aggregate individual beings into categories. These categories, however, do not denote real things. They are only useful fictions that help us make sense out of the radically individualized world.’¹² In other words, the modernist nominalism of ‘radical singularities’ ungraspable by human concepts described by Weller is arguably already implicit in Ockham’s philosophy.

However, by focusing only on modern language sceptics, Weller’s account elides the crucial underlying motivation for Ockham’s rejection of real natures

and universals: his theological voluntarism. For Ockham, the will is prior to and determines the intellect, in both God and human beings. Really existing natures and universals were felt by Ockham to limit God's absolute power, by obliging him to make use of these natures in his act of creation. On the contrary, says Ockham, God's will cannot be constrained in this way, for he is free to do anything that is not contradictory. Precisely in order to get rid of universals theologically, Ockham argues that each being is radically individual: directly and contingently created and sustained in being by God himself without any kind of mediation by created essences. God is furthermore not bound by anything he has previously done, any laws he may have ordained; God is 'no man's debtor', as Ockham often put it.¹³ There is thus no unchanging order of nature that human beings may securely grasp through reason, and there is no eschatological plan for the cosmos that God is bound to actually upholding. This generates a simply frightening picture of the nominalist God that would have tremendous historical repercussions. As Michael Allen Gillespie points out, this God:

was under no obligation to keep his promises or to act consistently. For nominalism God is, to use a technical term, 'indifferent', that is, he recognizes no natural or rational standards of good and evil that guide or constrain his will. What is good is not good in itself but simply because he wills it.¹⁴

It is worth pausing to note how revolutionary this position really is: this God could in principle decree even that we should not love him, and if he did decree this, it would suddenly *be* good for us not to do so. By sharp contrast, in the older view of Thomas Aquinas, the intellect has priority over the will in God as well as in human beings.¹⁵ God creates out of his own perfect goodness, and since he is 'very being by His essence, created being must be His proper effect'.¹⁶ The forms or substances created are an inherent outcome of his perfect intellect. The idea of God suddenly changing his mind about their value or deciding to redo creation is for Aquinas a contradiction in terms. The ultimate end of creation, and of individual creatures within it, is inscribed into the natures that God creates. In human beings, the will is conceived as a rational appetite, and its choice is therefore necessarily guided by the judgement of the intellect. Free will in human beings is thus not conceived in the nominalist-voluntarist way as a sheer power to choose between opposing alternatives. Instead, for Aquinas the will is guided by the end of happiness, an end which is not itself chosen as an object by the will, but rather is a gift of God's grace, for ultimate happiness consists in sharing his life. The will always chooses 'sub ratione boni', under the aspect of the intellect's representation of something *as* good—even when it mistakenly opts for a lesser good. Freedom of the will

for Aquinas therefore means the absence of constraints on the choice of the ultimate end, so that this end may, with the help of supernatural grace, be freely embraced.

Gillespie poignantly summarises the radical contrast between the ‘God that nominalism revealed’ and the ‘beneficent and reasonably predictable God of scholasticism’ found in Aquinas:

The gap between man and God had been greatly increased. God could no longer be understood or influenced by human beings—he acted simply out of freedom and was indifferent to the consequences of his acts. He laid down rules for human conduct, but he might change them at any moment. Some were saved and some were damned, but there was only an accidental relation between salvation and saintliness, and damnation and sin. It is not even clear that this God loves man. The world this God created was thus a radical chaos of utterly diverse things in which humans could find no point of certainty or security.

How could anyone love or venerate such an unsettling God?¹⁷

This is precisely the question that underlies Samuel Beckett’s lifelong repelled fascination with the nominalist God. For Beckett, as we shall see, a stance of ethical rebellion is justified through magnifying this God’s cosmic tyranny and arbitrariness, in juxtaposition with the suffering, failure and weakness of the creatures faced with existence in such a world.

III. ‘FOR REASONS UNKNOWN’: SAMUEL BECKETT VERSUS THE NOMINALIST GOD

For anyone familiar with Beckett’s most famous play, Gillespie’s emphasis on the arbitrary, changeable and un-knowable rules by which ‘some were saved and some were damned’ will instantly evoke the debate about the two thieves crucified next to Christ in *Waiting for Godot* (1952):

Our Saviour. Two thieves. One is supposed to have been saved and the other

... [*He searches for the contrary of saved*] ... damned.¹⁸

The comedy (and the menace) of Vladimir and Estragon’s banter stems from the unspoken assumption that the rules for obtaining one outcome rather than the other are unavailable, and all reports of the event are unreliable—so sheer chance is all there is to go by. The confusion reaches extreme pitch in Lucky’s disintegrating, schizophrenic language as he wrestles with the idea of ‘a personal

God quaquaquaquaqu with white beard quaquaquaqu outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell'.¹⁹ The nominalist God is indifferent ('apathia'), imperturbable ('athambia'), speechless ('aphasia') and utterly unknowable ('reasons unknown'). And his creatures suffer, irredeemably. The underlying driver of Beckett's adoption of a radically nominalist 'literature of the unword' is an ethical outrage against any attempt to justify the ways of the nominalist God to men. But as we shall see, this has paradoxical consequences.

To his friend Axel Kaun in 1937, Beckett described this artistic project of a 'literature of the unword' as governed by a 'nominalist irony', an attempt to 'invent a method by means of which this mocking attitude to words may be put into words'.²⁰ The medium of language itself becomes a 'veil that must be torn apart in order to get at the things (or the Nothingness) behind it'.²¹ Beckett's reading of Mauthner around 1938 confirmed these intuitions, and in the novel *Watt* (1953), started in 1940, 'nominalist irony' suffuses every page, as Chris Ackerley's annotations have shown.²² Watt arrives at the establishment of a certain Mr Knott and spends time there as a servant before moving on again. 'Watt' is a perpetual questioner and seeker, whereas 'Knott' is both enigma and nothingness—and an absent deity figure. The book is about the immense frustrations of Watt as he tries to apply language to the realities encountered in Mr Knott's establishment:

For Watt now found himself in the midst of things which, if they consented to be named, did so as it were with reluctance. ... Looking at a pot, for example, or thinking of a pot, at one of Mr. Knott's pots, of one of Mr. Knott's pots, it was in vain that Watt said, Pot, pot. ... It resembled a pot, it was almost a pot, but it was not a pot of which one could say, Pot, pot, and be comforted.²³

The essence of the Pot capital P, the form or Idea of the pot, has become inaccessible to the human intellect, and Watt finds himself in a chaos of never-fully-nameable particulars, experiencing first-hand the creeping, threatening realisation that, as Mauthner put it:

all thinking takes place in the words of the language and thinking dissolves into itself when the nebulous nature of words has become clear to us.²⁴

Following his tangle with the pot, Watt makes another distressing discovery:

As for himself, though he could no longer call it a man, as he had used to do, with the intuition that he was perhaps not talking nonsense,

yet he could not imagine what else to call it, if not a man. But Watt's imagination had never been a lively one. So he continued to think of himself as a man, as his mother had taught him, when she said, There's a good little man, or, There's a bonny little man, or, There's a clever little man. But for all the relief this afforded him, he might just as well have thought of himself as a box, or an urn.²⁵

The habit of 'calling yourself a man' is here just a comforting fable derived from childhood, but at the same time there is no alternative name available that is outside or beyond the particular language we have been arbitrarily taught. The reduction of 'a man' to an 'it' is no more satisfactory; in fact, the mention of a box or an urn hints at a kind of living death, for if 'man' has been interred then what kind of thing is left behind?

But if man is impossible to know or define, what of God? Watt obsessively records and broods over every circumstance in Mr Knott's establishment in order to discern any legible order, and large parts of the novel are taken up with his attempts to enumerate all possibilities that might hypothetically explain the arrangements surrounding seemingly trivial details such as the disposal of Mr Knott's after-dinner slops. The underlying idea, as Ackerley notes, is that a nominalist God does not communicate his essence to his creation, nor may he be known through the enumeration of mere 'accidents'.²⁶ Indeed, no order inherent in creation can ultimately be observed, for a voluntarist God is absolutely free to change his mind and to invent new hypothetical worlds. Accordingly, 'little by little Watt abandoned all hope, all fear, of ever seeing Mr Knott face to face'²⁷—echoing of course both Dante's *Inferno* (Canto III) and St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 13:12). An infernal lack of any certainty trumps and undermines the eschatological desire for final knowledge and judgement.

We also glimpse the frightening side of the nominalist-voluntarist God whom Watt is so fervently seeking. At one point, meeting by a stream in their shared asylum gardens, Watt and the narrator 'Sam' share in a grotesque *imitatio dei* of the arbitrary and capricious absolute power of a God ultimately 'responsible for all evil'²⁸ whose creation, red in tooth and claw, here appears as the worst of all possible worlds:

But our particular friends were the rats, that dwelt by the stream. ... [W]e would sit down in the midst of them, and give them to eat, out of our hands, a nice fat frog, or a baby thrush. Or seizing suddenly a plump young rat, resting in our bosom after its repast, we would feed it to its mother, or its father, or its brother, or its sister, or to some less fortunate relative. It was on such occasions, we agreed, after an exchange of views, that we came nearest to God.²⁹

This is deliberately shocking and carries an ethical protest against the claims of any kind of theodicy to justify God's ways to humanity in the face of universal creaturely suffering. As I have argued in detail elsewhere,³⁰ Beckett agrees entirely with Arthur Schopenhauer's view that such metaphysical optimism is a 'really wicked way of thinking', 'a bitter mockery of the unspeakable sufferings of mankind'.³¹ Like Schopenhauer, Beckett's texts display existence as driven by futile willing and therefore irredeemably stained with 'original sin, in other words, the guilt of existence itself'³²: the echo is explicit from *Proust* ('the sin of having been born'³³), to *The Unnamable* ('a punishment for having been born perhaps'³⁴) and beyond.

The Unnamable is a chief exhibit in Weller's analysis of linguistic negation, with its 'speaker seeking to describe where, when, and who or what he is, and yet, in rigorously Mauthnerian fashion, rejecting every linguistic self-identification as no more than a metaphor that fails to capture reality'.³⁵ But there is also a sense in which Weller misses the theological polemic that underlies this radical nominalist undoing of space, time, and identity ('Where now? Who now? When now? Unquestioning. I, say I. Unbelieving.').³⁶ Pressured by an anonymous collective 'they'—likely those who taught him language in the first place—to have an identity,³⁷ the speaker is performing a ferocious, impossible act of rebellion against the inescapably theological implications of speaking, and being, at all:

They also gave me the low-down on God. They told me I depended on him, in the last analysis. They had it on the reliable authority of their agents in Bally I forget what, this being the place, according to them, where the inestimable gift of life had been rammed down my gullet. But what they were most determined for me to swallow was my fellow-creatures. ... They gave me courses on love, on intelligence, most precious, most precious. They also taught me to count, and even to reason. ... Low types they must have been, their pockets full of poison and antidote.³⁸

Thus, for the unnameable voice, 'swallowing the notions of identity, historical existence, fellow-creatures, love, reason and "the inestimable gift of life" finally means swallowing the poison of dependence on God. This the voice will not do, for even if compliance might give access to a providential "antidote", acceptance of the idea that all the "misery" could ever be *worth it* through some greater good or restored harmony must be resisted absolutely.'³⁹ The absolute Will of the nominalist God has ultimately provoked an absolute *will not*.⁴⁰ Yet, without these fundamental notions, what remains of suffering, and the original ethical outrage against any possible restoration or redemption of existence-as-suffering? Where is suffering (or outrage) even located? This is an *impasse* that Beckett's texts can only circle but never resolve.

IV. 'GOD AND THE IMAGINATION ARE ONE': WALLACE STEVENS 'AS'
NOMINALIST GOD?

Poetry for Wallace Stevens 'refreshes life', it is 'an elixir, an excitation, a pure power'⁴¹: but its transformative capacity depends upon its ability to supply fresh versions of 'the supreme fiction':

The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe in it willingly.⁴²

The influence of Nietzsche's perspectivism and extreme language scepticism on Stevens' ideas is well established.⁴³ The most apposite (and emphatically nominalist) Nietzsche text here is 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense' (1873):

In particular, let us further consider the formation of concepts. Every word instantly becomes a concept precisely insofar as it is not supposed to serve as a reminder of the unique and entirely individual original experience to which it owes its origin; but rather, a word becomes a concept insofar as it simultaneously has to fit countless more or less similar cases—which means, purely and simply, cases which are never equal and thus altogether unequal. Every concept arises from the equation of unequal things.

...

What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force ...⁴⁴

For Stevens as for Nietzsche, whatever is believed as truth is necessarily a fiction, 'there being nothing else'. But bringing this process to self-conscious awareness through poetry can bring the 'exquisite' liberation or 'pure power' of embracing a created fiction *as* belief: to gloss this too in Nietzschean terms, 'only as an aesthetic phenomenon are existence and the world *justified* to eternity'.⁴⁵ As we shall see, however, this places immense stress on the power of poetry to name and unname, to propose beliefs and undo them, to create and uncreate—to the point where the Stevensian poet becomes an uneasy stand-in for the nominalist God.

The opening Canto of Stevens' 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction' presents a radical nominalist genealogy very like the one outlined by Fritz Mauthner. We find a similar history of the 'self-dissolution of the metaphorical' starting with Plato, whose theory of forms according to Mauthner 'personified abstractions' and made 'ideas into the mothers of the world'.⁴⁶ The sun here of course alludes to the Idea of the Good in Plato's Republic—for Plato, the light that enables all other perception of reality to take place:

Begin, ephebe, by perceiving the idea
Of this invention, this invented world,
The inconceivable idea of the sun.

You must become an ignorant man again
And see the sun again with an ignorant eye
And see it clearly in the idea of it.

Never suppose an inventing mind as source
Of this idea nor for that mind compose
A voluminous master folded in his fire.

How clean the sun when seen in its idea,
Washed in the remotest cleanliness of a heaven
That has expelled us and our images ...

The death of one god is the death of all.
Let purple Phoebus lie in umber harvest,
Let Phoebus slumber and die in autumn umber,

Phoebus is dead, ephebe. But Phoebus was
A name for something that never could be named.
There was a project for the sun and is.⁴⁷

Stevens' ephebe is a figure of the still-immature reader desiring entrance to the republic of poetry. But this is no longer possible by proposing authoritative metaphors about ultimate reality like Plato's sun-as-the-Good. There needs to be a new awareness of inventedness itself, the metaphoricity of all our images and the arbitrariness of all our naming. This requires a discipline of ignorance, an active forgetting of past names for the sun and a shedding of its accumulated associations with the divine: whether as Phoebus/Apollo, or as some anthropomorphic 'inventing mind' or 'voluminous master folded in his fire'. To see the sun 'clearly in the idea of it' means to see the sun as encompassed by the clutter of human ideas, but therefore also inconceivably alien from these ideas.

The paradox here though, as the poem openly admits, is that the very notion of a *Ding-an-sich* style sun behind and beyond our perceptions and images in itself constitutes a kind of re-imagination of heaven, in its 'remotest cleanliness'. As Stevens would later put it in 'The Plain Sense of Things' (1954), 'the absence of the imagination had/ Itself to be imagined'.⁴⁸ Similarly, in 'Notes', the death of all the gods, their sceptical dismissal as anthropomorphic myths, is followed by a self-consciously purple poetic passage evoking the seasonal 'slumber' of Pheobus in autumn, as if he will awake again: as if the gods are in fact inevitably being generated by the metaphoricity of language itself and will therefore keep resurrecting in ever new forms.⁴⁹ In one sense, this is reminiscent of Mauthner:

Whatever the human may dare to do through superhuman strength in order to discover truth, he always finds only himself, a human truth, an anthropomorphic picture of the world.⁵⁰

However, Stevens does not finally go along with Mauthner's relentless negativity. The last stanza of this Canto tries to make the very un-naming of the sun, the destruction of anthropomorphic images, into a new 'project':

There is a project for the sun. The sun
Must bear no name, gold flourisher, but be
In the difficulty of what it is to be.⁵¹

The ironic, as-if naming of 'gold flourisher' here emerges from within the prior consciousness of the impossibility of assigning any final name to the sun in itself.⁵² It is also, again, capriciously purple and poetic, imaginatively rich. The poet can continue to ostentatiously invent names, as long as there is also an awareness that all names are 'merely poetic'. But precisely as such, the poet arguably becomes the truest namer of all, the one with acutest access to the sun's being in its inconceivability, 'In the difficulty of what it is to be'.

As a consequence, for Stevens the poet as ultimate namer and un-namer of things comes to stand uneasily in the vacated place of the nominalist God, the God who can make and unmake arbitrarily, capriciously and at will. In his notebook aphorisms, Stevens places immense pressure on the transition from human-as-creator-of-God to the imagination as itself incipiently godlike:

This happy creature—it is he that invented the Gods. It is he that put into their mouths the only words they have ever spoken.⁵³

God is in me or else is not at all (does not exist)⁵⁴

Proposita:

God and the imagination are one
 The thing imagined is the imaginer
 The second equals the thing imagined and the imaginer are one.
 Hence, I suppose, the imaginer is God.⁵⁵

This sequence of thought is echoed in the third section of 'Notes', Canto VIII:

What am I to believe? If the angel in his cloud,
 Serenely gazing at the violent abyss,
 Plucks on his strings to pluck abysmal glory,
 Leaps downward through evening's revelations, and
 On his spreaden wings, needs nothing but deep space,
 Forgets the gold centre, the golden destiny,
 Grows warm in the motionless motion of his flight,
 Am I that imagine this angel less satisfied?
 Are the wings his, the lapis-haunted air?
 Is it he or is it I that experience this?
 Is it I then that keep saying there is an hour
 Filled with expressible bliss, in which I have
 No need, am happy, forget need's golden hand,
 Am satisfied without solacing majesty,
 And if there is an hour there is a day,
 There is a month, a year, there is a time
 In which majesty is a mirror of the self:
 I have not but I am and as I am, I am.⁵⁶

The poet here usurps God as the real creator of angels and appropriates their magnificent flight to his own self. Their explicitly projected, mirrored 'majesty' for a moment glorifies and fully satisfies the poetic self, to the point where he can echo the 'I am that I am' spoken to Moses from the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). The 'expressible bliss' of creation-through-words even undoes need itself—invoking a self-sufficient divine aseity.⁵⁷ But the poet's creation of the angel in language is also inherently arbitrary and can as easily be undone:

These external regions, what do we fill them with
 Except reflections, the escapades of death,
 Cinderella fulfilling herself beneath the roof?⁵⁸

Paradoxically, by brutally belittling the whole imagery of the angel and the majestic 'godlike' self as a pathetic solitary illusion by a Cinderella bereft of the fairy godmother, this passage also manages to evoke the exhilarating but frightening power to un-create at will characteristic of the nominalist God. Even so,

the poet's mimicry of this God's sheer arbitrary *potentia absoluta* is of little avail, is itself little more than a narcissistic game of mirrors. Angels, Cinderellas and even poetic selves here lack any form or essence of their own—so the supposed poet-God owes them nothing, not even existence. The 'godlike' imagination in Stevens thus turns into a problem that is never resolved in his poetry, forever veering between tremendous possibility and world-dissolving anxiety.

V. 'HE PLACED HIMSELF IN THE ORDER OF SIGNS': REJECTING NOMINALISM AND REDISCOVERING THE INCARNATE GOD IN DAVID JONES

I now turn to David Jones, whose root interpretation of the whole sign-making capability of human beings is radically different from the late-nominalist predicament sketched here via Mauthner, Beckett, Nietzsche, and Stevens. As his biographer Thomas Dilworth has pointed out, Jones' resistance to nominalism, inspired by the Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain, the sculptor Eric Gill, and his wider circle of Dominican friends, was foundational for his intellectual development in the 1920s:

Neo-Thomist discussion ranged through the history of philosophy. With Jones joining in, they voiced antipathy to Nominalism, which he had learned of from the Dominicans and Gill. The fourteenth century Nominalism of William of Ockham was responsible, they were all convinced, for much that was wrong in western thought and culture. Jones's main objection was to the Nominalist principle of economy known as 'Ockham's razor', which forbade the positing of unnecessary entities. This led to Protestantism, to the dualist minimalism of Descartes, the skepticism of Hume, Berkeley, and the English empiricists, and finally to positivist reductionism: why have angels? Why have saints? Why have God? Jones thought this abominable. They also objected to the Nominalist doctrine that the created world consisted only of unrelated singularities and that universal concepts and names (hence the term 'Nominalism') were empty of meaning.⁵⁹

Here, then, we have a modernist writer explicitly attempting to get behind and beyond the long shadow of nominalism in Western culture. In his essay 'Art and Sacrament' (1955), Jones argues that it is of the essence or nature of human beings to be sign-makers and sacramentalists, and hence artists, too: 'Man: sacrament at every turn and all levels of the "profane" and "sacred", in the trivial and in the profound, no escape from sacrament.'⁶⁰ Jones' perspective effects a complete reversal of emphasis from the kind of anxiety about merely arbitrary naming and the inaccessibility of ultimate reality discussed above. For Jones,

our sign-making nature is not a limitation, and language is not a prison-house. It is what most loudly proclaims our link to a creator-God, for he, like us, creates gratuitously: willingly, playfully, and out of love, as a pure gift of his being.

Since 'Art and Sacrament' unlocks Jones' aesthetic thinking as well as his whole artistic project, it is worth pursuing the essay a little further. Following Maritain's Thomist terminology in *Art and Scholasticism* (1920), Jones refers to the two realms or abilities specific to human nature as *Prudentia* and *Ars*. *Prudentia* concerns the realm of faith, morals, and religion; it is the faculty by which we seek to conform our conduct to higher ends. This is part of the essence of man as a rational being: the animals have no conception of moral or religious duty. But, Jones asserts, in order for human beings to be capable of such ordering in the first place, we must have freedom: and freedom pre-eminently involves the capacity for gratuitous acts, performed simply for their own sake. At this point, though, writes Jones, 'we are immediately confronted with the nature of *Ars*', for art is 'the sole intransitive activity of man'⁶¹: it is a 'fitting-together' of things performed not for any extraneous, utilitarian purpose but just for the rightness of this fitting-together itself. The contrast with the works of the animals is again decisive:

It is the intransitivity and gratuitousness in man's art that is the sign of man's uniqueness; not merely that he makes things, nor yet that those things have beauty. ... For though the spider's web and the honey-comb are contrived by animate creatures their beauty can be said to be of the same order as that achieved by inanimate nature: the hoar-frost on the pane or the leaf vein. In none of the animalic making is there any evidence of the gratuitous, nor is there any evidence of 'sign'. This making is wholly functional, these activities are transitive.⁶²

By contrast, says Jones, 'man must be considered a sign-maker' whose 'art is sign-making',⁶³ and this implies that 'man is *unavoidably* a sacramentalist, and that his works are sacramental in character'.⁶⁴ Jones means this inherent connection between sign and sacrament literally, for in any sign made by the creature called man, from the very beginnings of pre-history, 'this creature juxtaposed marks on surfaces not with merely utile, but with significant, intent; that is to say a "re-presenting", a "showing again under other forms", and "effective recalling" of something was intended'.⁶⁵ Anthony Domestico has drawn out the implications of this audacious analogy in Jones' thinking:

The Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation states that the bread and wine of the Eucharist make real—that is to say, do not just point towards but actually, really make present—the body and blood of

Christ. In this specific way, the re-presentation of the Eucharist is similar to the re-presentation of the modernist artwork. Just as the Post-Impressionist painting of a tree is a showing forth of the tree in a different form, so Jones writes, 'it is said of the eucharistic signs that they are a showing forth of something 'in an un-bloody manner'. ... The painting actualizes the tree in the form of paint, just as the Eucharist actualizes Christ's saving grace in the form of bread and wine.⁶⁶

In the whole sequence of Christ's redemptive acts from the institution of the Eucharist to his sacrifice on the Cross, therefore, he makes use of specific signs and forms: Christ draws close to humanity precisely by inhabiting and consecrating the nature of man-as-artist. 'Something has to be made by us before it can become for us his sign who made us,' as Jones put it in his Preface to *The Anathemata*.⁶⁷ Or, in a phrase Jones often quoted from the theologian Maurice de la Taille's work on the Eucharist, 'He placed Himself in the order of signs'.⁶⁸

Now, for Jones, the problem with the whole trajectory of modernity is a kind of forgetting or active suppression of the nature of man-as-artist, ultimately instigated, as we have seen, by nominalism. Modernity is technocratic, obsessed with devices and machines, and finally with the dominion of the human will over nature. But as Jones pointed out in the essay 'The Utile', 'when man's works seek utility only they can appear to become "utilitarian" in a most derogatory sense, that is to say they appear "sub-human"'.⁶⁹ This juxtaposition of a sense of desolation in face of the present waste land-like state of modern civilisation on the one hand, and the search for the redeemer of man-as-artist and sign-maker on the other is the dramatic core of Jones' poetry. The clearest example is the poem 'A a a Domine Deus':

I have journeyed among the dead forms
causation projects from pillar to pylon.
I have tired the eyes of the mind
regarding the colours and lights.
I have felt for His Wounds
in nozzles and containers.
I have wondered for the automatic devices.
...
I have watched the wheels go round in case I might see the
living creatures like the appearance of lamps, in case I might see
the Living God projected from the Machine.⁷⁰

In the long poem *The Anathemata*, this core tension is worked out through a dense, cumulative 'showing-forth' of significant signs held up or set aside

as sacred or sacramental, where layer after layer of the history of Western Christianity and the history of Britain and Wales gets evoked and intertwined by juxtaposition. The first scene is set at Mass. Even by the foot of the altar the ‘utile infiltration’ is everywhere, but the odd, out-of-place ancient ritual with its minute palimpsestic symbolism still proceeds:

These rear-guard details in their quaint attire, heedless of incongruity, unconscious that the flanks are turned and all connecting files withdrawn or liquidated—that dead symbols litter to the base of the cult-stone, that the stem by the palled stone is thirsty, that the stream is very low.

The utile infiltration nowhere held

creeps vestibule

is already at the closed lattices, is coming through each door.

The cult-man stands alone in Pellam’s land: more precariously than he knows he guards the *signa*⁷¹

In Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*, King Pellam is the wounded grail-keeper whose land stands barren until the grail-quest is fulfilled. This is closely related to another Fisher King motif documented across Jones’ work by Thomas Berenato, that of ‘asking the question’, directed to modernity itself:

[Jessie] Weston understands the hero’s failure to ask the question (‘to enquire the meaning of what he sees’) to be, in *Peredur ap Ewrawc*, the direct cause of the general vastation that ensues upon the hero’s visit to the Castle of Wonders, whereas before the encounter misfortune had been restricted to the body of the king. By ‘asking the question’ Jones unmistakably means the initiation of a diagnostic process. He concedes that posing a question does not amount to arriving at a cure—he ‘does not suppose that in asking the question the land can be “restored”’—but it is a necessary first move if such restoration is to be seriously pursued and soberly hoped for. Articulating the question can inspire others to ask it in turn, and ‘if all the world asked the question perhaps there might be some fructification—or some “sea-change”’.⁷²

On Jones’ reading, ‘nothing could surpass the “eccentricity” of the “normal” life and works of megalopolitan man today—and tomorrow’.⁷³ This is not a

situation that any individual artist has the power to change, yet authentic art here necessarily becomes:

a contradiction, a fifth-column, within that civilization, and here it shares the honours of sabotage with the tradition of religion, for both are disruptive forces, both own allegiance to values in any event irritant, and easily becoming toxic to those values which of necessity dominate the present world-orders.⁷⁴

The priest or ‘cult-man’ of the opening section of the *Anathemata*, then, joins with the modernist artist in an act of lifting up valid signs that is both ‘rear-guard’ sabotage and worship: ‘The arts abhor any loppings off of meanings or emptyings out, any lessening of the totality of connotation, any loss of recession and thickness through.’⁷⁵ It is this immense density of connotation, the sheer teeming vibrancy of sign-making itself, that is being recalled and consecrated in the ancient Roman rite of the Mass and Jones’ poem alike.

The ‘utile infiltration’ thus cannot ultimately undo the nature of man-as-artist, and the Mass continues to show forth the whole movement of Christ’s consecration of man as sign-maker and sacramentalist. Where *The Anathemata* comes closest to pointing to what a ‘cure’ or ‘restoration’ or cultural sea-change might look like is where it shows us what it entails to really see all human sign-making in light of the Mass. This would mean seeing sacrament as being everywhere and unavoidable, even from the beginnings of pre-history—from the time of the statue of the Venus of Willendorf, say, or the Lascaux cave-paintings:

Then it is these abundant *ubera*, here, under the species
of worked lime-rock, that gave suck to the lord? She that
they already venerate (what other could they?)

her we declare?

Who else?

And see how they run, the juxtaposed forms,
brighting the vaults of Lascaux; how the linear is wedded
to volume, how they do, within, in an unbloody manner,
under the forms of brown haematite and black manganese on
the graved lime-face, what is done, without,

far on the windy tundra

at the kill

that the kindred may have life.⁷⁶

The language of Catholic eucharistic doctrine is recalled in phrases like ‘under the species of’, and ‘in an unbloody manner’, pointing to the way in which the entirety of human sign-making, past present and future, is absorbed into the unbloody sacrifice of the Mass, where all times are present. How could it be otherwise, if man is man-the-maker-of-signs?

How else we?

or he, himself?

whose name is called He-with-us
because he did not abhor the uterus.

Whereby these umberal forms

are to us most dear

and of all hills

the most august.⁷⁷

Jones often quoted Aquinas’ opinion that the flesh is ‘not an infirmity but a unique benefit and splendour; a thing denied to angels and unconscious in animals’.⁷⁸ Here, the sacrifice on the ‘hill’ of Calvary is strikingly joined with the ‘umberal’ forms of the Venus of Willendorf, with Mary’s uterus as connecting link. Christ is Immanuel, God-with-Us, precisely because he does not abhor the flesh, and the arts of rational animals whose sign-making is rooted in the flesh.

I would like to conclude with the suggestion that Jones’ poem also offers a generous model for how to approach the long shadow of nominalism as literary and cultural critics. The passage I want to highlight is from the ‘Lady of the Pool’ section, whose main voice is a lavender-seller in medieval or perhaps Tudor London, an archetypal figure who has seen all that city’s comings and goings by water over many centuries. This then is a story about London as a culture built around and upon water, and that necessarily includes a tale of violent domination and expropriation as well. Nominalism turns out to be thoroughly implicated in this from the very start:

And those as after them
whose fathers shall relate to them of *these* old times before

them. Those as—by what new gear and a deal of dials, gins of propulsion and all manner of contraptions, unguessed even of a' admirable scab-shin Nominalist?—shall know the total compass of the thronging waters and assert regiment over the whale's entire domain.

And of these such, yet to come,
a tidy many from the many hithes of this river, captain, by
and large—some from this, here, very haw, captain ...

dona eis requiem

*sempiternam*⁷⁹

We need Jones' note to make full sense of the 'scab-shin' Nominalist, a derogatory epithet once applied to Franciscan friars:

See the description of Drake's voyage of 1577–80 published in 1628 as *The World Encompassed*: 'touching ordnance and great guns, the late invention of a scabeshind friar among us in Europe' with reference to Bacon, known as *Doctor Mirabilis*, whose thirteenth-century researches make him a harbinger of methods and instruments without which sixteenth-century techniques and our own subsequent sea-power could not have been. In common opinion, if you were a Franciscan you were a Nominalist and certainly Bacon's preoccupation link him with Nominalism and with English empiricism. He appears to be nearer his namesake of 300 years later than to the saint from whom that namesake got his Christian name: though it's a long way from Assisi to Verulam.⁸⁰

We find here a forward projection of the gradual ascent of technical mastery in the world of navigation, ship-building and sea warfare to come as we move from medieval England to the age of Francis Drake and beyond. Nominalism is being associated with a utilitarian will to encompass or dominate the world and its waters technically and experimentally, from the 13th-century friar Roger Bacon who introduced the recipe for gun-powder to the West, to those uncompromising 16th-century Franciscans, Drake and Bacon (Lord Verulam).⁸¹ Yet ultimately this note of critique is not allowed to dominate. Crucially, even nominalists cannot help being sacramentalists and sign-makers despite themselves, and a rich complex culture imbued with innumerable forms of creative gratuity will accrue around nominalist-inspired ideas and choices, too.⁸² Human mistakes, theological mistakes, send us out on particular journeys, establish crafts and traditions and stories worth recalling, prompt us to construct new hithes however temporary—and even our mistakes are never outside of the compass of the prayer, *dona eis requiem sempiternam*.

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- ¹ Shane Weller, *Language and Negativity in European Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 5.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 21–2.
- ⁴ Fritz Mauthner, *Beiträge zur einer Kritik der Sprache* (Leipzig: Verlag von Felix Meiner, 1923), Vol. III, pp. 615; English translation quoted in Matthew Feldman, 'Sourcing Aporetics: An Empirical Study on Philosophical Influences in the Development of Samuel Beckett's Writing' (PhD thesis, Oxford Brookes University, 2004), Appendix D: Notes on Mauthner, p. 387.
- ⁵ Weller, *Language and Negativity in European Modernism*, p. 11.
- ⁶ Mauthner, *Beiträge*, Vol. II, p. 473; translation quoted in Feldman, 'Sourcing Aporetics', p. 384.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 385.
- ⁸ My own commitments are Aristotelian-Thomist: for a contemporary defence see e.g. E. Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (Heusenstamm: Editiones Scholasticae, 2014). I take Weller's sympathies to lie with radical nominalism, though the value of his literary and historical analysis of this influence in no way depends upon his readers sharing those sympathies. My intention vis-à-vis the readers of this article is similar.
- ⁹ The most influential reading of secular modernity as rooted in theologically problematic choices of the 13th and 14th centuries is John Milbank's: see especially John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, Second Edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006) and J. Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), especially pp. 19–113. Milbank and the 'Radical Orthodoxy' school (notably scholars like Catherine Pickstock and Conor Cunningham) tend to associate John Duns Scotus closely with the later nominalist tradition after William Ockham, though more recent genealogies (see n. 10) have, perhaps more justifiably, focused directly on the latter influence.
- ¹⁰ In addition to Milbank's seminal work, the key studies are Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2008), Thomas Pfau, *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2012), Scott W. Hahn and Benjamin Wiker, *Politicizing the Bible: The Roots of Historical Criticism and the Secularization of Scripture, 1300–1700* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2013), and the classic Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986). For a recent study of the long-range literary impact of a post-nominalist theological voluntarism, see W. Schmidgen, *Infinite Variety: Literary Invention, Theology, and the Disorder of Kinds, 1688–1730* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Philadelphia Press, 2021).
- ¹¹ Pfau, *Minding the Modern*, p. 175.
- ¹² Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, p. 23.

- ¹³ See Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, p. 22; and Pfau, *Minding the Modern*, p. 177.
- ¹⁴ Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, p. 23.
- ¹⁵ I am basing my account here on Pfau, *Minding the Modern*, Chapter 6.
- ¹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia Q 8 A 1, quoted in Pfau, *Minding the Modern*, p. 150.
- ¹⁷ Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, pp. 24–5.
- ¹⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, edited by Mary Bryden (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 8.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.
- ²⁰ Samuel Beckett, letter to Axel Kaun, 9 July 1937, in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, edited by Ruby Cohn (London: John Calder, 2001), p. 173.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 171.
- ²² Chris J. Ackerley, *Obscure Locks, Simple Keys: The Annotated Watt* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), index entries for ‘Nominalism’, p. 289. See also Weller, *Language and Negativity in European Modernism*, p. 101. For a wider reading of the ‘nominalist ethic’ in Beckett’s work, see Holly Louise Phillips, ‘Samuel Beckett and the Emergence of the Nominalist Ethic’ (PhD thesis, University of Otago, 2015): pp. 180–4 discuss *Watt*. For documentation of the Mauthner influence on *Watt*, see Matthew Feldman, *Beckett’s Books: A Cultural History of Samuel Beckett’s ‘Interwar Notes’* (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 137–46.
- ²³ Samuel Beckett, *Watt*, edited by Chris J. Ackerley (Faber and Faber, 2009), pp. 232–3.
- ²⁴ See n. 4 above.
- ²⁵ Beckett, *Watt*, p. 68.
- ²⁶ Ackerley, *Obscure Locks, Simple Keys*, entries 27.4, p. 43, and 147.3, p. 143.
- ²⁷ Beckett, *Watt*, p. 127.
- ²⁸ Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, p. 29.
- ²⁹ Beckett, *Watt*, pp. 132–3.
- ³⁰ See Erik Tønning, *Modernism and Christianity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 105–9.
- ³¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, trans. E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), p. 326.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 354.
- ³³ Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: Calder, 1999), p. 67.
- ³⁴ Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, edited by Steven Connor (London: Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 21.
- ³⁵ Weller, *Language and Negativity in European Modernism*, p. 107.
- ³⁶ Beckett, *The Unnamable*, p. 1. There is a textual link between this opening of *The Unnamable* and the first draft notebook towards *Watt*, which, as Ackerley notes (*Obscure Locks, Simple Keys*, p. 100), opens by listing Aristotelian categories of existence in the form of a series of questions (‘who, what, where, by what means, why, in what way, when’). In both texts, then, nominalist undermining is consciously directed against the Aristotelian–Thomist tradition.
- ³⁷ Cf. Beckett, *The Unnamable*, p. 93, ‘to have no identity, it’s a scandal’.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- ³⁹ Tønning, *Modernism and Christianity*, p. 109.
- ⁴⁰ Cf. Pfau, *Minding the Modern*, p. 178: ‘Having rendered the *logos* contingent on a terminally unintelligible and inscrutable act of divine ordination, Ockham also deepens the finite self’s sense of his or her finitude and, however unwittingly, prompts human thought to devise compensatory strategies of self-legitimation.’
- ⁴¹ Wallace Stevens, ‘Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction’, in Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson (eds), *Collected Poetry and Prose* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1997), pp. 330–1.
- ⁴² Wallace Stevens, ‘Adagia’, in *Collected Poetry and Prose*, p. 903.
- ⁴³ See Bobby J. Leggett, *Early Stevens: The Nietzschean Intertext* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1992).
- ⁴⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense’, in Daniel Breazeale (ed.), *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from*

- Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1979), pp. 83–4. See Leggett, *Early Stevens*, pp. 163–9 and 234–8 for a discussion of the impact of this Nietzsche text on Stevens' poetry.
- ⁴⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 38. Cf. Leggett, *Early Stevens*, p. 61 on this influence: 'Both Stevens' and Nietzsche's texts assume that one artistic impulse—what Nietzsche calls the Apollonian—depends on the desire for appearance, for illusion.'
- ⁴⁶ Mauthner, *Beiträge*, Vol. II, p. 474; translation quoted in Feldman, 'Sourcing Aporetics', p. 384.
- ⁴⁷ Stevens, 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction', in *Collected Poetry and Prose*, pp. 329–30.
- ⁴⁸ Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, p. 428. This paradox is also explored in Beckett's short prose text *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1965).
- ⁴⁹ Matthew Mutter has developed a convincing reading of the 'constant suspicion in Stevens's poetry that language cannot rid itself of a kind of theological suggestiveness': Matthew Mutter, *Restless Secularism: Modernism and the Religious Inheritance* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press), p. 42.
- ⁵⁰ Mauthner, *Beiträge*, Vol. II, p. 479; translation quoted in Feldman, 'Sourcing Aporetics', p. 387.
- ⁵¹ Stevens, 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction', in *Collected Poetry and Prose*, p. 330.
- ⁵² My reading of 'Notes' on this point (and throughout) is indebted to the detailed close reading in A. Skei, 'Poetry as Poetics: A Reading of Wallace Stevens' Poetry' (PhD thesis, University of Oslo, 2005), pp. 221–369.
- ⁵³ Stevens, 'Adagia', in *Collected Poetry and Prose*, p. 906.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 911.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 914.
- ⁵⁶ Stevens, 'Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction', in *Collected Poetry and Prose*, pp. 349–50.
- ⁵⁷ Compare here Beckett, *Watt*, p. 175: 'For except, one, not to need, and, two, a witness to his not needing, Mr Knott needed nothing, as far as Watt could see.' Stevens, too, might be said to require a witness to the poetic self's divine aseity in the figure of the reader.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 350.
- ⁵⁹ Thomas Dilworth, *David Jones Unabridged. The Online Expanded Version of David Jones: Engraver, Soldier, Painter, Poet* (online access: <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/englishpub/42/>), last accessed 18.1.22, pp. 494–5.
- ⁶⁰ David Jones, 'Art and Sacrament', in *Epoch and Artist* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 167.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 154.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 155.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁶ Anthony Domestico, *Poetry and Theology in the Modernist Period* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), p. 75.
- ⁶⁷ David Jones, 'Preface to *The Anthemata*', in *The Anthemata* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 31.
- ⁶⁸ Jones, 'Art and Sacrament', p. 179.
- ⁶⁹ Jones, 'The Utile', in *Epoch and Artist*, p. 181.
- ⁷⁰ David Jones, 'A a a Domine Deus', in *The Sleeping Lord and Other Fragments* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p. 9.
- ⁷¹ Jones, *The Anthemata*, p. 50.
- ⁷² Thomas Berenato, 'A "re-cognition" in "the exact sense of that word": David Jones's Unfinished Essay on Gerard Manley Hopkins', in Thomas Berenato, Anne Price-Owen, and Kathleen Henderson Staudt (eds), *David Jones on Religion, Politics, and Culture: Unpublished Prose* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), p. 108.
- ⁷³ Jones, 'Art and Democracy', in *Epoch and Artist*, p. 95, n. 2.
- ⁷⁴ Jones, 'Religion and the Muses', in *Epoch and Artist*, p. 100.
- ⁷⁵ Jones, *The Anthemata*, p. 24.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁷⁸ Jones, 'Art and Sacrament', p. 165.

⁷⁹ Jones, *The Anathemata*, pp. 158–9.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 159, n. 1.

⁸¹ In the third Celtic insertion in *The Grail Mass*, Jones develops a contrasting view of the culture of sea-travel along the Celtic Sea, emphasising the ancient gods of the cultures of Wales, Scotland and Ireland, and the slow accretion of layers of cultural significance. This serves as a counterpoint to utile, technocratic empire. See Thomas Goldpaugh and Jamie Callison (eds), *David Jones' The Grail Mass and Other Works* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), p. 235.

⁸² T.S. Eliot's advice to the Christian critic is also apposite here: 'It is characteristic of the more interesting heretics ... that they have an exceptionally acute perception or profound insight, of some part of the truth; an insight more important often than the inferences of those who are aware of more but less acutely aware of anything. So far as we are able to redress the balance, effect the compensation, ourselves, we may find such authors of the greatest value. If we value them as they value themselves we shall go astray.' T.S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), pp. 24–5.