

DAVID JONES: July 1916, The Battle of Mametz Wood from In Parenthesis

Opus Anglicanum - An English Music

Programme Notes

Our sequence follows the narrative of Part 7 of David Jones's 'In Parenthesis'. The poet's voice is that of Jones himself, 'Private 25201 Ball', who combines a running commentary on the action entwined in a fragmentary dream like way with his own thoughts.

Owain Park's *Sequence: In Parenthesis* brings together snatches of tunes referred to by David Jones in the course of the poem, including Welsh and English songs and hymns, music hall and soldiers trench songs. The Dedication is to English and Welsh companions and to the enemy themselves, 'against whom we found ourselves by misadventure'.

Part 7 is prefaced by a quotation in Latin from the *Lamentations of Jeremiah*, as declaimed during the Holy Week liturgy, here sung in a setting by Palestrina. We find the narrator himself 'all gone to pieces' as the company move into the front line to wait for the advance, during which time they are shelled and sustain casualties and deaths.

As they go into the attack the 'genuine' Welshmen of the company sing *Jesu lover of my soul*. Jones describes his immediate companions, Londoners as much as Welsh, as they move across terrain that reminds him of southern English Downland. Men are killed around him and the bombardment continues; he recalls biblical, legendary and historical warriors. He sees to his front 'the dark wood'.

Folk songs quoted in the poem, *High Germany* and *John Barleycorn* ('the gentlemen must be mown'), are sung here together with the elegiac *Banks of Green Willow* by George Butterworth, himself killed during the Battle of the Somme about a month later, in August 1916.

As they enter the thickets and saplings of the wood the platoon Captain is killed. There is close fighting. The poet looses a hand grenade; an enemy soldier is badly wounded and cries out the names of two girls and of the 'parish priest of Burkersdorf in Saxe Altenburg'. Schubert's song *Death and the Maiden* is sung.

German soldiers are taken prisoner as the fighting continues; the company digs in. The poet prays to the Mother of Christ in the figure of the *Dolorosa* as she stands beneath the Tree of the Cross. Josquin's setting of the text (*Stabat Mater*) is sung.

The action continues as it gets dark, and by midnight men of both sides are seen lying dead in the wood. Cheryl Frances-Hoad's *In the crypt of the wood* takes its title from this section of the poem and sets various texts for the image of the Tree, composed with inspiration from David Jones' drawing in Kettle's Yard Cambridge *Vexilla Regis*.

The poet is wounded in the legs, and crawls back. He passes many dead. He deliberates whether or not to leave his rifle and eventually does so. He ends with words from the Chanson of Roland: "the man who described these things was a part of them; those who were not there themselves can know nothing of what it was like."

Following the poem is a page of fragmentary quotations one of which, *Agnus Dei*, is sung here from Palestrina's *Requiem*.