

## Storm Jameson's *No Time Like the Present:* *The Expatriate in patria.*

Nattie Golubov  
Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

"I never felt separated from an exile by more than a thin membrane"

—Storm Jameson, *Journey from the North*

In 1930s England, the idea that the decade's definitive and general crisis of social, political, and artistic activity would end in chaos and catastrophe predominated: Stephen Spender commented on the crisis of liberalism and the "middle-class *crise de conscience*" ("Background" 24) and Christopher Caudwell warned of the crisis of capitalism; for F.R. Leavis "culture is at a crisis" (*Mass* 5), and Ralph Fox identified a crisis of the novel (*Novel* 20). This generation positioned itself at the end of one era and the beginning of another: the death of capitalism was perceived to be imminent (though constantly, frustratingly deferred) and the birth of a truly democratic society (or a dictatorship, it could go either way) would inevitably follow if and when the course of history was directed "intelligently" (Jameson, "Duty" 13). The possibility of bringing forth a "new reality" from the ashes of the old gained currency as the threat of another war increased (Jameson, "Novel" 304), and writers felt, as Fox stated, that they exercised "some influence on society, and must intervene as the custodians of the world's consciousness on the ~~side~~ side of humanity" (*Novel* 7). Suddenly, the individual became empowered: "This was one of those intervals in history in which events make the individual feel that he counts" (Spender, "Background" 25). Storm Jameson responded to this sense of crisis by placing the writer center-stage as a role model, a moral guide and bearer of the conscience of society. To carry out these roles adequately, the intellectual had to be both a member of society and a critical observer, a voluntary exile from his/her community and its

accepted versions of reality, though deeply committed to the fate of this community. In what follows we shall see who this ex-centric persona is as described in Jameson's first autobiography, *No Time Like the Present* (1933).

In her 1940 essay "The Leaning Tower," Virginia Woolf notes that "no other ten years can have produced so much autobiography as the ten years between 1930 and 1940" (174). Like their predecessors T. S. Eliot, Lytton Strachey, Aldous Huxley, and E. M. Forster, dwellers in an ivory tower, the writing of Spender, Cecil Day Lewis, W. H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, and Louise MacNeice is possible only because of their privileged middle-class upbringing and expensive education, mainstays of the edifice of "bourgeois society" (172). However, unlike Woolf's male contemporaries, who inhabited a stable tower in which they could calmly discuss "aesthetic emotions and personal relations" (169), the younger poets inhabited a leaning tower, under siege from a world changing so dramatically that they could write about nothing except themselves: "When everything is rocking round one, the only person who remains comparatively stable is oneself." Woolf dwells on the fact that these writers, the beneficiaries of the system against which they angrily protested, became "great egotists" (174) because of the uncertain circumstances which "stung [them] into consciousness -into self-consciousness, into class-consciousness, into the consciousness of things changing, of things falling, of death perhaps about to come." Woolf concludes that the younger generation longed "to be whole; to be human" (173), to be like everyone else, but was, in fact, caught between two worlds, one "dying", the other "struggling to be born" (176). Incapable of shedding their education yet simultaneously isolated from the working class they claimed to speak for, they feared the world which they wanted to bring forth and dreaded the destruction of the one they knew.

Woolf's assessment of the autobiographies published throughout the decade, however, should be qualified in the face of the evidence available to the contrary: George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), Cyril Connolly's *Enemies of Promise* (1938), and Storm Jameson's *No Time Like the Present* are ostensibly autobiographical texts which gradually, almost inadvertently, become political and/or literary manifestos by thematizing the relationship between the interpreter and the world. These texts deliberately complicate the "I" and its relation to the social as a means of illustrating how identity is shaped by external factors. For these middle-class writers, the isolated individual came to be understood as politically alienated from both his/her class of origin and socially distanced from working-class life. Ironically, for Connolly, Caudwell, Jameson, and Orwell, Woolf's

generation of “New Mandarins” was itself understood as distinctly egocentric and subjectivist (Connolly 57). According to Connolly, writers Eliot, Forster, Strachey, Huxley, and Woolf were inhabitants of an Ivory Tower who “offered a religion of beauty, a cult of words, of meanings understood only by the initiated at a time when people were craving such initiations” (67); Orwell sees writers of the 1920s, whose tendency is “conservative,” united by their “*pessimism of outlook*” and notes their lack of interest in the world around them (“Inside” 137, 134, 136). This war of literary generations was staged as a battle over which was the most *politically* effective generation.

The basic argument of these 1930s writers was that the subjectivism and introspection of the post-war writers was an end in itself, an intrinsic aspect of their aesthetic, while their own self-awareness was a means to an end: the crisis of their world triggered a crisis of perspective which in turn gave rise to a new awareness of the contextual and intersubjective nature of the self. What they sought to achieve was not a revolution in literature, but a literature that would advance the revolution. Connolly, like Orwell, notes that “there exists a whole mood for whose expression we must thank Eliot, the mood of dissatisfaction and despondency, of barrenness and futility—the noon-day devil, the afternoon impotence which is curiously unpoetical and which no one else has been able so adequately to render in verse.” This despondency is apolitical because it betrays a “disbelief in action and in the putting of moral slogans into action, engendered by the First World War” (Connolly 53-54). Although 1930s writers openly acknowledged their aesthetic indebtedness to the previous generation, they also expressed a political unease with this legacy, since ‘futilitarianism’ was deemed incompatible with an active engagement in politics.

Yet it would be wrong to conclude that one generation’s apolitical and artistically-minded ‘egotism’ is replaced by another generation’s unqualified, selfless, heroic and martyred political commitment. Rather, it seems that one of the effects of elevating crisis to the very condition of being in the world of the 1930s is an internalization of this dichotomy. Surely it is no coincidence that the idea of split-mindedness recurs over and over again, as does the rejection of a liberal individualism centering on the self and a concomitant shutting out of greater issues or concerns, such as politics, that transcend, or at the very least complicate, the self. Subjectivity was seen as the product of a constant negotiation between inside and outside, not generated from within. According to Jameson,

The essential concern of the novel is with men and women in their times. With the passions and sympathies of men and

women as these penetrate and are penetrated by the powerful social currents of their time [ . . . ] . ("Novel" 290)

Although Jameson was caught up in the crisis mood, especially in her more topical pieces, and in fact used apocalyptic endings in two novels (a flood in *The World Ends* (1937) and a conflagration in *Here Comes a Candle* (1938)), she repeatedly emphasized the idea of transition in her interpretation of the interwar period. The "for the duration" feeling of the war years became an age in its own right in the years following the war during which permanence was transition: "the process of change, of decay, of growth, is taking place everywhere all the time" ("New" 263). It is important to observe how Jameson created a self adequate to this "age of transition" ("Between" 129): "I am one of those who spend their lives practising how to live" ("Technique" 238).

Jameson did not escape split-mindedness, though she expressed it in different terms:

The dichotomy of my mind—it goes deeper, but the larger word frets me—was there to be seen, if I had had eyes to see it: the instinct to withdraw completely, and the desire to live a flashing life in the world. How far back in the darkness must I force my way, to meet the self whose need was poverty, simplicity, solitude, freedom from possessions, and who was betrayed—oh, another of those large words, by the self hungry for a living which rests on money and power? Come to that, they betrayed each other. (*Journey* 162)

To ease the tension between these two essentially irreconcilable aspects of the self she submerged herself in *ennui*, that very literary state of mind characteristic, precisely, of Ivory Tower writers. Jameson is usually discussed as a writer of the 1930s, a politically active intellectual and the President of the English P.E.N. from 1938 to 1944. However, in her first autobiography (1933), she identified herself with "Class 1914":

The story of my life ends with the end of 1914. It is only worth telling in so far as it is general. The moment it becomes particular [ . . . ] it ceases to be worth a pin to you. My beliefs and feelings, on the other hand, will be worth nothing if they are not particular. (*No Time* 102)

Again, particularity and general relevance stand in a complex and rather paradoxical relationship to one another. Setting out to justify her story's merit by its general relevance as the testimony of a survivor of World War I, the "beliefs and feelings" of which we are about to be told are "worth nothing if they are not particular." A balance would need to be struck between the individually particular and a collective experience here, but it is precisely the seeming incompatibility of the

two that not only drives the autobiographical project, but also gives a name to the dilemmas of the writer.

Jameson's self is *ennui*, trapped in a stalemate between the two opposing forces of her mind which loosely correspond to the division between inner and outer life: on the one hand, there is the almost irresistible impulse to withdraw her attention from her surroundings and turn it upon herself, to be a passive observer of others; on the other, the equally powerful pull towards political action guided by the intellect, the business of which it is to "be inquisitive, to transform, to release new energies [and] change all the conditions of human life" (Jameson, "Crisis" 143). For Jameson, this dualism is not inherent in the human mind but the consequence of socio-economic phenomena such as scientific and technological innovation, the industrialisation of production, rapid urbanisation, the Protestant work ethic and its accompanying possessive individualism.

Jameson's *ennui* mainly takes one of two forms. Firstly, boredom is a reaction to her feeling of estrangement from her immediate surroundings. The self is unable to adjust to the vertiginous pace of modern life in a "mechanical civilisation"; there is no longer a balance between the "speed of daily life and the mind's ability to grasp it, to linger over an event, an action, long enough to turn it into something our nerves can assimilate" ("Crisis" 140). Bewildered by its inability to catch up with itself, the self simply seeks refuge in immobility. This is the mood of the immediate post-war years: "In a year of war the spirit lives out a lifetime of experience," she explains, and this abnormal acceleration causes a "deep-seated [injury] showing itself in that tiredness for no reason, the readiness to drop what seemed at first touch important, the drying-up of vitality, the lack, less clear, of resilience and warmth" (*No Time* 100). This reaction is almost involuntary. More consciously, Jameson's public self claims deliberately to withdraw her interest from her surroundings to avoid complicity with the ideology of her Acquisitive Society, and to offer moral resistance to its pervasive impact on the psyche. The trajectory of her public self is described as an endless passage back and forth between *ennui* and action, often plotted as a series of real and metaphorical journeys. Thus, in terms of a self whose very condition is defined as transitory and whose only definable characteristic is boredom, it is this very self that is constantly under threat. Despair and happiness, merely momentary by their nature, constantly dissolve into the only permanence available, that of *ennui*.

However, unlike other postwar writers who, according to Jameson, complacently focus on the inner life and are indifferent to the chaos surrounding them, Jameson elevates boredom to the ideal

mood for writing in the modern world: in fact, this state of mind is indispensable to the intellectual because it allows for a detachment from the world of things from which one is better placed to view the world critically. In her 1928 assessment of the literary scene *The Georgian Novel and Mr Robinson*, Jameson argues that the Georgian novelists, though very talented, lack "faith" in the "stability of the world" and hope in the possibility of changing it (70). Discussing Virginia Woolf, the narrator explains this generation's inability to produce a masterpiece because of its lack of "humanity": Woolf's talent has been "carefully tended, pruned, enriched [but] has no roots in our common earth" (62). Like Connolly, Orwell, and Spender ten years later, Jameson here claims that the Georgian novelists are essentially conservative in spirit, nostalgic for a "vanished leisure" (72); that is, their attention is focused on the past so they are blind to the present, indifferent to the "stirring of new life" (73). The writers of this generation are in despair because of the absence of a moral framework with which to structure their world, and consequently withdraw into the self as the only source of meaning. A new generation of writers, presumably her own, will be more sensitive to change, and this receptivity is to be brought about by a political transformation of the writer's consciousness. According to her, detachment from, not indifference to, the world is essential to obtain a new perspective on reality. The search for clarity necessary to discover "reality in the conflicting appearances" must overcome one obstacle, which is "precisely our self. Only when we make ourselves free of it are we able to write with real knowledge—earned by living attentively, and without self-love, or the self-pity which blurs much of the new war poetry" (*No Time* 155). The self is suspended, distanced from its immediate "fears and hungers" to allow room for the intellectual and emotional realities of others:

The novelist must be a receiving station for the voices coming from every corner of the society he lives in. He need not report them directly, but he must hear them [. . .]. Everything depends on the novelist being sensitive enough to detect the past and the future existing together in the present, and honest enough to turn the light on it, without caring what it reveals. ("Novel" 290).

The dissonance of the modern mind cannot be resolved under the existing social and economic arrangements, so it is the writer's duty to make the reader aware of the difficulties involved in the achievement of happiness by pointing out the contradictions between the ideals of capitalism and lived reality. The writer cannot avoid addressing moral issues simply because "there is no such thing as a book or a picture existing apart from human terms of reference" ("*Craft*" 55). That is, the

novelist is dealing with persons, beings with a sense of self, with values and the ability to make choices and adopt life-plans, so the questions to be asked are: "What is happiness? what is a good life?" ("Technique" 238). These are, of course, fundamental ethical questions.

Jameson often distanced herself from the writers of the 1930s who, though showing a welcome interest in politics, seemed uncritically eager to "sign manifestos and letters to the paper on subjects of which they are on the whole as ignorant as ever they were." Writing propaganda was not the role of the writer, no one should "legislate" for a novelist ("Craft" 74). She always "disliked giving implicit obedience, distrusted dogma," a defining trait of her generation, and throughout her life had a very clear idea of what the writer's role should be in relation to power and authority ("Apology" 11). Like Julien Benda, she believed that the intellectual should be located in a moral rather than a sociological space. The primary task of the "*clerc*" (Benda's well-known term for the intellectual), is to preserve the spirit of truth and justice. Jameson formulated the project as follows:

I hold that a writer should not in any circumstances or for any cause surrender his duty to criticise and to enquire freely into the soundness of any idea, faith, doctrine, delivered to him by the mouth of authority. He must doubt everything that is offered him to believe. And having believed must still keep his scepticism alive. He will need it—to see that his belief does not harden into dogma or his free agreement into a mere obedience. ("Apology" 11)

This is clearly inspired by Benda's *La trahison des clercs* (1927), whose image of the intellectual shaped her own public self and gave force to her assaults on the "sacred clubrooms of literature with the intention of giving the members the dressing-down of their lives" (Jameson, "Culture" 116). The treason in Benda's title was the "clerks'" betrayal of their ethical vocation as intellectuals, or, as Jameson put it, "*La Trahison des Clercs de nos jours*. Our 'clerks' are not fighting to help us" (*No Time* 157).

Benda divided the social world into intellectuals and laymen, the latter devoted to the pursuit of "material interests" in the realm of "real life" in which the principal motivations are self-interest and self-promotion (Benda 29). Political passions are realist passions, Benda argued, because they encourage humans to exploit their environment for their own benefit by whatever means necessary to procure power or material advantage. According to Benda, clerks, whose proper sphere is "*outside the real*," have abdicated their social duties by joining the layman in the "market place" (25, 32). Benda's main concern is that clerks have systematized and rationalized political hatreds. Rather

than use their indifference to material gain to guarantee the impartiality of their opinions on politics and social phenomena, they use their knowledge and "moral prestige" to justify irrational political passions, and compromise their moral authority in the process (33). Clerks have thus "condescended to the arena" by encouraging the values of the bourgeoisie, so "at the top of the scale of moral values they place the possession of concrete advantages, of material power and the means by which they are procured; and they hold up to scorn the pursuit of truly spiritual advantages, of non-practical or disinterested value" (35, 81).

True clerks should not pursue personal gain. Their role should be, therefore, to further liberty by encouraging the disinterested discussion of the activities of realists from the point of view of objective and impartial criteria founded on reason, with arguments that counter irrationalism with the fruits of knowledge and the principles, values, and attitudes of a universal morality: "abstract principle[s] superior to their egotisms" (147). Benda diagnoses clerics as extolling particularism at the expense of "humanitarianism" (61). It is of great importance to recognise the intrinsic dignity and value of individual humans by observing that the "abstract quality of what is human, is the only one which allows us to love all men" (62). Xenophobia, class antagonism and racism exacerbate difference. Given the prevalence of politics in every sphere of life, the social space in and from which members of civil society are able to resist political despotism has itself been overrun by politics.

Though no less ambitious, Jameson adapted Benda's program for the intellectual to suit her perception of the condition of Britain, which had experienced its own series of disillusionments: the social devastation of World War I, the fiasco of the General Strike, the relatively few gains made by the feminist and labour movements, the betrayal of the Labour Party in 1931, the Depression, unemployment, the destabilising impact of political extremism in the guise of both Fascism and communism and the growing threat of war. The cumulative effect of these events was, as Jameson saw it, "moral collapse" ("Duty" 14). Jameson cast the writers of her time as the conscience of society, although she believed it impossible in times of widespread crisis to remain as detached an intellectual as Benda would have liked.

Jameson's *No Time Like the Present* is above all an indictment of the "Elder Statesmen" (96) and clergy who betrayed their constituents by unnecessarily prolonging World War I, and, more seriously, by placing their moral authority at the service of the practical ends of capitalism, an accusation Jameson also levelled at writers. Benda's

critique that intellectuals were promoting militarism is echoed in her autobiography:

As the War progressed, the forces set in motion by it—patriotism [. . .], greed, personal and public ambitions, commercial interests—took charge. There took charge as well a subtle progressive corruption. War, like any powerful passion, like the passion of jealousy, begins by destroying the very source of reason. It becomes a state of being—*from* which people argue, as the old astronomers argued their conception of the universe from the existence of God. (207)

Because it is expected of spiritual and intellectual leaders to protect their people, it is, according to Jameson, inexcusable that they allow themselves to be misled by “common sentiment,” valuing above all the “corruptible rather than the incorruptible—what is dead above what lives” (*No Time* 192, 163). The clergy decided, during the War, that “because the State has declared war it becomes all our *Christian* duties to support it” (193), and by arousing nationalist fervour lost their former prestige: a “priest inciting to war is an embarrassing sight” (195). By 1933, the betrayal of the Church, politicians and many writers had created a moral vacuum. There is

no supreme Value to which all of us, we writers, stockbrokers, bankers, soldiers, must subordinate (if only in word) our smaller personal values, no embracing spiritual life to which the efforts of our personal lives are in a final account subdued. There exists only a number of conflicting values. We live to serve ourselves (and our children, friends, lovers) alone [. . .]. We have fallen out of the hands of the Absolute—in our world the roads run their parallel courses forever, and the infinite in which they meet has only a mathematical existence. (159)

It is the duty of the intellectual to offer a critical standard, a “common measure of value” appropriate to post-war England (110), a country in which most citizens are felt to be either apathetic and inward-looking out of fear and uncertainty, or dangerously misguided by irrational political passions which offer the illusion of safety and permanence; people are “cling[ing] to anything which offers a foothold. Hence the growth among us of this new vicious Nationalism” (Jameson, “Defence” 177). Jameson believed that the “desire for order is a primary need of our nature” (*No Time* 157); thus, man expects and needs a harmonious society to experience the

deep satisfaction of knowing himself bound up with that which is moving to some defined end. Whether he is to conform or rebel, he needs—to give meaning to his conformity, his

rebellion—the unequivocal statement of a suprême Good, to which stands in an agreed relationship every lesser good desired by his body, and by his mind and spirit. (158)

Unfortunately, as a result of the war, “we suffer, in our kind, from the feeling of disintegration, of the final futility of life” (159). To avoid the self-reflection that may prompt either gloom or critical self-awareness, people who feel that they have nothing to live for frantically keep themselves distracted, although in moments of repose “we know what is lacking to us: we lack that, outside ourselves, which would shape our lives and fragmentary activities into a whole” (159). Previously, State and Church, as supreme authorities in the worldly and spiritual spheres provided moral leadership, but the intricate network of interests shared by politicians, the clergy, capitalists and the media has, in Jameson’s view, undermined their authority.

Jameson reached a compromise; her intellectual was not completely detached from society, but instead profoundly committed to a common enterprise without losing critical distance. Identification with a community could not and should not be grounded in unconditional agreement with prevailing values. Thus, to gain some distance from the social world, the intellectual could imaginatively position himself as an outsider, writing for others about himself as a social being. Although writers are private individuals in Jameson’s view, they are also members of a community speaking to other members about their collective life: “There are moments in the history of the human race when what is personal in man is less important than the fears and hopes, the impulses, he shares with a great many of his fellows” (“Novel” 294). Her period was one of those moments. “What ought to come naturally from a good ‘clerk’, is contempt for the money power itself,” Jameson argued, but unfortunately some clerks have bought into the ideology of capitalism “nearly without protest” (*No Time* 166, 164). Other “clerks” have deliberately retreated from the world and “suffer from a sense of futility, the feeling, one of unassuageable bitterness, that they are cut off. Their inner life feeds on itself, having nothing else on which it can feed” (156). Life is meaningless if one cannot make sense of it in relation to a common end, that is, the idea of a common life has been so diluted that clerks, like the majority of the population, identify very weakly with the society of which they are a part.

Jameson clearly places herself on the side of the silent victims of authority. Her life-story is valuable only insofar as it is common to all survivors of the war, so her personal experience gives moral authority to her adversarial position within society. The critical distance she gained *vis á vis* postwar society is a consequence of her metaphorical

death: it is the death of youth (of an entire generation) and of the "naïve faith" of this lost generation, that was "destined to lead a crusade against poverty and national hatreds" (*No Time* 132). The first section of Jameson's autobiographical *No Time Like the Present* is a description of a young student's life, a confident, impoverished scholar in prewar London, untrammelled by social or financial position, and "beginning a new age" (71):

Like that we were happy, because we were outside the machine. As soon as that vagabond life comes to an end, when from poor scholars you become tax-payers, heads of family and what not, you may be comfortable, but are you happy? Of course not. You have possessions—and that alone is enough to destroy your peace of mind. (77)

This is clearly an attack on private property and an economic system that forces humans to protect their interests rather than subordinate them to a common end. As the economic system changes, so do its morals, and, for Jameson, this is a historical process of decline that began in the Renaissance, when "material success became a virtue" (162). Her metaphorical death is the origin of her exile, a position of marginality constitutive of her self. Her restlessness, one symptom of boredom, is a product of this self-imposed condition of homelessness. Jameson's first autobiography opens with her permanent exile from Whitby, her home, a place, moreover, which exists in her imagination as a stable, homogenous "organic community" (Jameson, "Culture" 121) with a body of values that binds the entire community but has been ruined by the "vulgarity of a mechanical civilisation" (*No Time* 13): "grass now grows in the last shipyard, and this is in some sort a death" (*No Time* 14). Her self-imposed exile from this home brings about a radical change in her social status: no longer the granddaughter of a shipowner, but a "vagabond," a poor scholar who, additionally, is androgynous, treated by her male friends as a "young brother," also released from the prescribed path plotted for her to a large extent, by her mother's ambitions (60).

Jameson's self-fashioned public image placed the intellectual as an outsider, at odds with her society. This self-imposed exile is experienced as a liberation from prescribed social roles, pressures and expectations. Jameson chose how she wanted to live her own life, in her view "eccentric" and unconventional (*No Time* 106). She goes to great lengths to explain that her education was not conducive to "Scholarship for its own sake" since at her university education had a "definite purpose—[her colleagues] needed degrees in order to teach, to do commercial research, to become engineers, dyers, managers in steel works and woollen mills" (54). Jameson's own ambition was to be

a don. Once at university in Leeds, however, she is already on her journey away from home, further estranged by her growing awareness of the realities of capitalism, "around me and under my feet the pulse of a vast machine" (54). Her eccentric life as a poor scholar gradually frees her from the "forms of a purely mechanical civilisation" that she feels "clamped around us" (55). Estranged from mechanical civilisation, she cannot find happiness as others do so she lives according to a different set of norms, citing "social ignorance" to explain her failure to adjust to a world familiar to everyone else (56). Jameson's life is, as she explains, a series of voyages, oscillating between the life of a vagabond and a life of domesticity. All her troubles "came of trying to lead a comfortable life" (82), which she read as a "bourgeois weakness": "again and again in my life, I have worked, plotted, forced circumstances, in order to have 'a settled life'. Only to discover—in the very moment of achieving it—that it is the last, absolutely the last, thing I want" (116). So Jameson is suspended between the memory of an organic community like Whitby and industrial capitalism, between the "mechanised and the natural sides of life" between her desire for a home and its oppressiveness ("Crisis" 155): she is condemned to a "state of inbetweenness," the very condition of Britain *entre deux guerres*. Her marginality in relation to the "comforts of privilege, power, being-at-homeness" (Said 44), however painful, has its rewards: a "habit of making comparisons" ("Crisis" 153). Having left one place and never fully adopting another, Jameson is in an ideal position to compare both. By juxtaposing and comparing experiences or ideas originating in different worlds, the 'clerk' gains a more universal perspective which allows her to see how things came to be as they are; she perceives "situations as contingent, not as inevitable, looks at them as the result of a series of historical choices made by men and women, as facts of society made by human beings, and not as natural or god-given, therefore unchangeable, permanent, irreversible" (Said 45).

In a speech delivered at the 1941 P.E.N. congress in London, Jameson explained that, from the Renaissance onwards the idea that "we have natural duties" had become increasingly popular, with citizens insistently demanding "natural rights. The right to life, the right to struggle for liberty, the right to pursue happiness" ("Duty" 13). Yet such demands are irresponsible, because these fundamental rights presume correlative "natural duties," that is, the obligation of every member of a community to ensure that the state facilitate the realisation of the social and economic conditions that would guarantee the possibility of fulfilling these rights:

[the] first and last of these [duties] is our duty to honour—not any national State only because it is the State we were born

into—but the material and immaterial values we have decided are worthy paying for. When the State is honouring the demands of these same values, it will be our duty to honour and help the State. We have agreed that in this war the values—resting on a Greek, Roman, and Christian base—of Western civilisation are in danger. (“Duty” 13)

Thus the writer’s duty to his fellow humans is to communicate and preserve in writing the store of those normative, binding values—loyalty, liberty, justice, truth—that have informed Western political and social practices by exploring that “territory of ideas [that] can cross and re-cross without being held up by frontiers” (“Crisis” 137). These values transcend national boundaries because they are the product of “sovereign reason, a law which is above nationalism” (“Duty” 14). Jameson’s attack on nationalism pre-dates this, however. World War I had created a gap in the “continuity of human experience” because it had depleted the generation that would have ensured such continuity (“Novel” 281). Her ancestors, she claimed elsewhere, could “sleep quietly on the deeply-rooted and intangible ideas of a more or less humane and liberal creed. Though they did not always practice tolerance, they invoked it at least as an ideal to be reached by going forward” (“Crisis” 139). The task of the intellectual is twofold: first, he must criticize all aspects of his society, specifically the activities of “authority [which] changes its habits and methods but not its nature. It is natural for authority to regard obedience and docility as very useful social virtues” (Jameson, “Writing” 190). Secondly, the intellectual must hold up to society the values of civilization, “justice, tolerance, respect for truth. It is the reflection of a precise idea of human dignity” (“Writing” 190). These abstract values are the measure against which reality is to be judged. The writer “may, he *must* revolt against hypocrisy, worn-out conventions, injustice and cruelty” (“Novel” 305). The eighteenth century, she claimed, was the last period in which there was a congruence between “inner” and “outer” life, that is, between a person’s moral orientation and the values of his community, but “today the disparity, the antagonism between the inner and outer worlds, is so great that it forces itself on the minds and hearts of all of us” (*No Time* 154).

How is this split to be resolved? There is the need to “impose a higher order on the increasing disorder of our common life,” that is, an ideal of the Good, a “new synthesis covering every activity, social and spiritual, of European man” (*No Time* 155). In Jameson’s own time, there are no common goods, no supreme Good in fact, no longer the certainty that ideals will be reached by “going forward,” no authority

that will ensure their stability, even the belief that men are capable of being good is in question.

If the intelligentsia of our day were to acknowledge any duty except to themselves (which—it makes me happy to give credit where it is due—they perform arduously), they would long since have begun a mass attack on two salients of the present social system.

The first is the theory that labour is a commodity to be bought in the cheapest market [. . .]. The second salient of an order which creates, with an equal inevitability, Dean Inge, poverty, war, and various social evils, is in its schools. In our country education is still infected by what Professor Tawney has called in this paper “the old bad doctrine that the great majority of children require only an elementary education.” (Jameson, “Salients” 63)

The first problem is, of course, both political and economic: because of the division of labour the exploited worker is reduced to an appendage of machinery, without autonomy or personal satisfaction in work and therefore lacking in self-respect; poverty is demoralizing. Jameson was an individualist in that she believed that every man should be treated as an end in himself, never as a means to an end: the “unit of value in the world is not a mile of frontier territory or a dollar, or even a bushel of wheat, but a single human being, the most obscure, the least outspoken” (“Duty” 15).

The second related problem is cultural and social, though ultimately the consequences may be political. Strong communal ties can only be gained by teaching the virtues of civility, the “cultivation of values” (Jameson, “Cultivation” 28); these would show the masses how justice was incompatible with xenophobic nationalism, collective security more valuable than conformity, self-realization better than self-gratification, future welfare better than the satisfaction of present needs. In sum, the individual should conceive himself as an individual-in-society, in a relation of interdependence with his fellow citizens. It is the duty of intellectuals to encourage a critical attitude in all their readers who should adopt Jameson’s instinctive “rebellion against authority,” a healthy scepticism instead of self-protective apathy (“Novel” 276”). The problem with education is not only that it is unequal in quality and distribution, but that “no provision is made at any stage of our educational system for developing critical sensibility” (“Culture” 116). Jameson was not calling for a particular kind of education, but simply one that developed a critical faculty and encouraged relatively independent thought, that is, a “valuing habit of mind” which she argued is not necessarily acquired in the “process of

reading for an Honours degree in 'English Language and Literature' ("Culture" 117). Such specialized knowledge is the product of an institution, and thus not conducive to an education the proper end of which is "a human being in full control of himself, actively aware of his environment, able to judge it as it affects his moral and physical growth" ("Culture" 121). The consequence of failing to educate for judgement is that the reader/pupil passively absorbs those values promoted by the "press, the cinema, the pronouncements of public men, in brief, all those voices which, as soon as he is out of school, din his ears and seek to exploit his emotional responses for their own ends" ("Culture" 118). Critical reading would train people to adopt a critical stance with reference to a common set of abstract values in the interest of their community. Intellectuals had to wean the malleable masses from their immature dependence on figures of authority by encouraging reflection, a rational rather than a predominantly emotional relationship to the world which only creates an imbalance in the person. She wanted education to be a tool with which individuals could lift themselves above the mass.

The media secured consent, according to Jameson. Popular fiction encouraged intellectual narrowness and emotional dependence. By making the reality media voices seek to name easier and simpler, they distort it, so that the reader is reconciled to the values of the Acquisitive Society that oppresses him. Undiscerning readers of popular, cheap books are like clean slates, receptive to anything that comes their way. "Why Do You Read Novels?" is the title of a review by Jameson of Q. D. Leavis's *Fiction and the Reading Public* in which she agrees with Leavis's conclusion that the act of reading popular fiction "has a definitely weakening and rotting effect on the mind":

You cannot drench yourself in passion of the *Sheik* or *Rosary* kind and yet appreciate or learn to appreciate the passion of *Sons and Lovers* or *The Passage to India*. A mind relaxed by continual indulgence in the second-hand and second-rate judgements that pass for thinking in even the better kind of novel loses the power to tackle what is hard, real, and serious. Loses, in fact, the capacity to form an independent judgement or to tell a genuine emotion from a conventional one. (Jameson, "Why?" 12)

Jameson disagreed with Leavis's solution to this problem: a critical minority could not alter a society which "gets the fiction it deserves; social rottenness breeds rotten fiction as it breeds slums, Hollywood, war, and disease." She shared both Leavises' objections to the destructive forces at work in culture listed in *Mass Civilisation and Minority Culture*: standardization, mass-production, stock responses,

levelling-down, and advertising. Like Leavis, Jameson blamed this on the machine: the cinema, the wireless and the automobile which, taken together, created a "substitute life," a term borrowed from F. R. Leavis to indicate that readers passively consume second-hand emotions which had not been experienced by the writer but had been mindlessly imitated (Jameson, "Dangers" 10). The descriptions of the world found in this kind of fiction are, according to Jameson, false. Ideas and words are the currency of the writer, a currency that had been greatly devalued by the War. The implication here is that the masses do not have an "inner life as complex as an intellectual's" (Carey 20). Accordingly, the type of culture Jameson most detests is that of the "chief figure of our times, the Little Man", who

spends anxious moments wondering why he is not happier. Everything possible is done for him and his wife; he has his golf and his little car at week-ends, instead of the old quiet sermon-and-roast-beef-Sunday; he can see Garbo for a shilling; his wife has a vacuum cleaner, copies of Paris models, three hundred varieties of face cream; there are the wireless, the sixpennies, the hire purchase agreement. They need never have a dull or an unoccupied moment. Then why is their life not one continuous smile? ("What is" 37)

Why indeed? Reality falls short of the promises made by advertisements, and consumption is not satisfying. The figure of the "Little Man," like Jameson's Mr. Robinson, is obviously suburban, an ordinary, average, undifferentiated, anonymous, fearful and child-like figure in need of moral guidance because intellectually incapable of knowing what he wants and imagining what the good life could look like for him. Jameson's explanation of the Little Man's reading process is similarly simplistic. The unsuspecting reader opens a novel with the expectation of being "pleased or entertained;" therefore he is relaxed, "prepared to receive everything the novelist is offering":

the people who read them, leaning in Tube trains, in the evening idle and half-listening to the wireless, are subtly persuaded that sexual passion is the be-all and end-all of life; that success is money, a car, holidays in the South Seas; that you can't change human nature; that something called Beauty floats messily round us all; that Socialism is more unpractical (untidy, dangerous, etc.) than Imperialism; that women are (this); that men are (the other). Now, all these are lies, and either we are deceived by them, or, knowing them to be lies, turn to them for relief from hard reality: we are either dupes or drug-addicts. In any event, herd prejudice has been

strengthened and the channels of genuine feeling choked.  
 ("Why" 12)

Jameson bemoaned the gradual loss of a familiar, time-honoured vocabulary with which to describe the moral life. Politicians and clergy had initiated the sentimentalization of this vocabulary, and the post-war popular press and advertising, perpetuated this tendency: "In our day the moral framework of society is collapsing from dry rot. If I use such words as 'honour', 'goodness', 'passion', I ought not to assume that they convey roughly the same meaning to everyone. Words and ideas shift their meanings to suit each reader's private system of values" (*No Time* 129). Moral consensus is the prerequisite to social cohesion and language plays a crucial role in cementing understanding. Just as Orwell claimed that the language of political debate was debased by "staleness of imagery" and "lack of precision," Jameson claimed that moral vocabulary was corrupt and wanted to regenerate an older one (Orwell, "Politics" 359): "The novelist is showing you his mind by means of words. He has to take his chance that certain words which stand for ideas and sensations and not for things—such words as 'honour,' 'decency,' 'passion'—mean to us what they mean to him" ("Craft" 61). To "regenerate the novel means to regenerate the language" because words are reappropriated, wrenched from the context in which they are devalued, and thus new connotative processes are set into motion ("Novel" 305). Jameson wants to undermine the strength of mass-produced literature by dislocating clichés, upsetting reading habits, challenging the beliefs and assumptions brought to the reading process by redescribing reality in a different form.

Published in *Fact* in 1937 as "Documents," one of her most partisan and frequently quoted essays on fiction is a call for the production of socialist rather than proletarian literature. The latter concentrates exclusively on the working class as its subject matter (elsewhere she wrote that "in all but the essential details [proletarian novels] are exactly like novels about middle-class life" ["Novel" 300]), while the former explores the intricate, dynamic interaction between the material and cultural forces at work in a changing society involving all classes, with particular attention to the coexistence of different temporalities, as well as "of change, of decay, of growth" ("New" 263). Socialist that she was, Jameson believed that "every individual, in his day-to-day actions, recreates and reproduces society at every moment; this is both the source of what is stable in social organisation and the origin of endless modification" (Giddens 35). As Anthony Giddens explains, any "fact" contains within itself elements of the whole (35). Jameson's emphasis on change is, in her view, more realistic than the reified world of popular fiction, that is "made artificially static by excluding from it all the factors

of change and the rumour of the real world," as it was full of clichés, fossilised intellectual habits, and predicable emotional responses ("New" 262).

Jameson emphasized the "angle from which to make our pictures," because the ordering of material is implicitly both a "criticism of values" and an exposition of "our moral judgements." What she argued against was the "dreadful self-consciousness which seizes the middle-class writer," whose intentions, though "decent and defensible," are conditioned by an education that encouraged self-centredness, a "habit" which is "natural" though not exclusive to him. <sup>3</sup> "To put it brutally, the writer is not born to express himself. His egoism is worthless unless it embraces the egoisms of other people. He has no knowledge of reality if the only reality he knows is that of his own sufferings and pleasures" ("Duty" 18). Self-consciousness is not confessional self-analysis, however, but an awareness of how the self is constructed in society. The middle-class habit of self-centeredness was the basis of an aesthetic that posed an "outlook on life" in complicity with the ideology of an Acquisitive Society ("Novel" 287). The writer, Jameson urged, should deliberately go "into exile," estrange himself from his environment and from himself ("New" 13): every good writer "has some inborn capacity for detaching himself from his experience. Those of us who are only talented are always falling into the temptation of thinking that our personal emotions, especially when they are intense, are valuable for their own sake" ("Novel" 303). Jameson acknowledged that the division of literature into "objective and subjective" is "arbitrary," but the subjective and objective differ in terms of "stress" ("Craft" 63): the writer can either focus on and use himself as a measure of value, or he can break through egoism to "give an account of the whole man and of the activities which relate him to his fellows" ("Craft" 64). Selfhood and agency are socially produced and specific. Therefore, the problem is not the personal voice but the moral perspective used to organize the fictional world. According to Jameson, the process of self-criticism involved in the creation of critical self-awareness should be conducted extratextually. As a result, personal experience is defamiliarized to such an extent that people and events are shown to be connected not by a single, intrusive viewpoint but to co-exist, connected by an intricate network of social and economic phenomena:

What in effect the novelist says is: Here is the social web I am uncovering for you. Look closely and you will see how men and women work, suffer, rejoice, and die in it, like fishes in water. Look closer still and you will see that the web itself moves, changes, and the human creatures with it. ("Novel" 293)

Montage was the literary device Jameson believed would create this social “web.” By stringing together apparently disparate fragments of reality, montage disrupts normal causality, that is, the expected connections between different events or characters. Thus the narrator does not impose a shape based on his own controlling psyche, in which elements are significant only in terms of their impact on himself. Good fiction, Jameson argued, should make a “dent in our consciousness” precisely by throwing up a previously invisible “pattern” (“Novel” 285):

The truth is that the order which the artist imposes on the flux of life is drawn solely from himself. He has arranged things in a certain order in his mind, putting some things first because he sees them as most important, and it is this order which appears in his work. Its style is the reflection of his personal style, of the value at which he assesses different modes of living. (“Craft” 56)

Keith Williams’s reading of “New Documents” within the context of the documentary film movement and the new reportage of the kind written by Orwell is useful here. According to Williams, Jameson’s project like that of her colleagues in *Fact*, fosters the belief that the reporting of “facts” would stimulate the creation of a new social consciousness and culture that would “safeguard society from Fascism and facilitate Socialist transformation” (Williams 166-7). Citing Althusser, Williams describes the project as one in which writers wanted to subvert the “subject’s imaginary relations to their real conditions of existence” of capitalist cultural practices using montage to show the “real conditions of existence” by defamiliarising social life (167). To Jameson’s mind, attention to a single individual was not the best way to deal with the complexity of modern, urban life, in which the scope of an individual’s point of view and his sphere of action became insignificant in relation to the social, economic, and political forces that shaped his life and against which he was powerless to act alone, assuming that he was even aware of their existence. Jameson argued that a good novel should make “you more sensitive in your relations with your fellows and more aware of what is going on within and without you” (“Craft” 61). In her view, subjective novelists were “like a man who tries to tell the time by examining only the works of his watch,” that is, without reference to any external, impersonal criteria of judgement his world became arbitrary (“Craft” 64) .

This need for an appropriate socialist system of values to organize collective life became more urgent as the menace of fascism escalated. The energy of people in times of peace was innocuous because they were preoccupied with personal problems, but in an uncertain world

people were more susceptible to the reassuring seductions of extremist ideologies. Hence the importance of literature as a civilizing tool:

So long as the units which compose "democracy" are uneducated and emotionally undisciplined, bred and maintained cheaply and rottenly, so long as they prefer cheap, rotten, and frivolous newspaper to a thoughtful responsible one. Back we come to the same place. Create awareness, train sensibility, educate taste. A man trained to use his mind will use it. ("Culture" 124)

Jameson believed that humans are social and benevolent beings who are corrupted by their environment, which should, ideally, enable self-realisation. She shared this belief with many of her contemporaries, particularly those we could consider socialist, such as Naomi Mitchison, Winifred Holtby, Rebecca West, George Orwell, G.D.H. Cole, Vera Brittain, R. H. Tawney, and Harold Laski, so she was not unique in her desire that readers, writers and intellectuals become politically aware and responsible. However, unlike some of her contemporaries—many of whom revised their political naivete in the future—she tempered her commitments with common sense and the caution born of experience very early on. This consistently critical attitude towards social, cultural and political phenomena, and her uncanny ability to tap into the *zeitgeist* of her age, allowed Jameson to locate and defend a moral space for intellectuals which many others after her have also sought to establish and defend. Perhaps more importantly, however, Jameson believed that the sense of crisis was the prevailing mood of the interwar period and, inadvertently perhaps, identified the structure of feeling which would prevail throughout the century.

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