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WARS IN COMMON: DAVID JONES, JOHN BALL AND REPRESENTATIONS OF COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE IN FIRST WORLD WAR WRITING

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Abstract

Since its first appearance, David Jones's *In Parenthesis* (1937) has been an exceptionalised text, its distinctive formal experiments and cultural reference points and its belated publication date serving to distinguish it from a canon of First World War writing shaped in the previous decade. By reference to Jones's self-identification as a "private soldier, in and out of the war," this essay emphasizes instead its links to a contemporary sub-genre of war writing that represented non-commissioned viewpoints exemplified here by Frederic Manning's novel *Her Privates We* (1930) and the war essays of R. H. Tawney. Tawney's work also suggests a shared relationship with the legacies of William Morris whose *A Dream of John Ball* (1886) provides a specific reference point for his collection of war essays *The Attack* (1953) and for *In Parenthesis*, an indication of the importance to Jones's writing of an English tradition of radical political and cultural thinking.

Key words

First World War writing; David Jones; In Parenthesis; Frederic Manning; R. H. Tawney

Since its publication David Jones's *In Parenthesis* (1937) has remained a routinely exceptionalised text, set apart from other writing about the First World War by its distinctive formal experiments, its unusual cultural reference points in Celtic history and medieval romance, and the belatedness of its appearance in comparison to much of the poetry, fiction and autobiography that came to constitute its first canon. Jones also distinguished himself from writers such as Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves and Edmund Blunden, describing them to Thomas Dilworth as an "educated, variously sophisticated, certainly cultivated, more or less upper middle-class, *very* English group of chaps" (Dilworth 1988: 49). These terms of estrangement were reinforced during his only recorded meeting with Sassoon in July 1964 after which the latter noted their shared wartime history during the Somme offensive of 1916 – Jones "was a private in the 15th Royal Welch Fusiliers & wounded at Mametz Wood [and his] Battalion relieved ours" and described him as a "pathetic helpless-seeming little man – ultra-sensitive" (Egremont 2005: 504). Jones, more generously, recalled a shared inability to "get

that 1st War business out of [the] system,” before concluding that they “had a war in common but not much else” (Hague 1980: 210; Blissett 1981: 51). This failure of a “war in common” to establish any ground for meaningful communication reiterated both his sense of what he described to William Blissett as the “great gulf fixed between officers and men” in the war and his own continuing commitment to the outlook of the infantryman (Blissett 51). “I’ve always known that I must be and am essentially a private soldier, in and out of the war,” he wrote in 1935, a claim to a social identity that has continued to be generally overridden in critical interest by Jones’s rhetorical and analogic experiments in *In Parenthesis* and by the theological frame of much of his own theoretical writings (Hague: 76). Oswyn Murray’s judgement that Jones, in contrast to his artistic mentor Eric Gill, was “radically unpolitical, believing in the need for individuals to create their own paradise of work and fulfilment apart from a hostile society” only makes evident assumptions that are elsewhere implicit in the criticism of his work (Murray 1997: 3). This essay, by contrast, seeks to re-locate *In Parenthesis* more firmly within two contexts of its time. Its concern with the identity of the volunteer private soldier and its interest in what Austin Riede has recently described as the “quotidian reality of labouring to produce the war” find parallels in a sub-genre of the war writing of the 1930s that, in the work of Frederic Manning, Henry Williamson and others, sought to recover the experience of the infantryman (Riede 2015: 691). Such a re-conception of collective war experience also indicates Jones’s relationship with an English tradition of social and cultural radicalism that has its sources in the work of John Ruskin and, more particularly, William Morris, emphasizing the shared interests of *In Parenthesis* and the work of Richard (R. H.) Tawney, a fellow non-commissioned veteran of the Somme offensive and another writer who has remained on the periphery of the canon of First World War literature.

“No one comes so near to the realities of war as the private soldier,” suggested the publisher Peter Davies in his publicity leaflet for Frederic Manning’s novel *Her Privates We* (1930), contrasting that “realism” with the writings of “men who were little more than boys at the time, and who served as officers” (Davies 1930: np). The significance of military rank was emphasized in the book’s attribution to “Private 19022,” Manning’s service number and a pseudonym that was to be maintained long after his authorship became more generally known. Its popular success confirmed a new interest in the experience of the “anonymous ranks,” as Manning described them in his preface to the first edition, privately published under the title *The Middle Parts of Fortune* (1929) (Manning 1990: xx-iii). T. E. Lawrence, the most prestigious reviewer of the novel cited in Davies’s leaflet, had made his own transition to the other ranks of the RAF by this time and in correspondence with Henry Williamson reported reading the latter’s own narrative of the ranks, *A Private’s Progress* (1930), concurrently with Manning’s book, noting his fellow servicemen’s enthusiasm for their new mode of writing (Williamson 1994: 16-17). This literature of “War as the ordinary man saw it,” as Williamson termed it in his introduction to another example of the genre, Douglas Bell’s *A Soldier’s Diary of the Great War* (1929), provided a contrast to the grand narratives, formal histories and officer-centred memoirs and poetry of the “very English group of chaps” to which David Jones was later to refer (Bell 1929: x). *In*

Parenthesis, completed some four years before its eventual publication date, can also be read as part of this re-focusing of war writing through the perspective of the non-commissioned, as can Richard Tawney's even more belated collection of essays and journalism, *The Attack* (1953). Central to these texts is their emphasis on the novel social structures shaped by and within the volunteer army of the early years of the war.

Jones's poem, Tawney's essays and Manning's fiction all depict what Paul Fussell calls in his introduction to the latter an "affectionate and loyal sub-society within the immense social world into which war has transformed the former local profession, the army" (Manning 1990: xi). Manning's diverse "triumvirate" of private soldiers – Bourne, an Australian, Martlow, a rural youth and Shem, an urban Jew – can be set beside Jones's trio of Private John Ball, Lance-Corporal Aneurin Merddyn Lewis, and the mysterious Dai Greatcoat in their shared experience of a "day-to-day human history" worked out within the enormities of the Somme offensive, but it also represents the tensions shaped by that "great gulf" between officers and men noted by Jones (Bell x). For Bourne – educated, French-speaking, often aloof – is recognized as an anomalous presence in the ranks by infantrymen and officers alike. The regimental padre, for example, tells him that "if you were an officer, you might at least have ... friends of your own kind," and though Bourne replies that "good comradeship takes the place of friendship," the question of his "kind" and its meaning within the binary world of the British Army becomes ever more pressing as the narrative develops (Manning 1999: 79). Despite his expressed conviction that the ranks represented a "world of men, full of flexible movement and human interest," in contrast to officers' absorption within an "inflexible and inhuman machine," Bourne eventually applies for a commission, an inability to maintain his chosen social identity that initiates the dissolution of the sub-group even before Shem is wounded and Martlow killed in battle (92). Tension concerning social roles also defines his engagements with officers, most crucially with his company commander, Captain Marsden. "Even when momentarily alone together, they recognized, tacitly, something a little ambiguous in the relation in which they stood to each other," Manning writes (229). That ambiguity, a perception of shared civilian class identity set beside the disparity of unequal military rank, is shown ultimately to bring about Bourne's death when his agreement to participate in an unnecessary raid is elicited through Marsden's exploitation of the unspoken obligations entailed upon their social parity beyond the war (240-1).

The destruction of the convivial alliance of the three soldiers in *Her Privates We* is, then, caused as much by existing class structures and the resentment of any challenge to its norms as it is by the contingencies of war, a persistence of civilian discriminations that also preoccupied Richard Tawney's more explicitly sociological treatments of military service. In "The *Personnel* of the New Army," published under the pseudonym "Lance-Corporal" in *The Nation* in February 1915, Tawney observes that an "officer and a private may have been friends for years. But they cannot talk together in public," concluding that the "customs of the army are simply the customs of English society crystallised," at a time when, as a product of Rugby School and Balliol College, Oxford, he was himself resisting a "natural" progression

to a commission (Tawney 1915: 677). Unlike Manning's narrative, however, Tawney regards the social relationships developed by the volunteer soldiers as examples of the emergent political possibilities that resulted from unprecedented conjunctions of army and civilian life in the circumstances of 1914 and 1915. Calling attention to the "improvised character of the new forces," he argues that the introduction into a professional army of volunteers who remain "incurably civilian" challenged its "crystallised" behaviours; the "individual man," he writes, "has a share, though a minute one, in building up the system of which he is a part" (Tawney 677). This system, Tawney argued both during the war and after, demonstrated a capacity for self-management and social discovery that opposed the class determinism that ultimately defines *Her Privates We*. It is a vision of the "new forces" that also finds a parallel in David Jones's long poem of the war.

Like Tawney's *Nation* article, *In Parenthesis* represents the volunteer army of 1915 as a social experiment. Lacking Tawney's and Manning's interest in any commissioned outlook, it explores the ways in which the novel social structures produced by the Welsh and English infantrymen are shaped and maintained by unanticipated historical and cultural resources. "Every man's speech and habit of mind were a perpetual showing," Jones writes in the preface, "now of Napier's expedition, now of the Legions at the Wall, now of 'train-band captain,' now of Jack Cade, of John Ball, of the commons in arms" (Jones 1963: xi). This miscellaneous list of "showings" encompasses Victorian imperialist forays in India, the inept militiaman of William Cowper's "The Diverting History of John Gilpin," Roman-controlled cohorts of the Celto-British borderlands and the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 that constitute "deposits of a common tradition," as he was later to define such fragmentary manifestations of variegated, untutored collective memories (Jones xi; Jones 1976: 56). As with Tawney's "incurably civilian" volunteers, Jones's soldiers, drawing upon the often-unrecognized resources of customary identities, shaped a new "commons in arms" that by-passed the invented militarised traditions of British statehood – the preface's list of "showings" contains reference neither to prominent victories of national and imperial histories, nor the kind of regimental battle honours that are celebrated in a text such as *Good-bye to All That* (1929), the memoir of Jones's fellow Royal Welch Fusilier, Captain Robert Graves. Instead, the allusions are to the interstices of such official records, fragments that form counterparts to the main text's development of a parallel British military tradition drawn from ancient Celtic sources with each of its seven sections carrying an epigraph from the 6th century elegy of military catastrophe *Y Gododdin*, the "monument of that time of obscurity ... when the fate of the Island was as yet undecided," as Jones describes it (191).

This cultural re-ordering of historical perspective in the preface is also reflected in Jones's triumvirate, two of whom explicitly negotiate the ancient Celtic military traditions and the modern warfare on the Somme. Thus Dai Greatcoat performs his knowledge of Celtic myth and bardic technique in the extended "boast" of heroic lineage in Part 4 whilst Lance-Corporal Lewis, who is said to have "fed on these things," bears the name of Aneirin, by repute the author of *Y Gododdin* (79-84; 89). Its third member, however, demonstrates no developed sense of tradition comparable to those of his two comrades. Private John Ball is inarticulate,

English and the soldier who comes closest to Jones's self-description of "amateur ... grotesquely incompetent, a knocker-over of piles, a parade's despair" (xv). He it is, though, alone of the three, who emerges from the fighting in Mametz Wood at the end of the poem and who, by his very lack of obviously heroic qualities, introduces an alternative political tradition to the poem. For just as Lance-Corporal Lewis is named after the bard Aneurin, Ball bears a nominal entailment of the fourteenth-century revolutionary priest mentioned in the poem's preface. The sparseness of that analogy, contrasting with the extensive end-notes explicating Dai's boast and other historical allusions in the text, has led commentators such as Paul Fussell, Keith Alldritt and Thomas Dilworth to expand the reference point from the specifically historical to include William Morris's prose romance *A Dream of John Ball* (1886). For Fussell, the analogy marks Jones's and Morris's tendencies to "sentimental Victorian literary Arthurianism" whilst Alldritt and Dilworth suggest only shared general concerns with values of "comradeship" and "fellowship" (Fussell 1975: 147; Alldritt 2003: 97; Dilworth 2008: 29). Yet Morris's text can also be seen as a "deposit of common tradition," and one that defines a sharper political content than is normally assigned to Jones's work.

A Dream of John Ball was a product of Morris's late period of revolutionary activism that found its most direct expression in *The Commonweal*, the newspaper which he founded in 1885 and edited until 1890, and in which the *Dream* began to be serialised in November 1886. It is a narrative of time-travel, transporting its narrator – unnamed, but in his role as a metropolitan socialist agitator clearly resembling Morris – from late-Victorian West London to the Kentish countryside at the moment of the Peasants' Revolt. There he joins the audience of the sermon preached by John Ball after his release from prison and witnesses the first brutal skirmish of the rebellion. Subsequently, he is welcomed within an idealised village community and engages in a night-long dialogue with the priest. Whilst the "comradeship" and "fellowship" noted by Alldritt and Dilworth are certainly among the values celebrated in the text there is also the denser politics of a social analysis that corresponds to the aspirations of a surviving sermon fragment that has the historical Ball declaring that "matters goeth not well to pass in England nor shall do till everything be common and that there be no villeins nor gentlemen but that we may be all united together" (Hilton 1973: 222). Such perceptions of breaches and oppositions within the social collective connect the circumstances of the England of 1381 and that of 1886, parallels that are the concern of the text's central debate between Ball and the narrator. This takes place in the village church, "betwixt the living and the dead" as the chapter heading puts it, with corpses from both sides of the previous day's fighting being laid out around them and the imminence of forthcoming battles pressing upon their conversation as dawn approaches, a context that also suggests its relevance to David Jones's poem.

As John Goode argues, Morris imagines "two men confronting the dead and being compelled to assert against the fact of death the only source of life's meaning, human community," but the meaning of that community and the legacy of the struggle to achieve it within the national commonwealth are also at stake in their dialogue (Goode 1971: 251). Each man works to make sense of the entanglements of an English history that both connects and separates them, for while Ball

is able to express his anticipation of a “hopeful strife and blameless peace,” the anachronistic narrator knows that the rebels will be defeated and, worse, knows that the social ideal that the priest is fighting for – the extension of the intense commonality of the village to the nation as a whole – will be betrayed even after later victories are achieved (Morris 1946: 265). Ball’s acceptance of personal defeat as a necessary stage in the progress towards “blameless peace” is reluctantly challenged by his interlocutor who traces the transition of feudalism to industrialisation in terms of the complicity of the commons in the changing forms of its own subjugation. War, its motives and consequences, are at the centre of this dilemma as the conflicts with France that defined the period are contrasted with the civil rebellion that is about to begin. It “was for nothing ye fought,” a rebel remarks to a veteran of the French wars at the beginning of the text, but “to-morrow it shall be for a fair reward” (240). In the night talk, however, the narrator is again forced to correct any such hope and to challenge Ball’s own simple determinations through his exposition of the consequences of what Edward Thompson terms in his biography of Morris “man’s unmastered history” (Thompson 1976: 722). “Wars indeed there shall be in the world, great and grievous,” he tells the priest, “and yet few on this score; rather shall men fight as they have been fighting in France at the bidding of some lord of the manor, or some king, or at last at the bidding of some usurer and forestaller of the market” (Morris 253).

The tempering of idealism by knowledge of historical process, as Thompson argues, brings to bear contemporary Marxist theory on an earlier period of popular aspiration and political organization, and Morris’s exposition of the predicament that such knowledge reveals, in its torturous syntax as much as its conclusions, defines its apparent intractability as well as that of the cause to which he himself was committed (Thompson 722). “[M]en fight and lose the battle,” the narrator states, “and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name” (Morris 214). The result of the long political war that Ball is initiating, he admits, is that the “free” man “must needs buy leave to labour of them that owns all things except himself and such as himself” (251). However, this “correction” of Ball’s plainly-stated social vision in which “fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell” by Marxist conceptions of the transformation of feudal hierarchy into capitalist “freedom” of labour offers by itself no way forward (212). As Michelle Weinroth argues, *A Dream of John Ball* acknowledges the potentially crippling effect of historical knowledge and a concomitant responsibility to find a “route out of the confines of narrow political thought and short-sighted activism” that can stem from such theoretical preoccupations and the factional disputes to which they lead (Weinroth 2010: 43). Ball’s visionary “error” is also a corrective, therefore, a statement of those aspects of Morris’s socialist commitments which, as Weinroth suggests, involve imaginative encounters and dialogues that are shaped within the oneiric frame of the text.

The publication of *A Dream of John Ball* in the workaday context of *The Commonwealth*, set amongst the “Socialist League Branch Reports” and records of the deliberations of the International Conference of the Glass Bottle Makers, is itself an indication of a political strategy initiated by the dialogue between medieval

priest and Victorian revolutionary. Routine records and weekly propaganda are interrupted and re-ordered by “things strange and new,” just as the narrator’s rounds of agitation and speech-making are disturbed by his inexplicable removal to the events of the Peasants’ Revolt (Morris 199). In both cases unexpected spaces are cleared for new forms of political dialogue and thought which, like the night debate, introduce a heuristic mode of enquiry through the establishment of a “subjunctive mood of culture,” to use Victor Turner’s phrase, an indeterminate state that contrasts with the slogans and attitudinising of the League. This space of “maybe, might-be, as-if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture [and] striving after new forms and structure” offers an invitation to alternative means of thinking about “man’s unmastered history” and the problems of response that it sets (Turner 1985: 295). As Weinroth argues, Ball’s generosity to his visitor from the future, his acceptance of the hard news that he brings and his interested questioning of its significance are indicative not of the failure of his convictions but what she terms his ‘anti-epic leadership where subjectivity is liberally shared, where openness elicits trust and nurtures fellowship’ (Weinroth 50). These qualities rather than any programmatic form of radical politics also suggest the importance of *A Dream of John Ball* for David Jones whose *In Parenthesis* invokes subjunctivity in its very title and whose John Ball embodies an English commonality at odds both with the military hierarchy of the First World War and the Celtic heroic tradition that haunts the identities of his comrades in arms.

Jones glosses his “parenthesis” in terms comparable to those of Turner, describing it as a “kind of space between” that encompasses both the war and the period of the poem’s post-war production, and that, like Morris’s dream, simultaneously escapes and conjoins social realities (Jones 1963: xv). These realities, as Austin Riede argues, are ever-present in a poem that Jones also claimed to be “much more ‘prosaic’ than [critics] imagine” (Riede 2015; Hague 189). It represents a military world of the “field-kit, the technical devices, the forms wholly determined by mechanics, trajectory power, convenience, use” as he put it in the essay “Art in Relation to War,” a mundanity that would have been further emphasized had Jones succeeded in persuading its publisher to print it “in long columns like a newspaper” as initially envisioned (Jones 1978: 140; Hague 195). Against such dense materiality, though, there also press the extraordinary personal and political extremities of the war. The prologue to the climactic Part 7, for example, evokes the formless process – “unmeasured, poured-out, / and again drenched down” – of memory that went to the poem’s making whilst the references throughout the text to Celtic legend and medieval romance continually destabilise the representation of twentieth-century warfare (153). Such opposition of the material and the strange culminates in the final pages of the text in a passage quite unlike any other in First World War writing. As the now-wounded John Ball retreats through Mametz Wood, he abandons his rifle before witnessing what Jones calls in notes for his recorded reading of the section a “tutelary spirit of the wood ... bestowing garlands of varying floriation upon those Germans and Welshmen and Londoners whose bodies lay scattered where they had fallen in the tangle of the wood and on the open approaches to it” (Jones 1967: np). For Paul Fussell, the episode is clinching evidence for what he views as Jones’s wilful

repudiation of the modern realities of war. In “another writer that passage might be highly ironic,” he comments, “but here it’s not, for Jones wants it to be true” (Fussell 1975: 153). The lack of irony is indeed definitive, as it is in all of Jones’s writing, but the status of the wanting that Fussell identifies is as central to the “new forms and structure” of the politics that the vision initiates as a similar wish was to Morris’s dream of the Kent of 1381.

The violence of the battle – a “gun-shot wound in the lower bowel,” the “severed head of ’72 Morgan” and other terse records of the day’s death and wounding – is still only a few pages away when the ceremony begins, and it provides both contrast and context for the subjunctivity of the Queen of the Wood’s engagement with the freshly dead (176, 180). Her delicate movements, the care of her considerations, her “influential eyes” and “awarding hands” establish a startlingly re-gendered space within the battlefield, comparable to Michelle Weinroth’s sense of Morris’s challenge to the limitations of masculinist modes of political activism in his presentation of John Ball in the *Dream*. Here the wood spirit’s strange protocols offer precise alternatives both to the violence that has preceded them and to military and state methods of managing and memorialising the war dead. Hierarchies of rank, patriotic appropriations of valour and marmoreal solemnity are alike displaced by an informal landscape of contact and surprise as the ceremony re-fashions the parade-ground nominations with which the poem begins and redefines conceptions of value, reward and collective identity. The “fragile prize” of local vegetation replaces medal and tombstone; solidities of nationhood and sexuality blur as German soldier and Welsh soldier share dog-violets while lying in “serious embrace beneath the twisted tripod”; and the previously despised Major Lillywhite is revealed to be one of an “elect society”. “[Y]ou’d hardly credit it,” a voice – perhaps that of Ball, of Jones, or of another, unknown observer – comments as this award is made, alerting the reader to a tonal playfulness that is also part of the re-conception of the commons at the most extreme moment of its endurance (185). A new order of seeing and appreciation is briefly achieved as the spirit’s attention to the particularities of the dead retrieves cultural meanings distanced from specific nationhoods and theologies, affirming instead a parenthetical world of diverse fellowship conducted on terms of mysterious “precedence”.

At the end of the poem John Ball, propped against an oak tree beside the corpses of a British and a German soldier, awaits rescue by stretcher-bearers. Like the conclusion of Morris’s dream in which the narrator awakes in West London to the sounds of factory hooters, the scene re-asserts restrictive material contexts – industrial warfare in one and industrial manufacture in the other – and emphasizes the fragility of any alternative order of things. Despite this, “deposits of a common tradition” are shown to have been retained in the most hostile of contexts, and, as with Morris’s reference point in the Peasants’ Revolt, to have allowed new perspectives upon seemingly intractable contemporary social predicaments. It is a conclusion predicted in the preface to *In Parenthesis* where Jones’s fatalistic statement of identification with the infantryman – “We find ourselves privates in foot regiments” – is followed immediately by a concise summary of the purpose of imaginative escape: “We search how we may see formal good-

ness in a life singularly inimical, hateful to us" (xiii). "Formal goodness" has its ambiguities, of course, but in amongst them is that sense of what Ross Terrill calls the idea of "right relationships" which had been shaped through a loose English tradition of social theory that reaches back to Morris and Ruskin and also embraces the eccentric commitments of Eric Gill and the politics of Richard Tawney (Terrill 1973: 193). What Jones himself describes in a eulogy for Gill as the "movement against the exploitation of man as workman which has been and is the characteristic defect of our society" provides a context for even so singular a passage as the Queen of the Woods sequence in its attempt to reconceive war experience beyond reductive binaries of nationalistic partisanship, indiscriminate destruction and anonymous manufacture (Jones 1959: 300). In this endeavour, despite evident differences in idiom and genre, it is Tawney's writing that provides the clearest analogue to Jones's deployment of the anti-heroic politics of *The Dream of John Ball* in the service of making common meanings from the early years of the First World War.

Tawney's collection of essays and articles *The Attack* carries as its epigraph John Ball's statement of fellowship as the central social virtue, a reference to Morris's text that confirms the cultural heritage that he shares with Jones along with their mutual commitment to the representation of the experience of the "anonymous ranks". In both cases that representation also resisted popular critical perceptions of the literature of the war as reflecting a developing consciousness of disenchantment and opposition. Jones "does not regard himself as an anti-war writer," William Blissett noted after a conversation with the poet in 1970, "war for him is simply the world in one of its ways," a position that can be set beside Tawney's consistently-maintained argument that his decision to volunteer in 1914 was an act of political radicalism rather than one of instinctive patriotism (Blissett 58; Tawney 1915: 677). Likewise, Lawrence Goldman's evocative image of Tawney in the 1920s writing economic history and political polemic dressed in his "increasingly tattered sergeant's tunic with the stripes still hanging on" recalls Jones's often-reported maintenance of the environments and vernacular of his time on the Western Front (Goldman 2013: 106). In both cases these attachments extended beyond the compulsions of traumatised survival and retained a sense of the political utility of their participation in the commons in arms, albeit differently inflected in aesthetic theory in Jones's case and socialist economics in that of Tawney. In both cases, too, the shared resource of the experiences of the volunteer was interpreted through the common deposit of Morris's cultural praxis.

"Art in Relation to War," Jones's only extended consideration of the theoretical contexts of *In Parenthesis*, was written in the early 1940s and, at first sight, represents a quixotic attempt to restore meaning to the concept of the "art of war" in a subsequent period of mass destruction to that of the poem. In the preface to *In Parenthesis* he had trailed the possibilities of a "new and strange direction of the mind" that would enable the contemporary soldier to "recognise these creatures of chemicals as true extensions of ourselves" and the later essay also insists upon the "art of war" as aesthetic reality rather than rhetorical gesture (Jones 1963: xiv). But it is ultimately the aesthetics of Morris's craft workshop rather than

Futurist exultation of industrial energy that shape the terms of the latter enquiry. Its celebration of the “field-kit [and] the technical devices” cited earlier in this essay is part of the material interests of a poem that celebrates not war itself but the capacity of the commons to establish everyday economies of use-value to be set against the anonymous scale of industrialised warfare on the one hand and what he terms the “signa” and “trappings” of official military ceremonies, uniforms and insignia on the other (Jones 1978: 140). In this sense, the tutelary spirit of Mametz Wood is also the spirit of the “art of war” and of Morris’s aesthetics of use, working deftly within a local economy of materials and landscape in her careful attention to human needs as she rescues the dead from the anonymity of monolithic forms of social power and memorialisation whilst confirming their participation in the “domestic life of small contingents of men” that Jones celebrates in the poem’s preface (ix). Whilst Richard Tawney’s discourse was at some distance from such developments of the more visionary aspects of Morris’s legacy, the reference to *A Dream of John Ball* in the epigraph to his collection of war writings, noted earlier, nevertheless acts as a reminder of its importance for his rendering of war experience as a resource for political potential as well as a confirmation of existing social limitations.

The volunteer forces of the early years of the war were “much more than half-civilian,” Tawney claimed in “The *Personnel* of the New Army,” adding that he had “seen our section when it resembled a debating society,” whilst also acknowledging that this new civic formation had been strengthened by the disciplines of a “common rule of life, common occupations” that the war had imposed (Tawney 1915: 677). It generated an innovative dynamic that, as both Tawney and Jones acknowledged, ended with the Somme offensive and the subsequent arrival of “conscripted levies,” but its brief realisation embodied the practical potential for a wider social realignment, representing for Tawney both rejection of nationalistic impulses and a base for future political change (Jones 1963: ix). The “real struggle, in which this war is only an episode,” he wrote in February 1917, “is not merely between our country and anything so unstable and transitory as modern Germany, but between permanent and irreconcilable claimants for the soul of man; and what makes the German spirit dangerous is not that it is alien, but that it is horribly congenial, to almost the whole modern world” (Tawney 1953: 33). Opposition to Germany only as the most egregious representative of the forces of the bellicose “usurer and forestaller of the market,” in Morris’s terms, led him to maintain the continuing validity of the “conscientious reasons” for fighting against that corrupting power which he had first outlined in his *Nation* article of 1915 (Tawney 1915: 677). German soldiers are said to be “victims of the same catastrophe as ourselves” in “Some Reflections of a Soldier,” published just weeks after he was severely wounded on the first day of the Somme offensive (an event described in the article “The Attack,” one of the earliest published memoirs of the battle) (Tawney 1953: 25). The “catastrophe” here is not just the military disaster that all its participants endured but the social and economic structures which had engendered it.

It is in a comparable spirit that Jones extends the dedication at the beginning of *In Parenthesis* to the “ENEMY / FRONT-FIGHTERS WHO SHARED OUR /

PAINS AGAINST WHOM WE FOUND / OURSELVES BY MISADVENTURE” (Jones 1963: np). Its courtly idiom and typographical imitation of Roman dedicatory inscriptions provide some evidence for Jones’s own sense of his “somewhat peripheral position to the major ‘movements’ of [the 1930s]” (Jones 1978: 41). Yet in its recognition of the contingencies of international warfare and the temporal perspectives that lead him to refer to the German people as “our *present* enemies [my emphasis]” in “Art in Relation to War,” it is also indicative of an outlook based in what Richard Tawney called in an introduction to his socialist polemic *Equality* (1931) the “convictions of common men and their courage in acting on them” (Jones 1978: 155; Tawney 1994: 15). In this way Private John Ball, one of those common men, suggests ways in which Jones’s engagement with a “hostile society” shared more of the political concerns of the decade of its production than is usually acknowledged. Ball’s name activates “English deposits” that record struggles over nationhood and collective identities that extend from the civil conflict of 1381 to Morris’s revolutionary period of the 1880s and further in Jones’s poem to the military crisis of July 1916 and beyond to the later economic and political disturbances that *Equality* addresses, an unschematic chain of correspondence that answers to Jones’s own openness to unexpected meaning in his work. He told Saunders Lewis, for example, with a characteristic combination of self-enquiry and military analogy, that for him influences and references tended to operate “rather like projectiles that penetrate the earth but are fused to explode some time [sic] after” (Jones 1973/4: 24). Such an uncertainty principle of meaning and affect allows, I hope, for the kind of reclamation of *In Parenthesis* for a political as well as a sacramental tradition that this essay has attempted. It is a way of reading that might be extended to other areas of Jones’s work that are beyond its scope – the sustained attention to colonial and postcolonial experience in writings such as *The Roman Quarry* (1981), for example, and the ecological intricacies of a poem like “The Tutelar of the Place” (1960), a text that pitches localised custom against globalising imperium. Here, though, it suggests ways in which Jones, the “private soldier, in and out of the war,” can move from the periphery of “war poetry” to a literature of the common soldier represented by Frederic Manning and Henry Williamson and to a tradition of political thinking shared with that other eclectic triumvirate R. H. Tawney, Eric Gill and William Morris.

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