

A Brief Introduction to David Jones's *In Parenthesis* (1937)

David Jones's 1937 epic poem *In Parenthesis* was written during and after a period of depression in the poet's life from 1932 to 1937, with 1932 being a total collapse. He was most likely suffering from delayed post-traumatic syndrome. Jones had served as a private infantryman during WWI in the 15th Battalion, 23rd Foot of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and saw frontline combat on a number of occasions. He also served for a time as a map-maker at headquarters. Later in 1917, he acted as a spotter for artillery bombardments. These various positions gave him insight into life at HQ, the needs of artillery, and life for the common soldier at the front. Jones was also a painter and engraver throughout his career, and his strong visual attentiveness shaped what and how he saw the events of the war.

The following overview is meant to help the beginning student make sense of the overall plot, as well as some of the more important references and allusions. I do not intend this to be exhaustive or to substitute for Jones's own notes.

Frontpiece

Jones's image "The Victim" features at center a WWI soldier, the majority of his clothing torn or burned away, who stands in a war zone holding his arms aloft in great pain from his burns. There is perhaps a hint of the biblical account of Moses having his arms held aloft while a battle continues, but if so, it is ironic. The soldier's form is also that of a crucifix—perhaps as an emblematic sacrificial victim whose arms are hung in protest yet helpless before the onslaught. At his head, stand ragged and tortured trees, torn apart by gunfire, as well as bombed out buildings. In the background, soldiers work the supply lines, while others march in file. At the soldier's feet are the tools of trench digging, barbed wire, and rats. Yet the stars and the moon still shine into this horrible scene, suggesting some measure of remaining hope. As you read the poem, keep these images in mind:

1. What do the rats, barbed wire, and trenches come to represent?
2. Likewise, what do the torn trees symbolize?
3. How does the poem employ the light of the moon and stars?
4. Most importantly, what does the central cruciform victim suggest about the nature of warfare and the common soldier in Jones's vision?

Preface

Jones's preface touches on a number of important themes and allusions of *In Parenthesis*, as well as some reminiscence upon his own personal experience as a soldier in WWI. He draws attention to how the Great War (ca. 1916) changed the experience of war, especially for the individual infantryman, and yet how important the memory of past wars and past warfare are to the meaning of their service. The echoes throughout the poem of *The Song of Roland*, Malory's Arthur, as well as Celtic and Welsh mythology form an important substructure—WWI in a way still fits within that heroic and tragic tradition. In particular, the differing mindsets of the Cockney English and Welsh soldiers forced together—one more matter-of-fact and comic, the other more biblical and mystical—produced a strange mixture of two poetic folkways.

Jones gives some explanation of the punctuation, as well as the purpose of profanity in the poem, which he understands as at times “real poetry” and not quite “blasphemy in any theological sense” (xii). Like the Welsh Queen, Jones writes to give glory to God and to remember the heroic past. The Arthurian element is particularly fitting, for Jones holds that the true poetry of the English and Welsh traditions comes out of defeat rather than victory. This raises a particular problem for Jones—how are we to note the beauty and heroism in mechanized war? It is still there, though mixed with the inhuman use of technology. The title, *In Parenthesis*, indicates that we stand in-between in three ways: 1) Jones himself has written as one standing between, unable to know exactly where he stands; 2) the war itself was in-between the old and new eras; and 3) existence for us all in this world is in-between.

1. What does Jones’s stated position of being in-between tell us about the poem’s method and allusions?
2. What does it mean to be both in a present unlike the past and yet somehow still tied to the past? Likewise, why should poetry seek its music from defeat?

Dedication: Jones dedicates the poem to both the Cockney and Welsh soldiers he fought with, especially to Private R.A. (Reggie Allen) who died in battle. He also dedicates it to the French “who exchanged their long loaves with us” and to the German soldiers they fought with on the frontlines.

1. Why, in your estimation, does Jones remember all these groups?
2. Why does he call them friends?

Epitaph: From the tale of Branwen in *The Mabinogion*. It recalls a group of Irish soldiers returning victorious from battle only to open a magical door that forces them to recall all that had occurred.

1. What does the epitaph suggest about the dilemma of being truthful to the past?
2. What does it suggest about Jones’s own personal dilemma in recalling the war?

Part 1 – “The Many Men So Beautiful”

The poem opens in 1915 as the 55th Battalion is assembling for inspection in order to embark for France. Its four companies (A to D) are paraded, while the sergeants and officers check off their readiness. We are introduced to various characters: John Ball, a strong fighting Englishman, who becomes a central figure in much of the poem; Lieutenant P.D. I. (Piers Dorian Isambard) Jenkins, a young, upper-class gentleman; Sergeant Snell, a no-nonsense Saxon who is nonetheless subject to panic on the field; Corporal Quilter, who is good at unifying the men; Lance-Corporal Aneiryn Merddyn Lewis, a Welshman, who has some biblical insight into the situation; and Private Bobby Sanders, a weak soldier.

Ball, educated, compares Jenkins to a painting he recalls, as the bugle sounds for the Battalion to rest. And he realizes his own canteen is not ready for inspection (2-3). The cold, wet wind blows on them, a woeful, unprepared troop. Jenkins allows the men to smoke (3-4). Despite his knightly appearance, the men do not have a high view of the lieutenant (5). Sanders complains that he is lame already to Quilter, who within himself sees the new recruits as going to a biblical “massacre of the innocents” (6).

The rest of the day passes in heavy rain, as the men march to their ships. The band plays as the men, increasingly tired, march through a town that does not celebrate their passing. Ball is placed on guard up

until the men depart between midnight and 2am. They disembark in France, and we follow B Company as they are loaded onto trains to travel to the Western Front (7-9).

1. What kind of mood does Part 1 set for the poem?
2. What makes the various classes and nationalities of the characters important to the story?
3. How does the poem begin to invoke historical and mythic motifs?
4. What is significant about the section's last line?

Part 2 – “Chambers Go Off, Corporals Stay”

Part 2 opens in an area not yet touched by warfare with the men awaiting the order to advance. In the meantime, they hear various lectures on hygiene and artillery, and one of the bombing officers takes away some who might be qualified for his work (13). After 3 weeks, with the arrival of higher-ups, rumors begin to spread in the ranks. Men are assigned various tasks, such as Sanders being assigned to trash detail, who reflects on the kindness of Jenkins as opposed to others. But with this at an end comes something of “immense realness,” and they march out (14-16).

They depart, freshly pressed, at 5:55am on Christmas Eve before the General Officer, but the men know they are being written down for any weak spot, so the Welsh soldiers call down biblical curses: “send it down.” (17-18). They now enter a place that, while it looks the same, smells strange and is marked by unusual quiet. Ball, feeling the increase in tension, nonetheless marvels at the clouds. They begin to encounter signs of war—a large crater, a splintered tree, sign-boards with directions, torn netting. The farm door carries palimpsests of previous companies. The upper-class Jenkins offers Ball a smoke (19-23), then addresses the officers. In a terrible poetic passage, Ball experiences for the first time a bomb falling (24).

1. How does Jones build the tension in this section?
2. Why does Ball marvel at the clouds?
3. Likewise, why does Jones render the falling of the bomb in such a dense, poetic passage?

Part 3 – “Starlight Order”

In this section, Ball emerges as a central figure. The men of no. 7 unit begin with no fanfare to march on a moon-lit night (Christmas Eve) to the Front. John Ball desires for the battle to begin and would embrace her like a lover—better than the fear and tedium of expectation. The orders along the march have a ritual-like quality, and they halt for the horse-drawn supply lines to pass (27-30). No. 6 unit, just ahead in the wilderness of war, moves out of sight to the sound of artillery fire. The moon light reflects off the Webley pistol of Jenkins as he consults with the commanding officer of no. 6 unit, and Jenkins is compared to a shepherd, both physical and spiritual, as the men move into the dark that the painter Breughel knew. Ball dreams as he leans against a post, is forced forward by a sergeant, then dreams again even as he marches. His dream merges imagery of a Nativity scene with family, with marching, and with scenes from figure drawing class. Meanwhile, Jenkins continues to check that all his men are accounted for on the march and hears stragglers coughing in the night (31-33).

Snell tells Jenkins that they've lost no. 6 unit, which had the guide, and the men reflect on the inexperienced Jenkins potentially leading them into the German line. The moon's silver shines down on them in a poetic passage, then a Welsh platoon passes them in the night, their commander thinking of green Wales and the outlawed wool earmuffs knitted by his aunt. No. 7 in turn passes on with a litany of promised comfort and good nights, as well as warnings about the barbed wire (34-36). The light of artillery serves as background to a Welsh unit relieved by their English one. The men look like marionettes in the half-light as they make their way over rubble, trapped in their own silent thoughts for a long way (37). The intermittent flares illuminate the night in a mixture of violence and beauty; they are ordered to halt as those ahead are stalled; Ball reflects on the Celtic, Roman, and Christian meanings of the moon, then looks upon the ruin all about his feet, only to be brought out of his musings by a stray bullet (38-39).

An officer tells them to get under cover and to be guided by their map. Jenkins continues to guide them until they are met by masons who let them know that the Germans ("he") are on the road, and the Old British Line is no longer usable. Jenkins chooses to stay on the road, then they enter the trenches. But they are soon exhausted, as the jab-jab of the machine guns force them to be fast companions (like David and Jonathan), and the Welsh Lewis sings hymns to steady his nerves (40-42). A flare now reveals the forms in the trenches, who are carrying out dead bodies that are powdered with lime to avoid spreading disease. The scene grows increasingly confusing within the network of trenches. Quilter falls into the water, while Ball is momentarily lost before catching up with Lewis. The German machine-guns go off again; they fear the earthworks might give way. Ball is water-logged, while the signallars seek to reestablish a line and act with cavalier bravery above the trench (43-47).

After being blinded by another flare, Ball imitates their bravery amidst the strange signs of the place. The platoon finally arrives at Moog's Hole, while Jenkins enters a tent of light to check in. The place has its own folkways that they will learn. The man that Ball replaces leaves him some dry firewood. Jenkins checks to see that all are accounted for, and Ball is (again) on first watch. He fights sleep, struggling to remember the password. Another flare reveals a metaled and desolate landscape. He hears a train and supply trucks, and he stands watch like both the Mariner at sea and Abel, his brothers' keeper. And the armed sleepers are like Mac Og of the Irish underworld and Arthur the sleeper (see note 36). After a brief check by a corporeal, Ball again reflects on the Celtic Underworld (see note 42) that lies before him. Near him Old Adams, a 62-year-old who enlisted as age 45, also keeps watch. Ball tries to keep his cold fingers and feet awake, curses, and fires off his rifle. He listens to the sound of the rats moving in the water, who feed on the dead. These are like the carrion birds of old. Ball comfortable in his bay is found asleep and snoring by his relief (48-55).

1. How does Ball develop as a character? What does he see and think that others don't?
2. How are light and dark interposed in part 3?
3. What important allusions underlie the plot?
4. How is the life at Moog's Hole a kind of folkway?
5. How does Ball's imagination structure our view of the platoon's march?
6. What emotions do the rats evoke?

Part 4 – “King Pellam’s Launde”

The platoon’s first full day in the trenches is Christmas Day. Part 4 acts as the epicenter of the poem; based around Ball’s poetic responses to the woods and the Welsh boast of Dai Greatcoat, it follows the daily action of the troop from before dawn until after nightfall. The section is more heavily metaphoric than the previous three and builds its effect on a number of mythic references.

Before dawn the birds begin to sing (“Stand-to/Stand-to-arms”). The light gives form to morphing figures in the fog. The sergeant awakens the men with mock romantic language, and the fog covers over the general complaints of arising soldiers and the general cacophony, while the line of sight is only as far as the earthen embankments and the trip-wire. Then comes the sun, “this beautiful one” and the fading of the fog over the “wire thickets” (59-62). The troops stand water-logged and caked with mud in want of oil or hot water to clean their rifles. Some are chosen with Lewis to be sent for Small Arms Ammo (S.A.A.) from Pioneer Keep, while the rest present their rifles for inspection. Jenkins is not so exacting or harsh, while Snel marks some down for infractions. It is a Green Christmas (63-65).

Ball, as usual, is chosen for first watch. What follows is a deeply resonant and lyrical hymn to the woods that draws in Arthurian imagery from Welsh sources (66). He sights a German but decides not to shoot. His meditation upon forests continues, interwoven with imagery of Norse (Odin is “the hanged, the offerant”) and Roman origin (see note 16). He hears the German Christmas carols cross the no man’s land, answered by the British singing an American dancehall tune. Ironically the Germans are the ones who sing the gospel of “rare and indivisible/ New Light. . . This concertin’d/ Good news” (68). Ball ends his meditation reflecting on the Nativity as recounted in Milton’s Ode (see note 19).

Meanwhile, Jenkins and Snell return mud-covered from the inspection, while the men all sit silent and reflective like philosophers, perhaps sentimental or looking at the half-light. Ball’s watch continues over a small epic catalogue of his friends, including “Dai de la Cote” (Dai Greatcoat). They all sit in their army gear like **monastics** of a sort, most like animals/scapegoats awaiting the temptations of demons, even as they are those demons (“each the Azazel to each”). Ball doesn’t know the Germans have a patrol out nor can he see the future fear that will come to those who desire a place of safety. Instead while the men joke about rations of wine for medicinal purposes, Ball remembers with kindness the one who left him dry wood (69-71).

Lewis and his men return with Christmas rations, and the mixture of high and low accents greets these gifts. For some the alcohol issue is like communion “let us taste and see,/ let us be renewed”), even though this is watered down by the Quartermaster like Pugh’s Hygenic Dairy once watered down milk. Ball, finally relieved of duty, arrives for his breakfast, plans to see his friend Reggie but is disappointed to learn his section is being sent out. Instead of the night fear, the day reveals a landscape of tedium and boredom for the patrol and outposts of men wombed in mud and insecurity. Compare this with the charts of the strategic clerks. At the communication trench they see examples of good and bad crafting of walkways and two veterans argue about Ypres’ (Wipers’) strategic value, peppering their talk with the military heritage/qualifications of the generals and staff intelligence officers. They end their discussion with recalling the military battles of the 23rd Infantry (78-79).

What follows next (pages 79-84) is an extended boast by the Welshman Dai Greatcoat, who recounts not only his military heritage, but also his ethnic and spiritual heritage. The extended note 37 on pages 207-210 explains the references in some detail. His boast divides into four or five parts:

First, Dai boasts that he and his people were present at/with:

- Henry V at Crecy in 1346 at the death of King John
- Abel's murder by Cain
- Artaxerses's army
- Balin's self-defensive killing of Pellam
- David's killing of Goliath and playing before King Saul
- Derfel the Mighty
- Samson's burning of the foxes
- Caesar's 7th legion in 54 BC
- Roland's winding of his horn
- Socrates as a hoplite in 432 BC
- The Battle of Camlann
- The 12 battles of Arthur
- The Roman legions ("Loricated Legions")

Secondly, he boasts that the Welsh may name Saint Helen of the Hosts as their protector, and he recounts her various praise names. (Jones notes that she may be tied to St. Helen, the wife of Constantine.) Among these, she contains in her bosom the chief priest, the defender of the Southern Coast, the Governor of Brittany, and the king. She is loved by both royalty and by the commoners. She outstrips Helen of Troy.

Thirdly, Dai boasts of the sacred and blessed head of King Bran buried under the Tower of London. Bran's head extended protection to Arthur, to the land against French invasion, and to those who rescued the Princess Flur from France. May he also extend protection against evil counselors such as Agravaine.

Fourthly, Dai says that he was there under the 10th Fretensis who crucified Christ on the cross, and there he beheld the five wounds of Christ, protected his body from raven and crow, beheld his garment, saw them gamble at his feet, and saw him die.

Lastly, Dai was there when Satan fell. What does all this mean? That Dai like Perceival holds the spear that offers the restoration of the maimed king and that Dai is the unicorn, the symbol of purity who may remove the poison from their midst. To this, his Cockney companions laugh and call him Melchizidek and sing the old soldiers' song with harmonica.

Meanwhile, the patrol with Ball is moving about. Near a set of trenches, some sense the bombs coming, which travel over head and fall on the trenches. A bombardment follows, which Jones (or perhaps Ball) compares to the myth of the giant boar Trwyth that destroyed a fifth of Ireland before Arthur defeated it. They hear the names of those who are killed in the bombardment called out (85-87). Those on patrol

continue onward toward Pioneer Keep; often they are lost and forced to “live by faith” as they are moved about like cattle. They notice how the dykes and the earthworks are constantly rebuilt because of the water, which is like this warfare itself: “They’re worthy of an intelligent song for all the stupidity of their contest. A boast for the dyke keepers, for the march wardens” (88-89).

They arrive at Pioneer Keep. Lewis is pained that his fellow Welshman Watcyn knows nothing of Welsh history and heritage (see note 42), while Quilter finds the old man who keep the supply dump, a filthy man who loves only his dog. Quilter with Sanders signs the form for the shovels, picks, and ladle. The troop looks westward back to the layers of fortune and authority behind the frontlines which they imagine as a kind of pastoral Arcadia. Instead, they must journey back to Sandbag Alley past the putrefaction of powdered, dead bodies and diseased places. Sanders retches. In 30 minutes, they return to the trenches and to their separate distractions. Ball attempts to read some poetry (89-95).

With the sentry change, the day passes. Near sunset, the men are roused to repair a sandbag wall. Tomorrow, ironically, we are told a battery will decimate a farmhouse. For now, the sentry hopes to be relieved in time for hot food. They look out on cratered earth that is prehistoric in its ruin. A high-stationed officer appears asking for liaison officer, and he is waved on to Jenkins. Snell passes out rations. Lights begin to go out in camp like the liturgy of Holy Saturday, and the night patrol goes out. Soon, a night bombardment falls and the patrol returns sooner than expected (96-99).

1. How does the poem mix together the language of a pastoral dawn with strange ghostly imagery and mundane circumstances?
2. What do Ball’s meditations tell us about the world?
3. Why is it ironic that the Germans sing of the gospel?
4. Why is the liquor ration of the men like communion?
5. What does the boast of Dai Greatcoat suggest about the meaning of the Welsh and the War?
6. Why is the bombardment like Trwyth?
7. What makes these lines significant? “They’re worthy of an intelligent song for all the stupidity of their contest. A boast for the dyke keepers, for the march wardens” (88-89).
8. Compare the world behind the front lines with what the men of the patrol must experience.
9. Is there poetry in the night bombardment? Explain.

Part 5 – “Squat Garlands for White Knights”

This section opens behind the front lines during the standard week away after three on the front. False rumors that they might be transferred to the East (wearing pith helmets and shorts) are mixed in with obscene songs about Alphonso the homosexual since the Turks are associated with pederasty. The men in a French café complain that Snell has been transferred, about the dangers of the German shelling, and talk of making love to the Kaiser’s daughter (as a symbol of German defeat). B Company is then ordered out in 30 minutes on a raid. Once they leave, the café owner and her husband, Jacques, argue about the English and whether this is all good for business. An ironically successful raid concludes with two English soldiers dead and two missing, while the one German prisoner captured dies on the return, but then the losses are often worse. The battalion returns to the café, and Watcyn is promoted. Among other news, we learn that Jenkins has been promoted on his 21st birthday (103-107a).

On Sunday, Jewish soldiers clean the latrines, while the Roman Catholics lead by Jenkins are marched to a nearby village, and the Anglicans worship in a field interrupted by the sound of German barrages. Afterwards, a rugby game ends too soon for the call for inspection parade. The orderly sergeant is asked whether he wants the soldier indicated by 73 or by 79 Jones. Other frustrating questions cause the sergeant to complain that he is neither a British senior commander, the prophet Daniel, or the German high command to know the future. And this quandary of meaning is in the ranks, too. Ryan longs for his True Love (perhaps Jesus) but commands the men harshly to fall into line, so they march to the support posts, the German attacks fail for the time being, and Watcyn is demoted, though he celebrates this with a drink. The men are clean after the dress parade, though it doesn't get rid of lice. Jenkins gives them a rest, so the companies sing songs in the canteen and at the café, followed later in the week by inspections and gas drills (107b-110).

German artillery fire scatters the horse lines, destroys the cobbler's shop, and shrapnel kills the café owner's chickens. The men argue at the café about a rumor that the real offensive is down south, over why the German guns are so accurate, over art, and so on. The harmonica player from Rotherhithe, looking through his glass of weak beer, imagines a kind of *Paradise Lost* in architecture back home. He and his drunk tablemate argue about if Alice is a French spy, and Lewis defends her. Ryan arrives to command a fatigue party and won't be bribed. Henry, a Yorkshireman, returns for his hat and complains at Ryan's leadership, and the others join in lamenting that orders are more random, the German shells are more destructive and more accurate lately. Why not parade the journalists before their guns? A runner enters to let them know that they are to be shipped forward tomorrow for another assault, and some men are ordered to help make coffins. They wave good-bye to Alice, for their replacements are already waiting, and they reflect on the green places they will miss (111-116).

They head back to the Front, but enjoy the meadow and water along the way. Mulligan, a professional soldier complains about the lack of discipline in the ranks. Ball and Thomas meet a French priest at his prayers (see note 25), and they attempt to speak to him. He encourages them to go blow up the Germans. In the march, we observe the skinny men, the water boys, and the cook. The medical doctors aren't much use for the blistered feet of the marchers. We continue to follow the march until they wait in fear of being the first to be called up. The Catholic priest opens up in the canteen to receive confessions (in expectation of coming deaths). The battalion is assembled, and Jenkins like an Anglican priest prepares to address the men, to pray for the dead, reads out battle honors, corrects some men, announces promotions, reads their orders, which are interrupted by a four-ton truck passing by, then the men are permitted to cheer (117-123a).

After another sleep and standing in the cold, the men at 10:00am pass by a massive stockpile of artillery shells, which they compare to "the four horsemen." Some of the troops look like Baroque angels. The specialist details, especially the elect dangerous ones, are assigned. They prepare to war like the unicorns against the lions in *Alice and the Looking-glass*. Then, the other details are assigned, including the ones for the pacifist Bale, the under-age Welsh soldiers who will dig (123b-126). Private Map, as a typist, overhears the signals officer that the general wants the attack in 48-hours. At his typewriter he hears the men outside. The runner Herne is awakened from a dream of Troy and women; he must take a message to the officers, those who behind the lines may drink American mixed drinks (slingers) in

safety. Herne arrives to deliver his message, like Ares in Signorelli's painting of the Innocents. Another runner is sent with a change in departure time. A complex section follows in which several privates at Headquarters play a game of cards, compare Herne to a marathon runner, and generally make jokes. They foresee a massacre. They break into a callous song until they are warned off by the sergeant and a staff woman. They continue in their ironic, empty tone oblivious (or wanting to appear so) to the coming deaths of the soldiers. In the last stanza they prepare for the coming battle (127-131).

1. How does the collage of events in part 5 form a picture of the humanity of the soldiers?
2. How do the themes of prophecy and expectation work themselves through this section?
3. Is Jenkins a kind of secular counterpart for an Anglican priest?
4. What do the various catalogues of military jobs tell us?
5. Why makes the attitude of the privates at HQ so sinister? Should we have any pity for them?
6. How important is that Ball meets a French priest?

Part 6 – “Pavilions and Captains of Hundreds”

Part 6 opens with quotations from Malory and the Old Testament that could serve as a second epitaph. The men are lying in tents at night, unable to sleep due to the busy goings on. Sanders and his two tentmates eat candy and watch the lights from the British bombardment. Meanwhile the artillery engineers puzzle over their mathematical measurements as they seek to hit enemy targets. Sanders and another are called up to run messages, and Sanders is envied, even scorned by his tentmates. The poet reflects on how quickly camaraderie falters in war. He is unnerved by the concentration of officers in the general's tent and is glad to make good his escape as soon as possible. Upon his return, he gossips about what he saw and heard. Corporeal Shallow doesn't like the sound of it (135-138).

Ball has gone to visit his friends Reggie and Olivier. The three discuss in a breezy manner a litany of everyday matters before their attention is drawn to the battle down on the road in the valley. The rolling smoke reminds them of the waves at the beach and the goings on, including, they imagine, the rum rations blown up. As pack-mules scatter, the echoes of artillery make them sit up and take notice. Olivier theorizes that the Germans are bringing up new positions under the fire. The friends then enter into a free-flowing exchange of ironic banter, partially to cover up their anxieties. They imagine the ritual suicide of the British officers if the battle is lost, how the Chaplain would declare it Christian and give them a Christian burial. They comment on how the Company Sergeant Major (C.S. M.) has wagered a bet that the cavalry will fight in the next onslaught, and they banter about the Roman twins, Castor and Pollux, fighting with the general. They hope the Germans will bomb the pacifists back home, but admit that it would spread to innocent Jewish neighborhoods. Reggie jokingly tells Olivier that he should join the atrocity commission after the war (139-143).

Some come across from A company to talk with friends, and their conversation is marked by disagreements as to what will happen in the battle, but beneath their bearing is the “essential unity of mankind.” Donkin declares his desire for revenge for his four dead brothers and a fifth captured in a German prison camp. He beats a man who jokes about it, and declares the purity of his vengeance and the ties of blood (144-145). The sun begins to set, and it gilds the horizon. Those who have fallen asleep are awoken with orders to prepare to move. Ball and his friends share the food they cannot pack with

them. Darkness descends as the companies move out, and the British barrage begins. Some begin to dig in preparation for the counter-barrage, while others chance it. Jenkins decides they are lost and urges them to dig in. At daybreak, they capture an abandoned German trench, though they fear it is boobytrapped with bombs. They behold the larger battle field, and see a ruined village—its architect's structural plans exposed. A church is bombed, and its civilian dead are churned up from their graves, mixed with the dead soldiers. They reflect that the German women are praying back in Bavaria for the dead. They sleep the night. The next day Ball watches as others ahead battle in the trenches, and that next night, they move into position (146-150).

1. How does this section contrast the strange beauty of the bombardment with the mathematical calculations of the engineers?
2. What does part 6 teach about comradeship and friendship?
3. Is Donkin right to desire revenge? Why or why not?
4. What does the bombed village reveal about the other side?

Part 7 – “The Five Unmistakable Marks”

Part 7 opens with biblical texts from Ps 132:6 and Lam 2:12 and a poem that reflects on the tormenting memory of war set against the little prayer office (which includes Ps 120 and 124).

A man loses control and others help him to regain composure. The troop belly-hugs the embankment, and they are a little lower than the angels (Ps 8) and marked by growing fear. Ball is next to two old comrades who talk heedless of the danger, while another near him screams in terror before the guns. Lewis dies, his body almost past recovery, subject to a power greater than the boar Trwyth or ancient Troy or the Battle of Catraeth. A Jew near him is wounded to death. With seven minutes to the advance, fear debilitates the men until it reaches a maximum point. The sun rises and shines upon them at 2 minutes until the advance. No time remains for excuses. Wastebottom is killed by shrapnel. Some hope that the leadership might yet cancel the advance. Talacryn panics and stands up only to be shot. Some are born under a lucky constellation, but that doesn't apply here where none can predict his fate (153-159a).

There is no Joshua to stay the sun, so “in the fullness of time” the siren sounds the advance, and the men go to a kind of wedding in the knowledge that all die eventually. The officers signal the advance, then retreat to safety, while Jenkins leads the men over. On one flank the Royal Welsh sing hymns, while in the other an epic catalogue of ethnic mixture is recounted. But they all move in ordered formation, rushing on to their deaths. Death is like a strumpet, leering at them all and offering herself. Next, follows another epic catalogue of knights who went to their deaths. The apocalypse now descends and men walk like the three Hebrew children in the fire with Christ. Quilter leads a group of six up the green slopes of the battle, and you see behind them others crawl towards the dark wood (159b-165a). [The poem at this point increasingly uses the second person to create an immediacy of action for the reader.]

The trees and plants are strewn with barbed wire and already covered with the blood of others. Jenkins dies tragically in battle, and Quilter takes over the leadership. They attack the German positions; Watcyn in particular has a blood-thirsty method, though he too is shocked at the carnage. You toss a

grenade at the German position. Blood drips from the trees upon you. A group of Germans come out to surrender and are escorted away while the German barrage continues in the valley killing one out of every three men. In the wood, the survivors gather for cover. You look upon the near-by dead, while a corporeal rallies those who remain for safety. They imagine the officers gathered for a nice meal, while the common soldiers need water and oil for their wounds. And the Catholic priest is ministering Extreme Unction to the dying (165b-173).

A soldier dies in Ball's arms, but there are no prayers and proper rituals for the dead. The trench is finally dug for their position, and the wounded are carried away. There is some hope with modern medicine that these will live (if handicapped and pensioned). Dai Greatcoat, wounded like the Fisher King, is lifted gently away. A prayer to Mother Mary is offered. Meanwhile, the German barrage continues below. The number of the dead grows in the wood like Balder the beautiful, and the stretchers come and go with the wounded. Some are crushed by the weight of fallen trees (174-178).

The darkness of the night renders everything uncertain and ephemeral. The wood trembles with sacrifice. A flare reveals dead bodies; a severed head—reminiscent of King Bran—rolls against Ball's foot. Thirty live Germans are spotted, but in the dark confusion breaks out until Corporeal Cadwalader brings order. The battle continues until you come to the still navel of the wood, which is like a crypt. You seek the living, and they find you—with horrific results. Their machine gun mows men down. (The section at the bottom of page 182 mimics the sound of machine gun fire.) Ball is struck and blood fills his boot as he crawls away. You (now likely Ball) should praise your rifle for its epic lineage and carry it with you to your death. You wonder if the dead forms of others under the trees watch you (179-184).

The Queen of the Wood now visits the dead, giving gifts to them, including Jenkins, though she cannot find Dai for whom she brought a special gift. You cannot hear what she says to Lewis. Finally, you can carry the rifle no longer. Leave it and crawl as far as you can for the rescuers. You see the new troops arrive, but those who bear the wounded never come for you; they pass you by.

And thus the poem ends with a quotation from Malory (185-187).

1. How important are the opening biblical texts to this section?
2. How does this last section mirror the confusion of war in its structure?
3. What is the purpose of the epic catalogues?
4. How does Jones memorialize the deaths of Lewis, Jenkins, and perhaps Dai? How do they participate in the story of Roland and Olivier?
5. How is death pictured in this section?
6. How does the wood become a kind of living corpse?
7. What is the purpose of the Queen of the Wood visiting the dead?
8. Is Ball at the end of the poem still alive? What do you think?

Endpiece: Jones's image for the endpiece presents a scapegoat pierced with a spear, caught upon barbed wire, and lost amidst a war-torn forest. But the sun still shines through the smoke and haze, while a shooting star (perhaps artillery or a flare) flies through the sky.

1. How does the image of the scapegoat parallel "The Victim"?

2. Likewise, what does the image of the scapegoat tell us about the theme of *In Parenthesis*?
3. Is the spear only a negative image?

Global Discussion and Reflection

- Is it possible to trace an architectonic pattern for the poem that holds together its various fragments? Why or why not?
- Is there a central theme or themes in *In Parenthesis*? What might they be?
- Is Jones able to create sympathy on the reader's part for the characters?
- Is this a novel and/or an epic poem? Does it have a single genre?
- Is Jones's poem a Catholic poem? Defend your position.
- How important are the historical and mythical allusions in the poem? What contributions do they make to the overall meaning?
- Can war be beautiful even while it is also horrible? Can it be both comic and tragic at the same time?
- Read the quotations below. What does Jones see as the primary mission of the artist who refers to war in his or her art? Do you agree?

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"The most convinced and clear-sighted pacifist, whether Christian or not, or the person suffering and outraged by one of the many contingencies of war, who takes up and reads a description of brilliant strategy, or an account of a well-executed tactical movement, is compelled to experience a measure of delight whether he would or no. . . . 'It was new, it was unique, it was simple, I could have wept.' These might be words of any one of us describing our reactions to the sudden realization of form in a great work of art. . . . But there is another side to all this, or rather many other considerations. . . . 'His sword rang in mothers' heads' . . . [I]t is the business of a poet in the sixth, or eighteenth, or any century, to express the dilemma, not to comment upon it, or pretend to a solution. . . .

"But in so far, and only in so far, as [art and war] can both be called arts, they both proceed towards 'splendour of form', and, as arts can be practiced by men, it becomes a truism to say that they both share, in some way or other, the stress and storm, the contradictions of the 'body of this death' and that both seek to be delivered from it."—"Art in Relation to War" (ca. 1942-43)