

Margaret Storm Jameson (1891-1986)

Maroula Joannou, January 2024.

Storm Jameson, a prolific, highly acclaimed, if now largely forgotten, early twentieth-century woman writer, who always professed that she wrote too much for her own good, spent the last twenty-two years of her life at 11 Larchfield, an unprepossessing block of flats on the Gough Way estate in Newnham. Before she decided to establish her first permanent home as an adult in Cambridge, a choice of place that owed much to her husband Guy Chapman, her passion for exploration and adventure had taken her to some of the most remote and beautiful places in Europe and the world.

Who, then, was this remarkable woman? Margaret Ethel Storm Jameson was born into a prosperous family of shipbuilders and master mariners in Whitby, Yorkshire from whom she acquired her abiding love of travel and the sea. She deeply resented how she was treated at home because she was a girl and became a lifelong feminist, joining the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and marching on the Great Pilgrimage for votes for women in 1913. Jameson obtained a scholarship to the University of Leeds where she was the first woman to obtain a first-class degree in English Language and Literature in 1912. She married another student, Charles Douglas Clarke, and gave birth to their son, William ('Bill') in 1914, going on to work as a postgraduate researcher at King's College London and to publish her revised MA dissertation on Modern Drama in Europe in 1920.



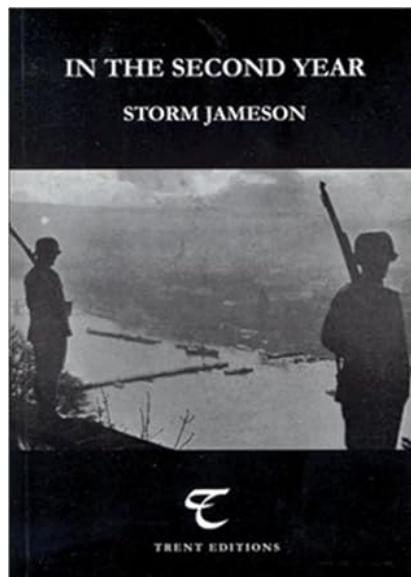
Storm Jameson in 1923 reproduced in *Journey from the North*, vol.1, Virago, 1984.

Jameson's first marriage was troubled and short-lived: her son was left with a kindly woman near Whitby who was paid to look after him while Storm worked in London in the Carlton advertising agency to support her family. She divorced Clarke and married the historian and novelist, Guy Chapman in 1926. She was extremely happy in her second marriage and the pair embarked on a peripatetic life in which both took delight in travel, research and writing. They traipsed across much of continental Europe which Storm loved and isolated parts of the world, living in makeshift lodgings, visiting romantic ruins, art galleries, medieval cities and rough mountain tracks. Jameson became habituated to her role of principal breadwinner in the marriage. She gained a reputation as a serious critical commentator and journalist through reviews and articles published in *The New Clarion*, *The New Commonwealth*, *The New Age*, *The New Statesman*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Daily Mirror*, *Time and Tide* and *Left Review*.

Both Chapman and Jameson were deeply affected by their personal losses in the First World War: Storm had lost her beloved brother, Harold in the Royal Flying Corps; and Guy, awarded the Military Cross for gallantry in Belgium and France, was devastated by the loss of his comrades in action. Like her friend, Vera Brittain, Jameson became a pacifist in the 1920s and a signatory of the Peace Pledge Union founded by Dick Sheppard in the mid-1930s. In 1937 with the publication of 'New Documents' and 'The Novel in Contemporary Writing' Jameson expounded her own theories about modern literature and the role of the writer as the chronicler of their time in a way that was analogous to the work of the serious documentary film-makers she admired.

Jameson reluctantly abandoned her pacifism at the start of the Second World War. From 1938 she was President of the English branch of PEN (Poets, Essayists and Novelists), working tirelessly with International Secretary, Hermon Ould, Rebecca West, and others to advise the Home Office on entry permits for European artists, Writers and intellectuals seeking to escape internment in Fascist-occupied Poland and Czechoslovakia.¹

¹ Jameson is unfailingly modest and self-effacing about her own achievements in helping refugees to escape to safety during her time as President of English PEN. See Storm Jameson, *Journey from the North*, 2 vols (London: Collins and Harvill, 1969-70), vol.1, p.89 and Maroula Joannou, 'Storm Jameson's *Journey from the North* as Political Autobiography', in Jennifer Birkett and Chiara Briganti (eds), *Margaret Storm Jameson, Writing in Dialogue* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007), pp.147-164.

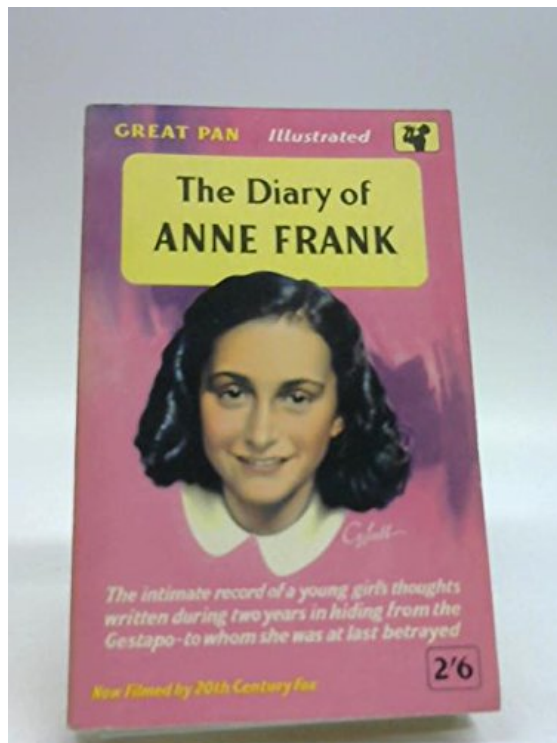


Front cover, Storm Jameson, *In the Second Year*, 1936, reissued Trent Editions, 2004, photograph taken by Jameson.

Among her many works of fiction, Jameson published two notable dystopian works between the wars. *In the Second Year* (1936) anticipates and warns against a British Fascist regime based on the purge of Hitler's political opponents, along the lines suggested by Hitler's Night of the long Knives in 1934. In *Then We Shall Hear Singing: a Fantasy in C Major* (1942) an unnamed German regime resorts to medical experiments to induce amnesia in the peoples of an unnamed country resembling Czechoslovakia which they have occupied.

A committed socialist who had been engaged in many of the struggles against hunger and unemployment and active in the 'Popular Front' against Fascism in the 1930s, Jameson had witnessed at first-hand the brutality of the supporters of Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists at a rally in the Olympia Hall in London in 1934. After the Second World War she grew increasingly despondent about the Iron Curtain, and the proliferation of armaments, dictatorial regimes and attacks on freedom of speech and thought.² She was, however, heartened by the revival of the peace movement in the 1950s and persuaded to join the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) by the Cambridge-based archaeologist, Jacquetta Hawkes. A commission very close to her heart was the invitation to write the 'Foreward' to the first paperback edition of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in 1961.

² See also Joanna Labon, 'Come in from the Cold War': Rebecca West and Storm Jameson in 1930s Europe', in Maroula Joannou (ed.), *British Women Writers of the 1930: gender, politics and history* r. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; 1999), pp.205-16.

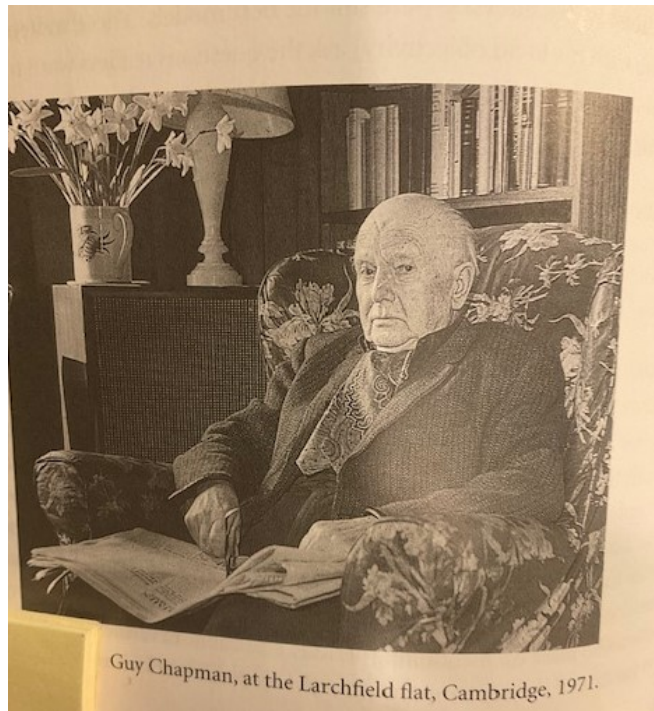


Portrait of Hermon Ould (1920), artist unknown, copyright Pen International Archive

Jameson lived a semi-nomadic existence for much of her adult life preferring hotel rooms to all other forms of housing due to her intense dislike of the responsibilities of settled domestic life. She finally moved into Larchfield on the Gough Way Estate on April 16, 1964, but there were long delays while she and Chapman waited for essential building work on their flat to be completed. The landowners, Corpus Christi College, had signed an agreement with the council in 1961 making some 13 acres of land available for the construction of

what was to become the largest private residential development in west Cambridge at the time.³

The rooms in the flat on the top floor of a four-storey building without a lift were small and ‘sadly vulnerable to the Cambridge damp.’⁴ Chapman enjoyed the proximity of the flat to the Cambridge University Library, Churchill College and Peterhouse College where he had dining rights and academic friends.



Reproduced in Jennifer Birkett, *Margaret Storm Jameson: A Life*, 2009.

A photograph taken in their Larchfield flat in 1971 depicts comfortable, even elegant furnishings, with Guy ensconced in a deep, well-upholstered arm chair, book-lined shelves and a vase of fresh flowers.⁵ In contrast, Jameson ‘dreaded being sucked into the university way of life, firmly keeping their phone number (51540) off her letterhead ‘to discourage dons’ wives who ask me to coffee in

³ See Philomena Guillebaud, ‘Changes in the Landscape of West Cambridge’, Part 5, 1945-2000, pp.1-16, p.12, in *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, CV111, pp.127-142.

⁴ Elizabeth Maslen, *Life in the Writings of Storm Jameson* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014), p.434.

⁵ Photograph of Guy Chapman reproduced in Jennifer Birkett, *Margaret Storm Jameson: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2009, plate on p.334.

the morning.’⁶ When Chapman became terminally ill ‘she refused to let him go into hospital and acted as a nurse most of the day and night, and ward maid during the very few hours when a real nurse takes over’ and dreamed of acquiring a small ground-floor flat nearer the shops so that Guy could get out and sit outside.⁷

Jameson carried on living in Larchfield after Chapman’s death in 1972 despite its many inconveniences, watching approvingly as the appearance of the estate improved with mature trees and shrubs, and as it attracted more families with young children. Her arthritis grew progressively worse and concerned friends were aware that she was failing to look after herself or eat properly.

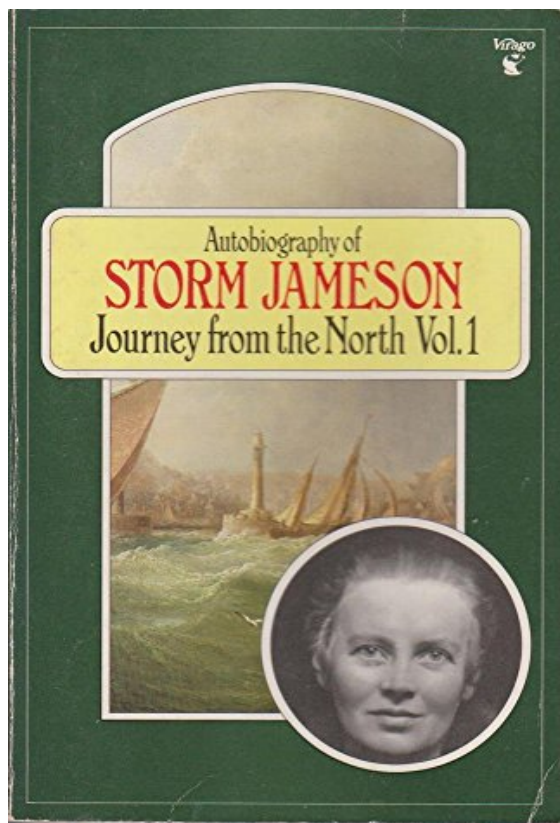
Jameson was already a ‘grand-dame of English Letters’ when she moved into Larchfield at the age of seventy-three. But in contrast to many of her literary contemporaries who had had little problem in adapting their postwar style, publications and outlook on life to the politics of the Cold War, her writings, which were unmistakably imbued with the values of the democratic left in the 1920s and 1930s, struck many modern readers as passé and outmoded. Interest was aroused by the publication of two volumes of her well-reviewed literary autobiography, *Journey from the North* by the Collins and Harvill Press in 1969-70.



Front Cover, *Women Against Men*, Virago, 1982, detail from Edward Hopper, ‘Tables for Ladies.’

⁶ Elizabeth Maslen, *Life*, p.435

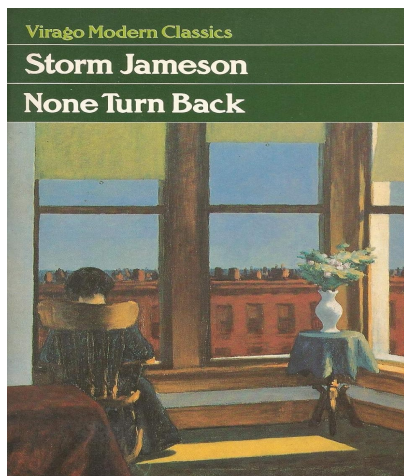
⁷ *Ibid.*, p.460.



Front cover, *Journey from the North*, vol.1, reissued 1984, detail from Henry Redmore, 'Entering Whitby'.

A dramatic reversal of Jameson's fortunes occurred when her *Mirror in Darkness* Trilogy, *Company Parade* (1934), *Love in Winter* (1935) and *None Turn Back* (1936), the latter set at the time of the General Strike in 1926, were reissued by the feminist publishing house, Virago, in 1982 and 1984. This trilogy brought the life choices of her doughty, fiercely independent Yorkshire protagonist Mary Hervey Russell and her friendship circle, to the attention of a younger readership of second-wave feminists, to whom her work was new and refreshing. The Virago collection of Jameson's subtle shorter fictions *Women Against Men* (1982) was edited and introduced by her good friend, Elaine Feinstein, who lived near her in Cambridge. This showed women to be their worst enemies when emotionally entangled with men and brought together three novellas 'The Delicate Monster' (1937), 'The Single Heart' (1932) and 'A Day Off' (1932) for the first time under one cover. Jameson enjoyed another huge

publishing success when Virago re-issued the two volumes of *Journey from the North* in 1984.⁸



Front cover Storm Jameson, *None Turn Back*, reissued Virago, 1984, detail
From Edward Hopper, 'Room in Brooklyn'.

As the critic Janet Montefiore has pointed out, the type of autobiographical novel or novella produced by Jameson between the wars 'was written to articulate the experience, not merely of the woman who writes it, but of a whole generation', entailing an 'interweaving of personal and collective memory' which 'defines the writer both as a woman and as a universal subject.'⁹ Hers was the generation of women and men whose lives were indelibly marked by the traumas of the First World War, by the inter-war years scarred by the spectres of hunger, unemployment and Fascism, and by the problems of the Cold War and the post war settlement.

In 'A Day Off', Jameson gives a voice to an unnamed middle-aged working-class woman who takes a day off work to wonder around Richmond – echoes of Virginia Woolf and of Mrs Dalloway here – to reflect upon her life as mill girl in the north, as a domestic servant, shop worker and mistress of a salesman who discards her when her beauty fades leaving her, like one of Jean Rhys's vulnerable and sensual urban protagonists, with no future prospects or means of economic support. 'A Delicate Monster' contains incidents which closely mirror

⁸ Maroula Joannou, 'Storm Jameson', in Janet Todd (ed.), *British Women Writers* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp.353-4.

⁹ Janet Montefiore, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s: The Dangerous Flood of History* (London: Routledge), 1996), p.34.

those described in Jameson's discursive and autobiographical writings. The novella is focalised through Fanny, an aspirant middle-class writer who makes the journey from the north of England to pursue a career as a serious writer of literary fiction alongside her childhood friend, Victoria, the daughter of her dominating mother's dressmaker, whose sensational novels are far more popular than her own. 'The Delicate Monster' involved Jameson in a short altercation with the best-selling novelist, Ethel Mannin who felt that the manipulative Victoria bore too strong a resemblance to herself.

Jameson was offered but turned down the CBE in 1979. Her son, Bill Storm Clarke, whom she had always supported emotionally and from her earnings as a writer died in 1983, by which time she had become reclusive and was displaying unmistakeable signs of dementia. Storm Jameson was discharged from a geriatric ward in Addenbrookes Hospital and died shortly afterwards in the Bethany Paxton Hall near St Neots on September 30th 1986 at the age of ninety-five, with some forty-eight published works of fiction to her credit.