

## Anna Jameson and George Eliot

Adele M. Ernstrom

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### Article abstract

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# Anna Jameson and George Eliot\*

ADELE M. ERNSTROM, BISHOP'S UNIVERSITY

To the Memory of Shauna Murray Lamont

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## Résumé

Considéré au milieu du XIXe siècle comme l'un des plus anciens incunables gravés d'Europe, la gravure sur bois anonyme, connue sous le nom du saint Christophe de Buxheim se retrouve parmi les images discutées par Anna Jameson dans son livre, *Sacred and Legendary Art* (1848) où, dans une partie consacrée aux saints patrons de la Chrétienté, l'historienne raconte la fable de saint Christophe. La "vie" de Christophe y est caractérisée sous une forme qui en minimise l'aspect légendaire, tout en insistant sur une signification latente comme narration figurative. Cet article examinera le texte de Jameson sur saint Christophe et les motifs

iconographiques de la xylographie de Buxheim avant de voir comment George Eliot travaille ce motif dans la structure symbolique de son roman, *Le moulin sur la Floss*. Puis, il tentera, tout en tenant compte du contexte socio-culturel et féministe de l'époque, de donner un sens aux rapports entre l'oeuvre des deux auteures en montrant que la connaissance approfondie de George Eliot des ouvrages sur le symbolisme de l'art chrétien d'Anna Jameson lui permet d'établir les paramètres de la sainteté et de la vocation féminine tels qu'ils apparaissent dans *Middlemarch*, en s'inspirant du paradigme de la vie de sainte Thérèse développé dans *Legends of the Monastic Orders* (1850).

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Celebrated in the mid-19th century as one of the earliest incunabula of European print-making, the anonymous German woodcut dated 1423 known as the Buxheim St Christopher<sup>1</sup> figures among illustrations to two books on art by Anna Jameson (Fig. 1). One is her widely read *Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters* (1845), where the print exemplifies an initial stage in development of the graphic arts. It appears in another context three years later in *Sacred and Legendary Art*, in which the "parable" of St Christopher is elaborated under the sixth chief heading of Jameson's study of Christian iconography, "The Patron Saints of Christendom."<sup>2</sup> The "life" of Christopher is here characterized in a way that derogates his story as a legend—in this sense she finds it "prosaic and puerile"—while insisting on its latent significance as a figurative narration. In what follows I offer a paraphrase and commentary on Jameson's account of St Christopher and observations on the iconography of the Buxheim woodcut before turning to what I suggest is a reworking of these materials in the symbolic structure of George Eliot's novel, *The Mill on the Floss*. The argument takes up historical and interpretive considerations for an assessment of George Eliot's relationship to Jameson's work, examining next paradigms in *Legends of the Monastic Orders* (1850) as they relate to framing images of sainthood and ideas of female vocation in *Middlemarch*. George Eliot's knowledge of and close attention to Jameson's books on Christian symbolism in art is thus a starting point for this study; review of circumstantial indications bearing on the relationship between these writers is reserved for an appendix.

Recalling Old Testament traditions of giants as early inhabitants of Canaan, St Christopher in Jameson's text is a Canaanite whose epic size is proportionate to his sim-

licity of spirit. First known as Offero, the bearer, he became Christopher for having borne Christ, as he helpfully explains in her account. Like other mythical ferrymen ranging from Charon in Greek legend to Stamp Paid, the character in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* who ferries runaway slaves to freedom across the Ohio River, Christopher fulfils an ethical vocation by conducting travellers on usually fateful journeys across a treacherous river.

He does not come to this mission by design. In the course of a search for the most powerful prince on earth, Christopher joins the service of one reputedly the most powerful and richest of earthly kings, but leaves on discovering the latter's fear of Satan. He next attaches himself to Satan, a personage previously unknown to him, but loses faith in Satan's omnipotence when he sees his new master thrown into confusion by a crucifix beside a road. Wandering in quest of yet another prince to serve, Christopher encounters a holy hermit who acquaints him with the existence of Christ and with Christ's claim to his loyalty. Christopher is however unable, or unwilling, to serve Christ by fasting or prayer. The hermit then asks, and I cite the quotation within Jameson's text, "Knowest thou a certain river, stony and wide and deep, and often swelled by the rains, and wherein many people perish who attempt to pass over?" Christopher says that he does and the hermit continues: "Since thou wilt neither fast nor pray, go to that river, and use thy strength to aid and to save those who struggle with the stream, and those who are about to perish. It may be that this good work shall prove acceptable to Jesus Christ, whom thou desirest to serve; and that he may manifest himself to thee!" Christopher agrees and sets off to dwell by the side of the river, having first uprooted a palm tree which he uses as a staff.

Figure 1. Anonymous German master, *St Christopher*, 1423. Coloured woodcut from Buxheim (Swabia), 29 x 20.6 cm. The John Rylands Library, Manchester. Reproduced by courtesy of the Director and University Librarian, the John Rylands University Library of Manchester.

For a long while, Christopher obeys the hermit's injunction by saving those in danger of drowning and carrying the weak across the stream. One night a child's voice reaches him as he rests in his primitive hut of boughs. The child repeatedly importunes Christopher to conduct him across the river and, despite darkness, rising wind and swift current, Christopher complies. He makes his way with difficulty as the child on his shoulders proves a heavier and heavier burden. On reaching the opposite shore the child reveals himself to be Christ; the weight with which Christopher struggled was the weight of the world that Christ created. He acknowledges Christopher's offering: "Me wouldst thou serve in this thy work of charity, and behold I have accepted this service." At Christ's direction, Christopher plants his palm staff and, in further sign of Christ's acceptance of his effort, the tree puts forth leaves and fruit.

While intricacies in the formation of this legend were not Jameson's concern, we might note parenthetically that the Christ-bearing story is of medieval origin and connected with popularity of the saint's cultus from ca. 1300, while the narrative related as subsequent comes from much earlier sources.<sup>3</sup> We should not wonder then at the lack of explanation for Christopher's apparent desertion of his post. What occurs next in Jameson's account is his journey to Samos in Lycia to support Christians persecuted there. Thrown into prison by King Dagnus, Christopher resists the allurements of women sent to tempt him to sin. Finally the King orders the scourging, torture and beheading of the Saint, who goes to his martyrdom praying "that those who looked upon him, trusting in God the Redeemer, should not suffer from tempest, earthquake, or fire."

In the wide range of sculpture, paintings and prints that Jameson discusses as representative of the treatment of St Christopher in art, a series by Mantegna is entirely exceptional as a cycle depicting the passage of the river, conversion of a heathen in Samos and martyrdom.<sup>4</sup> Portrayals of the martyrdom by Tintoretto and Lionella Spada are highly unusual.<sup>5</sup> A great preponderance of images represent the



Christ-bearing subject, serving perhaps through the combined authority and mobility of visual invention to define as history what had initially been conceived as parable. I specify mobility because Jameson's iconography of St Christopher especially emphasizes prints, a medium with a propensity to travel, and in the case of popular devotional prints to provide a talismanic value as well. Two of the three images of St Christopher that she illustrates are prints. Of these the Buxheim woodcut especially epitomizes popular devotional imagery in this medium, given the archaic directness and *naïveté* of the print's means and handling in contrast to Jameson's 16th century examples by Dürer (Fig. 2) and Paolo Farinato.<sup>6</sup> In subject all three images are

Figure 2. Albrecht Dürer, *St Christopher*, 1511. Woodcut, 21 x 21 cm. The British Museum. Reproduced with permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.



linked to the ideal atemporal character of devotional imagery—the definition is Jameson’s—<sup>7</sup> through a dialectic between the narrative historical aspect of Christopher’s action and an implicit allegory of charity presented for contemplation. The contemplative provision merges with magical belief in apotropaic powers attributed to the sight of St Christopher’s image.

Announcing those powers, the Latin inscription in the Buxheim St Christopher is translated thus by Jameson: “Whoso shall behold the face of Christopher, on that day shall be exempt from an evil death.” She proposes that the print was directed to the working poor “as an emblem of strength and consolation”; the presence of toiling figures—a peasant wielding a spade to make a channel (?) on the left, a man guiding a donkey carrying grain to a water-powered mill below—would seem to support that suggestion. In this optic, Christopher’s effort would have its place in an economy of labour, his exertion expressed by resistance against wind that blows back his mantle in a cursive sweep, and by coils of line that register his contested progress through the current. Even the hermit who, we surmise, has followed Christopher to the scene of trial appears to serve actively in holding a lantern to light the way, though the

left/right disposition of ancillary figures may also suggest a contrast between the active and contemplative life.

Otherwise the print is characteristic in portraying a Christopher of gigantic size, with a full dark beard according to the German preference, and as looking up with furrowed brow at the child on his back. Interpreting Christopher’s perplexity in his travail, Jameson speaks of his carrying Christ and with him—here she quotes Wordsworth—“the burthen and the weight of all this unintelligible world.”<sup>8</sup> The devotional aspect of the print is enhanced by representation of the child, yet to be revealed as Christ, with a cruciform nimbus, the right hand raised in blessing; in the left, an orb surmounted by a cross signifies Christ as ruler of the world. Similarly proleptic in character, rather than historical, are roots of the yet to be planted palm staff as well as the leaves and date clusters.

On the basis of such claims, textual and pictorial or graphic, Christopher takes his place in Jameson’s study as a patron saint of Christendom, that is as one who (from the High Middle Ages) was generally rather than locally venerated and who symbolized a profound ethical truth. Let us now consider in alignment with Jameson’s treatment of this legend, George Eliot’s account of the patron saint of St Ogg’s which the narrator in *Mill on the Floss* elaborates before introducing the reader to Mr and Mrs Glegg at home.<sup>9</sup>

Appearing as historian of the old town of St Ogg’s, the narrative voice evokes what is said to be the remnant of a chapel dedicated to St Ogg, perhaps a section of wall built into the belfry of the parish church. The narrator claims to own several manuscript versions of St Ogg’s “history” and urbanely suggests how aleatory our reading of the past may be in avowing that he/she takes the shortest version because it is likely to contain the least error. Citing from this putative source, “my private hagiographer,” the narrator gives the following account of a saint unknown in the calendar (I, 107):

Ogg the son of Beorl was a boatman who gained a scanty living by ferrying passengers across the river Floss. And it came to pass, one evening when the winds were high, that there sat moaning by the brink of the river a woman with a child in her arms; and she was clad in rags, and had a worn and withered look, and she craved to be

rowed across the river. And the men thereabout questioned her and said, 'Wherefore dost thou desire to cross the river? Tarry till the morning, and take the shelter here for the night: so shalt thou be wise and not foolish.' Still she went on to mourn and crave. But Ogg the son of Beorl came up and said, 'I will ferry thee across: it is enough that thou heart needs it.' And he ferried her across. And it came to pass, when she stepped ashore that her rags were turned into robes of flowing white, and her face became bright with exceeding beauty, and there was a glory around it, so that she shed a light on the water like the moon in its brightness. And she said—'Ogg the son of Beorl, thou art blessed in that thou didst not question and wrangle with the heart's need, but wast smitten with pity, and didst straightway relieve the same. And from henceforth whoso steps into thy boat shall be in no peril from the storm; and whenever it puts forth to the rescue, it shall save the lives both of men and beasts.' And when the floods came, many were saved by reason of that blessing on the boat. When Ogg the son of Beorl died, behold, in the parting of his soul, the boat loosed itself from its moorings, and was floated with the ebbing tide in great swiftness to the ocean, and was seen no more. Yet it was witnessed in the floods of aftertime, that at the coming on of even, Ogg the son of Beorl was always seen with his boat upon the wide-spreading waters, and the Blessed Virgin sat in the prow, shedding a light around as of the moon in its brightness, so that the rowers in the gathering darkness took heart and pulled anew.

This invention weaves together a number of traditional legendary motives and opens perspectives on the novel in several directions. That the traveller in need was a woman whose credibility and desire were at issue portends the conflicts foreseen for Maggie Tulliver. Also suggestive is the presence as blessing divinity of the Virgin, among whose associations with water the title *Stella Maris* and her affinity with the moon are discussed with other attributes of Mary in Jameson's *Legends of the Madonna* (1852).<sup>10</sup> The "*pulchra ut Luna*" to which Jameson points as one of the metaphors from the Canticles applied to the Virgin may have recalled or converged with recollection of traditions connecting the moon with the movement of water, signalled in Titania's epithet for the moon, "governess of floods," in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. A further mythical dimension, proleptic for the novel's outcome, is the Scandinavian motif of the boat loosed from its moorings at the moment of death and carried away to sea by the tide. While these and other mythical themes contribute to the polysemic richness of *Mill on the Floss*, it is particu-

larly the implications of St Ogg's vocation of service that is explored in the discussion that follows.

By a stroke of irony, St Ogg's charity and sublimity of insight are placed in immediate proximity to Mrs Glegg's vigilance as an observer of "gadding" tradesmen's wives and other signs of human weakness. His example offers coordinates of comparison that place the Gleggs' narrow criteria of rectitude in a devastating light. The legend of the saint also participates in a vista on the past in which history and belief converge, followed by the sedimentation of memory up to a time when there were no more sightings of St Ogg with the Virgin at the prow of his boat: "the present time was like the level plain where men lose their belief in volcanoes and earthquakes, thinking to-morrow will be as yesterday, and the giant forces that used to shake the earth are forever laid to sleep" (I, 108-109). History is seen as inseparable from conditions of belief, as well as inflected by local material factors such as the loss of cattle in floods or availability of Russian linseed to the milling economy of St Ogg's.

In the imaginatively reworked appropriation of George Eliot's "private hagiographer," she was indebted to Jameson's understanding of legends of the saints as registering popular mentalities in terms that framed the moral existence of communities, terms imbricated within the structure of European history.<sup>11</sup> Jameson's method of reading these traditions in an ethical dimension, carefully distancing herself from any doctrinal position and from what were seen as "Popish" errors or superstition, was apposite to George Eliot's purpose in constructing her fiction within a mythical grid allowing for complex levels of reference. While the territory of myth deriving from Greco-Roman antiquity offered primarily iconic possibilities that George Eliot exploited, the ethical gestures inscribed in the lives and visual imagery of the saints as interpreted by Jameson were more widely fertile for the narrative texture of George Eliot's novels in ways that have recently begun to be examined.<sup>12</sup>

Similarities of narrative structure and genre between St Ogg's legend and that of St Christopher in *Sacred and Legendary Art* hardly need belabouring. Both stories are parables. Both figures reside by a river and make a practice of, in St Ogg's case a modest living by, conducting travellers across. Each is tested by the pleading of a person who asks passage at night in turbulent weather. The accomplishment of each test receives divine approval when the child discloses that he is Christ and when the woman in rags assumes the aspect of the Virgin. These epiphanies are associated with legacies of protection from death by drowning, with the difference that Christopher's salvific range extends to other forms of accidental death. Divergences between

the two accounts turn chiefly on the way motivation of a saint is characterized and especially on the issue of gender. Before looking at these differences it maybe useful to consider those aspects of St Ogg's story analogous to St Christopher's as they function in *Mill on the Floss*.

As a paradigm of vocation that is also a charitable mission, the legend of St Ogg operates as a meta-statement of the novel's meaning. Implicitly, as we have seen, it casts opprobrium on the quality of fellow feeling exemplified by the Gleggs and the provincial middle class ethos they represent. The story is implicated in the contrast to the Gleggs of Bob Jakin's offer to Tom and Maggie of his small capital of nine sovereigns to help repair the Tulliver family's ruin. Equally does St Ogg's legend comment on Tom's indifference to the expression of kindness and his self-righteous rigor in administering punishment. It glosses as well the generosity of Lucy Deane, so admirably foreign in the narrator's view to the prevailing meanness and vanity of womankind.

The story of St Ogg rings through the novel in other ways. Resonating as it does with traditions surrounding St Christopher, the burden of the world he bore amplified in Jameson's citation of Wordsworth—"the burthen and the weight of all this unintelligible world"—echoes in the defeated perplexity of Mr Tulliver's admission: "This world's been too many for me" (IV, 336). The world presents itself as insolubly "too many" for Maggie as well when in the novel's last book, "The Final Rescue," she is advised by the sympathetic Dr Kenn that she will need to leave St Ogg for a time. She then feels that she must be "a lonely wanderer" (VII, 467), but in the crisis of the rising flood assumes the mantle of St Ogg in a heroic gesture of charity that, with the death that ensues, cancels the "error" of sexual temptation into which Maggie has been drawn.

When St Ogg responds to the suppliant woman by saying, "I will ferry thee across: it is enough that thy heart needs it," the legend of St Christopher is rewritten, as it were, to supplant that figure's motive in the veneration of power. When the active role of St Ogg is assumed by a woman in the novel, the question of vocation is posed with a difference, that of sexual difference, which was ideologically crucial in the mid-19th century. The legend operates as an ideal plane on which a conflicted conceptualization of women's vocation as it would apply to middle class women is projected. The kind of work Maggie undertook as teacher in a school in order to be independent of her brother (or other family members) was implicated in a principal site of debate around women and work in the 1840s and 50s, that of the governess. As Mary Poovey has observed, the framing of the governess' situation as anomalous was grounded in fixed assumptions of the necessity of

women's dependence on men; the very existence of governesses was determined by fathers' "imprudencies" or failures to provide, according to the formulation of Elizabeth Rigby that she cites.<sup>13</sup> That Maggie Tulliver's Dodson relatives represented the position of teacher or governess to themselves as one of "going into service" (VI, 427) is a version of the unthinkable of such a choice in the earlier period of the novel, the 1820s.

Work as a teacher, though depicted as preferable to its alternative for a woman of Maggie Tulliver's temperament, could not be likened to the benign practice by which St Ogg earned his modest livelihood. No framework existed for considering the teacher or governess' work as a positive exercise of skill or of service. The terms in which the idea of work for women took on a new guise emerged in the mid-1850s in rationales presented for sisterhoods dedicated to active service in public education, in workhouses, in ministering to the sick poor and other arenas later the province of the social services. Florence Nighingale's accomplishment in the crisis of the Crimean War, important in part because of the extraordinary extent and kind of publicity it received, is but one strand in a complex development; her relevance in the present context may be seen in her insistence that nursing was a calling, though she was intent on separating that concept from an association with religious orders.<sup>14</sup> That the notion of work as a calling was, broadly speaking, a religious concept, had an acknowledgment in Anna Jameson's influential *Sisters of Charity, Catholic and Protestant* (1855). Her argument denying that "the existence of communities of women, trained and organized to help in social work from the sentiment of devotion" was necessarily Roman Catholic, positioned sisterhoods in relation to an ethos of work.<sup>15</sup> The world is to be understood as a place in which there is work to do, "work which it is *good* [her underlining] to do; a place in which labour of one kind or another is at once the condition of existence and the condition of happiness."<sup>16</sup> We are called to work worth doing, she affirms. "Sometimes the voice so calling is from within, sometimes from without; but in any case it is what we term expressively our *vocation* [her emphasis], and in either case the harmony and happiness of life in man or woman consists in finding in our vocation the employment of our highest faculties, and of as many of them as can be brought into action."<sup>17</sup>

Maggie Tulliver finds her "calling" in a single, final act that is a gesture of charity in its intention and effectively or symbolically a renunciation of desire. Hers is a story about the imperative of vocation, about the excessiveness of the "world's" constraints, and one that registers the difficulty of imagining an accommodation of female energy within a

provincial town of the period. George Eliot's hagiography of St Ogg, refashioning and in a few key respects "correcting" Jameson's account of St Christopher, is central to the novel's meaning and to what might be called its effect of ethical grandeur. The concept of vocation set forth in Jameson's *Sisters of Charity* similarly underwrote the widened grasp of purposeful life that for George Eliot in her maturity could not have the doctrinal basis it once had, but nevertheless took form in correspondence with a Christian fable.

Second in what Anna Jameson called her "series" on Christian art, *Legends of the Monastic Orders* in 1850 followed by two years the publication of *Sacred and Legendary Art*.<sup>18</sup> Among its accounts of saints of the Mendicant Orders is that of St Theresa, foundress in 16th century Spain of the Discalced Carmelites. Jameson's opening move in this exposition brackets, provisionally at least, her subject's sanctity: "St Theresa, even setting aside her character as saint and patroness, was an extraordinary woman—without doubt the most extraordinary woman of her age and country.... But she would have been a remarkable woman in any age and country."<sup>19</sup> Jameson takes issue with the judgment of Richard Ford in his well received *Hand-book for Travelers in Spain* (1845) that Theresa was a "love-sick nun."<sup>20</sup> Allowing that "in some respects the epithet may be deserved," she counters that there have been "some thousands of love-sick nuns: there have been few women like St. Theresa."<sup>21</sup> Among her "great gifts," Jameson affirms, were "large faculties of all kinds for good and evil, a fervid temperament, a most poetical and 'shaping power' of imagination, a strong will, singular eloquence, an extraordinary power over the minds and feelings of others,—genius, in short, with all its terrible and glorious privileges. Yet what was she to do with these energies," Jameson asks, "—this genius? In Spain, in the sixteenth century, what working sphere existed for such a spirit lodged in a woman's form?"<sup>22</sup>

Jameson's characterization of St Theresa's "genius" operated in several dimensions. In one of these she challenged the understanding of Theresa's capacity, especially her courage and intellectual scope, as masculine. Indications of such an attitude from her lifetime through the 19th century could be adduced at length, but some representative instances give the outlines of a convention. There was for example in her time the blunt approval of Pedro Hernandez, general of the Carmelites, who "had looked to find a woman in Teresa, he said, and he found a bearded man."<sup>23</sup> Theresa's most fervent English admirer, the 17th century poet Richard Crashaw, praised her "Masculine courage of performance," among other qualities, in the title of his *Hymn in Honour*

of St. Teresa, a poem quoted—though not to this effect—in *Legends of the Monastic Orders*.<sup>24</sup> The major 18th century compendium, Adrien Baillet's *Vies des saints* (1701), assigned principal credit for St Theresa's works to the Holy Spirit, but also considered her career in a more naturalistic light. According to Baillet, Theresa was possessed of "un Courage masle qui l'élevoit beaucoup au dessus de son sexe pour l'exécution des choses les plus difficiles...."<sup>25</sup> In the period that concerns us, this tradition was perpetuated by Henry Edward Manning, Archbishop of Westminster, who in his preface to an anonymously published life of St Theresa in 1865 pronounced that Theresa had the intellect of a highly gifted man.<sup>26</sup> It is implicitly in opposition to this mode of "explaining" what were seen as prodigious qualities and achievements that Jameson positions Theresa's "large faculties" as those of a remarkable woman.

In another dimension, Jameson's attribution of genius to St Theresa worked to abstract her subject from Theresa's context in Counter-Reformation Catholicism and from her historically important ties to members of the Jesuit Order. (Ford's *Hand-book* treats her as a tool of the Jesuits.) To distance Theresa from what was most problematic or positively offensive in her career and its representations from a Protestant perspective was necessary for Jameson's audience as well as in her own apprehension of the case. As a confirming authority on the head of Theresa's genius, she cites Harriet Martineau, a former Unitarian who had by this date renounced all religious beliefs. In *Eastern Life, Past and Present* (1848), Martineau describes her response to a portrait of Theresa in her convent on Mount Carmel: "there she is, the woman of genius and determination,—looking at us from out of her stiff head-gear,—as true a queen on this mountain-throne as any empress who ever wore a crown."<sup>27</sup>

Genius as an attribute of a Theresa understood in some sense as a secular heroine participated in feminist contention around the Romantic notion of genius in the middle decades of the 19th century. Christine Battersby has shown that in this legacy qualities often characterized as feminine—imagination, intuitive insight, spontaneous effusiveness, *inter alia*—were seen as properties (or privileges) of genius that excluded actual women from possession of the flame. She points out that this more recent version of genius joined earlier, still vital, traditions extending back to Roman antiquity when genius was vested in procreative power of the *paterfamilias*, broadly rather than narrowly construed in a phallic sense, and by extension in any free born-male.<sup>28</sup> This ancient convention survives as latency in what I take to be the most characteristic touchstone of genius in the mid-19th century: the idea of power. A telling formulation at

the threshold of this development occurs in 1824 in an article, "Men and Women: Brief Hypothesis concerning the Difference in their Genius" in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. "Omega" (John Neal, according to the *Wellesley Index*) here counters the claim that women's capabilities are related to conditions of education: "all the training in the world will never make the female part of the human family equal in bodily or intellectual power—by power, I mean downright and absolute strength—to the male part of the human family."<sup>29</sup> It was evidently in reference to this, or similar, assertions that Anna Jameson in her *Visits and Sketches* of 1834 affirmed the possibility of equal power in men and women artists, though she conceded that difference would govern its application.<sup>30</sup> Refusal of the equation between genius and male strength by Elizabeth Barrett Browning's heroine Aurora Leigh marks a turning point in the eponymous poem of 1856 when Romney Leigh's courtship speech condescendingly allows that "If your sex is weak in art/... it is strong/ For life and duty."<sup>31</sup> In *Middlemarch* George Eliot implicitly criticizes the gendered construction of genius by placing her protagonist Dorothea Brooke in apposition to the supposed profundity of Casaubon's scholarly vocation. She comments as well in connection with Ladislav's response to Dorothea's eloquence when her narrator's voice ironically observes: "A man is seldom ashamed of feeling that he cannot love a woman as well when he sees a certain greatness in her, Nature having intended greatness for men." Despite these intentions, "genius" had earlier been ascribed to Dorothea as a planner of labourers' cottages in an opinion cited approvingly by her suitor, Sir James Chettam (I, 33).

While George Eliot may well have known John Dalton's translation of St Theresa's *Life*, as Ellen Moers suggested,<sup>32</sup> Jameson's characterization of Theresa's "genius" is most immediately relevant to the project of *Middlemarch*. Largeness of vision, firmness of will, enthusiasm and the capability of influencing others are qualities by which genius is here understood. They form the paradigm against which the capacity of Dorothea Brooke is marked and the problem of vocation posed. But St Theresa's example was compelling not only for the conjunction around it of contested ideas of genius and of women's vocation. Dorothea sought a destiny that was "at once rational and ardent"; she felt that "if she had written a book she must have done it as St Theresa did, under the command of an authority that constrained her conscience" (I, 86). As Dorothea Barrett has argued, sexual fulfilment was envisaged by George Eliot in parallel with vocation for her central character.<sup>33</sup> Had desire not been an issue, St Catherine of Siena or St Clara—both of whom, renowned for their asceticism, figure in

*Legends of the Monastic Orders*—might have served as exemplars of vocation.

George Eliot alludes to Theresa's passionate nature in the Prelude to *Middlemarch*, but avoids reference to the rapturous intensity of Theresa's visions or their representation. Instead she offers an engaging image of childhood in which Theresa toddles out from Avila with "her still smaller brother" to seek martyrdom at the hands of the Moors. With all the bowdlerization of Theresa's own guarded account in her autobiography of what she considered seriously delinquent "pastimes" in adolescence, George Eliot could assume in her audience some notion of Theresa's vital sexual energies. If readers of *Middlemarch* travelled, they might well have seen or otherwise known of Bernini's work in Rome; they would likely have been acquainted with Crashaw's florid imagery in *The Flaming Heart* and his *Hymn to St Theresa*. More proximately, George Eliot could assume in her audience familiarity with Jameson's handling of this issue, however obliquely, in the *Monastic Orders*. It is to Jameson's text that we now return.

First of all it is worth noting that Jameson had to address issues in St Theresa's life and iconography that could be mobilized elliptically in a work of fiction. This is not to say that it was feasible to be very direct. Indeed she precedes George Eliot in the muting strategy that gives prominence to Theresa's early pursuit of martyrdom and in the language and emphasis by which the tale is told. We learn that among Theresa's eleven siblings was a brother of whom she was especially fond:<sup>34</sup>

They read together the lives of the saints and the holy martyrs, until they were filled with the most passionate desire of obtaining for themselves the crown of martyrdom; and when they were children of eight or nine years old, they set off on a begging expedition into the country of the Moors, in hopes of being taken by the infidels and sacrificed for their faith.

The use of this episode is unconnected with any claim for its importance in the iconography of the saint, nor is a single example of its representation in art cited or discussed.

Jameson's indication that she judges Theresa's writings from the French translation suggests that she consulted the four volume *Oeuvres très-complètes de sainte Thérèse* published in Paris in 1840-1845.<sup>35</sup> It is from this source, apparently, that she gives a condensed paraphrase of Chapters VIII and IX in Theresa's autobiography evoking a long divided allegiance between God and the world. In this context Theresa acknowledges the help she received from reading the *Confessions of St Augustine*, a work marked by conflict between the author's sexuality and sacred vocation.



Jameson would also have encountered in this translation of the *Life* Theresa's account of her intimacy with a kinswoman through which she was so changed as to lose nearly all inclination to virtue: having lost the fear of God, "il me resta seulement celle de manquer à ce qui me regardait mon honneur."<sup>36</sup> She says that the course on which she was engaged prompted her father to place her in a convent. Jameson elides these revelations by characterizing the adolescent Theresa as motivated by the "love of pleasure" and by stating that her only serious motive was concern for her "womanly dignity"; the specific sexual meanings of female "honour" are thus evaded.<sup>37</sup> But in a general way Jameson intimates the scope of Theresa's libidinal forces in a polyvalent reference to her "large faculties of all kinds for good and evil." She makes a similar suggestion that indeed questions the unity of affect and purpose in Theresa's spirituality when, noting "the orientalism of the Canticles" at times in her language, Jameson asks whether it may not be possible that "fervour of temperament was mistaken for spiritual aspiration?"<sup>38</sup>

Related problems surface in Jameson's consideration of the iconography of St Theresa. She regrets that despite highly picturable aspects of Theresa's history, "as a subject of art, she has been—not neglected, but, in all senses of the word, ill-treated."<sup>39</sup> Images of the seraph armed with the arrow of divine love and hovering by the saint in Spanish art are deplored for the "materialism" of the conceit. What historically appears to have been experienced as a unity of corporeal reality and metaphorical presence cannot be grasped through a mid-19th century lens which severs physical existence from a vaporous "ideal". But what is most critical here is the distance between Theresa's figurative language and the concreteness of visual imagery in representations that, unlike such translations in "early" art, cannot be received as *naïve*. The "grossest example" in Jameson's view is Bernini's group in S.M. della Vittoria: "the head of St Theresa is that of languishing nymph; the angel is a sort of Eros...."<sup>40</sup> She does not mention the problem of spectatorship provided by Bernini in the (far from rapt) male onlookers of the Cornaro family before a mystical experience interior to St Theresa. It is an objection that art history with its formalist inheritance and exclusion of such considerations as "prudery" does not entertain. But outside the conventions of art historical analysis, the dimension of voyeurism in Bernini's representation has not been mistaken. It was received by Jacques Lacan who asserted that one only had "to look at Bernini's statue in Rome to understand immediately that she is coming," at the same time positing the non-subjecthood of women in which there was no question of Theresa knowing or understanding her *jouissance*.<sup>41</sup>

Figure 3. After Charles Le Brun, *St Theresa*. Wood-engraved vignette illustrating Anna Jameson's *Legends of the Monastic Orders* (London, 1852), 6.5 x 5.3 cm. Apparently derived from one of several anonymous prints after Le Brun's *Sainte Thérèse en prières*, recorded in the 19th century as located in Convent of the Carmelites, faubourg St-Jacques, Paris. Reproduced from author's copy.



St. Theresa.

As exceptions to such offenses, Jameson refers to representations in which Theresa looks up rapturously at the dove of the Holy Spirit, expressing, she thinks "the claim to direct inspiration made for her—never by her."<sup>42</sup> One of these is a painting by Le Brun reproduced, like most of her illustrations of paintings, in the form of a wood-engraved vignette (Fig. 3). She also finds admirable Rubens' *St Theresa pleading for Souls in Purgatory* for its beauty as a composition and for its characteristic portrayal of Theresa with features that are "large and heavy, yet bright with enthusiastic adoration and benignity"<sup>43</sup> (Fig. 4).

That George Eliot with her keen interest in the visual arts did not engage any representation in art of St Theresa in *Middlemarch* was surely deliberate. Her many allusions to individual works of art and to art historical modes are carefully chosen and significant within the structure of her fiction.<sup>44</sup> Evidently she concurred with Jameson on the inequality of art portraying St Theresa in relation to her value as point of reference for ideas of women's vocation. Or for the vocation of exceptional women, whose "path through life [could never] have been the highway of common-place mediocrity."<sup>45</sup> She reworked Jameson's account in an idealizing direction, passing over evidence of severe, long-lasting conflicts that Theresa experienced in determining her

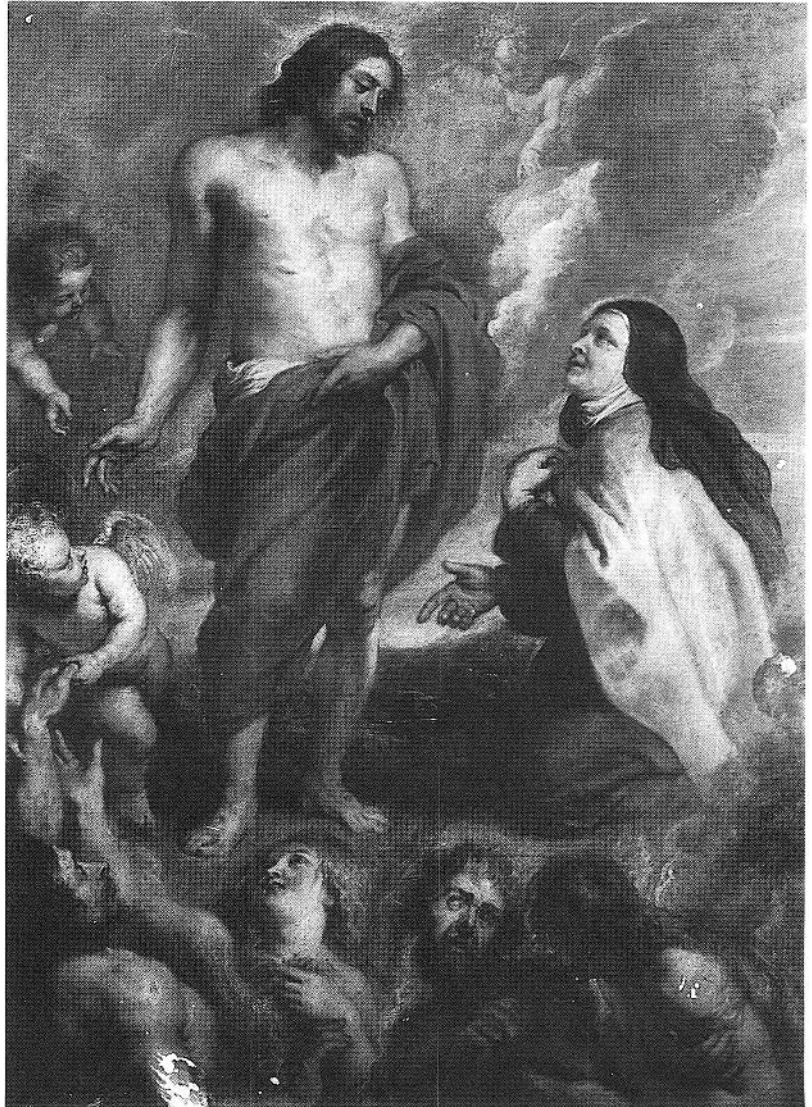
course. This tradition found its culminating idealization in Simone de Beauvoir's treatment of St Theresa as the exceptional woman who managed to live a fully human destiny, beyond terrestrial hierarchies and beyond gender.<sup>46</sup>

George Eliot's acknowledgment to Jameson in *Middlemarch* is oblique but telling. It is accomplished through characterization of Dorothea's introduction to the symbolism of art in Rome by the Nazarene painter, Naumann. Oppressed by "the weight of unintelligible Rome" (II, 190), as well as by disappointment in marriage, Dorothea is assisted by Naumann in "getting quite new notions as to the significance of Madonnas seated under inexplicable canopied thrones with the simple country as a background and saints with architectural models in their hands or knives accidentally wedged in their skulls" (II, 211). The narrator goes on to remark that this was apparently a branch of knowledge in which Mr Casaubon had not interested himself. This branch of knowledge was Jameson's province and it was largely through the influence of her work between the pre-Reform period of the novel and that of its composition around 1870 that the understanding of art by George Eliot and her English-speaking contemporaries was transformed.

\* This article is dedicated to the memory of Shauna Murray Lamont, teacher of Victorian literature and Women's Studies, colleague and friend. My thanks to Carol Doyon for generous help in producing the manuscript against an exigent deadline and to Cheryl Porter for work on the final stage.

1 Formerly in the Spencer collection and now in the John Rylands Library, this print is known as the Buxheim St Christopher because in the 15th century it passed from its original owner in Memmingen to the nearby Carthusian monastery of Buxheim. See A.M. Hind, *An Introduction to the History of Woodcut* (N.Y., 1963) I, 104, n.2, where the renown of this print is traced to German publication of a woodcut copy by Sebastian Roland in 1775. In the same year in which it figured in Jameson's *Memoirs of Early Italian Painters* (London, 1845), its fame as the earliest impression from a wood block bearing a date was challenged by publication in England of a woodcut discovered the year before in Malines and dated 1418, *Madonna with Four Virgin Saints in a Garden* (Bib. royale, Brussels). "The Oldest Wood Engraving with a Date" appeared in the *Athenaeum*, Oct. 4, 1845 with the professed aim of enabling readers to compare the Malines print with the Buxheim St Christopher.

Figure 4. Peter Paul Rubens, *St Theresa pleading for Souls in Purgatory*, 1635. Oil on canvas, 194 x 139 cm. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp. Reproduced with permission of the Koninklijk Instituut voor het Kunstpatrimonium, Brussels.



- 2 Anna Jameson, *The Poetry of Sacred and Legendary Art*, 2 vols. (London, 1848). References here are to the 3rd edition (London, 1905), where the legend of St Christopher appears in II, 439-50.
- 3 According to the *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, 12 vols. (Rome, 1964), the oldest text relating to Christopher's *Acts* goes back before the 8th century. The same authority attributes enthusiasm for Christopher in the High Middle Ages to the medieval legend as given in the 13th century *Legenda aurea* of Jacopo da Voragine. This was the principal source for Jameson's account.
- 4 Ovetari Chapel, Eremitani Church, Padua. All but the *Martyrdom of St Christopher* was destroyed in 1944.
- 5 The Tintoretto is in Sta Maria del Orto, Venice; the Spada is in the Louvre.
- 6 I have not been able to trace the Farinato, which evidently is not a print; it does not appear in *The Illustrated Bartsch XXXII, Part 1: Italian Artists of the Sixteenth Century School of*

- Fontainebleau* (New York, 1979) or in Gioconda Albricci, "Le Incisioni di Paolo e Orazio Farinati," *Saggi e Memorie di Storia dell'Arte*, XII (Firenze, 1980) as a print by him or an engraving after one of his paintings.
- 7 See "Of the Distinction to be Drawn between the Devotional and the Historical Subjects," *Sacred and Legendary Art*, I, II-17.
  - 8 Jameson's citation is elided from Wordsworth's *Lines composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey*.
  - 9 The Everyman edition (London, 1908-1941) is used here. The account of St Ogg occurs in the chapter, "Mr. and Mrs. Glegg at Home," I, 107.
  - 10 *Legends of the Madonna, as represented in the Fine Arts* (London, 1852). See especially the discussion, "Symbols and attributes of the Virgin" in the Introduction, xlv-lv.
  - 11 "Of the Origin and General Significance of the Legends represented in Art," in *Sacred and Legendary Art*, I, 1-10 is a founding statement of her approach.
  - 12 Most notably by Gillian Beer in "Myth and the Single Consciousness: *Middlemarch* and *The Lifted Veil*" in *This Particular Web: Essays on Middlemarch*, Ian Adam, ed. (Toronto, 1975).
  - 13 Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (London, 1989), 126-63; discussion of the governess as epitomizing the possible fate of any middle class woman (131-33) is based on Elizabeth Rigby's review of *Vanity Fair*, *Jane Eyre* and the 1847 Report of the Governesses' Benevolent Institution, *Quarterly Review* 84 (Dec. 1848).
  - 14 For an examination of Florence Nightingale's view of nursing, including her opposition to state registration of nurses as inappropriate to the status of nursing as a calling, see Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, 182-93. Her attitude to sisterhoods in relation to nursing is explored in A.M. Allchin, *The Silent Rebellion* (London, 1958), 121-24.
  - 15 Anna Jameson, *Sisters of Charity, Catholic and Protestant, Abroad and at Home*, 2nd ed. (London, 1855), 18.
  - 16 *Sisters of Charity*, 3.
  - 17 *Sisters of Charity*, 4.
  - 18 *Legends of the Monastic Orders, as Represented in the Fine Arts* (London, 1850). References here are to the 2nd edition (London, 1852).
  - 19 *Monastic Orders*, 415-16.
  - 20 Jameson refers to [Richard Ford] *A Hand-book for Travellers in Spain, and Readers at Home* 2 pts (vols.) (London, 1845), II, 805.
  - 21 *Monastic Orders*, 416.
  - 22 *Monastic Orders*, 416.
  - 23 As quoted in [J.A. Froude] "Santa Teresa: A Psychological Study," *Fraser's Magazine* LXV (Jan. 1862), 70.
  - 24 The manuscript of this title is reproduced in *The Poems of Richard Crashaw*, L. C. Martin ed., 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1957), facing page 315.
  - 25 Adrien Baillet, *Les Vies des saints*, 12 tom., nouv. éd. (Paris, 1739), VII, 236.
  - 26 [Miss Lockhart] *The Life of Saint Teresa of the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel*, ed. with preface by the Archbishop of Westminster [H.E. Manning], (London, 1865), xxxvi.
  - 27 *Eastern Life, Past and Present*, 3 vols in I (London, 1848), III, 235-36.
  - 28 Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (London, 1989); see esp. 52-60 for roots of the concept of genius in ancient Roman ideas of male procreativity.
  - 29 "Men and Women...," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* XC (July 1824), 389.
  - 30 *Visits and Sketches, At Home and Abroad*, 2 vols, 3rd ed. (London, 1839), II, 134-35.
  - 31 Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Her Novel in Verse: Aurora Leigh, with Other Poems*, introd. by Cora Kaplan (London, 1978), 86.
  - 32 *The Life of Saint Teresa written by herself, and translated from the Spanish by...John Dalton* (London, 1851). Ellen Moers's suggestion occurs in her *Literary Women* (New York, 1976), 315-316.
  - 33 In *Vocation and Desire: George Eliot's Heroines* (London, 1989), 128-29.
  - 34 *Monastic Orders*, 416-17.
  - 35 *Oeuvres très-complètes de sainte Thérèse*, trad. par Arnaud d'Andilly, Mlle de Maupeou et al., 4 tom. (Paris, 1840-45). The *Life of St Theresa* is in the first volume.
  - 36 *Oeuvres...de sainte Thérèse*, I, 139.
  - 37 *Monastic Orders*, 417.
  - 38 *Monastic Orders*, 416, 420.
  - 39 *Monastic Orders*, 421.
  - 40 *Monastic Orders*, 421.
  - 41 In "God and the *Jouissance* of The Woman" in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne*, tran by Jacqueline Rose, Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, eds (N.Y., 1982), 147.
  - 42 *Monastic Orders*, 421.
  - 43 *Monastic Orders*, 423.
  - 44 For an examination of George Eliot's knowledge of art and her literary pictorialism, see Hugh Witemeyer, *George Eliot and the Visual Arts* (New Haven, 1979). With regard to Jameson, however, Witemeyer notes only that George Eliot read, or reread, her work in 1860-61 as preparation for *Romola*.
  - 45 *Monastic Orders*, 416.
  - 46 Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe*, 2 tom. (Paris, 1949), II, 557-58. "Il n'y a guère que sainte Thérèse qui ait vécu pour son compte, dans un total délaissement, la condition humaine: on a vu pourquoi. Se situant par-delà les hiérarchies terrestres, elle ne sentait pas plus que saint Jean de la Croix un plafond rassurant au-dessus de sa tête. C'était pour tous deux la même nuit, les mêmes éclats de lumière, en soi le même néant, en Dieu la même plénitude."

## APPENDIX

Destruction by J.W. Cross of George Eliot's journal for the years 1849-54 unfortunately removed evidence for the period of her acquaintance with Jameson. It is nonetheless known that they met in 1852 through the arrangement of Bessie Parkes, friend from 1847 of Barbara Leigh Smith, later Bodichon, with whom George Eliot enjoyed one of her closest and most lasting female friendships. (G. S. Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography* (N.Y. & Oxford, 1968), 106). Bessie Parkes' father, Joseph Parkes, subsidized publication in 1846 of George Eliot's translation of Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu*. Bessie Parkes and Bodichon were subsequently editors of *The Englishwoman's Journal*, founded in 1858 at the suggestion of Anna Jameson. Another key figure among Jameson and George Eliot's mutual friends was Robert Noel. In a letter of 25 June 1853, George Eliot expressed her vexation at having repeatedly missed Mrs Jameson, whom she had especially wanted to see, when Mrs Jameson paid calls on George Eliot in Noel's company. (*The George Eliot Letters*, G. S. Haight, ed., 7 vols (N.Y., & Oxford, 1954) II, 105). This is not to suggest that close personal ties developed between them. George Eliot's liaison with G.H. Lewes followed very shortly after the missed visits with Jameson and the reclusiveness of George Eliot's life once her relationship with Lewes became known worked against the cultivation of recent acquaintances. Jameson indeed expressed reservations, in terms that were mild for the context, when writing to her close friend Ottilie von Goethe on March 15, 1856 (*Letters of Anna Jameson to Ottilie von Goethe*, G.H. Needler, ed. (London & N.Y., 1939), 209):

The story of Lewes and his Wife is true, I fear. The lady who is with him I have seen before her (known) liaison with him. She is first-rate in point of intellect and science and attainments of every kind, but considered also as very free in all her opinions as to morals and religion. In the first, there are I think certain duties not to be

thrown overboard; in the second, certain principles to be recognized; so that I do not well understand how a good and conscientious woman can run away with another woman's husband.

Juxtaposed with George Eliot's earliest recorded opinion of Anna Jameson, the foregoing seems a paradox. As an earnest Evangelical of twenty years, Mary Ann Evans registered her enjoyment of Jameson's "lively book," *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (1838), but pronounced the author to be "I fear of no fixed religious principles, if I may judge from an apparent affectation of a liberalizing, philosophising manner of speaking about religion and morals" (*George Eliot Letters*, I, 36). Mary Ann Evans presumably had in mind such passages as that in which a Delaware chief, Wangoman, tells a missionary he had been intimately acquainted with God for many years and would have known if God became a man and shed his blood; or that recording Jameson's admiration of a Chippewa woman who remained unmarried by choice, living undisturbed as devotee of her tutelary deity, the sun (*Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (Toronto, 1990), 308-09; 395-96).

All this is incidental, however, to the mature George Eliot's interest in Jameson's exploration of Christian symbolism in art, the first substantial and also historically sophisticated study of Christian iconography in the English language. In literary scholarship, notice of George Eliot's interest in Jameson's work has been mainly limited to recorded references to *Legends of the Monastic Orders* in the preparation of *Romola*. Within this framework it was assumed, quite inappropriately, that Jameson's book was simply a compendium of information rather than a work of interpretation that might warrant examination for its possible bearing on the novel's purposes in a wider sense. Such a lapse of scholarly curiosity is perhaps in itself something to be explained. But it is more comprehensible than failures by art historians to recognize Jameson's major contributions to the formative pre-institutional phase of art history in the literature of art in English.