

**“I HAVE BEEN A CHIPPEWA BORN”:
ANNA BROWNELL JAMESON’S NATIVE CANADIAN
TRANSFORMATIONS**

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses one of the canonical works of nineteenth-century Anglophone Canadian literature, a travelogue by Anna Brownell Jameson (1794–1860), a dedicated, if conservative, early feminist, who commented publicly on the issue of the rights of women in different social contexts. Her book *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (1838) represents a symptomatically Canadian genre oscillating between a classic travelogue and an extensive diary, and provides a detailed account of the author’s originally involuntary sojourn in Canada between December 1836 and August 1837, during which she became the first woman of European descent who, all by herself, accompanied only by Native guides, left the safety of the city, ventured into the wilderness of northern Ontario and encountered the Native inhabitants of her new country. Jameson welcomed these encounters as enriching opportunities for intercultural comparison, in which it was particularly the position of Native women that interested her. What makes Jameson’s text original is not the choice of genre but, rather, the fact that it provides an authentic literary testimony about the process of intercultural transformation of the authorial subject. Unlike her literary contemporaries, the sisters Catharine Parr Trail and Susanna Moodie, Jameson was not satisfied with merely recording her exploratory experience, but consciously strove to reach the inner substance of “otherness,” to achieve a kind of voluntary cultural marginalization which would facilitate the real, unmediated understanding of this otherness, as well as of herself. The article analyses the process of Jameson’s symbolic transformation into a “new Native Canadian,” the literary account of which became one of the foundation texts of Canadian national literary culture.

Keywords: Anna Brownell Jameson; nineteenth-century Canadian literature; travelogue; national literature; Canadian Native culture

British writer Anna Brownell Jameson (1794–1860) was, according to *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, “a determined, though conservative, early feminist, one of the many in her generation who were vocal about their rights in law and their needs and opportunities in society.” Her book *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (1838), long regarded as a cross between a classic travelogue and a diary, provides an account of her

initially unwanted experience in the colony of Canada from December 1836 to August 1837, where she was one of the first female travelers to leave the relative safety of a city, and the – then sample – position of a woebegone exile, to dare into the wilderness of northern Ontario, and to meet with an open mind and intellectual, as well as emotional enthusiasm, the Native people of the “new” country.

The circumstances of Jameson’s visit to Canada are well known, but nonetheless symptomatic; she had been an established writer and respected intellectual among her circles before her brief, but determinative Canadian sojourn, with special interest in the situation of women in the arts, as well as in society at large. She was a proficient art and literary critic, connoisseur of German culture, and a keen and insightful commentator on the social and political realities of her time. It was namely her fictional *Diary of an Ennuyée* (1826) and *Characteristics of Women* (a study of Shakespeare’s heroines, 1832) that initially established her public repute and indicated her deeply ingrained intellectual orientation, which was later reflected in her Canadian oeuvre.

Another constitutive aspect of her Canadian experience was the fact that hers was a case of involuntary immigration: from 1825 Jameson (née Murphy) had been married to lawyer Robert Jameson; however, the marriage was not happy, and by the time her husband was appointed chief justice of Upper Canada in 1833, the couple had lived separated, apparently without mutual regret. In 1836, however, Robert Jameson summoned his wife to Toronto, in order to maintain an image of a stable and respectable family background. Anna, conversely, most probably came to Canada with the intention to obtain her husband’s consent to legal separation, which he eventually granted her a year later.

These circumstances indicate that Jameson reflected her brief encounter with Canada through a very particular mindset, which enabled her to give it an unusually fitting aesthetic form. In spite of the fact that initially she was far from inclined to assume the role of a public advocate for Canada – or, for emigration as such, for that matter – she was well equipped and qualified to formulate poignant, thoughtful observations of her new surroundings, and it was particularly the presence of the Native people that made the most radical and lasting impression upon her.¹ True, her very first account of meeting several of them was, from the point of view of the rhetoric used, still consistently in line with the prevalent post-romantic discourse of the day, lamenting the plight of the “vanishing race”:

The impression they left, though amusing and exciting from its mere novelty, was melancholy. The sort of desperate resignation in their swarthy countenances, their squalid, dingy habiliments, and their forlorn story, filled me with pity and, I may add, disappointment; and all my previous impressions of the independent children of the forest are for the present disturbed. (1990: 27–8)

¹ Admittedly, descriptions of the “Indians” were almost requisite in accounts of North American emigration and settlement written by Europeans, both male and female. Often these descriptions responded to one of two (equally inaccurate) stereotypes: the North American Native as an example of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s nature-tutored and innocent “noble savage,” or the American frontier depiction of the fierce, bloodthirsty warrior and enemy of white settlers. Interestingly, it was more typically female writers, such as Canadian settlers Susanna Moodie or Catharine Parr Traill, who refused to accept the usual stereotypes, preferring to base their accounts on their own experiences with their new neighbours.

Nonetheless, a moment later she deliberated on the situation in a tone that resolutely departs from the dominant discourse and opens space for a much more authentically informed and much less culturally biased debate on the issue:

These are the first specimens I have seen of that fated race, with which I hope to become better acquainted before I leave the country. Notwithstanding all I have heard and read, I have yet but a vague idea of the Indian character; and the very different aspect under which it has been represented by various travellers, as well as writers of fiction, adds to the difficulty of forming a correct estimate of the people, and more particularly of the true position of their women. Colonel Givins, who has passed thirty years of his life among the north-west tribes, till he has become in habits and language almost identified with them, is hardly an impartial judge. He was their interpreter on this occasion, and he says that there is as much difference between the customs and language of different nations, the Chippewas and Mohawks, for instance, as there is between any two nations of Europe. (1990: 28)

Jameson's initial response to the encounter with the New World is primarily a literary or aesthetic one, marked with European romantic sensibility and composed using language arsenal stemming from the concept of the sublime. Like most newcomers who provided written accounts of their visits to North America, she was instantly affected by the immensity, grandeur, and what had already been defined as "beauty" of its nature and landscape. Indeed, "whether they were French or English, whether they were born in Canada or elsewhere, most Canadian writers before 1850 both found the Canadas to be beautiful and accepted the convention of the sublime as the basis for much of their description of the natural world" (MacDonald 1986: 49). Jameson's discursive engagement with the new situation that inevitably engulfed her very powerfully was immediately not only aestheticized, but genuinely personalized, in line with Edmund Burke's famous description of the sublime:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (Burke 2008: 36)

Jameson's description of the Niagara Falls, which forms one of the climactic points of the *Summer Rambles*, clearly fits all of Burke's criteria for the sublime, and becomes a textbook, perhaps even lyricized, example thereof:

The verge of the rapids is considerably above the eye; the whole mighty river comes rushing over the brow of a hill, and as you look up, it seems coming down to overwhelm you. Then meeting with the rocks, as it pours down the declivity, it boils and frets like the breakers of the ocean. Huge mounds of water, smooth, transparent, and gleaming like the emerald, or rather like the more delicate hue of the chrysopaz, rise up and bound over some unseen impediment, then break into silver foam, which leaps into the air in the most graceful fantastic forms; and so it rushes on, whirling, boiling, dancing, sparkling along, with a playful impatience, rather than overwhelming fury, rejoicing as if escaped from bondage, rather than raging in angry might – wildly, magnificently beautiful! The idea, too, of the immediate danger, the consciousness that anything caught within their verge is inevitably hurried

to a swift destination, swallowed up, annihilated, thrills the blood; the immensity of the picture, spreading a mile at least each way, and framed in by the interminable forests, adds to the feeling of grandeur; while the giddy, infinite motion of the headlong waters, dancing and leaping, and revelling and roaring, in their mad glee, gave me a sensation of rapturous terror, and at last caused a tension of the nerves in my head, which obliged me to turn away. (1990: 204)²

However, it was when Jameson began to see the Native people as part of the anything but inferior Canadian landscape and comment specifically on their situation that she was able to depart from the “literariness” of her perspective, authenticate and problematize her observations and give voice to a variety of perspectives, including ones that had, so far, been mostly marginalized – and, of these, it was particularly the situation of Native women that interested her most. This was, for her, the decisive point of departure, in both literal and metaphorical sense, in which she liberated herself from the discourse of the sublime, traditionally gendered as masculine, in order to eventually find her own voice.³

Jameson soon realized that in order to achieve this goal she needed unmediated, personal exposure to and experience with her subject matter; while the first part of her literary account of Canada, aptly titled *Winter Studies* (comprising roughly one fifth of the whole text), is dedicated largely to theoretical considerations, expressed through the prism of her European education and expectations, in the considerably more ambitious *Summer Rambles* she reaches much further, both metaphorically and literally speaking. In June 1837, she set out, mostly alone, for a journey taking her from Toronto to Niagara, Hamilton, Brantford, Woodstock, London, St. Thomas, Port Talbot, Chatham, and Detroit; from there she continued by boat to Mackinaw, Sault Ste. Marie and Manitoulin Island on Lake Huron, and finally to Petetang and Lake Simcoe. This “wild expedition” (1990: 542), as she herself referred to it, turned into the subject matter for one of the representative narratives of early Canadian literature, and for Jameson not only into a fundamentally transformative experience of the discovery of Canada, but, ultimately, the discovery of her self. Her “engaged, contactual discourse” (Gerson 1997: 9) gives evidence of her distinctly gendered approach to the moment of exploration and discovery, in which the self, the “epic subject,” is “not a predetermined, static entity awaiting discovery and description, but rather a living, changing process revealed through relationships, partly including [...] her manipulation of traditional genres” (Gerry 1990–91: 36). Jameson

² Descriptions of the Niagara Falls were perhaps as mandatory in the travel discourse of early North America as those of the Native people. The very first one of them, written by the Catholic missionary Father Louis Hennepin and published in 1699, already sets a typical tone which, judging by the striking similarity of both accounts, might have inspired Jameson’s: “This wonderful Downfall is compounded of two cross-streams of Water, and two Falls, with an isle sloping along the middle of it. The waters which fall from this horrible Precipice, do foam and boyl after the most hideous manner imaginable; making an outrageous noise, more terrible than that of Thunder; for when the wind blows out of the South, their dismal roaring may be heard Fifteen off ...” (Louis Hennepin, *A New Discovery of a Vast Country in America, Extending Above Four Thousand Miles, Between New France and Mexico*. London: Henry Bonwicke, 1699, <https://archive.org/details/newdiscoveryofva12henn>).

³ Both the classics of the philosophical discourse of the sublime, Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, gender the beautiful as female and the sublime as male. Sublimity is seen as a powerful, masculine force, while women are literally declared to be a source of beauty for men, along with, at best, calm nature and “disciplined” landscape art. In Burke, sublimity is associated with the “authority of a father” and beauty with a “mother’s fondness and indulgence” (2008: 89).

achieved this “manipulation of genres” mostly by putting emphasis on “the personal (and the feminine) as the principles of meaning and order” (Freiwald 1986: 65).⁴

At the beginning of her journey, Jameson consciously placed herself in an almost archetypal vantage point, necessary for her to accomplish her personal – and literary – mission, requiring both determination and awareness of possible consequences: “I was alone – alone – and on my way to that ultimate somewhere of which I knew nothing, with forests, and plains, and successive seas intervening” (1990: 196). This distance, however, is soon to be crossed, and the acknowledged mental void is readily filled with a sequence of personal encounters which Jameson embraced as extremely enriching opportunities for intercultural comparison and original social analysis. Witnessing the reality of Canada’s Native community and its undeniable, then mostly un-admitted exploitation by the mainstream society thus leads her to issuing a noteworthy invitation extended to other members of her community to share in the experience, and consequently in responsibility:

I am inclined to think that the idea of the Indians becoming what *we* call a civilized people seems quite hopeless; those who entertain such benevolent anticipations should come here, and behold the effect which three centuries of contact with the whites have produced on the nature and habits of the Indian. The benevolent theorists in England should come and see with their own eyes that there is a bar to the civilization of the Indians, and the increase or even preservation of their numbers, which no power can overleap. Their own principle, that “the Great Spirit did indeed create both the red man and the white man, but created them essentially different in nature and manners,” is not perhaps far from the truth. (1990: 305–6)

Jameson, an educated cultural worker, articulate translator and sensitive artist, poses a rhetorical but pressing question with serious ethical implications:

With regard to all attempts to civilize them, what should the red man see in the civilization of the white man which should move him to envy or emulation, or raise in his mind a wish to exchange his “own unshackled life and his innate capacities of soul” for our artificial social habits, our morals, which are contradicted by our opinions, and our religion, which is violated both in our laws and our lives? (1990: 309–10)

In these statements, Jameson unhesitantly challenges and transcends “the uncertainty of many women writers daring to assume the authority of the travel narrator, whose heroic adventures and breadth of knowledge were conventionally gendered masculine” (Mills 1991: 77). Throughout the nineteenth century, women’s area of literary expertise and authority was seen primarily in “their own lives, which they depicted in diaries, memoirs, and personal anecdotes, all included in the catch-all category of autobiography” (Dagg 1992: 113). At the same time, however, travel books about North America written by women were also popular, for particular pragmatic reasons:

⁴ Bina Toledo Freiwald determines a structural difference between “conventional forms of autobiography” and Jameson’s text in “Jameson’s emphasis on the presence of an addressee who is specifically *other*,” and terms her work an “epistolary journal,” while discerning a “frame narrative” in it which combines the personal/feminine with Jameson’s consciousness of the female other (1986: 68).

Early publishers found them lucrative because thousands of readers wanted to learn about little-known parts of the world. Women were seen as suitable authors for such books because they did not need to step out of their prescribed roles as companions to men, and they had time and inclination to observe and describe the interesting minutiae of distant or foreign parts. (Dagg 1992: 115)

In that sense, travel accounts by women authors, often containing elements of personal anecdote or sketch as an added value, were appreciated precisely for their authenticity and factual currency:

Based on real-life experience, blurring the line between fiction and non-fiction, they contain documentary elements, which make them closer to women's letters and journals of that time than to the improbable sentimental fiction being published alongside them. (McMullen and Campbell 1993: 8)

In the course of her self-appointed pilgrimage from "civilization" to "wilderness," or, rather, transfer from one point of reference to another, Jameson undergoes a discernible transformation, not so much of her opinions but, rather, of her own positioning and understanding thereof, which is indeed unusual for her time. In the Afterword to the *New Canadian Library* Edition of *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles*, Clara Thomas notices that:

Once on the road she was a different person from the Anna, frost-bound in body and spirit, who was the centre-stage heroine of "Winter Studies," gallantly upholding her ideas on culture even with the temperature at twelve degrees below zero and the ink freezing in the ink-well. Anna, the practiced traveller of "Summer Rambles," enjoyed all manner of people and related well to them, from the reclusive Colonel Talbot, the "Lake Erie Baron," to the picturesque voyageurs who rowed her *bateau*. Most importantly she found all the Indians fascinating cultural studies: some of them [...] became lasting friends. (Thomas 1990: 547)

Judging by her own account, Jameson's narrative evidences her success in what Bridget Orr in her analysis of early North American women's discourse describes as "a construction of encounters with the other as productive meetings in which the autonomy and difference of each partner is left intact" (1994: 156).

The key to understanding Jameson's accomplishment in this respect rests in the fact that she did not only content herself with making and aptly recording her observations, but made herself their active component: first of all, she willingly admitted that the Native people, namely the women, "excited the strongest surprise and interest" (1990: 200) in her, which she then instilled into her sometimes exulted but persuasive descriptions. In an account of her meeting with a Native woman at Niagara she thus recalls:

As she spoke, her black eyes flashing, she extended her arms, and folded them across her bosom, with an attitude and expression of resolute dignity, which a painter might have studied; and truly the fairest white face I ever looked on never beamed with more of soul and high resolve than hers at that moment. (1990: 201)

Jameson blends her acknowledgement of the newly discovered realities with the verbal imagery and linguistic apparatus that her readers would recognize, in order to advocate their status of equality of value; even though in the Preface to her book she almost apologetically refers to it as mere “‘fragments’ of a journal addressed to a friend,” she is acutely aware of the implications of “venturing to place [it] before the public [...] particularly at this time, when the country to which it partly refers is the subject of so much difference of opinion, and so much animosity of feeling” (1990: 9). Equally importantly, she is aware of having been “thrown into scenes and regions hitherto undescribed by any traveller [...] and into relations with the Indian tribes, such as few European women of refined and civilized habits have ever risked, and none have recorded” (1990: 9). Therefore, she was clearly writing with both the private and public agencies in mind, “venturing outside the domestic sphere [...] in the name of good works” (McMullen and Campbell 1993: 3). Jameson’s strategy can be described in line with the parameters of female travel writing as such, generically described by Sara Mills as: “differ[ing] from the writings of male travel writers in the stress they lay on personal involvement and relationships with people of the other culture and in the less authoritarian stance they take *vis-à-vis* narrative voice” (1991: 21).

Moreover, Jameson was openly appreciative of the reception she received from the Native people, many of whom she considered personal friends – she proactively created favourable conditions by her openness and unfeigned interest in them. Halfway through her *Summer Rambles* she proudly reports to her reader:

Mr. Johnson tells me, what pleases me much, that the Indians like me, and are gratified by my presence, and the interest I express for them, and that I am a subject of much conversation and speculation. Being in manners and complexion unlike the European women they have been accustomed to see, they have given me, he says, a name among themselves expressive of the most obvious characteristic in my appearance, and call me the *white or fair English chieftainess* (Ogima-quay). (1990: 429)

Although here we might sense a touch of wishful thinking blending with the sincerity of objective rendition – Jameson was certainly neither the first nor the last white “benefactor” boasting of his/her adopted Indian name,⁵ and her assertion that “I go among them quite familiarly, and am always received with smiling good humour” (1990: 429) sounds almost touching on that account – she does deserve credit for going as far as she possibly could along the path of personal exposure, authenticity, and conceptual transgression. In the frequently cited finale of her journey, after bravely descending the falls on Lake Huron in a canoe with her Indian companions, she is adopted into “her” Chippewa

⁵ One of the most famous cases in the Canadian context is that of Edmund Kean, English actor and one of the first “celebrities” on theatre stage. During his 1825 tour of North America, organized in the hope of mending both his, at the time scandalous, reputation and financial situation, Kean met with four Huron chiefs in Quebec, and gave to each a medal made by a goldsmith called Smillie. In return, he was received into the Huron tribe under the name of Adanieouidet (or Alanienouidet) and was apparently given the Huron costume and arms. After leaving Quebec City, Kean travelled to New York and from thence back to England, in December 1826. Both in New York and London, it amused him to wear his Huron costume and he was so proud of his Indian name that he had it engraved on the back of his visiting card.

family, in the personalized act of which she symbolically attested to the possibility (and, perhaps, to her own wish) of the coexistence of the Native and non-Native constituents of the future Canadian nation. Similarly to her early Canadian literary sisters, Catharine Parr Traill and Susanna Moodie, she, according to Carole Gerson: “Powerful as white but disempowered as female [...] share[s] with Native women some marginal space on the outskirts of frontier culture” (1997: 10). However, unlike Parr Traill’s and Moodie’s stories, hers is an act of voluntary, almost self-imposed marginalization, based not simply on putting up with unasked-for circumstances, but on actively seeking those that would authentically inform her of the reality of which she became a part. Her self-marginalization is thus transformed into an openly political gesture of uncompromising social commentary, by which she completes the circle and invades the primarily male-dominated sphere “through the back door.” Her concluding comparative remarks about the position of Native women therefore reach beyond the discourse of ethnicity to more general moral issues concerning femininity, and humanity at large:

When we speak of the *drudgery* of the women, we must note the equal division of labour; there is no class of women privileged to sit still while others work. Every squaw makes the clothing, mats, moccasins, and boils the kettle for her own family. Compare her life with the refined leisure of an elegant woman in the higher classes of our society, and it is wretched and abject; but compare her life with that of a servant-maid of all work, or a factory girl – I do say that the condition of the squaw is gracious in comparison, dignified by domestic feelings, and by equality with all around her. If women are to be exempted from toil in reverence to the sex, and as *women*, I can understand this, though I think it unreasonable; but if it be merely a privilege of station, and confined to a certain set, while the great primeval penalty is doubled on the rest, then I do not see where is the great gallantry and consistency of this our Christendom, nor what right we have to look down upon the barbarism of the Indian savages who make *drudges* of their women. (1990: 516)

For all these aspects, Jameson’s personalized, but nonetheless socially and aesthetically conscious story of (self)exploration forms one of the early foundations of Canadian national culture, in line with John Moss’ conclusion about the genre of gendered “wilderness narrative”:

Men and women have learned to tell the stories of their reality in different ways. In writing of wilderness experience, the structural anarchy and creative discontinuity of women’s narratives are refusing absence and adversary, finding instead the wilderness a place where people find things, sometimes themselves. In reading women who have learned to revel in freedom from meaning, from numinous tyrannies, women who, in denial of male authority and privilege, write to dismantle the constructed world [...] subversively exploding notions of conquest and reduction of the natural world to metaphor, in reading such writers we can break from the narrative conventions that determine perception and shape our experience. We can rediscover wilderness as a good place to be, *Dasein* with a difference, ourselves at home in the lovely amplitude of time. (1998: 106)

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„NARODILA JSEM SE JAKO ČIPEVAJKA“: KANADSKÉ DOMORODÉ TRANSFORMACE ANNY BROWNELL JAMESONOVÉ

Resumé

Článek pojednává o jednom z kanonických děl kanadské anglofonní literatury devatenáctého století, cestopisu Anny Brownell Jamesonové (1794–1860), jedné z odhodlaných, byť konzervativních raných feministek, které se svým dílem veřejně vyjadřovaly k otázce postavení ženy v různých kulturních kontextech. Její kniha *Zimní studie a letní putování po Kanadě* (*Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada*, 1838) představuje pro Kanadu příznačný žánrový typ na pomezí klasického cestopisu a rozsáhlého deníku a podává detailní záznam o autorčině původně nedobrovolném pobytu v Kanadě mezi prosincem 1836 a srpnem 1837, během něhož se stala první Evropankou, která zcela sama, jen s domorodými prů-

vodci, opustila bezpečí města, vstoupila do divočiny severního Ontaria a setkala se s původními obyvateli své nové vlasti. Tato setkání vítala jako obohacující příležitosti k interkulturnímu srovnávání, na němž ji zajímala především situace domorodých žen. Na textu Jamesonové není originální jeho žánrové zařazení, ale skutečnost, že zprostředkovává autentické literární svědectví o procesu interkulturní transformace autorského subjektu. Na rozdíl od svých literárních současnic, sester Catharine Parr Traillové a Susanny Moodieové, se Jamesonová nespokojila s pouhým zaznamenáváním svých objevitelských zkušeností, nýbrž vědomě usilovala o proniknutí do samotné podstaty „jinakosti“, o jakousi dobrovolnou kulturní marginalizaci, která by jí umožnila skutečné, nezprostředkované pochopení této jinakosti i sebe sama. Článek analyzuje proces symbolické transformace Anny Brownell Jamesonové v „novou domorodou Kanadanku“, jehož literární zpracování se stalo jedním ze základních textů kanadské literární kultury.

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