

Postgraduate English

www.dur.ac.uk/postgraduate.english

ISSN 1756-9761

Issue 31

September 2015

Editors:

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Postgraduate English, Issue 31, September 2015

I have only tried to make a shape in words, using as data the complex of sights, sounds, fears, hopes, apprehensions, smells, things exterior and interior, the landscape and paraphernalia of that singular time and of those particular men.¹

David Jones’ *In Parenthesis* is a text which foregrounds auditory experience like few others. Such an interest in sound is perhaps surprising in an artist usually associated with the visual – as Philip Pacey points out, ‘Much of David Jones’ visual work is more easily and more immediately accessible’ than his written work – and yet his 1937 publication is remarkable for its careful attention to the sonic patterns and interfaces of battle, as well as to the nuances of noises encountered away from the frontline.² Indeed, the text is studded throughout with descriptions of sound, creating a complex aural portrait of David Jones’ experience as a private in the Royal Welch Fusiliers during the First World War and suggesting the importance of sensory impressions in understanding and coming to terms with the events of the conflict.³ Sound is conveyed notably by the polyphonic voices of the text, and Jones notes that the shouted commands and curses heard during his time of service at times ‘reached real poetry’ (xii). In a similar manner, the noises of war are rendered musical, transformed by the trauma of war and heightened by Jones’ use of

¹ All quotations are taken from David Jones, *In Parenthesis* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010). This quotation is from the Preface, p. x. Further quotations will be denoted by page number parenthetically.

² Philip Pacey, *David Jones and Other Wonder Voyagers* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1982), p. 49.

³ For an extensive biography, see Keith Aldritt, *David Jones: Writer and Artist* (London: Constable and Robin, 2003).

onomatopoeia, alliteration, and anaphora. An emphasis on the aural qualities of the work is also available in its form. While much critical debate has centred upon the genre of the text, with attempts to establish whether it constitutes poetry or prose, it is likely that Jones exploits both in order to fuel the rhythmic and acoustic intensity of his work.

David Jones' interest in the sonic qualities of wartime experience is evident notably in his preface to *In Parenthesis*, where he explains his attempt to record the 'complexities of [...] sound' (xi) to which he was exposed whilst serving as a soldier for the RWF between January 1915 and January 1919.⁴ That sound is crucial to the makeup of the poem is further suggested by Jones' assertion that:

I have tried to indicate the sound of certain sentences by giving a bare hint of who is speaking, of the influences operating to make the particular sound I want in a particular instance, by perhaps altering a single vowel in one word (xi).

This level of specificity with regard to acoustics – Jones is willing to alter even 'a single vowel in one word' in order to create his desired effect – is apparent both in the poem's determination to provide a full account of the multiple and varied sounds encountered during war, and in its close attention to minutiae of speech and accent.

Certainly, *In Parenthesis* is remarkable for the sheer number of voices it records. This polyphony is immediately apparent upon reading the poem, and the first section opens with a number of different voices calling and responding to roll-call:

'49 Wyatt, 01549 Wyatt.
Coming sergeant.
Pick 'em up, pick 'em up – I'll stalk within yer chamber.
Private Leg... sick.
Private Ball... absent.
'01 Ball, '01 Ball, Ball of No. 1.
Where's Ball, 25201 Ball – you corporal,
Ball of your section.
Movement round and about the Commanding Officer.

⁴ As William Blissett and Alan Horne note, Jones was not officially demobilised until 1919, although he has ceased active service at this point. See Blissett and Horne, *David Jones: Artist and Writer* (Toronto: Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, 1995), p. 11.

Bugler, will you sound ‘Orderly Sergeants’. (1)

The passage begins ‘abruptly, like a script for a radio-play’: the reader is immediately thrown into the verbal commotion of the army, with little sense of character or idea of who is speaking.⁵ Instead, voices dominate the passage, and the shouted cries resound with an effect close to that of music. This tenor is given in part by Jones’ use of ellipses, which act like directions in a musical score and focus the ear on the moments of silence in between speech. Repetition also contributes to a sense of musical structure: the name ‘Ball’ punctuates the middle of the section with metronomic regularity, and other words, names, and phrases – ‘Wyatt’, ‘Pick ‘em up’, ‘Private’ – are repeated twice, forming an intricate pattern of echoes. It is perhaps in recognition of these musical qualities that Thomas Dilworth refers to the voices of *In Parenthesis* as ‘a kind of anonymous chorus’, highlighting the oral/aural nature of the work as well as the song-like feeling of much of the dialogue.⁶

The idea that spoken words approach the status of music in *In Parenthesis* is evident notably in the fifth section of the poem. Here, repetitions in speech lend a rhythmic intensity to the passage:

Runner.
 Yes sir.
 Tell ‘em no later than 4.55.
 Yes sir.
 Tell them to note the correction.
 Yes sir.
 And find first the Reg’mental.
 Yes sir.
 I want him now.
 Yes sir.
 I want him now – I want him here now – he ought to be here now.
 Yes sir. (129)

⁵ Elizabeth Ward, *David Jones: Mythmaker* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), p. 91.

⁶ Thomas Dilworth, *The Shape of Meaning in the Poetry of David Jones* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 32.

The repetition of the affirmative ‘Yes sir’ acts as a musical refrain or beat underpinning the text, and suggests the potential for speech to become transformed and elevated under the pressures of wartime existence. While the extract functions as a plausible dialogue between a soldier and an army messenger, the unceasing and highly rhythmic nature of the repetition points to something beyond ordinary speech rhythms, closer to the interwoven vocal or instrumental sounds of music. The repeated ‘Yes sir’ is certainly striking, and forms the metronomic baseline of the passage, upon which the variations of the soldier’s speech play: ‘I want him now’ becomes ‘I want him here now’, which then modulates to ‘he ought to be here now’. These subtle modifications resemble the complex, shifting patterns of many musical compositions, and are heightened by the text’s insistent repetitions: the adverb ‘now’ is repeated four times in just three lines. It is useful to consider the passage in light of T. S. Eliot’s comments in ‘The Music of Poetry’, published in 1942 – just five years after Eliot had helped edit and publish *In Parenthesis* with Faber and Faber.⁷ In a notable passage, he remarks:

The use of recurrent themes is as natural to poetry as to music. There are possibilities for verse which bear some analogy to the development of a theme by different groups of instruments; there are possibilities of transitions in a poem comparable to the different movements of a symphony or quartet; there are possibilities of contrapuntal arrangement of subject-matter.⁸

Jones’ voices certainly seem to incorporate some of these musical techniques; indeed, the interaction of the voices above may be termed contrapuntal. The passage is also juxtaposed to the distinctly less musical sections that precede (and proceed) it:

This form-master in khaki strokes his nose with the seasoned bole – waiting
for the formula; for the buzzer behind the blanket to stop
countermanding one seven one five hours
substituting one six five five hours. (129)

⁷ Eliot was himself highly attuned to the musical qualities of *In Parenthesis*, noting in his Preface to the work that Jones, like James Joyce, seemed to him ‘to have the Celtic ear for the music of words’ (viii).

⁸ T. S. Eliot, ‘The Music of Poetry’ in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 114.

Even in these non-musical passages, however, sound plays a crucial role. Indeed, the buzzer's unremitting noise can be seen to feed into the following conversational exchange, providing another layer of ambient acoustic experience.

David Jones was convinced that everyday speech could be transformed by the alien and unusual circumstances of war in this way. Speaking of his representation of army chatter in the preface to *In Parenthesis* he notes:

I have been hampered by the convention of not using impious and impolite words, because the whole shape of our discourse was conditioned by the use of such words. The very repetition of them made them seem liturgical, certainly deprived them of malice, and occasionally, when skillfully disposed, and used according to established but flexible tradition, gave a kind of significance, and even at moments a dignity, to our speech. (xii)

In this sense, even simple commands and orders – ‘Mind the hole | mind the hole | mind the hole to left’ (36) – are transformed through their repetition into rhythmically charged instructions; or as the poem notes, ‘The repeated passing back of aidful messages assumes a cadency’ (36). This rhythmic force is particularly noticeable in passages where conversational exchange is fast-paced and pared-down: ‘Don’t talk wet. | Who’s talking wet. | You’re talking wet.’ (78). Here the verbal sparseness and repeated words recall the energetic and fragmented rhythms of T. S. Eliot’s *Sweeney Agonistes*, a work with which Jones would undoubtedly have been familiar, and equally suggests Jones’ interest in speech patterns and dialogue.⁹

A fascination with colloquial speech is indeed evident throughout *In Parenthesis*, and the importance of speech rhythms in the poem – particularly Cockney ones – cannot be underplayed. Jones himself notes in the preface: ‘I am surprised to find how much Cockney influences have determined the form [of the poem]; but as Latin is to the Church, so is Cockney to the Army, no matter what name the regiment bears’ (xii). Slang words and Cockney phrases are frequently

⁹ For more on the relationship between David Jones and T. S. Eliot see Thomas Dilworth, ‘T. S. Eliot and David Jones’, *Twentieth Century Literature* 37, no. 2 (1991), 240 – 252.

woven in with the narrative, so that it is not uncommon to find descriptive lines interrupted by lively speech:

Some like tight belts and some like loose belts – trussed-up pockets –
cigarettes in ammunition pouches – rifle-bolts, webbing, buckles and rain –
gotta light mate – give us a match chum. (5)

Here the lack of speech marks, as in other passages, means that the text's many voices are fully interwoven with the overall narrative; the impression this gives is of a text that is primarily oral,¹⁰ although as Chris Hopkins notes, there is also 'potential for ambiguity as to who is speaking'.¹¹ This is perhaps not a great cause for concern, however, due to the poem's interest in language and patterns above characterization: it may be that an uncertainty as to who is speaking in fact appropriately reflects the plurality of voices and confusion of sound of frontline combat.

David Jones was, however, keen to aptly portray Cockney habits of speech. He notes that his companions in the war were 'mostly Londoners with an admixture of Welshmen' (x), united by the use of 'the same jargon' (x). This 'jargon' surfaces at numerous points throughout the poem; one such example is the use of the Cockney rhyming slang 'china' (47), as a term for 'mate'.¹² Jones nonetheless had considerable difficulty in recreating these speech rhythms, and noted in a letter to René Hague:

The real thing I'm afraid of is this business of Cockney speech. It's the very devil to try and make a *real enduring shape that won't be embarrassing* with the stuff – dropped h's and 'yers' and 'bloody' and all that are *so* difficult. And yet you've got to get across that form of speech somehow because so much of the feeling of the sentences depends on all that.¹³

¹⁰ Jones' assertion in the Preface to his *Anthemata* could equally be applied to *In Parenthesis*: 'I intend what I have written to be said. While marks of punctuation, breaks of line, length of line, grouping of words or sentences and variations of spacing are visual contrivances they have here an aural and oral intention'. See Jones, *Anthemata* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 35.

¹¹ Chris Hopkins, 'Mixed Languages: David Jones' *In Parenthesis*', *The Swansea Review: Writing, Region and Nation* 13, no. 1 (1994), 318 – 315 (p. 320).

¹² The full Cockney term would be 'china plate'.

¹³ David Jones in a letter to René Hague, 2 December 1935. René Hague, ed., *Dai Greatcoat: A self-portrait of David Jones in his letters* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), p. 80.

Much of the Cockney speech in the poem is in fact a toned-down version of what Jones remembers from his experience of the army. As Thomas Dilworth notes, the effect of this is that the poem's spoken words are much closer to the narrative language, allowing for 'easy modulation between the coarse, lower-class eloquence of the dramatic mode and the more formally composed styles of the lyric and associative modes'.¹⁴ By eliding the two modes in this manner, Jones is also providing a composition in which voice is inseparable from impressions of events and actions; as noted earlier, it can be difficult to untangle moments of speech from the general narrative. Readers must negotiate the poem in terms of its multiple and varied voices, then, much as the characters of the poem must navigate the waste land of war according to the verbal instructions that they receive. It is also worth noting T. S. Eliot's assertion in 'The Music of Poetry' that

poetry must not stray too far from the ordinary everyday language which we use and hear. Whether poetry is accentual or syllabic, rhymed or rhymeless, formal or free, it cannot afford to lose contact with the changing language of common intercourse (p.110).

David Jones' attempt to 'get across' common forms of speech and register is very much in this vein.

Jones' use of Cockney dialogue also stands in distinct contrast to that used by Eliot in his own *Waste Land*, a work which has generated numerous critical comparisons with *In Parenthesis*.¹⁵ While Jones' Cockney speech is thoroughly interwoven with overall narrative, Eliot's use of Cockney in the second part of *The Waste Land*, entitled 'A Game of Chess', creates a strong sense of dissonance and incongruity when contrasted with the poem's opening section. The scene is set in a public house, and features a Cockney voice relating an earlier conversation:

I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,
It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.
(She's had five already and nearly died of young George.)
The chemist said it would be all right, but I've never been the same.

¹⁴ Dilworth, *The Shape of Meaning*, p. 53.

¹⁵ Ward, *David Jones: Mythmaker*, pp. 70-81

You *are* a proper fool, I said.¹⁶

The use of reported speech, with its continual iterations of ‘she said’ and ‘I said’, differs greatly from Jones’ more integrated portrayal of Cockney language, which is interspersed among the instances of gun-fire and explosions as an integral part of the acoustic landscape. Eliot’s passage above also differs notably from the more formal beginning of ‘A Game of Chess’, which hovers around the pentameter of blank verse:

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
 Glowed on the marble, where the glass
 Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
 From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
 (Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
 Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra (*Complete Poems*, p. 64)

The vocabulary connoting wealth, ‘burnished’, ‘throne’, ‘marble’, ‘golden’, provides a further contrast to the medicinal ‘pills’ and ‘chemist’ of the later section, and there is a notable distinction made between the colloquial ‘low’ mode of Cockney speech and the more lyrical and metrically structured ‘high’ poetic mode. *In Parenthesis*, however, offers no such division: as previously noted by Dilworth, Jones’ instances of dialogue in fact amalgamate and merge to create a whole with the more lyrical sections of the poem.

The voices of David Jones’ waste land nonetheless have to struggle against the various other noises that the text contains. Speech is often shown to be futile when placed against the backdrop of ambient natural sound, army hubbub, and war noises that permeate the text, as indicated by the officer’s ‘Words lost’ (3) in the first part of the poem: ‘Reverberation of that sudden command broke hollowly upon the emptied huts’ (3). The weak level of sound is communicated both by the adverb ‘hollowly’ and the connotations of vulnerability evident in the verb ‘broke’; combined with the term ‘emptied’, the sentence gives the impression of a failed

¹⁶ T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays*, ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), p. 66.

attempt to produce sound. Similarly, the natural conditions experienced by the army challenge their attempts to communicate vocally: not only does the damp ‘rasp[...]

the sensed membranes of the throat’ (61), likely causing difficulty with speech, it also impedes the successful transmission of orders from officers:

Fog refracted, losing articulation in the cloying damp, the word of command unmade in its passage, mischieved of the opaque air, mutated, bereaved of content, become an incoherent uttering, a curious bent cry out of the smarting drift, lost altogether – yet making rise again the grey bundles where they lie. (60)

Here the acoustics become not only muted but ‘mutated’: the fog ‘unmakes’ the spoken words as if in a deliberate attempt to sabotage communication. That the words are transformed from a ‘word of command’ to an ‘incoherent uttering’, and finally to a ‘curious bent cry’, is also significant: subject to the distorting pressures of nature, human words lose not only their semantic value, but cease to sound like words at all. Instead, they resemble mere sounds, appearing ‘out of the smarting drift’ as if from nowhere. Speaking of the passage’s visual imagery, Kathleen Henderson Staudt notes that:

as *In Parenthesis* progresses, the narrator uses more and more images of saturation, confusion, and blurring, to show how the approaching battle threatens the world of ordered particulars in which the men first find refuge. The gradual undoing of this order is suggested most clearly in the fog that pervades the landscape of part 4.¹⁷

The ‘undoing of this order’ is equally evident in the steady disintegration of sound as the poem progresses: not only does the fog imagery present a *visual* distortion of the landscape, it also provides a disorientating *aural* deformation of the voices and sounds present. A similar effect of disorientation is apparent in the third section of the poem, where the sound of human voices takes on a dream-like quality: ‘hollow unreal voices, reaching the ear unexpectedly, from behind or round the traverse bend’ (47). The ‘unreal’ voices not only distinctly recall the ‘Unreal City’ and

¹⁷ Kathleen Henderson Staudt, *At the Turn of a Civilization* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 53.

delusional voices of Eliot's *Waste Land*, but also provide an unsettling contrast to much of the poem's earlier clipped verbal instructions:

Pick those knees up.
 Throw those chests out.
 Hold those heads up.
 Stop that talking.
 Keep those chins in. (4)

A disintegration of sound and language is most evident, however, in Jones' descriptions of the noises encountered during battle. The first instance of such sound occurs in Part 2 of the poem, and records John Ball's encounter with a shell:

Out of the vortex, rifling 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. (24)

The passage is remarkable not only for the unrelenting alliteration of the plosive 'bright', 'brass-shod', 'breath', 'bludgeoned', 'burstings', 'barrier-breaking', imitating the destructive and explosive nature of the shell itself, but also for its textures of noise and silence. Just as the speed of the shell is juxtaposed with the 'slow-motion' feeling of its depiction, so the 'all-filling screaming' is contrasted to the 'bludgeoned stillness' that occurs in the half second before its detonation. This moment of 'stillness' perhaps only increases the effect of the 'pent violence', however, the fury of which is translated in the passage's numerous hyphens. These hyphens act as pauses, or moments of stillness, furnishing the lines with a broken, staccato rhythm similar to that of gunfire. David Blamires finds the passage particularly effective, commenting on its 'accuracy of its visual and auditory detail, the rapid succession of words hammering at the same area of consciousness [...] all this has not been bettered anywhere'.¹⁸ Certainly the passage is successful in giving a full auditory picture of the event, from the 'screaming' and 'howling' of the shell,

¹⁸ David Blamires, *David Jones: Artist and Writer* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1971), p. 94.

to the silent ‘universal world’ and the ensuing ‘burstings out’ of both auditory and physical violence.

This technique of using unusual syntax and extreme alliteration in order to convey the uproar and brutality of war was not unique to David Jones, however. William Blissett comments that

Many literary experiments, most of them failures [...] were made to render the new stress and violence [of war] by violence of language and dislocation of syntax, to match the impact of high explosives and machine-gun fire, not forgetting the hardly less wearing, but opposite, experience of fatigue, boredom, attrition.¹⁹

Onomatopoeia, he notes, was also a common device, and is used frequently in *In Parenthesis*, often to striking effect. A notable distinction between Jones and writers who were less successful in manipulating these effects, however, lies in the sense that the alliteration, anaphora, and other devices in Jones’ work do not feel excessive; similarly, they are not mere ‘sound effects’. T. S. Eliot’s statement regarding sound and music in poetry thus fits Jones’ work particularly well: ‘the music of poetry is not something which exists apart from its meaning. Otherwise, we could have poetry of great musical beauty which made no sense’.²⁰ Indeed, the sound in Jones’ poem not only provides a full auditory portrait of his experiences, but also enacts the distorting pressures of contemporary warfare itself. To return to the idea of a disintegration of sound and language, it is useful to compare the passage cited above with two later passages. The first is from the third part of the poem, when the soldiers are marching by night:

Throbbing on taut ear-drum
boomed hollow out-rushing and the
shockt recoil
the unleashing
a releasing.
Far thuddings faintly heard in the stranger-world (30)

¹⁹ William Blissett, ‘The Syntax of Violence’ in *David Jones: Man and Poet*, ed. John Matthias (Maine: University of Maine, 1989), p. 195.

²⁰ T. S. Eliot, ‘The Music of Poetry’, p. 110.

While the previous example of auditory violence, from the second part of Jones' poem, resembles prose, here the section has modulated into a typography suggestive of poetry. It is worth bearing in mind Jones' assertion in the preface that: 'I frequently rely on a pause at the end of a line to aid the sense and form. A new line, which the typography would not otherwise demand, is used to indicate some change, inflexion, or emphasis' (xi). The emphasis here may well be on the explosive nature of the auditory experience: the lines in the passage seem to echo the short bursts of explosions that they record, while the repetitive and unceasing nature of the attack is documented in the assonance of the long vowel sounds. Jones also directs attention to the act of hearing itself, noting the effect of sound on the 'ear-drum'; the verb 'Throbbing' also seems particularly indicative of the vibrations that constitute sound. The fragmentation of the passage is also notable, and Elizabeth Ward is apt in her assertion that it 'reflects the shattering impact of the war-experience upon the senses and upon the capacity to connect one sensory impression to another in a coherent way' (p. 88). The 'shockt recoil' of the passage can thus also be seen to communicate the 'shocked' state of the listener who is subject to the 'unleashing' and 'releasing' of violent sound, the pressure of which is so great that even the word 'shocked' is dislocated to produce the strange, compacted spelling 'shockt'.

A later passage, from the climatic seventh part of the poem, provides a further example of auditory disintegration and encapsulates the acceleration from the staccato, but nonetheless comprehensible, rhythms of the first passage examined, to the fragmentation of the second into a new territory of acoustic breakdown:

fanged-flash and darkt-fire thrring and thrung athwart thdrill a Wimshurt
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 backfiring 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 (182)

Here language is manipulated for maximum sonic intensity, and mimics the disorder and acoustic confusion of battle. Words seem to blend and mould together in imitation of the overwhelming auditory backdrop of war: the terms ‘thring’, ‘thrrung’, ‘athwart’ and ‘thdrill’ are particularly notable for their shared visual and verbal components, and suggest that a greater rhythmic and auditory force accompanies moments of emotional magnitude in *In Parenthesis*. Distinct animal noises are also revealed in the confusion of the passage – the bark of a dog, the rattle of a snake – and it is interesting to note both these creatures’ capacities to cause damage and incite fear by their respective warning sounds, much as the noise of shell fire frightens, but does not injure, John Ball. By comparing gunfire to the bark of ‘Berthe Krupp’s terrier bitch’, the narrator is also highlighting the non-human, mechanical aspect of modern weaponry; as Vincent B. Sherry notes, Jones’ ‘criticism of technical war is uncompromising’ in this sense.²¹ Jones’ reference to human body parts – ‘harrow your vertebrae, bore your brain-pan’ – serves a similar purpose. The line indicates the extent to which the ambient war-sound is able to penetrate the human form, shaking the very interior of the body (vertebrae, skull) with considerable effect: the terms ‘harrow’ and ‘bore’ both communicate a sense of unrelenting discomfort. It also offers a further comparison between the automated and mechanized tools of warfare and the more vulnerable, and sensory, human body. As Jones notes in the preface of *In Parenthesis*:

We who are of the same world of sense with hairy ass and furry wolf and who presume to other and more radiant affinities, are finding it difficult, as yet, to recognise these creatures of chemicals as true extensions of ourselves, that we may feel for them a native affection, which alone can make them magical for us. (xiv)

This feeling of alienation from the tools and acts of modern warfare may equally contribute to the passage’s strange verbal makeup, unusual spellings, and odd phrasing: as well as being an accurate auditory documentation, the section reflects the incomprehension experienced by many of those involved in fighting. Certainly,

²¹ Vincent B. Sherry, ‘David Jones’ *In Parenthesis*: New Measure’, *Twentieth Century Literature* 28, no. 4 (1982), 375 – 380 (p. 379).

the passage's most noticeable characteristic is its slide towards auditory and linguistic disintegration, and its emphasis on the portrayal of sound is made clear by the focus on the auditory distortion of words ('thrring and thrrung athwart thdrill') and onomatopoeic representations ('rrattle a chatter you') in preference to the straightforward semantic content of words. This dislocation of language enforces the sense of sonic disturbance, or 'pandemonium', created by the passage: words can no longer be understood as clear signposts to meaning. Instead, they become noise-filled imitations of the violence and (sonic) disorder of battle, erupting from the silence like the sounds produced by the instruments of war themselves. T. S. Eliot's assertion that 'the poet is occupied with frontiers of consciousness beyond which words fail, though meanings still exist' has particular relevance for this section of *In Parenthesis*.²² While words are dislocated and distorted in the passage, they nonetheless contribute to a fuller sensory understanding not only of the experience of battle itself, but also of the psychic hurt and confusion that may result from such an ordeal. The passage also reflects the wider feel of the final part of the poem, the 'retreat into incoherence – to stop-start rhythms, dashes, or the urgency of adjectives' that contributes to a 'verbal equivalent of extremity' in the section (Ward, p. 101). Indeed, there is a sense in which sound dominates the poem's dénouement, and there exists a notable contrast between the frenzied, noise-producing activity of the army and the 'ancient stillness' (181) of the natural environment in which the combat takes place.

It is interesting to note that while the conditions of war have the ability to push language and sound almost to breaking point – so that language is exploited for its sonic potential and becomes closer to the discordant rhythms of machine weaponry than to ordinary speech – the sounds associated with war are on occasion spoken of in relation to music. In Part 3 of the poem, the expulsion of gunfire is compared to instrumental music:

Rotary steel hail spit and lashed in sharp spasms along the vibrating line;
great solemn guns leisurely manipulated their expensive discharges at rare
intervals, bringing weight and full recession to the rising orchestration. (38)

²² T. S. Eliot, 'The Music of Poetry', p. 111.

That this is an ominous music is indicated by the uncomfortable images of ‘spit’, ‘lashed’, and ‘sharp spasms’, all suggestive of a negative physical state, and lends weight to T. S. Eliot’s idea that ‘Dissonance, even cacophony, has its place’ in creating a sense of music in poetry.²³ The poem’s alignment of war noises with music is accentuated in the fifth part of the poem, where soldiers listen ‘with ears wide for the distant drum-fire’ (124), and in the fourth part of the poem, where a soldier is compared to a musician: ‘A long way off a machine-gunner seemed as one tuning an instrument, who strikes the same note quickly, several times, and now a lower one, singly’ (98). While the latter image may be intended to indicate the soldier’s careful handling of his gun, it may equally be suggestive of the ways in which soldiers sought ‘formal goodness in a life singularly inimical, hateful, to us’ (xiii). Deprived of the music hall and the opera house, and under the pressured circumstances of war, it is possible that ordinary sounds took on the timbres and qualities of music. It is perhaps for this reason that the central consciousness of the poem reports that at night and away from the frontline ‘you could lie with exquisite contentment and listen to the war’ (116).

Indeed, frequent reference is made to the act of hearing itself. While the contemporary Western world privileges the sense of sight over that of hearing, the conditions of war made an acute attention to sound necessary. R. Murray Schafer’s comments on the acoustic impact of urbanization could therefore be applied to the new and unfamiliar circumstances of war: ‘The soundscape of the world is changing. Modern man is beginning to inhabit a world with an acoustic environment radically different from any he has hitherto known’.²⁴ This adjustment to a new ‘soundscape’ (which Schafer notes consists of ‘events *heard*, not objects *seen*’²⁵) requires a more attentive listening, and *In Parenthesis* features numerous depictions of soldiers intently focusing their hearing on the environment – often as a matter of survival. In the fourth part of the poem, soldiers in the trenches are noted to be particularly aware of their auditory surroundings: ‘Men sensitive of hearing

²³ T. S. Eliot, ‘The Music of Poetry’, p. 112

²⁴ R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1977), p. 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

cock heads enquiringly, as rodents aware, prick ears, acutely directed suddenly' (85). The effort of listening is translated into the visual stance of the soldiers, whose cocked heads indicate their keen attempts to understand their surroundings. Just as the city prevented the facility for hearing noises at a great distance, however, so the acoustics of battle in Jones' *In Parenthesis* are shown to obstruct the clear hearing of its participating soldiers. Speaking of the city, Schafer notes that 'Today the world suffers from an overpopulation of sounds; there is so much acoustic information that little of it can emerge with clarity'.²⁶ Similarly, the soldiers of Jones' poem encounter considerable difficulties in hearing – and comprehending – the ambient acoustics of war: in the sixth part of the poem, the central consciousness notes of the battle-sounds that 'It was not so much the noise that surprised you – although you had to spit in a bloke's ear to make any impression' (147). Details are also given of the surrounding acoustic tumult: 'Hour on hour the gunfire did not relax nor lessen, in fact took on a more tremendous depth' (147); 'you felt faint for the noisesomeness sweated up from the white walls' (148). Given this acoustic pandemonium, it is unsurprising that soldiers had to strain to hear; indeed, an earlier part of the poem notes that servicemen would 'strain ears to the earliest note – should some prevenient bird make his kindly cry' (61).

The importance of sound in Jones' *In Parenthesis* cannot, therefore, be underestimated. Not only do the acoustic qualities of the work serve to provide a resonant aural portrait of Jones' experience of the army, they also echo the psychological experience of serving as a soldier itself. Voices, under the pressure of war, are transformed into music; ordinary speech becomes rhythmic and even liturgical: as Jones notes 'the "Bugger! Bugger!"' of a man detailed, had often about it the "Fiat! Fiat!" of the Saints' (xii). The Cockney rhythms and ordinary speech patterns of the work thus form an important layer within the text's overall acoustics, but equally are demonstrated to be subject to the war's distorting pressures on sound and language. This pressure reaches its height in the climactic final section of the poem, where language is dislocated and manipulated to such an extent that it

²⁶ Ibid., p. 71.

becomes almost pure sound, its auditory qualities foregrounded above straightforward semantic logic. The alignment of war noises with music further contributes to the sense in which sound dominates in the poem, suggesting that above all *In Parenthesis* is ‘a work that is meant to be read aloud and *listened to*’.²⁷

²⁷ Janet Powers Gemmill, “‘In Parenthesis’: A Study of Narrative Technique”, *Journal of Modern Literature* 1, no. 3 (1971), 311 – 328 (p. 312). Italics mine.

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