

# Anna Maria Jones

(1748–1829)

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Born on 5 December 1748, Anna Maria Jones was the second child and eldest of five daughters of Anna Maria Mordaunt and Jonathan Shipley, the dean of Winchester and bishop of St. Asaph. Her father was a man with literary interests, and he taught his daughter both classical and modern languages. At the age of thirty-five she married Sir William Jones, an Oxford-educated scholar, author, and philologist, remembered today as a pioneer in comparative linguistics and the first to perceive the common ancestry of the Indo-European languages. He had already published a Persian grammar, a history of Persian literature, and translations of Persian and Arabic poetry and was also well versed in chemistry, mathematics, botany, law, and music. Anna Maria had known him for some years before he proposed in October 1782; they were married the following April. A friend of Benjamin Franklin's, he was an enlightened partner who valued not only Anna Maria's excellent linguistic abilities but also her "Good sense, and good temper, agreeable manners, . . . feeling heart, [and] domestick affections," as well as her "knowledge of the world and contempt of what is wrong in it."<sup>1</sup> He had recently been knighted and appointed judge of the British Supreme Court at Fort William in Bengal.

Shortly after the wedding, the couple sailed for India by way of Madeira and Cape Verde, arriving in Calcutta in September. They spent their evenings reading aloud in the original languages from Ariosto, Tasso, Metastasio, Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch, and others. An acute observer, Anna Maria enjoyed botanical research, recording what she discovered in sketches and watercolors. She also drew and painted local fauna, which her husband described in Latin. While he presided over the court, she wrote letters and poems. Each autumn they escaped Calcutta for a rural retreat on the Ganges, where they had a dairy and kept flocks and herds (including pet sheep and a

1. Sir William Jones to Viscount Althorp, 27 October 1782, *The Letters of Sir William Jones*, ed. G. H. Cannon, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1970), 2:586.

tiger cub) and where they were “literally lulled to sleep by Persian nightingales.”<sup>2</sup> Anna Maria saw much of India during her ten years’ residence, once taking a perilous trip up the Ganges through the jungle to Benares.

But the climate of India, according to Sir William, was “such as we had no idea of in England, excessive heat at noon, and an incessant high wind from morning to night.”<sup>3</sup> Anna Maria’s health suffered, especially during the warmest season, and she was frequently ill with digestive disorders, colds, fevers, rheumatism, and, on at least one occasion, dysentery, for which she took laudanum. Finally, the physicians told her that for the sake of her health she would have to leave India. She promised in October 1791 to return to Europe, but she could not bring herself to leave until more than two years later, in December 1793. Just before her departure, she published in Calcutta a volume entitled *The Poems of Anna Maria Jones*. Her husband stayed behind to complete his work, intending to return to England the following year. But he became ill only months later and died on 27 April 1794 at the age of forty-seven. According to her sister Elizabeth, “Anna . . . reproached herself severely for having left Jones, though he had been well then and she would have sacrificed her own life by remaining.”<sup>4</sup>

After her return to England, Anna Maria Jones lived at Worthing House, near Basingstoke, with long stays in London, and in 1806 she adopted her sister’s children. She edited her husband’s voluminous writings, published in 1799 by G. G. & J. Robinson as *The Works of Sir William Jones*, and gathered the necessary letters and papers for a memoir, written by her husband’s friend John Shore, Lord Teignmouth, and published in 1804. Anna Maria Jones died on 7 July 1829. Her manuscript journals and letters from India were destroyed in 1857. A pen-and-ink sketch of her from the mid-1780s is in William Jones’s notebook in the Osborne Collection at Yale, reproduced in Garland Cannon’s edition of the *Letters of Sir William Jones* (1970). Some of her sketches are preserved in the Royal Asiatic Society in London, and four of her letters are in the British Library.

MAJOR WORKS: *The Poems of Anna Maria Jones* (Calcutta, 1793).

TEXT USED: Text of “Sonnet to the Moon” from *The Poems of Anna Maria Jones*.

2. *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Correspondence of Sir William Jones*, ed. Lord Teignmouth, 2 vols. (London, 1835), 2:27.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Elizabeth Shipley to Sarah Ponsonby, 26 January 1795, quoted in *The Hanwood Papers of the Ladies of Langollen & Caroline Hamilton*, ed. Mrs. G. H. Bell (London, 1930), 274.

## Sonnet to the Moon

Thou lovely Sorc'ress of the witching Night,  
 Whose paly Charms thro' sombre Regions glide;  
 Lur'd by the Softness of thy silver Light,  
 The Muse pathetic glows with conscious Pride.

On the gem'd Margin of the lustrous Flood,  
 Whose rippling Waters glide so sweetly by;  
 Oft have I list'ning to its Murmurs stood,  
 Trac'd thy pure Ray, and wing'd a lonely Sigh!

10 For *Thou*, chaste *Cynthia*, o'er my gentle Soul,  
 Shed'st the mild Beam of Contemplation's Sway;  
 Thy fascinating Spell with proud Controul  
 Sweeps the full Cadence of my trembling Lay:  
 Then gleam, bright Orb, from Midnight's velvet Vest,  
 And dart thy pearly Lustre o'er my pensive Breast.  
 (1793)