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19 David Jones, *In Parenthesis* (1937)

Abstract: David Jones, claims Thomas Dilworth, is “the lost great modernist” (2017, Preface). The author of two major poems, *In Parenthesis* and *The Anathemata*, as well as several smaller ones, Jones’s work has been described as curiously absent from the canon, despite drawing praise and status from many impressive sources. This chapter explores the part *In Parenthesis* plays in the genre of First World War poetry, examining how Jones reflects his own experiences of being a soldier in that War via a complex set of cultural and literary lenses, and how that has been received by the academy.

Key Terms: David Jones, war poetry, modernist, *In Parenthesis*

1 Context

An artist, engraver, and a poet, Jones (1895–1974) was born in Brockley, Kent. His parents, Jim and Alice, were a printer’s overseer and teacher respectively. Jones was brought up in a strict household with his siblings, and described himself as “backward at any kind of lesson and physically feeble” (2008 [1980], 20). He was subject to respiratory illnesses, which led to much bed rest, but this enabled him to do a great deal of reading and drawing: activities which were to help shape and characterise his later work. His father was a committed evangelical Anglican, whose family came from North Wales, and who were stonemasons and farmers. Although he didn’t speak Welsh, Jones’s appreciation of Welsh cultural history was to have a deep and abiding impact on his poetry; he argued that Welsh influences were not there because he happened to be in part Welsh, “but because the Welsh mythological element is an *integral* part of our tradition” (156). His mother’s family were shipbuilders, and her faith was more High Church, a result of the influence of the Oxford Movement, experienced when she was training to become a governess in that city. Jones was brought up in a family environment where the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, and religious-themed works such as Milton’s ‘Hymn on the Morning of Christ’s Nativity’, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, and John Keble’s *The Christian Year* provided a regular backdrop to home life. As Dilworth says, Jones would know scripture “better than any other important modern writer, being able to quote it from memory and at length” (2017, 9). It wasn’t only religious texts that Jones was exposed to at home, however: his parents also subscribed to the monthly *Books for the Bairns* series, and it was the Arthurian stories in these volumes that Jones enjoyed the most, including the 1899 adaptations of Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur* (Jones 1952, 41).

In 1909 Jones joined the London County Council School of Arts and Crafts in Camberwell, a fact that Renée Hague highlights as “remarkable and admirable” (Jones

2008 [1980], 22) as he was only 14. Here he not only learned how to draw and paint, but also about artists like the Pre-Raphaelites and the English illustrators of the nineteenth century, as well as many different literary and historical sources: “A Victorian storytelling impulse pervaded the school, art being seen as an extension of historical, often medieval, narrative” (Dilworth 2017, 28). The eclectic nature of Jones’s education is worth emphasising, for it illuminates the influences that formed his creative poetic style. He took historical costume-making classes, learning embroidery, and classes in English Literature, which gave him access to medieval texts like *The Song of Roland*, and poets such as Chaucer, Langland, Skelton, Shakespeare, Robert Browning, and bits of Coleridge and Milton. In 1910, when Jones’s brother Harold was dying from tuberculosis, and Jones was sent to stay with his uncle, Tom Pethybridge, in Brighton, Pethybridge distracted him with an introduction to Roman history, something which Jones says left “an indelible mark” (Dilworth 2017, 24).

When the First World War began, Jones was accepted into the Royal Welch Fusiliers in January 1915. His experiences in the trenches were to be translated into *In Parenthesis* in later years, but on return from the War he continued to study art, converting to Catholicism in 1921, and becoming close friends with the sculptor Eric Gill. Jones found a talent for engraving, and during the 1920s was known as one of the best in England (Dilworth 2008, xv); in 1932 he suffered his first nervous breakdown, and for the rest of his life was to suffer from depressive episodes. *In Parenthesis*, his first major poetic work, was published by Faber and Faber in 1937, followed by *The Anathemata* in 1952. Jones was never in a financially stable position, and lived from a variety of sources, selling paintings, taking on commissions, and helped out by friends and gifts from foundations and charitable trusts. He moved around, spending time in Wales, in Devon, Northumberland, and several different places in London, ending his days in a nursing home in Harrow, and dying of degenerative heart failure on October 28 1974. He had a wide circle of friends, – broadcasters, artists, writers, historians, philosophers, politicians – and from all age groups and classes. As evidence like William Blissett’s (1981) records of visits to Jones shows, he was a quietly sociable host, and although he never married, he had several close female relationships, glimpsed at through his paintings and letters: this was a man who could command loyalty and deep affection, and if he was not a natural leader or public speaker (he put off travelling to Cardiff to receive an honorary degree from the University there several times), he nonetheless was remembered as “a singularly dignified, gentle, and warm spirit, amused and amusing” (*The Times* 1974, 19).

What this brief biographical sketch shows is that Jones’s palette of knowledge, interests, and experience was broad; though not educated via a university, his reading was wide, and his appreciation of his cultural heritage, enriched by his spiritual beliefs, his artistic ways of seeing, and his sense of responsibility to represent both past and present in his work is what makes him unique:

I am in no sense a scholar, but an artist and it is paramount for any artist that he should use whatever happens to be at hand. For artists depend on the immediate and the contractual and their perception must have a 'now-ness' about it. *But*, in our present megalopolitan technocracy the artist must still remain a 'rememberer'. (Jones 1978, 17)

This role as 'rememberer' and this focus on the 'now-ness' both aligns Jones with other great modernist poets, like Eliot and Pound, but also sets him apart, just as it situates him in some ways with the other First World War poets but also emphatically distances his work from theirs.

These tensions will be explored in the next section, as *In Parenthesis* is examined in more detail. David Jones was "in many ways typical of his generation. A product of the late-Victorian, early Edwardian lower middle-class, he was imbued with idealistic, patriotic, imperialistic values ... but in his devotion to drawing, and his breadth of reading, he was exceptional" (Dilworth 2012, 19). The work of Paul Fussell has highlighted the literary context this pre-war generation inhabited:

There was no *Waste Land*, with its rats' alleys, dull canals, and dead men who have lost their bones: it would take four years of trench warfare to bring these to consciousness. There was no *Ulysses*, no *Mauberley*, no *Cantos*, no Kafka, no Proust, no Waugh, no Auden, no Huxley, no Cummings, no *Women in Love* or *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. There was no 'Valley of the Ashes' in *The Great Gatsby*. One read Hardy and Kipling and Conrad and frequented worlds of traditional moral action delineated in traditional moral language. (1975, 23)

However, the beginnings of change were there even before the Great War began: recent work looking at poetry in 1914 points out that the distinctions are not as striking as "the crossover between poets and their various ideas" (Palmer and Minogue 2015, 118). The Imagists, the Georgians, a proliferation of small presses publishing poetry magazines – poetry on both sides of the Atlantic was pushing against, and still adapting, traditional forms and themes. In 1918 the poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins were finally published: held back by his friend and fellow poet Robert Bridges until he felt the time was right for Hopkins's experiments with sprung rhythm, language, and form, the Victorian Jesuit's poems illustrated the battle between the Modernists and the Georgians; *A Survey of Modernist Writing*, published in 1927 and written by Robert Graves and Laura Riding, defended Hopkins against critics who, they say, object to "daring that makes the poet socially rather than artistically objectionable" (2002 [1927], 93–99). Jones encountered Hopkins's work during this period, and was impressed by it: "most certainly the appearance of Hopkins's verse in the 1920s was a red-letter day for all who love the Muses of Britain" (Jones 1978, 122). His own daring was to cause similar critical controversy later on, as will be explored later in this chapter.

Although *In Parenthesis* did not appear until 1937, its long gestation period meant that it had absorbed and reflected upon all of these contexts, personal, literary and cultural. Jones has left many letters and essays which lay out his influences and his opinions on different writers and ideas. So much material exists, generating academic

responses which engage with different aspects of Jones's work, that it can move the new reader too far away from the work itself, complicating and impeding reading: it is true, Jones's poems are direct, obtuse, allusive, formal, colloquial, mythological, intellectual, and his work likened to Blake, to Hopkins, to Eliot, and yet it is like no-one else's at all. This enables Jones to be claimed as a Modernist – “the only Modernist soldier-poet of any note”, says Tim Kendall – but it should not be forgotten that he was brought up on, read, and expressed admiration for, earlier poets including many of the Georgians (Kendall 2013, xvii). As the sections below reveal, *In Parenthesis* offers an immersive reading experience, not just of the Great War, but of the wider pre- and post-war contexts, too.

2 Basic Coordinates: Central Topics and Concerns

In Parenthesis was published in 1937, eighteen years after the end of the First World War, and when another war was looming on the horizon; it is, in that respect, in a temporal parenthesis between two major historical events. Jones, in the Preface, tells the reader that it “has to do with some things I saw, felt, & was part of ... the period covered begins early in December 1915 and ends early in July 1916” (*IP* ix).¹ Dilworth points out that Jones saw more active service than any other British war writer, 117 weeks at the front, and emphasises that his experience would have been “more onerous” than many of his officer-class contemporaries, as his rank was that of private (2008, 18). However, Jones himself says that he “did not intend this as a ‘War Book’ – it happens to be concerned with war”. Rather, he says, he should prefer it to be “about a good kind of peace” (*IP* xiii).

It is a long and complex piece of work, so marking some key topics helps map out a reading. On a basic narrative level, it describes the journey between Jones's departure for France in 1915 and the attack on Mametz Wood in the Battle of the Somme in July 1916. Critics have pointed to the historical accuracy of Jones's portrayal of events: “almost everything in *In Parenthesis*, however imaginative it might be, and however wonderful its imagery, is rooted in actual experience” (Hughes 2007, 18); “we are given as concentrated a picture of the feel of the War from the viewpoint of a private as can be found anywhere, a picture built up from a mass of fine details and precisely observed minutiae” (Blamires 1971, 77). The soldier is not only a semi-autobiographical central figure, however; Ball is a kind of Everyman, for Jones saw the soldier as “one of the basic human prototypes” (75). A close reading of the Preface that Jones wrote to *In Parenthesis* reveals the poet's belief that the end point of the poem marked a change: “from then onward things hardened into a more relentless, mechanical affair,

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, page references in brackets with the abbreviation *IP* refer to Jones 1963 [1937].

took on a more sinister aspect” (*IP ix*). The poem is, then, in many ways a retrospective mourning for what has been lost, taking its examples and metaphors from literary and cultural artefacts, for, as Jones says, “at no time did one so much live with a consciousness of the past, the very remote, and the more immediate and trivial past, both superficially and more subtly” (*xi*). This central concern helps make sense of a host of major and minor themes and allusions, which cover areas like Welsh folklore and Roman-British history, the Arthurian legends, Norse myths, Old Testament teachings, Catholic liturgy, and London motifs and language:

The War is thus not experienced as something totally other, forming a kind of world in itself, with its own values and self-consistency. Its disruption of the normal order of life is made sense of by the reference to a historical background which is itself accepted as part of the normal order. (Blamires 1971, 81)

For example, Jones’s poetic and artistic output is steeped in allusions to the Middle Ages, and though other twentieth-century writers also drew upon earlier works, “none of these poets has drawn as deeply or as consistently on medieval literature and culture” as he has done (Blamires 1976, 73). Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur* is arguably one of the most important texts Jones read and used in his own work. He has been called “the Malory of the trenches” (Read 1937b, 304) and described as having the *Le Morte Darthur* “so consistently running in his mind that the threads of the one text are constantly making connections” to the one that he was working on (Wilcockson 1995, 249). In the Preface, Jones talks about Christopher Dawson’s reflection that it is the “conservatism and loyalty to lost causes” which have given the British national tradition its distinctive character, and that therefore “perhaps the middle ages were not far wrong in choosing Arthur, rather than Alfred of Edmund or Harold, as the central figure of the national heroic legend” (*IP xiii*). That he should include this idea shows both the sense of respect he has for examples which may seem “lost” but which also bind hope within them: Arthur is, after all, the once *and future* king.

This key belief connects to another major focus in the poem: the sacramental, and the spiritual life. Jones converted to Catholicism in 1921, after the War was over, and has written at length about the experience of seeing a Mass in an outbuilding at night at the Front, peering in at the candlelit service through a crack in the wall, and feeling “immediately” the oneness between the Offerant and the soldiers around him (*IP 249*). The idea of sacrament is perhaps the most vital element to all Jones’s work, whether his art or his poetry. In an essay, “Art and Sacrament”, he explores what he means by sacrament and sacramental, taking it beyond the purely Catholic sense, and linking it into man’s ability to create, to make signs:

I think a purpose is served in deliberately reminding ourselves (whatever our predilections or prejudices) that man is unavoidably a sacramentalist and that his works are sacramental in character ... we still cannot very well deny that this creature has, for about fifty millenniums ... made works, handled material, in a fashion that can only be described as having the nature of a sign. (1959, 155)

Understanding this drive in Jones's work, a drive that carries through into words what his engravings and paintings convey more directly, is to understand the significance of detail for the poet: nothing is neglected, ignored. As Rowan Williams reveals:

Jones often wrote about "the Break", the cultural moment somewhere around the beginning of modernity when the European world-view shifted decisively. Instead of a world where things were unique but linked by an unimaginable density of connection and cross-reference, we had created one in which things were unconnected but endlessly repeatable and where everything could be exchanged in the market for an agreed equivalent: above all, for money. Jones saw his work – both as a visual artist and as a poet – as a sustained protest against the Break and an effort to show that the older picture could, after all, be brought to life. (2017, 41)

Jones's unique perspective on the sacramental, on sign-making, is shot through with a Christian belief in the redeeming nature of God which prevents his work from despair. It is often a bleak, dark, and wasted landscape exposed by *In Parenthesis*, but, as I have stressed elsewhere, it is also a space where faith and a profound belief in the creative positives of humanity transcend the horrors of the present (Rayner 2009, 239). Or, as Kathleen Henderson Staudt puts it, "We are not so much deciphering or admiring a finished product as we are discovering traces of the activity of making, in this artist's particular experience, an activity that he associates with a sacred dimension of human life" (2016).

3 Aesthetics

In Parenthesis, then, is a collection of signs, a set of markers, of creative acts, massive in scope and resonance. The aesthetic strategies Jones employs as tools in his making of this monumental work are, as might be anticipated, complex and sophisticated. Dilworth's warning, that "reading is actively alert or it fails" is therefore a useful starting point: this poem may be long, but it fits together, and although several readings may be needed before the scope and scale can be adequately appreciated (even Dilworth confessed that his first attempt was like "clawing through gauze"), it rewards a patient surrender to its challenges (2008, 20). *In Parenthesis* is "different in form, style and ambition from other British 'war poetry', in so far as it is a single long piece of work, suggesting that the traditional genre to which it owes allegiance is epic rather than lyric" (Poole 2013, 146).

As an epic, it stands alone: Dilworth claims it as the "only great epic since *Paradise Lost*" (2008, 98), a brave assertion, as Eliot's *Waste Land*, more widely known, arguably also deserves the accolade of "great" epic status. Jones, however, pushes that form even further than Eliot does: for by using the Great War at the centre of the narrative he can, as Dudley explains, apply "a greater degree of pressure" to the modern idiom, "one that ruptures smaller fissures already found in Pound, Joyce, or Eliot" (2013, 107). Blamires, however, had earlier rejected the label of epic, saying that "the

notion of epic seems to be raised simply in order to have some criterion by which to judge David Jones's work a failure". He admits that it shares certain qualities with the epic form, but it would be "fairer to his work not to try and fit it into such moulds" (1971, 196). In essence, Jones's poem takes the lens of war and uses it to emphasize that that experience "exhausts the domestic and urban images Eliot constructed" (Dudley 2013, 108). It is, therefore, a poem that defines categorisation in any tidy sense, in part because "Modernism's practice of juxtaposition, allusion, and parataxis to create newness, was, for Jones, religious in structure and nature" (106). Jones's sacramental approach to his poetry meant it was "the most linguistically and formally innovative British work to emerge out of the Great War" (Robichaud 2007, 2).

The poem is structured into seven parts, which can be divided into two halves: Parts 1–4, which describe Private Ball's journey from England to France, the march to the camp, and life in the trenches up until Christmas, and then Parts 5–7, which look at the preparations for the battle, the battle itself, and the fates of Ball's fellow soldiers. The first half is dominated by prose, with some poetic forms, especially in Part 3, and the second half gradually uses more and more verse until Part 7 is almost wholly in that medium. There are epigraphs to each part, all from *Y Gododdin*, an early Welsh poem, but the headings all come from different sources: Coleridge, Hopkins, Lewis Carroll, Shakespeare, and Malory. Jones gives notes to accompany the poem at the end of the book, as well as a Preface which explains his style in a little detail. The punctuation, Jones says, uses pauses at the end of lines to aid the sense and form. A new line is used to indicate some change, inflexion, or emphasis (*IP xi*). As other critics have discussed, there is also an absence of many speech marks, which has the effect of "blurring the distinctions between different speakers, and so representing 'that hotch-potch which is ourselves'" (Palmer and Minogue 2015, 241). Describing the different stylistic elements so baldly does not capture the aesthetic power of the whole, however. Jones uses language with Hopkins's creativity, pulling compound nouns and adjectives into service to create moods of light and shade, as for example in Part 3, describing the monotonous walking, one behind the other, of the soldiers:

Half-minds, far away, divergent, own-thought thinking,
tucked away unknown thoughts; feet following file friends,
each his own thought-maze alone treading; intricate, twist
about, own thoughts, all unknown thoughts, to the next so
close following on. (Part 3, 37)

The use of syntax to create a sense of tired plodding, tripping and stumbling in places, breaking the rhythm that the word order also sets up, shows Jones's control of language. The closeness of the soldiers is contrasted with the mystery of their thoughts, the physical tiredness juxtaposed with the "intricate, twist / about, own thoughts", the imagery succeeding in conveying both the block of soldiers, and the many different identities within that as a moving unit. Note how Jones uses line breaks to help build this image, too, and alliteration and internal syllabic stresses to round out the impact to full effect.

At other points the style becomes dense with allusion, cockney slang mixing with what looks like code words, acronyms, place names, all jumbled to make reading slow and confused and baffling:

Castor neck on Pollux in harness on the right – boot to boot
to Auntie Bembridge with her Mafeking V. C. – all in their
battle-bowlers – more preferably with plumes – when we
go over – this Conchy propaganda’s no bon for the troops—
hope Jerry puts one on Mecklenburgh Square – instead of fus-
sing patriotic Croydon. (Part 6, 143)

Jones drafted and redrafted *In Parenthesis*, continuing even after Faber had returned a new typescripted version in late Autumn 1936, and then again when the page proofs were sent to him. As with his paintings, he worked constantly to improve it, saying that he felt like “an unpracticed & ignorant driver trying to control a whole team of very restive horses on a steep path – in fact some of the horses seemed to be oxen & some mules” (Dilworth 2017, 182).

4 Reception

“Am I dotty?” asked W.H. Auden, reviewing *The Anthemata* in 1954: “When *In Parenthesis* came out ... I thought it – I think so still – the greatest book about the First World War that I had read. But nobody seemed to notice or write about it” (2008, 407). Jones’s first major poem did, in fact, get good coverage from reviewers: Herbert Read, in the *Times Literary Supplement*, called it a “miracle” and said that “the final quality of this book is not of the war but of the spirit that is perturbed by the war” (1937a) and James Agate in *The Daily Express* called it a “masterpiece”, saying “this seems to me to be the best book yet thrown up by the war, and possibly the best we shall ever get” (1937, 4). Robert Speaight, for *The Tablet*, hailed it as “likely to take rank among the greater works of modern literature, and that it is both in its intention and achievement unique” and goes on to claim confidently, “*In Parenthesis* will take a natural place beside ‘The Unknown Eros’ and ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’ among the few modern books written by Catholics which will have a certain influence on English letters” (1937, 16).

The first impression of *In Parenthesis* was 1500 copies, a respectable number for a first book by a new poet. The number of book sales that resulted was substantial enough for Faber to order a second printing of another thousand copies, when it was awarded the prestigious Hawthornden Prize in 1938, which seeks out the most imaginative literature (prose or poetry) written in any year. *The Tablet* quoted from the speech Jones gave at the event, where he talked about the feeling of “the unity of the Arts” that writing *In Parenthesis* had given him:

to coax the Unicorn into the garden—this is the task of the writer no less than the painter. If the Hawthornden Committee have felt that my own attempt, in whatever limited a fashion, and from however far off, has got a huntsman’s ‘view’ of this illusive creature, whose capture is so arduous, I am naturally made glad. (Speaight 1938, 18)

Yet even as this “unicorn” received accolades, its rarefied nature was also attracting responses which shed light on why the work might not, after all, fulfil the influential place Speaight predicted for it in the canon. *The Bookseller* hinted at the poem’s challenges when the publisher, and not the poet, is praised for the Hawthornden: it was “a tribute to the publishers, Messers. Faber & Faber, for courage in producing a work which before publication must have seemed an uncommercial proposition” (1938, 319). A notice in *The Observer* described it as “the distilled essence of war, rather than a personal memory of things seen and endured” but also added that it was “as difficult to describe as it is staggering to read” (1937, 6). A book-length poem, unlike anything else that had been written before, with its mix of prose passages and allusive and innovative poetic forms, was a daunting endeavour for any reader: even T. S. Eliot, apologising to Jones in late 1935 for the delay in responding to his draft, admitted that this was because “everyone in the firm wanted to read it slowly” (Dilworth 2017, 186).

The Second World War undoubtedly created a hiatus in attention and sales, and it wasn’t until much later, in 1961, that an American edition was brought out by Chilmark Press. Jones warned Louis G. Cowan, the Press’s founder, that in the last quarter century *In Parenthesis* had only sold 3000 copies. He mused that “there is something ... about *In Paren* that is under suspicion or something ... don’t really like it” (Dilworth 2017, 315). Despite this, Cowan went ahead and had 1500 copies printed, and a year later, 1100 of those had been sold. Reviews were very positive, with glowing pieces written by W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and Winfield Scott in the US press. The first academic assessment appeared in January 1962, written by John H. Johnston, from the University of West Virginia, for the *Review of Politics*. Johnston put the long wait for academic recognition down to two factors: Jones’s “own modesty and reticence” and “critical neglect” which combined “to make him certainly the least known of World War I poets” (Johnston 1962, 65). Johnston earned praise from Jones, who, writing to Blissett in March 1962, said that “He’s really got down to what I was attempting to do & it’s an awfully well written and scholarly bit of work” (Blissett 1981, 33). As a letter to Harman Grisewood in May of the same year reveals, Jones had been providing Johnston with information about the composition of *In Parenthesis* that had helped with the article:

In various letters I’ve written to Prof. John H. Johnston I’ve told him as best I could the circumstances of how *In Paren*. came to be written. It would be untruthful to say that Tom Eliot’s *Waste Land* and also Rene’s reading to me *Anna Livia* did not influence the ‘form’ of *I.P.*, I think. But what I’ve tried to tell Johnston is that in my view the whole business of critics endlessly nosing around for ‘influences’ is a bore and virtually useless and deceptive, and gives quite a false impression of how an artist works. Trying to rack my brain for ‘influences’ makes me more and more

convinced of this. It's more the conditioning civilizational situation into which one was born that determines the 'form'. Browning, for example, gave me a bit of a clue of how something might be managed, and then the sudden appearance of Hopkins and my reading of Skelton and one's interest at that time of 'negro spirituals' and God knows what all, seemed to 'click' in some way with all sorts of childhood things – nursery rhymes, early readings of Malory and, of all people, Ma-caulay, and fragmentary bits of Welsh stuff, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Norse sagas, and Caesar's Gallic Wars, and all kinds of popular cockney songs, and bits of the metaphysical poets, and Lewis Carroll, and Lear and God! it's absurd to try and trace the differing and very disparate strands, and behind that being brought up on the Authorized Version of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. And then all this heterogeneous stuff given new point and cohesion by becoming a Catholic in 1921 and reading Maritain and meeting you and Tiger Dawson and Tom [Burns] and those various blokes we used to talk with in the late 1920s and early 1930s. But how the hell can one explain all this – you can't. (Jones 2008 [1980], 189–190)

There is a clear sense in this important piece of correspondence that Jones was both puzzled, frustrated and flattered by the academic attention; the quotation above provides evidence that even while he railed against the futility of trying to explain his influences, he was simultaneously attempting to do that very thing. Elizabeth Judge sets out a strongly defended argument for Jones's lack of canonical status, focussing on his habit of self-annotating his work, either directly, as peritextual apparatus, or indirectly, via epitextual commentaries in essays and letters. She says that Jones fails to engage either the general or academic reader because his footnotes are "still too erudite, enigmatic, and time-intensive for the mass audience, yet too over-explicated, manifest, and literal for the academic audience" (2001, 182). She further argues that Jones "misunderstood that the canonization of the allusional and discursive modernist style is integrally linked to the universities and their particular professional discourse requirements" (187). Whereas Eliot "understood and fostered the academic enterprise for which his canonicity is the bestowed prize", Jones "ignored the academy and his efforts on behalf of the common reader go unremarked" (191). However, Jones did not ignore the academy, as his letters describing his responses to the work of Blamires and Johnston, show: he was given an honorary degree by the University of Cardiff, was unable to collect another offered by St Andrews University, and was proposed as a candidate for an honorary doctorate at Oxford. These are hardly signs of a writer standing entirely unrecognised by the academy, or unengaged by it.

Elizabeth Ward suggests that it is a combination of Jones's Roman Catholic and political views, together with his view of himself as an outsider, both from the artistic establishment and because of his religious beliefs, that limit his popularity (1983, 2). She notes that "public enthusiasm for his work still has about it a defensive quality, and his status remains that of a minor cult figure rather than that of an acknowledged master in the fields of either literature or painting" (1). This was true, but there is evidence that this is changing: academic criticism on Jones has been, and largely still is, dominated by the work of William Blissett and Thomas Dilworth, who, as gatekeepers of his legacy, have opened up and extended knowledge and understanding of how Jones lived and worked. But the field of academic discourse on his work has also increased signifi-

cantly, aided by the establishment of the David Jones Society in 1975, which publishes the *David Jones Journal*, and the more recent establishment in 2012 of the David Jones Centre, at Aberystwyth University and the 2018 launch of the David Jones Research Center at Washington Adventist University, which both foster research into his work.

Dilworth claims, in his most recent work on Jones, that Faber did not include *In Parenthesis* in its poetry list until 1988, and that this “generic misidentification postponed academic interpretation” (2017, 273); this is slightly misleading, as Faber’s sales leaflet, *Spring Book Announcements 1937*, has the poem listed in two sections, General, and Poetry & Criticism. The misidentification was not consistent: but it was there. *The Bookseller’s* ‘June Monthly List: Books for July’ (1937) has it listed in the section called Essays and Belles-Lettres, and it does not feature at all in either of the two full page Faber advertisements for new and forthcoming books in the issues of June 3 and July 15, 1937. In addition, Dilworth’s assertion that the initial mistake was Eliot’s is backed up by a re-reading of the Introduction to the text, where Eliot calls it “a work of literary art”, “a work of creative literature” and “a book about War, and about many other things also”; what he very definitely does not call it is a poem (*IP* vii-viii). How far this impacted on the discoverability of the book needs more investigation, but it is at least probable that it was a factor in the availability of the text via bookshops, and that confusion about its genre, coupled with the large gap in time between the first publication and the subsequent reissue as a more affordable paperback in 1963, contributed to its lack of choice as a text for teaching in universities.

In just over a month, sales figures of the new paperback were just under a thousand, a very impressive performance for a text considered to be so obscure. Sales in the US of both *In Parenthesis* and *The Anathemata* were more enthusiastic, but overall the effect boosted Jones’s profile, and in 1971 the first book length study of Jones appeared: *David Jones: Artist and Writer*, by David Blamires, a German specialist from Manchester University. Jones may have hated the typography of the cover, but he judged it “a very careful and complete introduction” to his work (Blissett 1981, 89). Since then, books and articles have been appearing at a regular pace, but when, in 2010, Faber reissued *In Parenthesis* and *The Anathemata*, David Wheatley, Irish poet and academic, wrote a piece for the *New Statesman*, and was still able to muse on Jones’s mysterious position within the canon. The title of the piece is “Tome of the Unknown Soldier”, and Wheatley begins, “if posterity has consigned the poet-painter David Jones to obscurity, it is an obscurity of a strangely enviable kind. Most writers in need of a revival have suffered critical neglect or have fallen out of print, but that has not been Jones’s fate” (2010, 40).

In Parenthesis was admired by Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and W. H. Auden. Seamus Heaney thought Jones “literally an extraordinary” (1974, 547), and Basil Bunting, John Heath-Stubbs, Kathleen Raine, and Jeremy Hooker have also paid homage to his poetic skills. Although anthologies of First World War poetry have sometimes missed out mention of *In Parenthesis* in the past, a quick check shows that currently available Faber and Oxford editions include extracts (Motion 2004, 54; Kendall 2014, 201) and

Penguin's does not, although the editor, George Walter, does justify this in his introduction, saying that *In Parenthesis* and *The Wasteland* "need to be read whole in order to be properly appreciated" (2006, xxxvii). As a Great War poet, Jones is now rarely an invisible presence.

Jones's reception, however, is still a contested site: a battle ground of strongly held views, and distorting portrayals of his place in literary culture. *In Parenthesis* is the "unicorn in the garden" of more easily categorised War poets, and its vision of the sacramental in detail and design a full realisation of the horror – and the beauty – of battle. It both remembers the relevant past, and captures the immediate past present, the "nowness" of the War experience. It deserves a more thorough re-evaluation of its place in the canon.

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5.2 Further Reading

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