

Preface

ANNA BROWNE JAMESON (1794–1860) was a popular writer of the nineteenth century, widely read in England and America for her criticisms of literature and art and for her travel biographies. Her concern for the “Position of Women” ensures a place for her in the roster of feminist propagandists, as her eager friendships with Victorian celebrities guarantee a certain degree of curiosity about her own life and character. For Canadian readers her interest is enhanced by her *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada*, a vivid report of her travels and one of the best existing accounts of Upper Canada in the nineteenth century.

In his reminiscences of literary figures, Henry Crabb Robinson said of her: “She makes books for the great publishers, and having taste and a knowledge of the market is able to edit and be well paid for editing works of taste or commenting on pictures, etc.”¹ The statement is true, but its baldness is misleading: years of apprenticeship in the building of her reputation preceded the eminence of Mrs. Jameson’s later years and her choice of an area of concentration. Her writing career began in 1826 with *Diary of an Ennuyée* and was consolidated by the publication of *Characteristics of Women* in 1832. This work, a consideration of Shakespeare’s heroines, added a considerable Continental reputation to her growing prestige in England and America; by the time she came to Canada in 1836 she was a practised and a confident professional woman of letters. For the last twenty years of her life it is not an exaggeration to say that she could have written about a very wide choice of subjects and had been read by a devoted public on two continents. A combination of family background, training and taste and, above all, the availability of a market for such work in the England of the forties and fifties determined her choice

of art criticism as the major field of the last two decades of her writing. In *Consort of Taste*, a modern assessment of influential figures in nineteenth-century art criticism, John Steegman adds a solid testimonial to her importance: "She was rather a compiler than a thinker, perhaps; but she was a woman of wide experience and immense industry in her field, whose labours still bear fruit. . . . [A] most important link between old and modern criticism."²

There are three major sources for biographical material, all of them now out of print: *Memoirs of the Life of Anna Jameson*, written by her niece, Gerardine Macpherson, and published in 1878; *Anna Jameson: Letters and Friendships*, edited by Mrs. Steuart Erskine and published in 1915; and *Letters of Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe*, edited by Professor G. H. Needler, published in 1939.

The first of these works was written by Mrs. Macpherson as a family memorial to her aunt, with the secondary motive of defending her memory from certain unflattering remarks made by Harriet Martineau in that astonishing Victorian phenomenon, her *Autobiography*: "Lady Morgan and Lady Davy and Mrs. Austin and Mrs. Jameson may make women blush and men smile and be insolent; and their gross and palpable vanities may help to lower the position and discredit the pursuits of other women. . . ."³ Understandably, Mrs. Macpherson's account is coloured by family pride in Mrs. Jameson as a public figure. It is also marked by her own guilty feelings for having chosen marriage in preference to the role for which she had been trained, that of her aunt's research assistant and engraver for the art works always in progress between 1845 and 1860.

Mrs. Erskine's book adds a mass of material to Mrs. Macpherson's *Memoirs*. It maintains the respectful view taken by Mrs. Macpherson and its image of Anna Jameson, famous authoress, correspondent with the great and the near-great, adds interest and breadth to the earlier account. In no way, however, does it contribute a new dimension of depth to the picture of Anna Jameson, woman and writer.

Professor Needler's collection of letters from the Goethe Archives at Weimar is the latest published and a better source of revealing biographical data. Although his Introduction follows the Macpherson-Erskine pattern of unstinted admiration for Mrs. Jameson, the letters themselves leave an impression of her personality which disturbs one with its pathetic, possessive emotionalism and which underlines one's conviction that to estimate the achievement of a lifetime by biographical detail alone is less than justice and less than truth.

Besides these sources, which I have freely used to enlighten the

process of her development, I have worked with a multitude of printed references and manuscript letters. A letter to Mr. Malcolm Elwin on the publication of his *Lord Byron's Wife* in 1963, led me to the Lovelace-Byron papers and two hundred letters to and from Lady Byron and Anna Jameson. A Canada Council grant enabled me to go to England where Mr. Elwin's hospitality was unforgettable and his advice of incalculable benefit; the letters, which Lord Lytton, their owner has permitted me to use, were of absorbing interest and great value to the further understanding of my subject.

In answer to a letter sent out to many American and British libraries and to the Goethe Archives in Weimar, I was informed of the existence and the whereabouts of some six hundred letters to and from Anna Jameson. Most of these, indeed all that have any important bearing on her life and writings, I have seen, thanks to the notable co-operation of many reference librarians in both public and university libraries. In particular I am indebted to Miss Edith Firth of the Baldwin Room, Toronto Public Library, for leading me to unpublished letters concerning Robert Jameson; to Professor Heinz Bluhm, Leavenworth Professor of German Language and Literature, Yale University, for his interest and advice and for his staff's provision of letters from Yale's Goethe collection; to Dr. Hahn, of the Goethe and Schiller Archives in Weimar; to Miss Hannah French and Mrs. Hazel Godfrey of the Wellesley College Library for making quickly available to me the Browning-Jameson letters and to Sir John Murray for his permission to quote from them; to Mr. George Johnson of the Osgoode Hall Library, Toronto, for his help in unearthing records of Robert Jameson's tenure as Upper Canada's Vice-Chancellor; to Miss Sybille Pantazzi of the Art Gallery of Toronto; and to Mr. Alfred Bennett, Secretary of the Law Society of Upper Canada. Important letters were made available to me by the staff of the Houghton Library, Harvard; the Armstrong-Browning Library of Baylor University; the Detroit Public Library; the libraries of Duke, Cornell and Columbia and of the universities of Texas, Illinois and Rochester. In addition the librarians of a host of other institutions answered my queries with far more interest and assistance than I could reasonably have expected.

The editorial assistance of Miss Frances Halpenny and Miss Diane Dilworth, of the University of Toronto Press, has been invaluable to me; Mrs. M. Moëns, Mrs. F. Knight, Miss V. Fairbairns, Miss S. Bracken, Ian Cameron and Stephen Thomas have assisted with both patience and industry. This work has been published with the help of a grant from the Humanities Research Council of Canada using

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Through all the time that the work was in progress, the late Professors A. S. P. Woodhouse and G. H. Needler of the University of Toronto, were unfailingly encouraging. To them, and to Professor Northrop Frye, who first agreed with me that the life of Anna Jameson required twentieth-century investigation, I owe my greatest debt of gratitude.

In presenting Mrs. Jameson's life, I have made use of letters wherever possible, allowing them to speak with their own authenticity for the events and the people who were important to her. Critically, I have examined each of her works, from *The Diary of an Ennuyée* to the final two volumes of her *Sacred and Legendary Art* series, published posthumously in 1862. I have considered the influences having a bearing on its writing, the public for which it was designed, and, most important, its reception by the nineteenth-century literary world as demonstrated by contemporary periodical reviews. Anna Jameson's rise in prestige can be charted from the review of *The Diary* by the relatively minor *Monthly Review*, to the rough but valuable experience of "Christopher North's" criticism in *Blackwood's* beginning in 1829 and to her first notice in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1834. Finally she was accepted and given consideration by all three of the "Royal Reviews," the *Quarterly*, the *Edinburgh* and the *Westminster*, a distinction which began in the forties after the publication of *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada*. *Sacred and Legendary Art*, whose volumes were the major preoccupation of the last twelve years of her life, was received with enthusiasm on two continents and Anna Jameson, secure in her reputation, could and did speak with increased temerity and influence beyond the range of art criticism into the vexed "Rights of Women" field, always one of her subsidiary concerns.

The process of growth in literary reputation along with the cumulative interaction of the people, events and works which produced it has been an absorbing study. No final and completely authoritative unravelling of all the complexities of pattern is possible to any biographer; some degree of illumination of an interesting life and of a considerable achievement has, perhaps, been established.

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