# The online *Anathemata*

(production version 3, 6 January 2019)

**About this version of** *The Anathemata*

This website is an online presentation of *The Anathemata of David Jones*. It is a work in progress which began in earnest –though not as a penitential exercise!– during Holy Week 2015 and occupied me until Christmas 2015 with revised and additional material added in the following three months. Since it is a work in progress, to which pages will be added as I complete or rewrite them, it will change from time to time. It includes the entire text of the poem, but not the preface, all of DJ's own notes, and some of my own and those of other commentators, which I hope will act as a guide to this most difficult of poems.

I use the power of hypertext to show links between various sections and paragraphs of the poem, though my first task was to get the text in place. I feel that the natural medium for the presentation of DJ's writings is hypertext not linear text and I am sure that, had he lived to see it, he would have agreed.

The first page beyond this page is a title page and then an epigraph page, as in the original text. This present page also allows you to go straight to the introduction to a particular section or page of the original text.

At the top left of each page of poem text, there is a little icon of three horizontal lines: ☰ . Hovering your mouse over this icon shows a temporary display of all the annotations I have made (including DJ's own notes) of the text on that page; moving the mouse away from the icon causes the annotations to disappear. If you want the annotations to remain visible, move your mouse to the icon and click. This will fix the annotations in place until you click on the icon again; they will then disappear once you move your mouse away from the icon. Try it — I hope it is obvious once you have found out how it works. The purpose of this mechanism is to allow you to read the poem paragraph by paragraph aloud, slowly and with deliberation as the poet requested, without being distracted by the interference and complexity of the commentary apparatus, unless you really want to be. If your window is wide enough (about 1250 pixels) the text and annotation will be displayed side by side; otherwise the annotations will be below the text. This feature is responsive to resizing the window. Next to this icon, there is a new window icon ⊡. This opens a copy of the current page in a new window, thus essentially bookmarking the page onscreen, for example when looking at a part of the commentary or toolbox which cannot be displayed in the current window at the same time as the poem text to which it refers, or when exploring a list of pages similar to the current one.

At the bottom of the window (you may have to scroll down a bit to see it) there is a button which opens a toolbox. When the toolbox is open, the button will close it. The tools in the toolbox are as follows:

> There is a set of links to the introduction to each section and one back to this introductory page.

For each paragraph of text, I have made a list of keywords, sorted under a classification into people, places, objects, themes and so on, which is stored in an accompanying database. These I call the semantic entries for that paragraph, and can be seen by clicking on a button in the toolbox. There may be more than one semantic entry for each paragraph. They are still under active review and development. I have also provided a link to explore paragraphs similar to the current one. Similarity comes in three strengths: weak, meaning that there is one semantic entry in common; medium, meaning two common entries; strong, meaning three or more. The pages on which the results are displayed has a colour chart at the top; clicking on a colour changes the background colour of the page. I put this in because I found it useful for quick recognition when I have more than one such page open simultanously.

There are also buttons to list all the paragraphs marked with a particular keyword and a button to list all paragraphs which contain a particular word in the text (but DJ's notes and my commentary are not examined). Words here may be combined by & and +; thus 'not any' finds all paragraphs containing those two words together in that order; 'not+any' finds all paragraphs with both words in that order but not necessarily adjacent; 'not&any' finds all paragraphs with both words in either order. (Note that this does not yet apply to the keyword search; that is for the future.) There is also a button to show all the semantic entries in the database and the paragraphs to which they refer (this is quite a long list). Finally, there is also a tool to produce a KWIC index for a particular word. Other tools, and enhancements to the present ones, are planned for the future.

One class of semantic entry may need a bit of explanation. I have long been interested in the problem of unifying a complex artwork composed of differing media. Simple examples are text+image and music+drama. The main problem is showing how one element in one medium supports, counterpoints, or contradicts another element in the same or a different medium. It is the problem of demonstrating relationships between components.. Although some people (such as DJ himself) find much to dislike in Wagner's operas, his idea of using musical leitmotifs to support, counterpoint or contradict the text that is being sung –in other words, to show the character's inner thoughts and emotions even, or especially, when these differ from the verbally expressed thoughts and emotions– is a very good one. I quite often find the same thing happening in *The Anathemata* – there is often a subtext there which sometimes I am sure and sometimes I'm not so sure that DJ intended but did not always make explicit. I have called such subtexts 'leitmotifs' after Wagner (Anglicised). They sustain unity which persists through the breaks and resumptions in the flow of the main text. As of the date of this draft, the leitmotifs are very provisional and will certainly change as I give them more consideration. I agree that some of the leitmotifs I have recorded may be of my own construction. But that doesn't actually matter.

It is important to realise that there is not, and cannot be, any definitive interpretation of *The Anathemata*. Any poem, not just this one (though particularly this one), is a joint creation of the poet and the reader, and readers are expected to bring to the poem their own associations of the words the poet has chosen to use. It is sometimes forgotten that that the pleasure of a poem involves two creative beings, not just one: there is the poet who makes it, and there is also the reader, whose mind finds its way back to the subject of the poem. The further both of them have to travel to meet at one and the same point, the more creatively both of them are working. I have therefore tried to suggest to the reader some of the associations DJ might have had in mind, together with some of my own; if some of mine had not occurred to the poet, then I have enriched the poem thereby. And the same goes for you.

It is for this reason that I have confined myself to exegesis not critical interpretation. I do have my

own interpretation, of course; and an account of it is presented on this website under the title 'An Atheist looks at *The Anathemata*' (see end of this introduction for link). But the website is primarily designed as an aid for those who wish to construct their own interpretation.

**Editorial policies**

In converting the printed text into its html representation, there were a number of editorial decisions I had to make about the structure and representation of the html. Some of the more important ones are listed here.

1) The first decision I made was to regard the unit of my text as the paragraph not the page of the printed text. Some paragraphs are shorter than a page; some overrun from one page to the next. In this version each paragraph on a page is a presented as a separate page of the website; where a textual paragraph crosses a page boundary, it is presented as two separate pages of html, with lines repeated for continuity where I felt it necessary, such repeated lines being in a paler colour. Thus all text on a browser page can be referred back to its original page number by looking at the browser title bar.

2) This decision had implications for line justification. I have, as far as reasonably practicable, kept to the original line indentations for lines that are shorter than the line width. Where a paragraph of the original is presented as a block of text, however, problems arise from the fact that each browser has its own way of managing line justification, and I have not much control over how it does this and in any case it is not as good as the practised eye of an experienced human printer. What this amounts to is that if I wanted to preserve the individual line endings of the original, the browser representation would in some cases have slightly ragged right hand ends (i.e. the block would not be properly right-justified); if I let the browser do its own right justification, the right justification would be correct but the line endings would sometimes be at a different word and word spacing on the line would occasionally be infelicitous. I decided to go for the second of these choices; I do plan to adjust manually the worst of the infelicities, but it is tedious to do and I do not regard it as a high priority. It is a 'sometime' task.

3) All biblical quotations in my annotations are from the King James version of the Bible, even when more accurate translations are available from more recent versions, since this is the version that DJ would have been most familiar with.

4) All links are in the usual blue, though they do not change colour after being followed. All links open in a new browser page or tab, as the browser decides.

5) The original text has a few illustrations in the form of DJ's paintings and inscriptions. I have, after some reflection, decided to omit these from the web pages, though my notes identify such omissions with links to reproductions where possible. Some of the illustrations proved impossible to reproduce adequately, and I have noted where this occurs. I do not consider I have lost anything significant to the poem by adopting this policy.

**Finally**

All charitable comments will be gratefully received, even (or perhaps especially) negative ones provided they are politely phrased. I am not a literary scholar, even less a poet — though I do read a lot of poetry. I am still feeling my way into this poem and its presentation, and recording my

discoveries as I find them in the hope that they may be of use to others. Let me remind you of one of my favourite Billy Collins poems:

### Introduction to poetry

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

So, working in this spirit, please feel free to help me explore *The Anathemata*. You can email me at john@johndobson.info

I am very grateful for all the help and support I have received from Tom Dilworth during the years it has taken me to produce this website.

Thank you

*John Dobson*

Feast of the Epiphany 2019

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I have written an essay entitled *An Atheist Looks at The Anathemata*,
which describes my initial reaction to reading and studying the work.
It may be read here (opens in a new window) or download the pdf.

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