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WAR AND RECONCILIATION IN DAVID JONES' IN PARENTHESIS

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Abstract: David Jones' long poem *In Parenthesis* was his first literary work, and approaches the First World War in an atypical way. It is written from the point of view of a direct personal participation in the conflict, and is characterised by an attention to the minute physical particulars of the daily life of a soldier on the front, but the detailed physicality of this portrayal coexists with layers of cultural allusion, including allusions to war narratives from earlier stages of European culture, and allusions to sacred history. Jones' own participation in the First World War as a private on the Western Front serves as the basis for the descriptions of everyday war life. I shall explore how Jones is able to turn a minute description of ordinary British soldiers' experience of the First World War into a statement of a reconciliatory meaning of the event and of conflict in general, and I shall show how he achieves this through placing the action within the setting of a metaphysical scheme in which a present physical reality carries echoes of past physical realities, which together evoke and make present a transcendental reality carrying the possibility of a reconciliatory perspective. Jones' complex web of allusions to past conflicts in European history creates a context within which he can create a meaning for seemingly meaningless war experiences. I shall discuss the way that Jones uses Celtic cultural motifs in order to convey the meaning of defeat at a spiritual level leading to victory at higher, spiritual and cultural levels.