

Margaret Storm Jameson

Margaret Storm Jameson
Writing in Dialogue

Edited by

Jennifer Birkett and Chiara Briganti



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For Elsie and Gillian, with love
Jennifer

A Sergio, con amore
Chiara

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INTRODUCTION: THE WRITER'S SITUATION

Jennifer Birkett and Chiara Briganti

From her birth in Whitby in 1891, to her death in Cambridge in 1986, Margaret Storm Jameson's life and writing encompassed almost the whole of the twentieth century. She was, in every sense, a woman of her time, speaking to the long series of generations she lived through of their collective present, past and future—the society and culture they created together, which is now our own inheritance.

Jameson's writing, like her commitment to politics, was full of fresh starts, each undertaken with the same passionate intensity. In the best of her work, passion joins analysis, exploring the questions of the day in the landscapes of their making. She wrote about individuals and their communities, social justice, the cultural heritage, cultural memory, crossing frontiers and opening borders, exile, cruelty, and kindness. "Individuality," as she represented it, was a matter of private experience, and at the same time, of experiences held in common. Out of her own life-history, she created a mirror reflecting the long twentieth-century transformation of Europe. To carry her analyses into the minds and imaginations of contemporaries, she manufactured her own version of stylised realism, both in tune with her times and in advance of them, in which the innovative forms of 1930s social documentary, fiction and film were married to the different modernities of Stendhal, the Symbolistes, Eliot and Auden. And yet, by the time of her death in Cambridge in 1986, Margaret Storm Jameson had almost slipped from sight. The cultural community that can read all the levels of her work is only now emerging.

As modern scholarship finds the perspectives to grasp the larger contexts of her work, and the scope of her writerly vision, Jameson's original contribution to the understanding and direction of social and cultural politics in England, the formal development of the language of the English novel, and the European horizon that enfolds them both, takes its proper place in the cultural canon. Creative writer, journalist and cultural activist, the much-admired President of wartime PEN (Poets, Essayists and Novelists), she was preoccupied both with the state of the novel and the need for writers to speak for their times. A best-seller in her day, she speaks in her fictions with a strong political voice, from her epic *Mirror in Darkness* trilogy on English society between the wars, to novels of war that trace the rise of fascism, the collapse of Central Europe, the fall of France and the remaking of Europe. She is one of the most important figures of

twentieth-century modernity. An understanding of her work and the subtleties of its form is crucial to an interpretation of modernity that reaches beyond the boundaries of High Modernism, and that can encompass the “mingled and immediate modernities” (McNeil, 163) of Jameson herself, and of those other writers of her generation—Vera Brittain, Rebecca West, Winifred Holtby, Naomi Mitchison, George Orwell, J. B. Priestley, John Sommerfield—who took fiction and journalism into direct engagement with politics. She stands head and shoulders above popular male contemporaries such as Priestley, and the best of her work rivals the best of West and Woolf.

A Life in Writing

Jameson’s career, crossing the frontiers between North and South, traced a very modern trajectory. This was not the classic move from country to city that is enshrined in the British national imagination, though traces of nostalgia for that simpler moment linger in her thinking. That new lever of social change, the scholarship system, took her in 1909 from Whitby, the North Yorkshire fishing port of her birth, where shipbuilding had just died, to university in Leeds, a town catapulted into all the accessories of modernity, railways, factories, strikes, slums, the ILP (Independent Labour Party) and avant-garde art. From there she went to King’s College London, to write a masters thesis on modern European drama. Hers was the first cohort of bright children from the impoverished professional middle class, together with a very few from the poor and unemployed, invited into advanced education to become the teachers and administrators of a new workforce. In her case, as with many of her contemporaries, the education that should have produced a trainer of skilled and docile workers created an intellectual leader demanding social reform, and opportunities for others at least as good as her own.

Modern Drama in Europe (1920), her revised MA thesis, was hailed as “the most compact intellectual review of the realistic movement in Europe” (Harrison, 57). While the writer for *The Spectator* assumed the author to be male, the most enthusiastic of her admirers, Austin Harrison, writing for the *English Review*, was enthralled by the discovery that the book had been produced by a woman, a fact which he deemed to be “of an evolutionary cultural significance” (57). Harrison was delighted to discover “no bias of sex in her judgments, unless it be found in a (perhaps feminine) weakness for Oscar Wilde and the author of *Peter Pan*, whereby she seems to betray the motherly instinct” (59). Of her first efforts at fiction-writing, Jameson herself expressed considerable misgivings. She was later to comment of *The Pot Boils*

(1919) that “its singular badness proves that I was not a born novelist” (*Civil Journey*, 323). But her reviewers shared an appreciation for her “exuberance of feeling,” her energy and vitality, the sense of a mind “like a volcano in eruption” (Anon., *The Pitiful Wife*, 571; Anon., *The Clash*, 554). And indeed, Jameson, although haunted by what she later described as an irrational contempt and indifference for the form of the novel, continued to write compulsively (Briganti, 65). She needed the money—she had no independent income, and two successive husbands, and a child to support—but she also needed to write, or as she more self-deprecatingly expressed it, to make her mark on the world. Her production includes forty-five novels, short stories, novellas, and a play, as well as three collections of critical essays, numerous literary reviews, critical introductions, polemical interventions and translations, two autobiographies and two edited biographies (of her second husband, Guy Chapman, and of Morley Roberts).

Jameson has suffered from the tendency in feminist scholarship to focus solely on female writing for its representation of women's lives and to ignore their political work except in terms of their feminism, which, as Janet Montefiore has noted, “is only indirectly relevant to hunger marches and the Popular Front” (20). To Jameson it was self-evident that the cause of women was inextricable from that of social reform. In *The Pot Boils*, florists on strike are more important than literary lionesses, posturing in their salons, and winning the vote takes second place to releasing women from domestic drudgery, to fight for work and wages alongside men. There are self-possessed women's voices in that novel, especially among the young, but she draws best the monstrous psychological deformations that threatened the women of her generation, phallic mothers or martyrs, products of the ancillary roles assigned them. Yet despite the sarcasm she reserved for some of her fictional feminists, and the army of contemptible women she created, a closer look at her career reveals a continuous interest in the politics of gender. An emancipated woman herself, she was eloquent from the start about the conflict of domestic and marital obligations. As the heroine of *The Pot Boils*, Athenais, cries with characteristic vehemence: “You must see that you can't shove women back, no matter how you coax and abuse. You'll have to make your plans for a re-made society on the basis of feminine labour alongside masculine” (192).

In the 1920s, she was a fresh, exhilarating voice on the London scene, “the eminent author and feminist,” according to the by-line to “Nothing Wrong with Modern Woman,” her second article in the *Daily Mirror*, where in 1927 she helped prepare readers for the arrival of the flapper vote. In “Problem of Sex in Public Life,” printed alongside an advertisement for a Silk Stocking Competition, with a model in camisole and French knickers, she had discussed

robustly the problems of men and women working together. Two months later, in “Nothing Wrong with Modern Woman,” she put right those who criticised Modern Woman for lack of brain and shortness of skirt: “For an era [man] has had a free hand. He has made an unholy mess of things. Nothing can excuse him for his cities and his trousers.” Later, in an essay on “Man the Helpmate,” written for Mabel Ulrich, she would poke fun at a society in which for Mrs Brown “there was only one way to hold her husband in the manly pose—this was to lean on him. She leaned. He remained upright” (109).

The story of Jameson’s life in the 1920s and 1930s is one of tales urging to be told, characters pressing on her, the need to write relevantly, the awareness of writing too much and too quickly, and the dire financial conditions that forced her to accept a position as copywriter for an advertising agency, as editor of the *New Commonwealth* magazine and, eventually, as the London representative of Alfred A. Knopf. It was in this capacity that she met the historian Guy Chapman, “a person of naturally fine tastes” (*No Time Like the Present*, 142), whom she married in 1924. Despite Chapman’s war-induced exhaustion, his egoism and excessive fastidiousness, and his ineptness in financial matters, Jameson deferred to his judgment. Her discontent with her own writing was fuelled by admiration for his, and his distaste for what Nicholas, Chapman’s persona in her two trilogies, describes as anything overly emotional. She felt profound shame for the novels she had written so far. From Chapman she acquired the wish to “write coldly and shortly without emphasis or charm [and to] loathe and distrust charm in writing” (*No Time*, 38). The product of this new mode was *The Lovely Ship*, the first volume in the *Triumph of Time* trilogy, with which she began her long journey within the tradition of Arnold Bennett’s *Clayhanger Family* (1910–16) and John Galsworthy’s *Forsyte Saga* (1906–20). She adapted the form of the chronicle, stretching its boundaries and making of this most “impure” of genres—to which Woolf had objected in 1932—a supple medium to reflect the embeddedness of human character in history.

Set in the industrial North, *The Triumph of Time* depicts the high point of industrial capitalism and its replacement by finance capitalism through the life of a shipbuilding family led by matriarch Mary Hansyke Hervey. While in novels such as Phyllis Bentley’s *Inheritance* (1932), which also chronicles important industrial changes, the historical fabric remains rather thin, nothing more than a stage set, in Jameson’s trilogy the vicissitudes of the industry constitute an essential structural and thematic element, determining plot, narrative tempo, characterisation, and symbolic texture. Mary’s personal life cannot be disassociated from the events that transformed the world of shipbuilding, in a time heavy with change and the presage of new opportunities. Thus, for instance, in an implicit rejection of the mundane events that map a woman’s life, the time

of her husband's desertion is remembered as "the year when the Suez Canal, swinging open, delivered the trade of the East over to her steamships. Another three years, and the people who had jeered at steam were falling silent" (*The Lovely Ship*, 209). Ultimately the life of Mary Hervey, formidable as it is, draws its significance and uniqueness from its situation in a period of extraordinary transformation, reflecting that focus on the juncture of the personal and the political that will continue to characterise Jameson's work.

The pressures of making a living in London forced the Chapmans to take refuge in Whitby at the end of the 1920s. When they returned to London in the Autumn of 1932 for Guy to enroll at the London School of Economics, and Jameson to pursue her writing career, coming from Yorkshire had a certain voguishness—Winifred Holtby and J. B. Priestley were also starting to make their mark—and a curiosity value which substituted for any real metropolitan concern for the problems of the North. Jameson played up her background, in both fiction and memoirs. It justified the negative characteristics she liked to confess to: cruelty, violence, (repressed) sensuality, a sharp tongue, and a sense of guilt. On the other hand, self-styled "Yorkshire" determination and contempt for backsliders were qualities she regularly invoked in her politics.

Up to the early 1930s, Whitby, with its back to the moors, was her icon of Englishness, and the dalesmen the last representatives of deep-rooted individualism. But by the end of the decade, as events in Britain and Europe demonstrated how easily such local loyalties slip into parochialism, she identified the peasant mindset—a possessive individualism, fearful of outsiders—as the chief obstacle on the road to a new future. Novels such as *The World Ends* (written as William Lamb), *Cousin Honoré*, and *Cloudless May* grappled with the problem: how to marry the peasant's self-centred grasp on survival with that openness to others which in the end creates a better community. Whitby is not the end of the moors but their beginning: a harbour, a refuge that faces out to Europe and the wider world.

By the middle of the 1930s, the association of Jameson's name with steamy novels of passion (*The Pitiful Wife*, 1923) had been replaced by a reputation for innovatory novels of socialist commitment. The *Mirror in Darkness* trilogy (*Company Parade*, *Love in Winter* and *None Turn Back*), explored the tangles of politics and personal ambition through which Britain stumbled from 1918 to the General Strike. The trilogy, together with the two books that picked up its characters and themes after the war (*Before the Crossing*, *The Black Laurel*), explored the limits set to ordinary people's ability to take hold of their own lives. The world dances to the tune of William Gary, the man of inherited wealth, made impotent by a wartime shell. He pays the scientists who make poison gases. He pulls the strings of the army, business, and industry. His money breaks

unions and buys off working-class leaders. Under his rule, corrupt politicians, former radicals, survive and prosper. Yet somehow, values endure to the next generation. If individual weaknesses can break organisations, individuals still remain. Though she worked for it in her time, Jameson had few illusions about the Labour Party, or middle-class initiatives such as Fabianism, which turned the poor into the faceless object of managerial planning, “a wretched lay figure on which a thousand itching brains and fingers satisfy their need to interfere and rule” (*The Pot Boils*, 126). The empowerment of individuals, not the machine, was where she thought socialism should begin.

From the middle of the 1930s, she was increasingly preoccupied with the pacifist movement. In 1934, she was a founder-member of Dick Sheppard’s Peace Pledge Union. Like her feminism, Jameson’s pacifism was born of her personal situation, as well as a burning sense of justice. As the son of her first marriage grew up, she intensified her attacks on the makers of armaments and warmongering politicians. But her public commitment to pacifism co-existed with an increasing sense that fascism would not be stopped by anything less than armed resistance. She resigned from the Peace Pledge Union in March 1939, already committed to the war effort, and ready to acknowledge her share in the guilt and responsibility that comes with resistance—what Auden, in many things her mentor in the 1930s, in his great poem “Spain” (1937) had called the “necessary murder.” What the future needed was “a social order that does not require war as a solvent” (*No Time*, 237).

In October 1938, Jameson had become President of the London Centre of PEN. She led the association through the Second World War (Birkett, “Mobilising Commitment”). Together with Hermon Ould, the International Secretary of PEN, who was also Secretary of the London Centre, she put all her energy into helping writers escape from Europe. They accepted a Home Office brief to advise on the status of those Germans, mostly Jews, who had denounced and fled Hitler only to find themselves in British internment camps.

The Second World War made some issues clearer, and others easier to fudge. Jameson’s article “Fighting the Foes of Civilisation. The Writer’s Place in the Defence Line,” published on 7 October 1939 in the *Times Literary Supplement*, set out the writer’s duty to speak freely and disinterestedly in the service of truth. She attacked class oppression, authoritarianism, suppression of free speech, anti-semitism, and nationalism. Opening the famous PEN Conference of September 1941 on the writer’s role in post-war reconstruction, and addressing diplomats, politicians and writers from many countries, she was clear that this was a war for social justice, to end “the dole, the outrageous wastage of child life. The force that really opposes the Nazis is [...] the need, the only half-conscious impulse, of Western civilisation to renew itself” (“The Duty of the

Writer," 13–14). After the war, Jameson wrote novels to argue herself and the public out of despair about the possibility of radical social change. *The Green Man* was a well-received family saga, attached to a decaying manor where the values of Englishness (integrity, loyalty, freedom) were increasingly under siege, in a world almost completely dominated by the values of the market. *A Cup of Tea for Mr Thorgill* showed what the working classes had gained and lost since the 1920s.

In 1933, Jameson's had been one of the voices that identified a united Europe as a new space for social and cultural renewal. War-weakened Europe now faced another threat, squeezed between America and the USSR. In the 1930s, Jameson had worked alongside card-carrying Communists, and respected their commitment and single-mindedness. She wrote in 1934, in "The Defence of Freedom," that she was "honestly anxious that the Russians shall succeed in their experiment" (*Civil Journey*, 171). But she also indicated her distaste for a society that dictated what writers could and should write, and she attacked Russian writers who let that happen. Her opposition to Stalinism was unremitting. But increasingly, she wanted the United States kept at arms' length, and looked to European union to save Europe from being overwhelmed by the raw energy of American capital.

However, by the end of the war, her dislike of both Germany and General de Gaulle made it impossible for her to contemplate the kinds of European coalition being proposed. In October 1951, as the first steps were taken towards the Common Market, and discussions got under way on the use of West German troops in NATO, she was fearful that France would, as in 1918, let slip the chance of getting together with the fragile remnants of liberal democracy in Germany.

Through the 1950s and 1960s, her novels sold widely in the United Kingdom and the United States, and appeared in translation throughout Europe. The political challenges she confronted in her novels grew harder, but her attacks on the abuse of power remained uncompromising. *Last Score*, the novel of colonial politics published in 1961, turned the spotlight on the "necessities" of imperialist politics that were invoked to justify torture. Jameson was unequivocal in her condemnation. Nothing justified the use of torture, which destroys society's faith in its own values. The victim confronts the Governor who ordered his sufferings: "I believed there was something in me—in any man—that could survive anything, torture, anything." But now, he goes on, "I don't know whether it's true, I don't know whether what is human in us is stronger than what is inhuman and obscenely cruel" (*Last Score*, 194). In *Cloudless May*, the soldier rallying to the Free French, renewing the fight against fascism, could promise himself a son "with eyes like a hawk," who would

take forward his father's cause (513). In *Last Score*, the piercing vision of the Governor's son tears his father to shreds: "That you did it is irreparable. [...] it's despicable and disgusting" (226). With such unforgiving images, Jameson's writing highlighted the greatest failure of her generation's political struggles, and its greatest triumph: to have created a future that would show no mercy to the wrongs of the past.

Bouts of illness, suspected ulcers and a heart problem, and following her second husband round his various posts in Britain and the United States, withdrew her frequently from the metropolitan scene. From 1964 onwards, the couple were struggling with the cold in a Cambridge retreat that always felt far too small. But well into the 1970s, Jameson was still writing, and concerned with issues in whose resolution she could no longer play an active part. While Simone de Beauvoir wrote a memoir exploring the degeneration of her body in old age (*La Vieillesse*, 1970), in 1973 Jameson published a novel, *There Will Be a Short Interval*, considering what future was left for the humane values to which her life and work had been committed. The novel expressed remorse for the harsh and dangerous world her generation had bequeathed to posterity. But it also expressed its faith in the capacity of the young to start again, and create a future of their own. Later came the beginnings of the dementia that would mar her last years. Visitors kept coming—she was 91 when Czeslaw Milosz asked her to keep an eye out for his postgraduate son¹—and honours and marks of recognition still trickled in. She lived increasingly in her correspondence, maintaining networks of friendship stretching from Amherst to Warsaw.

Writing in Dialogue: Politics and Form

The essays in this collection, following the chronology of Jameson's career from the 1920s to the 1960s, review the different forms of her writing (journalism, fiction, autobiography), to show how effectively it engages with the contested issues of the period (socialism, fascism, pacifism, writers' responsibility in wartime, exile, communism, colonialism) and with key historical events (the First World War, the General Strike, the Munich Pact, the Second World War, the Cold War). They place her writing in relation to cognate work by other writers of the day, to underline its relevance, to recover forgotten networks of activism and collaboration, and to restore Jameson to the pivotal role she played in so many areas, before the literary generation of the 1960s, with their

¹ Letters from Czeslaw Milosz to Margaret Storm Jameson, 1982–83 (private collection of Christopher Storm-Clark).

very different projects and career alliances, came to claim for themselves that space of free expression for which her generation had fought.

Jameson's work is, in some senses, best understood in the context of that generation of women writers born in the 1890s, Rebecca West, Vera Brittain, Winifred Holtby, Naomi Mitchison, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and the slightly older Rose Macaulay. Their writing was marked by the legacy of the war and the consciousness of another conflict brewing. They shared socialist ideals and were all committed, in their various degrees, to an aesthetic in which texts were written to intervene directly in history. They contributed to publications such as *Time and Tide*, *The New Statesman*, *The News Chronicle*, *Woman Today*, the *Daily Worker*, *Left News*, *FACT*, and *Left Review*; and they gave their time and energy to organisations such as PEN, Writers Against Fascism and for Collective Security, the Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture, and the National Council for Civil Liberties.

As in the case of Townsend Warner, whose reputation was revived in the 1960s with the reissue of her first three novels, all written in the 1920s, without any mention of her political views, so the rediscovery of Jameson's fiction in the 1980s, while attentive to her woman-centred concerns, glossed over her broader political interests. In that area, as in the realm of aesthetic form, Jameson's writing must also be assessed in terms of its connections to the interests of the men of a previous generation, as well as her contemporaries. Orage, Wells, Forster, Eliot and Auden, Sartre and Malraux, were influences, models and sometimes, rivals.

The feminine-masculine allegiances of her work represent one productive contradiction among the many that emerge when reviewing the dialogues in which she engaged. Her long writing career was energised by a rich tension, at every level, between opposing impulses. Maroula Joannou's description of Mitchison as "a writer with all the instincts of a nomad whose fiction testifies to the values of rootedness" ("Naomi Mitchison at One Hundred," 293) could very well apply to Jameson who, a regular and often long-term visitor to a France whose culture and sensibility she much admired, nevertheless never ceased to declare her visceral connection to her native Yorkshire.

Politically, she maintained her independent vision. Though she was never a member of the Communist party like Townsend Warner, and was far more ambivalent toward Communism than Mitchison, she viewed radical political action as essential. Like Mitchison and Rose Macaulay, she wrote of the need for socialism while entertaining a conflicted relation with the political left. But in her case there was also a deliberate effort to eschew dogma. Tireless in reminding her fellow writers of their duty to participate in a responsible opposition against fascism, she was nevertheless determined to resist the

socialist call for the proletarian novel (though she admired the work of James Hanley, and helped foster his career). Claiming repeatedly that “novels are not serious, not worth a tear” (*The Novel in Contemporary Life*, 8), she spent her life struggling to wrench the novel away from the efforts of some modernists to disconnect it from life. Ever suspicious of the novelist’s tendency to self-analysis, she compulsively returned to her own life in fiction and memoirs. However, she never allowed her own self, in her various incarnations, to be centre stage. Even her autobiography, for all its relentless honesty and disarming candour, shows a determination to keep the reader at a distance, not out of coyness, but to keep attention fixed on the large canvas, on the forces that shape the individual, and on what individuals have in common.

Jameson was easily nudged out of a literary canon shaped by first-generation modernist insistence on the necessity of taking literature out of history and cutting it off from its political moorings. Far from attempting to transcend history, her novels are immersed in their time. Her characters refuse to be separated from the private, domestic world that shaped them and display a lucid awareness of the fact that this world was in turn shaped by its historical moment. While T. S. Eliot and T. E. Hulme insisted on the purity of art, which successfully disconnected modernism from modernity, Jameson boldly stated that “the so-called pure novelist never could express an age and our age last of all. Life, at the level on which the great novelist must approach it, is full of impurities” (*The Writer’s Situation*, 61).

The definition of formal experimentation as the disjunction of language has caused critics to ignore the range of formal innovations in Jameson’s novels. Thus, though attempting to reclaim Jameson as a modernist, and praising her work for its “aesthetic wholeness,” which “interconnects intellect and emotion, and prizes social inclusiveness,” Bonnie Wilde Cunningham argues that Jameson “rejects stylistic experimentation” (618). Only recently have commentators begun to notice that Jameson’s social concerns, rather than preventing her from engaging in stylistic experimentation, fostered subtle formal innovations. Jennifer Birkett has pointed to how Jameson’s familiarity with French culture, in particular with Proust and Stendhal, shaped her style (“Beginning Again,” 6). Not only in the novels set in France that she wrote in the late 1930s and 1940s, but as early as in *The Pot Boils*, Jameson’s stylistic experiments in the use of historical memory to “reinvent a common culture” produced “a politicised version of the Proustian project” (“Beginning Again,” 10). The subtleties of the distinctive form of stylised realism that she gradually evolved expose the parochial aspect of orthodox definitions of modernist experimentation.

The burgeoning interest in modernity is just beginning to provide us with ways to read Jameson’s work. As the unexamined identification of modernity

with modernism begins to break down, the division between High Modernism and other forms of modernity appears to be no longer tenable. At the same time, studies which have advocated a historical understanding of English fiction and invited readers to resist the “formalist conception of realism” that “‘fixes’ both social reality and the literary work,” help us approach a writer who, like Compton-Burnett and Henry Green, experimented with technique and form while resisting the subjectivism to which much modernist literature succumbed (Pykett, 14).

As early as 1922, reviewing *The Clash*, Rebecca West begrudgingly acknowledged Jameson's “curious emotional clairvoyance which would make her novels worth reading” (213). Indeed, in an age like ours in which “collateral damage” stands for killed human beings, Jameson must seem nothing less than prophetic in her claim that the political preference for phrases such as “training camps” over “concentration camps” is not a harmless linguistic choice. It indicates a murderous divorce of words from reality (see for example “Between the Wars” and *In the Second Year*). But Jameson's clairvoyance, far from ensuring her place in the literary canon, only enabled her to foresee her own dismissal and was, indeed, to a great extent responsible for it. Having made her novels first a forum for the analysis of the way in which the Treaty of Versailles had spawned another war, then for the dissection of the motivations of fascism, and finally, for the threat of nuclear annihilation, she was accused of suffering from war obsession. One hundred and sixty wars later, as the twenty-first century has again plunged into war, the accusation sounds not only hollow but irresponsible. As we try to define the modernity of the twentieth century, we cannot ignore the linking of will to violence and technological expertise that made it the bloodiest in the history of the world. Jameson's contribution to exposing the deadly combination represents a participation in “modern literature's sometimes heroic, often doomed, and always troubled attempts to speak the unspeakabilities of its age” (Norris, 509) that can no longer be ignored.

The Present Collection

A recent focus on Jameson's explicitly political writing (for example, Lassner, Vance, Labon), welcome in itself, has helped obscure the range of her formal innovations, and implicitly perpetuated a view of the 1930s centered on the dichotomy “between aesthetics and politics [...] textuality and content” (Williams and Matthews, 1). The essays presented in this volume challenge that divide. They propose a re-assessment of Jameson's overall significance in the

writerly landscape of her time as a stylist, an activist in politics and cultural politics, an analyst of feeling, and a chronicler of public life.

Through a discussion of Jameson's first two novels, Deborah Gerrard's account of the young Storm Jameson's negotiations with the early modernisms promoted by Alfred Orage's *The New Age* and Dora Marsden's *The Freewoman* enriches our understanding of modernism as it debunks the self-constructed myth of Jameson's "middle-brow-ness." Gerrard argues that Jameson's middle-brow stance was a deliberate political and aesthetic choice that accompanied the growing disillusionment with the ideology of her formative years in the intellectual climate of the University of Leeds. Catherine Clay's study of Jameson's journalism, in the period 1913–33, complicates the modernist paradigm by highlighting its vexed but productive relationship to popular culture and market forces. By comparing Jameson's journalistic writing to that of other important women of her generation, Clay demonstrates how Jameson's self-positioning as a writer reproduced the emerging definitions of a modernism from which she felt excluded, at the same time as she resisted the distinction between "literature" and "journalism" that modernism endorsed. Sharon Ouditt's study, "Finding Words for War: Men, Women and World War I in the Fiction of Storm Jameson," addresses Jameson's early novels by comparing them to the works of other women writers, from Rose Macaulay to May Wedderburn Cannan, who, excluded by their gender from "an area sacred to masculine experience," found themselves struggling with the problem of representing war from the perspective of the non-combatant.

In "Mirroring the Darkness: Storm Jameson and the Collective Novel," Chiara Briganti takes issue with Jameson's censure of what she considered her ill-fated attempt to put the novel to the service of a political vision, and argues that rather than hindering formal experimentation, Jameson's political commitment fuelled it. Briganti's essay examines Jameson's 1930s trilogy in conversation with other writers, in France and in Britain, who shunned the subjectivism of High Modernism and found in the synoptic novel an apt medium to translate political commitment into a compelling aesthetic vision.

Nattie Golubov, focusing on *In the Second Year*, reads Jameson's dystopia of 1936 in the context of the political and ideological debates that took place within the British Labour Movement between the wars. Through a comparison with the work of Naomi Mitchison, she examines how Jameson incorporated political ideas into her text not only as issues to be debated but also as factors that shape narrative form. In "Voices and Values: Storm Jameson's *Europe to Let* and the Munich Pact," Kate McLoughlin examines another novel that both dramatises the politico-linguistic confrontation and participates

in it, this time on an international level. McLoughlin's analysis tunes in to Nazi demagoguery, Czech restraint, British understatement and American intervention-by-message, and argues that "Munich" was a battle of politico-stylistics, fought over the definition of civilised values.

Jennifer Birkett discusses Jameson's fictions written in the fifteen years after the Second World War, which give a brutally honest representation of the exhaustion of a generation and class finally confronting the irrelevance of its liberal ideals to the inconceivable society its children are building. The essay traces also her rejection of contemporary English writing, and her interest in and resistance to the varied forms of new writing coming from France. The collection ends with Maroula Joannou's discussion of the work for which nowadays Jameson is best known, her great autobiography, *Journey from the North*, written and published in the 1960s and re-published by Virago in the 1980s. Focusing on the account the book gives of the 1930s, and setting Jameson's work in dialogue with other autobiographical accounts of that period by her friend Naomi Mitchison, and a fellow-activist from a younger generation, Stephen Spender, Joannou brings out the distinctive quality of a text where the emphasis on the significance of writing itself, as the performance of selfhood, empowers a radical call for political change.

The volume closes with the voice of Jameson herself, speaking directly to contemporaries and friends of the great questions and personalities of the day, and alongside them, the private matters, of great or small concern, that together form the stuff of a life lived to the full, for itself and for others. Jameson's letters to Hilary Newitt Brown and Harrison Brown, selected and edited by Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei, are a rare chance to listen in to conversations long fallen into silence, but still vigorous and lively, full of fresh insights into their own moment, and of frightening relevance to our own. The reader who recognises how closely the voice that speaks in those letters resembles the familiar voice of published texts, has stumbled on one of the greatest strengths of Jameson's textual production. Bonamy Dobrée, reviewing her first autobiography, *No Time Like the Present*, with its sudden plunge into anti-war polemic, described how the directness of the address demanded from the reader an active response to the ideas that were expressed:

For that is one of the qualities of this book, the sense she gets into it that what she talks about affects you profoundly; you have got to react, you have got to sit up and ask, "And what am I doing?" ("Views and Reviews," 90)

And he praised the power that came from "the impression of a person speaking to us in a living voice, the voice natural to a person of her knowledge and

insight; it is as well the voice of her own generation, the generation that grew up just in time to be given the war by its proud parents” (91). This is the voice that sounds through the present collection, out of a century of conversations, to begin yet one more lively, affecting and provoking dialogue with the contemporary world.

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CHAPTER 1

“THE TEMPESTUOUS MORNING ENERGY OF A NEW ART”: SOCIALISM, MODERNISM, AND THE YOUNG STORM JAMESON

Deborah Gerrard

Writing her autobiography, *Journey from the North*, in the late 1960s, when “a highly selected version of the modern” had come to stand “for the whole of modernity” (Williams, 33, cit. Ardis, 4), Storm Jameson traced out a myth of origin of her own “middle-brow-ness,” attempting to explain to herself as much as to anyone her bewildering descent into literary “invisibility” (*JN I*, 142). According to this myth, as an ignorant young outsider in 1920—a year after Virginia Woolf, in “Modern Novels,” fired her first salvo against literary Edwardianism—Jameson obtained an entrée into a literary coterie that, unbeknown to her, was already creatively obsolete. This coterie was frequented by Arnold Bennett and Walter de la Mare, but not by D. H. Lawrence or T. S. Eliot, and thus the currents of contemporary modernism had passed her by (*JN I*, 160).

Yet Jameson’s first two novels, *The Pot Boils* (1919) and *The Happy Highways* (1920), tell a very different story. In them, we find a far from naïve young author creating her own brand of cultural-criticism-as-fiction as she rewrites some of the most radical cultural ideas of the period from the perspective of the “other,” in her case that of a socialist woman writer. These novels reveal the sophistication of the young Jameson’s understanding of certain strands within early modernism, namely those of Alfred Orage’s *New Age* and Dora Marsden’s *New Freewoman* and *Egoist*, and the extent to which she shared both their critique of liberalism’s “rhetoric of reason” and their interest in the fluid, non-rational nature of experience; and they show where and why she parted company from them (Sherry, 25). Among the pleasures their rediscovery offers is a fascinating insight into those “*other* aesthetic and cultural agendas” that have been erased from the history of modernism (Ardis, 7). Above all, they show Jameson’s middle-brow-ness to be neither

ignorant nor facile but a highly conscious political choice within which traces of modernism remained.

This chapter explores Jameson's evolving fictional dialogue with the modernisms of the *New Age*, the *New Freewoman* and the *Egoist* in her first two novels, as she begins to develop her own aesthetic. Since Jameson is first and foremost a socially committed writer, her early interest in a range of romantic-modernist aesthetic theories and practices is driven by their association with a particular variety of mystical socialism to which she herself subscribed as a student and which was an important influence on all three journals. Jameson's subsequent critique of those aesthetic theories and practices is best understood, therefore, in the light of her growing disillusionment with the political ideology of her youth, as its idealism—in both a general and a philosophical sense—gave way to a more sceptical, pragmatic and materialist approach. Jameson's equal disillusionment with the various responses of the *New Age*, the *New Freewoman* and the *Egoist* to the "Woman Question" is less central to the issue of modernism, and so is only dealt with here in passing.

The variety of mystical socialism adopted by the young Jameson emerged out of the Leeds Arts Club, "one of the most interesting sites of radical thought and experimental art outside of London" (Steele, 1). Established by Alfred Orage and Holbrook Jackson in 1903, the Club was the haunt of first-generation-educated meritocrats, the beneficiaries of the late-Victorian extension of state education. The Club's socialism was a fragile and indeed paradoxical marriage of convenience between the Club's two founding influences, Edward Carpenter and Friedrich Nietzsche, reconciling the talented meritocrat's personal desire for self-realisation with an equally urgent collective need for social transformation. In reality there were crucial differences between, on the one hand, Nietzsche's pessimistic Darwinism, his emphasis on Will, and his elitism and, on the other, Carpenter's mystical evolutionary optimism, his anarchistic emphasis on the benevolent workings of natural Desire and his assumption that transcendence would be communal and socialistic. However, these differences were played down by the shared vitalism of these two "Utopian visionaries," the Life Force being an ambiguous concept that lent itself to interpretation in more or less spiritual and egalitarian terms (Bridgwater, 206). This ambiguity allowed the Club to introduce a Nietzschean modification into Carpenter's mystical evolutionary socialism. Carpenter believed that ordinary men and women had only to be in touch with their unconscious selves to break through the rigid structures of contemporary ideology and gain access to the ideal, organic society that lay dormant within the human mind. The Club's mystical Nietzschean-socialism, on the other hand, looked to an avant-garde