Ghent University
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"THE COLD IRON OF THEIR SLOPED RIFLES"

TECHNOLOGY IN DAVID JONES'S *IN PARENTHESIS*

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I.   Introduction

As the Great War centennial approaches, Flanders readies itself for thousands of tourists from all over the world, with special new exhibitions, guided tours and other commemorations of World War I. But aside from the war-era artefacts in the form of bomb shells, helmets and bones that farmers in the Westhoek region still dig up every day, we also possess an array of soldiers' personal memoirs in written form: letters, poems, novels, journals. One of those written remnants is David Jones's *In Parenthesis*.

Even though *In Parenthesis* has been praised by literary dignitaries the likes of T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats, it has not attracted the same amount of academic interest as some of Jones's contemporaries, such as Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen. The limited academic analysis of *In Parenthesis* mostly focuses on the mythological sub-layer, with its Arthurian and Celtic elements (Robichaud 2001, Potter 2011) or Jones's narrative techniques (Johnston 1962, Gemmil 1971). Others have looked deeper into Jones's typically modernist language; his mix of prose and poetry or his use of slang, for example (Hughes 2008). This paper will try to shed a new light on *In Parenthesis* by researching and analysing the role technology plays in the poem. It will do so by analysing in-text occurrences of technology as well as drawing from various secondary sources.

This research angle is particularly interesting in the light of the revolution in technology and the growing trend towards industrialism that formed the backdrop of the events leading to, and during, the First World War. Vincent Sherry, in his analysis of Paul Fussel's critique on *In Parenthesis*, states that "impersonal technological warfare […] certainly invalidated the old heroic codes of single combat" (Sherry 1982: 375). Sherry concludes that "Jones may not believe that the martial profession is by nature evil, but his criticism of technological war is uncompromising" (Sherry 1982: 379). This paper is an attempt to analyse the nature of this criticism, what it consists of and if it is, indeed,

uncompromising. It will argue that Jones establishes a negative portrayal of technology through various methods, and it will research how Jones's negative perception of technology came to be.

II.   Technology of World War I

The Great War was, more than ever before, a technological conflict. Battlefields across the globe saw the introduction and improvement of tanks, submarines, poison gas, flamethrowers, machine guns, aerial warfare, railway guns and other new types of heavy artillery, which accounted for the majority of casualties. The importance of new technology as a decisive factor in warfare was only matched by the Second World War, with the introduction of the atomic bomb. A decisive factor in World War I's enormous casualty rates was the clash of all of this new technology with the rather outdated military strategies of the 19th century, such as straight charges. The new machine guns were heavy and immobile, but well suited for defensive positions and absolutely devastating for the charges that still took place years into WWI (Engen 2006: 3-4). When not actively charging the enemy, soldiers could still be lured out of their defensive trench positions with heavier-than-air poison gas, bringing them into the machine guns' line of fire. Thus, the myriad of new technology allowed for the relentless slaughter of men on an unprecedented and industrial-like scale. British losses on just the first day of the Battle of the Somme amounted to 20,000. By the time the four-and-a-half month long battle, which Jones fought in as well, came to its end, casualties had soared up to an estimated 350,000 men – UK troops alone. As John Johnston puts it in what Jones himself called "the only decent analysis of *In Parenthesis* that's ever appeared" (Jones 1980: 188): "[it was] an entirely new type of warfare in which the infliction of death or disablement was systematically abetted by every known principle of scientific violence" (Johnston 1962: 63).

III.   Shifting attitudes

World War I ended a near-century of relative peace in a still industrialising Europe. Paired with the newly accumulated prosperity that industrialisation brought to large parts of (Western) Europe, it inspired many to believe a peaceful future was no utopia - and that technology was to be the key to this much wanted peace. Countermovements, especially the Italian futurism movement, opposed this idea. While agreeing that technology is the key, futurists considered it to be a tool for warfare as well. The futurist manifesto, written by Filippo Marinetti, includes these paragraphs:

> 4. We declare that the splendor of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing automobile with its bonnet adorned with great tubes like serpents with explosive breath ... a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace.
>
> […]
>
> 9. We want to glorify war — the only cure for the world — militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchists, the beautiful ideas which kill, and contempt for woman. (Marinetti 1909: 139-140)

Note again how technology, however glorified, does not imply peace for the futurists – indeed, it is very much believed that the act of war, through technology, spawns new art. Lazzarich (2012) claims it was this "continuous celebration of conflict [that] contributed to the birth of the myth of war that brought millions of men to participate in war itself, hoping to change the world and to give a new sense to their lives." While the futurist movement antagonised in every way the popular notion of equating peaceful and prosperous, it certainly joined the popular notion that technology is good.   This positive notion of technology was not

omnipresent, however. Ever since the Industrial Revolution swept through Britain, there have been polarised views on how technology changed society, and whether it has done so for better or for worse. Aside from the movements that were unhappy with their unemployment as a result of industrialisation (e.g. the Luddites), there were other concerns as well – during the Romantic and Victorian era it was believed that technologic progress seemed to "militate against tradition, to fragment the family, to encourage loss of religious belief" (Daly 1982: 219). Poets like William Blake and William Wordsworth, strong believers in the purity and perfection of nature, believed that the Industrial Revolution severely damaged both the environment and society itself and were avid opponents of the exponentially growing industrialism in Britain. Thus, for most anti-industrialists it was not technological unemployment that was to be counted among the more grave effects of the Industrial Revolution, but the spiritual implications of automatised labour: "the same technology which brought increased physical riches brought spiritual poverty - and the Victorians were left to face a world burgeoning with physical products in a spiritual vacuum" (Daly 1982: 219). This negative approach towards technology and industrialism would grow further as new technology found its way onto the battlefield and as casualties in the Great War increased because of it.

Most of the new weapons were only used in the later years of the war. Though chlorine poison gas was already being used in 1915, for example, it was only prior to the 1917 Third Battle of Ypres that the dreaded mustard gas was used. This allowed for the first years of the Great War to still carry a notion of romantic patriotism, and fighting to change the world (cf. the Futurist 'war myth'), but also maintained positive attitudes towards technology. This type of war poetry is conserved in the typically motivational and extremely patriotic work of, for example, Jessie Pope. The belated introduction of new weaponry also provided the unique circumstances wherein combatants found themselves recognising adversary forces

as fellow humans, a clear example being the infamous Christmas Truce of 1914, a series of unauthorised ceasefires along the Western Front. Not only the drastic countermeasures taken by superiors terminated occasions of these ceasefires - increasing polarisation as a result of the introduction of poison gas accounted for further antagonisation as well. Jones himself also refers to this change around July 1916 in his preface:

> From then onward things hardened into a more hardened, relentless, mechanical affair, took on a more sinister aspect. The wholesale slaughter of the later years […] knocked the bottom out of the intimate, continuing, domestic life of small contingents of men […] In the earlier months there was a certain attractive amateurishness, and elbow-room for idiosyncrasy […]
> (Jones 1937: ix)

In his autobiographical memoirs, he states:

> I can only register a very considerable change of feelings and conditions on my return in late October: the piling-up of shells for guns of various calibre, with little attempt to camouflage them, and the bringing forward of heavy platformed howitzers, made one wonder... What it actually was, was the careful planning for an offensive against the enemy on a big scale. Anyway, the increased use of mechanical transport, and mechanization in general, made the whole 'feel' very different from the war I had known in the months before the Somme battle. (Ward 1983: 22)

In *In Parenthesis*, this insight is shared by one of Private Ball's higher-ups:

> Getting pretty much of a wait and see sort of mob these days – he's having a really nice time with his book o' life and yous and yous and not-ter-reason-why technics – it used to be fourteen in and five out regular – knew where you were

– everything conducted humane and reasonable – it all went west with the tin-hat – that harbinger of their anabasis, of these latter days, of a more purposed hate, and the establishing of unquestioned ascendancy in no-man's-land – and breaking his morale and – this new type of toffee-apple[1], and these very latest winged-pigs[2], whose baleful snouts rend up no mean apocalypse, and the mk. IX improved pattern of bleedin' frightfulness. (Jones 1937: 114-115)

This change shifted the popular perception of technology, and would later lead to counter-movements such as Dadaism, which dismissed the glorification of technology and established a significant amount of cynicism and satire in response to the idea of progress through technology. As new weapons were introduced to the Great War's battles and casualty rates soared, these countermovements became more and more popular. Jessie Pope's romantic patriotism was replaced with a more critical approach, with leading poets the likes of Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg. As Jones only began writing his poem ten years after his infantry experiences and published it another ten years later in 1937, on the eve of the next World War, it seems sentiments opposing technology should not be unexpected.

Jones's personal ideas about technology were heavily influenced by his experiences serving at the Western front. He tried to enlist into the Artists' Rifles when war broke out in 1914, but was rejected. He then successfully joined the 15th Battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers on January 2nd, 1915. The Royal Welch Fusiliers were made up of Londoners and Welshmen living in London, Jones being a part of the latter through his father. His training was restricted by a lack of equipment, which would make the shock all the greater when he participated in the First Battle of the Somme, with its abundance of equipment: the battle was

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[1] Type of ball-formed artillery shell.
[2] Heavy, large-caliber mortar used by UK troops from Autumn 1916 onwards

preceded by the largest artillery barrage in history – some 1.6 million shells were fired in the week before command sent in waves of allied troops (Hamilton 2010:20). The complete mobilisation of equipment and personnel that was needed to accomplish this type of technological excess is also referred to in *In Parenthesis*:

> [...] they drew to the right of the road for tractored howitzers, their camouflage-paint blistering at noon-day; you could see the cared-for working-parts, glistening from under, in deep shadow, the thrown tarpaulin, heavy on the outside with white deposit; a lorry with aeroplane parts, and more artillery – for the magnetic South [...] (Jones 1937: 119)

During the attack, Jones got shot in the leg and was evacuated to England to recover, after which he served in the quiet sector of Ploegsteert Wood. He subsequently returned to the front lines on the Ypres salient, in the region of Langemark and Passchendaele. He was eventually evacuated to Ireland in February 1918 after he got hit with trench fever. He spent the last months of the war in recovering in Ireland.

The time in between Jones's experiences at the Western Front and the writing of *In Parenthesis* allowed for new influences to shape Jones's ideas on technology. In 1922, a year after his conversion to Roman Catholicism, he joined the Guild of St Joseph and St Dominic in Ditchling, Sussex. It was "a unique experiment in communal life in the early twentieth century [...] a Roman Catholic community based on the idea of the medieval guild" (Price). The Guild was founded by Eric Gill, a follower of the Arts and Crafts movement, which stood for craftsmanship and anti-industrialism (King 2005: 144). Gill was a controversial figure, who saw "the Industrial Revolution as the origin of all man's woes [and] hankered after a falsely idealised pre-industrial society" (Blamires 1978: 16). It was here that Jones further shaped his aesthetic vision, influenced by his peers at the guild as well as by the teachings of

Thomism, scholasticism (Daly 1982: 222), and distributism (Ward 1983: 30). Jones himself later stated that the Guild of St Joseph and St Dominic's felt that society had not just grown megapolitan and complex, but also disillusioned and neurotic (Ward 1983: 39). His years at the Guild, in short, "reinforce[d] the attraction he had felt since childhood for rural life and the dislike of modern technological excesses which had been a notable legacy of his war experience" (Ward 1983: 30). Nonetheless, Jones did not always agree with Gill's strong, and sometimes black-and-white, convictions (Blamires 1978: 16).

Indeed, in spite of the strong and mostly rather unnuanced perception of industrialism and technology in Ditchling, Jones did not always find himself opposed to all aspects of technology. Carson Daly mentions Jones's love for fast cars and interesting technical words (Daly 1982: 226) and Blamires mentions Jones's appreciation of the beauty of an aeroplane – he evens sees the beauty in its weapons, he admits in his 1941 essay 'Religion and the Muses' (Blamires 1978: 21). Jones himself wrote the following on space travel:

> I listened to the radio all the afternoon when the American astronaut was circling the world - I found it terribly impressive - again because of this technological thing. I loved hearing his actual voice giving all kinds of un-intelligible code numbers ... to some other bloke   down below. Jolly nice the way he kept on talking about the 'beauty' of what he saw. (Daly 1982: 226)

Nonetheless, Jones had strong convictions on the almost exponential increase of new technology used in warfare. In his preface to *In Parenthesis*, he writes:

> It is not easy in considering a trench-mortar barrage to give praise for the action proper to chemicals — full though it may be of beauty. We feel a rubicon has been passed between striking with a hand weapon as men used to

do and loosing poison from the sky as we do ourselves. We doubt the decency

of our own inventions, and are certainly in terror of their possibilities. That our

culture has accelerated every line of advance into the territory of physical

science is well appreciated — but not so well understood are the unforeseen,

subsidiary effects of this achievement. We stroke cats, pluck flowers, tie

ribands, assist at the manual acts of religion, make some kind of love, write

poems, paint pictures, are generally at one with that creaturely world inherited

from our remote beginnings. Our perception of many things is heightened and

clarified. Yet must we do gas-drill, be attuned to many newfangled

technicalities, respond to increasingly exacting mechanical devices; some

fascinating and compelling, others sinister in the extreme; all requiring a new

and strange direction of the mind, a new sensitivity certainly, but at a

considerable cost (Jones 1937: xiv).

Even though Jones clearly admits the positive sides of these 'technicalities', it becomes clear

that Jones makes a clear dichotomy between the personal combat of the past, which is

represented in *In Parenthesis* by the mythological sub-layer, and the new, highly impersonal

technology-fueled type of warfare, represented by the surface text and of course duplicating

historical reality. Taking cover from a bombardment in a bomb crater, Private Ball and a

fellow soldier wait "helplessly, white-faced, **and very conscious of their impotence**" (Jones

1937: 86, emphasis in bold added). This, of course, stands directly opposed to the archetypal

Arthurian knight who has but to raise his sword or shield to defend himself. *In Parenthesis*

summarises in one sentence: "Properly organised chemists can let make more riving power

than ever Twrch Trwyth[3]" (Jones 1937: 155). This divide will mark a turning point, or at least

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[3] Enchanted wild boar in Arthurian legend.

a radical change, in what Jones considers the everlasting, universal experience of war throughout human history (cf. infra).

IV.   Technology in In Parenthesis

When determining the attitude towards technology that speaks out of *In Parenthesis*, a clear distinction should be made of whose attitude that is. It is of importance that the author is separated from both the narrator and the protagonist, Private John Ball. John Johnston notes, in his analysis of the work:

> Although the poem is, among other things, a revelation of inner experience, that inner experience is not offered as a personal account in the guise of fiction but as a self-subsisting product of the creative imagination. Thus Jones's independence and impersonality contrast markedly with the earlier poets' conception of their work as necessarily expressive of personal emotions and attitudes. (Johnston 1962: 65)

While it is true that the work does not carry out a clear vindication or moralisation of war itself, it is undeniable that a certain idea about technology speaks from the work. Paired with the autobiographical information that influenced Jones' personal views on technology, given earlier, it is assumed a large part of the attitude towards technology that the poem implies is not Jones's per se - but it does largely overlap with his particular vision, just as the narrative in *In Parenthesis* largely overlaps with Jones's experiences at the front.

Jones's statements regarding finding the beauty in technology, mentioned earlier, say very little about finding beauty in technology used for martial purposes. To understand how Jones approaches this question, his approach to beauty or art itself must be explained. In typically Ditchling-influenced manner, Jones argues that technological society and the mass-production that follows in its wake has decreased the general public's responsiveness to

genuine art because it expects art to have a function, like the mass-made products have as well (Daly 1982: 225). This expectation opposes Jones's aesthetic vision, which attributed an important role to art for art's sake. Daly states that Jones believed that beauty could be found in lethal weaponry as well, but only when the weapon is brought back to its core symbolic value and stripped of its purely utile function. "However," Daly adds, "[j]ust because he believed that this was necessary [...] does not mean that he found it easy to accomplish" (Daly 1982: 227).

i)   Glorification of technology

The glorification of technology that peaked in the futurist movement also seeped through in the trench propaganda of the Great War. Jones cleverly incorporates this in *In Parenthesis:*

> One day the Adjutant addressed them on the history of the regiment. Lectures
> by the Bombing Officer: he sat in the straw, a mild young man, who told them
> lightly of the efficacy of his trade; he predicted an important future for the new
> Mills Mk. IV grenade, just on the market; he discussed the improvised jam-tins
> of the veterans, of the bombs of after the Marne, grenades of Loos and
> Laventie - he compared these elementary, amateurish, inefficiencies with the
> compact and **supremely satisfactory** invention of this Mr Mills, to whom his
> country was **so greatly indebted**. He took the names of all those men **who**
> **professed efficiency on the cricket field** - more particularly those who
> claimed to bowl effectively - and brushing away with his hand pieces of straw
> from his breeches, he sauntered off with his sections of grenades and fuses and
> explanatory diagrams of their mechanisms stuffed into the pockets of his
> raincoat, like a departing commercial traveller. (Jones 1937: 13, emphasis
> in bold added)

Critically assessing this glorification, Jones makes use of irony to debunk the almost propaganda-like properties of technology glorification. The commercial traveller simile works particularly well as it evokes a certain sense of scepticism.

When Private John Ball is shot in the leg in the Battle of Mametz Wood, he attempts to crawl to safety. Leaving behind his rifle offers him better chance at survival, but even in this moment of life or death, Ball remembers what his superiors told him and the other recruits time and time again about the paramount value of their rifle, all the while contemplating whether to leave it under an oak or not:

> […] it's the soldier's best friend if you care for the working parts and […] you men must really cultivate the habit of treating this weapon with the very greatest care and there should be a healthy rivalry among you – it should be a matter of very proper pride and - Marry it man! Marry it! … / ...Cherish her, she's your very own. Coax it man, coax it – it's delicately and ingeniously made – it's an instrument of precision – it costs us tax-payers, money – I want you to remember that. Fondle it like a granny – talk to it – consider it as you would a friend [...] You've known her hot and cold. You would choose her from among many. You know her by her bias, and by her exact error at 300, and by the deep scar at the small, by the fair flaw in the grain, above the lower sling-swivel – but leave it under the oak. (Jones 1937: 184)

Glorification of technology is so deeply ingrained Ball deeply doubts whether to abandon his rifle for a better chance at surviving, a sentiment Jones himself in any case lost after the war, as he lost his rifle when visiting a public bathroom (Edwards & Hughes).

Glorifying technology puts it on a pedestal, resulting in the common soldier ending up inferior. Therefore, another essential juxtaposition Jones makes, is the comparison between the use of high-tech weaponry and the primitive means of living in the trenches. A lot of daily

and essential activities were carried out through particularly rudimentary means. Boiling water, used for making tea or even for cleaning the rifle, is almost impossible to find (Jones 1937: 74). Sleeping bunks are non-existent; soldiers sleep in improvised shelters made out of laced-together bivouac sheets (Jones 1937: 135). Systems for alerting troops to the presence of various war gases were primitive: soldiers loudly banged empty artillery shells and swung ratchets from trench corner to trench corner to alert each other. The soldiers' Lee-Enfield rifles' sixty-three parts are cleaned daily and thoroughly – the soldiers themselves, however, are not (Jones 1937: 63). All of these stark contrasts, ironic because of their juxtaposition, show how technology used to kill is idealised and seen as the highest good in warfare – even human lives are inferior to it. The care for technology, then, reflects this: it is more important than the care for soldiers.

These instances featuring the use of subtle irony in *In Parenthesis* are quite remarkable, since several scholars have denied the very presence of irony in the poem. Paul Fussell wrote that there is no irony to be found in *In Parenthesis*, much to his dismay (Fussell 1975: 153). Bernard Bergonzi, in his study of Great War literature, argued that "Jones does not make his juxtapositions with ironical effect" (Bergonzi 1966: 194) and "whereas [other war poets] establish contrasts, whether nostalgic or ironical, between the past and the realities of the Front, Jones is concerned always to find parallels (Bergonzi 1966: 201).

ii)   The language of technology

Another step to figuring out how technology is represented in *In Parenthesis* is examining the language Jones uses to describe it. Jones's portrayals of technology always evoke a certain industrial atmosphere – when talking about soldiers' guns, Jones tells of the "cold iron of their sloped rifles" (Jones 1937: 17), birds chatter in spite of the "malice of the engines" (Jones 1937: 154). The columns of smoke that rise from the wasteland are "spread acrid nightmare capitals" (Jones 1937: 86).

Jones consistently adds a cold, industrial and negative connotation to technology throughout the poem to establish his criticism; another passage reads "Rotary steel hail spit and lashed in sharp spasms […] great solemn guns leisurely manipulated their expensive discharges at rare intervals, bringing weight and full recession to the rising orchestration" (Jones 1937: 38). Note how Jones uses 'spit' and 'lash'; the gun does not shoot in bursts but in 'sharp spasms'; the gun does not load and fire its bullets, but 'manipulates' them. Again we find hints of irony: the juxtaposition of aforementioned negative description with describing the guns as 'great and solemn'. This way, Jones challenges the reader to make an effort at looking beyond the surface text; "great and solemn" is much easier to accept as Jones's true stance towards the guns than the more subtle emotional associations that most of the words in his description carry. Another clear example is found in the description of a morning landscape at the front: "the trip-wire graced its snare-barbs with tinselled moistnesses" (Jones 1937: 61) - the morning dew makes the trip-wire visible to the enemy, yet Jones ironically states it 'graced' the tripwires.

Jones's clear denunciation of technology continues with his description of bullets: "Occasionally a rifle bullet raw snapt like tenuous hide whip by spiteful ostler handled″ (Jones 1937: 42-43). Again, Jones chooses negatively connotated words to summon up a particular atmosphere; in this instance, that of a cruel groom cracking his whip. This atmosphere is created in the following passage as well, where Private Ball gets hit by enemy machine gun fire:

> [...] he finds you everywhere. Where his fiery sickle garners you: fanged-flash and darkt-fire thrring and thrrung athwart thdrill a Wimshurst pandemonium drill with dynamo druv staccato bark at you like Berthe Krupp's terrier bitch and rattlesnakes for bare legs; sweat you on the sudden like masher Bimp's back-firing No. 3 model for Granny Bodger at 1.30 a.m. rrattle a chatter you

> like a Vitus neurotic, harrow your vertebrae, 'bore your brain-pan before you
> can say Fanny - and comfortably over open sights: the gentleman must be
> mowed. And to Private Ball it came as if a rigid beam of great weight flailed
> about his calves, caught from behind by ballista-baulk let fly or aft-beam
> slewed to clout gunnel-walker below [...] He thought it disproportionate in its
> violence considering the fragility of us. (Jones 1937: 182-183)

Again, Jones vivid imagery makes up a gripping atmosphere; visions of Death's fiery sickle are mixed with images of heavy-weight beams and baulks. Industrial, mechanical sounds are used to establish an industrial effect on an audible level.

Perhaps one of the most crucial and vivid descriptions of technology in *In Parenthesis* is the impact of the first shell. Jones skilfully slows down perceived time to elicit the feeling that combat itself is ultimately a barrage of stimuli for all senses.

> The exact disposition of small things - the precise shapes of trees, the tilt of a
> bucket, the movement of a straw, the disappearing right boot of Sergeant Snell
> - all minute noises, separate and distinct, in stillness charged through with
> some approaching violence - registered not by the ear nor any single faculty -
> an on-rushing pervasion, saturating all existence; with exactitude, logarithmic,
> dial-timed, millesimal - of calculated velocity, some mean chemist's
> contrivance, a stinking physicist's destroying toy.
>
> He stood alone on the stones, his mess-tin spilled at his feet. Out of the vortex,
> rifling in the air it came – bright, brass-shod, Pandoran; with all-filling
> screaming the howling crescendo's up-piling snapt. The universal world,
> breath held, one half second, a bludgeoned stillness. Then the pent violence
> released a consummation of all burstings-out; all sudden up-rendings and
> rivings-through – all taking-out of vents – all barrier-breaking – all

unmaking. Pernitric begetting – the dissolving and splitting of solid things.

(Jones 1937: 24)

As this passage is one of the key moments of the poem, it has already been analysed thoroughly. Vincent Sherry, for one, points out the double entendre in Jones's use of 'Pandoran': "the pandora, the lute-like instrument of a stern wiry sound, provides a heroic metaphor for the shrill whine of the shell approaching. But Jones is also alluding to the myth of Pandora, the girl who rashly opened the box whose contents, previously unknown, became, through her importunity, all human ills" (Sherry 982: 377). Of course, the description of the artillery shell as being 'Pandoran' reflects Jones's own vision; he feels humanity has opened a box of destruction it cannot close again. With the technological growth continuing and leading to the advent of nuclear arms and the concept of mutually assured destruction, it seems the simile is strikingly accurate.

Jones's use of chemical imagery ("chemist's contrivance", "pernitric") fits into a larger motif that recurs in *In Parenthesis.* This repeated theme when Jones describes technology is the idea of chemicals, and especially chemicals as a pollutant of nature. In this aspect, Jones shows parallels with Wordsworth and Blake in that he sees nature as pure and good – chemicals, science and technology, then, are pollutants of what is pure. A first instance of this idea is found in Part 3: Jones describes the dead bodies in no man's land as "chemical-corrupted once-bodies" (Jones 1937: 43) – the idea of pollution and corruption is very outspoken here. The chemicals in question are the chemicals of enemy artillery shells; poison gas especially, but the chemicals used for blast charges as well: TNT, picric acid, ammonium nitrate, etcetera (Hamilton 1916: 5). Jones continues the theme of pollution with another ironic passage. Since there was neither time nor resources to properly bury dead soldiers, the unhygienic decomposition of bodies in the First World War was countered by using bleaching powder. Jones writes: "they bright-whiten all this sepulchre with powdered

chloride of lime. It's a perfectly sanitary war" (Jones 1937: 43). As Schwartz put it: "The large number of casualties caused due to this technological progress are met by a technological answer" (Schwartz 2005: 326), further polluting what, in Jones's eyes, is already heavily corrupted. The chemical earth motif returns in the description of the first bomb hit: "a great many mangolds, uprooted, pulped, congealed with chemical earth, spattered and made slippery the rigid boards leading to the emplacement" (Jones 1937: 24). Jones continues his criticism of technology and chemistry with descriptions like "black chemist's smoke" (Jones 1937: 85). An incoming bomb shell is described as "some mean chemist's contrivance, a stinking physicist's destroying toy" (Jones 1937: 24).

Another remarkable aspect of Jones's (and the average soldier's) language of technology is the use of nicknames. Heavy, lethal weaponry is given pleasant nicknames: 2-inch howitzer shells are called "toffee apples" (Jones 1937: 90), the ML 9.45 inch Heavy Trench Mortar was nicknamed the Flying Pig (Jones 1937: 114), the trench-mortars the German forces call Minenwerfers are dubbed "Minnies" (Jones 1937: 103), torpedoes "tin fish" (Jones 1937: 115), shell bursts are coal-boxes (Jones 1937: 99) and Woolly-Bears are German high-explosive shells with a distinct cloud-like explosion (Jones 1937: 148). This nicknaming was one of the typical language phenomena at the front, and it parallels Jones's own way of approaching superior technology – with irony, that is.

iii)   Technology and nature

Jones's condemnation of technology impacts even harder because of his praise of nature. As stated above, it is especially the juxtaposition of the chemicals with the purity of nature that makes Jones's image so compellingly strong. Jones's description of nature seems the complete opposite of how he represents technology.

Throughout *In Parenthesis*, Jones puts nature directly opposite technology and describes almost as if it were the cure against scientific developments which led to mass

killing. A tree that has been splintered because of artillery still "spill[s] its life low on the ground" (Jones 1937: 21), the noise an animal makes in its barn is described as the "kindly creature's breathing" (Jones 1937: 16), the hides of mules have a "homely texture flayed horridly to make you weep, sunk in their servility of chain and leather" (Jones 1937: 149) and the first bird of the day produces a "kindly cry" (Jones 1937: 61).

Nature also provides the soldier's most basic and visceral refuge. Trenches and foxholes provided protection against artillery, the darkness of the night and fog provided a cover for patrols, the release of poison gas was subject to wind conditions, and when Private Ball is targeted by machine gun fire, he instinctively drops down to the ground (Jones 1937: 169).

In spite of this 'help' nature gives the soldier, it is also indifferent – nature cares not whether nations all over the globe are waging war or not. Birds chirp in spite of the "malice of engines" (Jones 1937: 154) that was mentioned earlier, and the stars do not align the night of the battle nor does the moon look brighter than other nights: "[…] what was the matter with that quite ordinary tree. That's a very usual looking farm house. The road was as Napoleon had left it. The day itself was what you'd expect of December" (Jones 1937: 19).

Indifference also means that nature does not only help – it can also harm and hinder. The fog that gives patrols their cover also induces false gas alarms, and gives the enemy cover as well, confusing and scaring the sentry posts (Jones 1937: 61). The trees provide a well-camouflaged home for German soldiers and their snares:

> But keepers who engineer new and powerful devices, forewarned against this morning / prepared with booby-trap beneath / and platforms in the stronger branches / like main-top for an arbalestier" (Jones 1937: 168)

In order to better outline the properties of both nature and technology better, Jones thus contrasts them throughout *In Parenthesis*. In another example, Jones purposely chooses

similes that compare war technology with nature's plants to further mix both: "You stretch out hands to pluck at jerry wire as if it were bramble mesh" (Jones 1937: 166). Even conventional nicknaming seems to blur the lines: "gooseberries" (Jones 1937: 35) are arrangements of barbed wire over wooden poles that were made in the trenches to be easily manageable by night, "thrown in among existing entanglements" (Jones 1937: 194). In this last example, Private Ball observes a priest walking in his garden:

> [...] man in black walked between his vegetable beds; he handled his small black book as children do their favourite dolls, who would impute to them a certain personality; he seemed to speak to the turned leaves, and to get his answer. The south-east wind came to sway his beanstalks, to mingle with the drone of bees, a heavier burden (Jones 1937: 117)

Here, the buzzing of the bees blends with the sound of the battlefront's cannonry, further developing the interaction between nature and technology.

iv)   Technology and the mythical allusions in *In Parenthesis*

Vincent B. Sherry makes an interesting argument for a connection between technology, nature and the mythological layer of *In Parenthesis*. In *David Jones's* In Parenthesis*: New Measure*, Sherry mentions how nature is repeatedly represented through fertility – and Mars, the war god, originated as a god of fertility (Sherry 1982: 376). He argues that Jones's contrast of highly technological weaponry with an originally life-giving god becomes deeply ironic (Sherry 1982: 376). The practice of turning all aspects of sophisticated technology against humanity does indeed starkly contrast with scenes like the one mentioned above, where the bees fertilising the flowers represents nature and fertility.

Sherry also mentions a parallel between the intense increase in technology and temperance, one of the four cardinal virtues – the opening of the Pandoran box that was the

revolution in industrial science, then, signifies a lack of restraint, a lack of temperance. More importantly, the concept of temperance occurs in medieval literature as 'mesure', a renewed take on Plato's σωφροσύνη, s*ôphrosunê* [4]. It is one of the major themes in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, which utilises Arthurian knights to represent different virtues. . In the second book of the poem, the knight Guyon represents Temperance as he resists Acrasia's carnal temptations in the Bower of Bliss. The virtue of temperance seems to unite Jones's personal views on technology and the Arthurian legend he was so interested in. Temperance, thus, represents a golden mean in assessing the value of technology; the technological excess of the Great War fails miserably to adhere to it, and Eric Gill's rustic and faith-based community in Ditchling, which Jones left after a couple of years, is located at the other end of the spectrum. Jones laments the transformation of warfare; from the heroic man-to-man combat in Arthurian legend to the "perfectly sanitary" mass-killings in the First World War; loosing poison gas without even seeing the enemy. This dichotomy, between the vastly different technological backgrounds against wars are fought, is the essential dissimilarity between privates in the Great War and any other soldiers – a stark contrast in the universal experience of war Jones seeks to lay bare throughout the poem.

One remarkable aspect of this analysis is how Jones almost does not mention the use of bayonets. Barring a few mentions of the soldier's mere possession of bayonets (Jones 1937:70), Jones never goes into detail on their use. Nonetheless, bayonets were frequently used in the Battle of the Somme: "For the troops who did manage to reach the German trenches, the bayonet was preferred for man-to-man fighting" (Payne 2008). The use of a bayonet reduced the waste of bullets and prevented instances of friendly fire during close combat in enemy trenches, next to having noteworthy psychological effects – for both the soldier using the bayonet as the intimidated adversary forces (Engen 2006: 2). It is not known

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[4] 'self-restraint'

whether Jones's and the regiment he was a part of saw much use of the bayonet, as Jones has mentioned he was "part of the covering troops. To be part of a raiding-party you had not only to volunteer but be judged the kind of person best suited for the job. I was not considered suitable" (Dilworth 1982). Yet, it could be quite interesting how Jones fits the use of bayonets – however limited – into his lamentation of the disappearance of honourable, man-to-man combat; the bayonets are about as close as it gets to Arthurian swordfights.

Analysts of the mythological allusions in *In Parenthesis* have drawn a parallel between the passage where Private Ball contemplates leavings his rifle behind and the death of Roland in *La Chanson de Roland*, the classic *chanson de geste*. John Johnston explains:

> "In the Old French epic, Roland is similarly concerned about the fate of his sword Durendal; he attempts to shatter it upon a rock, when defeat and death are certain, because he does not wish the weapon to become the trophy of a Saracen. The sword, however, cannot be broken, and as a last resort Roland places it beneath his body before he dies" (Johnston 1962: 79).

Again, connecting Ball with other soldiers in other wars, from Roman times to medieval legends, is one of Jones's more obvious techniques to seek the greater combat experience throughout history. If the soldier's experience proves universal – and that is what Jones implies in *In Parenthesis* – then it is the technology that separates the privates in the trenches from those fighting in Roman legions. This way, Jones contrasts the fundamental similarities between soldiers through the ages with what divides them, technology, in order to balance the equation. It is this ever-balancing of the layer representing Arthurian and Celtic mythology with the technological layer that gives *In Parenthesis* its particular dynamic form of viewing technology. It also causes Jones's idea of a fundamental soldier's experience to be more acceptable, as the nuance of a difference because of technology adds credibility.

v)   Criticism of technology

Jones also makes a case for the fallibility of technology. Technology is never perfect; artillery soldiers and sentries, for example, are plagued by faulty shells that explode prematurely, too late, or never at all (Jones 1937: 86, 95). Other equipment routinely fails certain requirements, such as the talc on the British gas masks, which was susceptible to cracking (Jones 1937: 214). The communication wires in the trenches and on roads were a repeated source of frustration as well; "They ran in the most unexpected fashion and at any height; and, when broken, trailed and caught on any jutting thing, to the great misery of hurrying men" (Jones 1937: 194). Jones mentions the frustration field-telephone wires cause among the ranks: a soldier warning others to "mind the wire" recurs time and again and the wire turns out unresponsive when it is needed direly (Jones 1937: 127, 177). The recollection of the glorification of the rifle mentioned earlier is countered as well: "it troubles your painful crawling like a fugitive's irons" (Jones 1937: 184), making clear the ambiguous role technology can play – both a saver of lives and a ball and chain. The irons would keep Jones prisoner for the rest of his life, through post-traumatic stress disorder-induced anxiety breakdowns. On painting, Jones would later state: "I always work from the window of a house if is possible. I like looking out on the world from a reasonably sheltered position" (Dawes 2005: 78).

vi)   Technology in a positive light?

The absolute barrage of criticism Jones delivers on the subject of technology begs the question of whether there is any positive aspect to scientific and technological developments. As stated before, according to Jones's personal view on technology which certainly is not devoid of any nuance, there are - but the answer to the same question in *In Parenthesis* certainly does not seem to follow that distinction. With little to no positive mention of

technology, only Private Ball's appreciation of his gas mask stands out (Jones 1937: 186). Then again, the horrors of new weaponry are the cause he has to carry it in the first place. In conclusion, the particularly negative view at technology in *In Parenthesis* is a fictionalized and radicalised account of Jones's views, and offers no positive descriptions of technology.

V.   Conclusion

I have described the unique circumstances that led to the widespread use of new technology in World War I and the clash it made with outdated 19th century strategies, particularly the clash between machine guns and straight charges. The emergence of these machine guns, poison gas and other new technologic developments radically changed how war was waged in the Great War and consecutive military campaigns. In spite of the early presence of technophobia since the early days of the Industrial Revolution, for example in Romantic and Victorian poetic circles, the perception of the ever-increasing mechanization and industrialization changed towards the later years of World War I and this attitude shift caused, at least partially, the development of countermovements such as Dadaism.

I have pointed out that the introduction of new weaponry had a direct impact on how the war was viewed by Jones and the public in general. In poetry, the typically patriotic-romantic war poetry à la Jessie Pope made way for more satirical and captious works, Owen's 'Dulce et decorum est' being an almost archetypal example.

I have shown how Jones's personal views on technology were heavily shaped by his biographical background. His years at the Guild of St Joseph and St Dominic in Ditchling proved to be of paramount importance, as the founder Eric Gill, and many of the communards, had a very outspoken and quite black-and-white hostile perception of technology and industrialisation as a whole, a radicalisation of the Arts and Crafts design movement. Jones's preoccupation with Arthurian legend also left its marks in his views.

Still, Jones's judgement of technology is not devoid of nuance; on several occasions, he acknowledged the beauty in technology, and even made a point out of saying art can be found in weaponry if one were to find its symbolic beauty. This dualistic vision is most probably the convergence of his different opinions before and after October 1916.

This nuanced vision, however, is not reflected in *In Parenthesis*. The poem consistently portrays technology negatively, and Jones uses several techniques to debunk the glorification of technology. One of the more surprising techniques is the use of irony, of which Paul Fussell and Bernard Bergonzi said the poem is without. He uses this irony in two ways; the first being the use of subtle irony in descriptions and juxtapositions, and the second type being the use of charming nicknames for heavy weaponry - although the latter was an authentic occurrence at the front on its own. For further detrimental portrayal of technology, Jones heavily makes use of illustrative language. By establishing a cold, utterly negative, industrial and mechanical atmosphere every time technology comes into play, Jones condemns its excessive force. There is also a motif of hazardous chemicals running through his descriptions of technology, and especially in contrast with the purity of nature this motif works particularly well at eroding the perceived value of chemicals and industrial science as a whole. A last technique Jones uses in his negative portrayal of technology is indicating technology's flaws, thus further debunking and countering its glorification.

I have also clarified the relationship between technology and the mythological layer of the poem, by explaining that the medieval renewed concept and cardinal virtue of 'mesure' should be connected with the use of especially chemical weaponry in the First World War. Mesure, or Temperance, which is an important part of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, has not been adhered to in the war in Jones's eyes - the use of technology on an exceptionally excessive scale has tipped the equilibrium he felt present in ancient combat, completely out of balance. Additionally, I have stated that the mythological layer seeks to establish a universal

experience of the soldier, but that only technology contrasts heavily in his comparison.

In conclusion, the portrayal of technology in David Jones's *In Parenthesis* is particularly negative, with ironic undertones. The poem implies excessive mechanization is a Pandora's box that opposes everything the virtue of temperance stands for and it is uncompromising in its criticism that technology made the Great War make a turn for the worse. *In Parenthesis* is a unique product of World War I and the background of its author, as Jones's personal perception of technology overlaps a great deal with the portrayal of technology in the poem. Bearing in mind the heated debate recently on the ethical implications of unmanned aerial vehicles ('drones') and how they have 'depersonalised' warfare, Jones's perception of how technology influences the nature of war seems more relevant than ever.

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