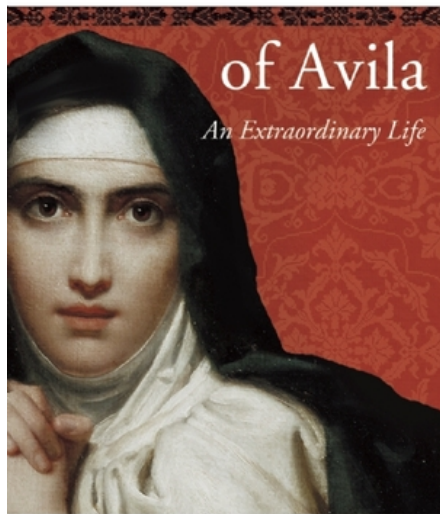


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Shirley du Boulay

"A first-rate biography...a compelling portrait."—The Independent

Teresa of Ávila: An Extraordinary Life

Shirley du Boulay

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Teresa of Ávila: An Extraordinary Life Shirley du Boulay

This intelligent, balanced portrait of an irreverent, intense, and fiery Renaissance woman and her times includes moving excerpts from her letters and sublime spiritual writings. Her unconventional, progressive views on prayer and worship, her outstanding administrative and literary talents, her travels around Spain to found and supervise convents, and how she spent much of her life under the scrutiny of the Inquisition are all detailed.

Teresa of Ávila: An Extraordinary Life Details

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From Reader Review Teresa of Ávila: An Extraordinary Life for online ebook

Lia Aprile says

Ugh. I was really excited about this book because I'm very interested in Teresa of Avila, but it was pretty darn dry. A shame, because her life, from what I've heard, was anything but. I was looking for a little inspiration, a little spiritual uplift, but it felt like a pure recounting of facts. Couldn't finish it. Sigh.

booklady says

Teresa of Jesus was powerful in obscurity, influential through humility and visionary recovering tradition. *Teresa: An Extraordinary Life* is an exceptional biography of a most exceptional woman. She has long been my hero and patron.

Born Teresa Sanchez Cepeda Davila y Ahumada in 1515, it will soon be the 5th centenary of her birth. Growing up a woman in post Reformation Europe and Inquisitorial Spain, Teresa's life was an anomaly from start to finish. Nothing about her seems plausible, then or now. And yet, the facts are irrefutable and attested to by a myriad of her contemporaries, as well as her own writings. Shirley du Boulay's tour de force is heavily footnoted; yet it reads like the best of novels. I literally raced through it.

Perhaps I'm not the best qualified to review this book as I've long been a devoted fan of Teresa. In 2007 I visited her home town of Ávila and the first convent she established, St. Joseph's. I walked the amazing walls encircling the medieval city, the best-conserved example of their kind in the world and included on the list of World Heritage Sites in 1985.

Despite Teresa's many visions, voices and mystical experiences and even her ancestral Jewish blood, Teresa stood up to the Inquisition. As 'a silly woman' (her words) she founded fifteen monastic institutions – for men and woman – beginning when she was 43 years old and continuing almost up to her death at age 67. She crisscrossed Spain usually in uncomfortable dangerous ox-pulled carts under the most treacherous weather conditions. Teresa, her sisters, one priest and the driver usually comprised the traveling party. Typically they encountered every kind of 'shelter' including flea, lice and other vermin infested rooms, unsafe dilapidated and/or non-existent walls and ceilings and unsavory dishonest characters. Upon arrival at the city where the new convent was to be established, she frequently found herself in battles with both church and civic authorities, without a location, housing, or funding to acquire a facility. Her insistence that each house be dependent on alms alone made her establishments extremely controversial, as that left them at the mercy of the goodwill of the local townsfolk, who would prefer she get a rich patron as other convents did. Yet she pressed on guided by her Señor.

Teresa was not only unique in her own time, she continues to inspire souls—of all faiths—in their search for God. The accessibility of her books, written as guides for her sisters, remain classic works in spirituality down to the present helping many (including myself) develop and deepen the prayer life 500 hundred years later. Begin with *The Way of Perfection* before moving on to her *Interior Castle*. However her autobiography, *The Life of St. Teresa of Jesus: Autobiography*, is also a good place to start.

In 1622, forty years after her death, she was canonized by Pope Gregory XV. The papal honor of Doctor of

the Church, was finally bestowed upon her by Pope Paul VI in December 27, 1970 along with Saint Catherine of Sienna making them the first women to be awarded the distinction. Teresa is revered as the Doctor of Prayer.

For many years she struggled to pray. This encourages me to persevere.

This biography is excellent, whether you are new to Teresa or just being introduced.

Jaclyn says

A pretty impressive story. She was a very inspiring woman.

Kyote4me says

I learned that overland travel in Spain from 1515-1580 was very dangerous, difficult and exhausting, especially for women. There were only ruts for roads, no maps, no Holiday Inns and a lot men who believed that women travelers, even nuns, were fair game for mischief. Teresa was very adventurous and intelligent during a time when women should be docile and pregnant. I only gave it three stars because I felt the author did not bring this facinating woman's story to life as well as she could have.

Jean says

This is a very interesting biography of a remarkable woman. It gives a lot of information about life in a convent and the reformation of the Carmelite Order. It's focus is on Teresa's quest to find God and do His will and the foundations of Discalced Carmelite Women's Convents that she established throughout Spain.

"To anyone asking for proof of the existence of God, anyone saying, 'Is God there?' Teresa's whole life offers a resounding 'Yes'."

Jeni Enjaian says

While at first I was intrigued by this book, ultimately I was left unsatisfied.

I read this book for my Reformation class (and will be writing an academic book review soon) and chose it because I knew little about Teresa of Avila.

This book was categorized as a biography but would be better labeled with the term hagiography using the strict definition of the word. Teresa of Avila is a saint in the Catholic Church. This is her story. Beyond the strict definition, du Boulay also indulges in frequent adorations of the saint, almost like fan-girl behavior. Any inconsistencies in Teresa of Avila's life du Boulay would mention and then praise Teresa because Teresa is a saint. What du Boulay did not do is explain how, for example, Teresa could strictly admonish no close personal relationships yet indulge publicly in many of her own.

du Boulay also diverts frequently into what could be termed meditations on various spiritual topics that arise throughout Teresa's life. At times the book reads more like a devotional than a biography or even

hagiography.

I wish that these flaws were not present in the book because du Boulay is a more than capable author. Her prose flows beautifully creating wonderful word pictures.

This book is not for people looking for an objective biography of Teresa of Avila. Those of the Catholic faith, especially those drawn to mysticism, would enjoy this book.

Jane says

Well written biography of a great and very human saint. A Great introduction.

It does have a "creepy" ending which ought to be intriguing enough to make a person want read it.

James says

This was a good biography of an interesting lady.

Judy says

Often when I read biographies of saints I have a very hard time relating to their stories or even grasping some of their thought patterns. This author did a great job of helping the reader to relate to Teresa and of putting her story in the context of the time period. I am now ready to read some of St. Teresa's own writings.

Katelyn Beaty says

I picked up this new biography on St. Teresa of Avila, the 16th-century Spanish mystic and founder of the Order of Discalced Carmelites, primarily to learn more about her ecstatic experiences. I now realize I should go directly to her autobiographical accounts of those experiences! Though Shirley du Boulay writes clearly and compassionately, she focuses too intently for my taste on Teresa's business savvy and dealings with a number of hard-headed monks who didn't want to see Teresa's plans materialize. I would recommend this for church-history buffs, only.

Katie Marquette says

This was an intriguing and well written biography of one of the more complex and 'human' saints. The author does a good job of making Teresa seem relevant to a modern audience while acknowledging and emphasizing cultural differences. I'm very interested in St. Teresa and look forward to reading some of her work - especially "The Interior Castle." Her ideas on mysticism and personal prayer are intriguing and appealing - a fun, interesting read!

Peggy Wickham says

I have trouble reading for very long lately, but this book I could not put down. I found Teresa (my Confirmation name!) a wonderful person to emulate. She had an amazing life, and the parts about St. John of the Cross made me want to read about him too!

Tweedledum says

Review written in 1998: I'm so glad I came across this book. My little exploration of St Teresa so far left me completely cold, but understanding where she was coming from changes everything. Inspired now to read her writings and discovered her for myself. Du Boulay speaks of a vibrant, strong and loving woman.

Debbie Hoskins says

As well as a mystic, Teresa was a good business woman and leader of convents who also worked for their reform. The text is understandable and well-written. The book is well-documented.

❄Elsa Frost❄ says

This is one of those books I read when I was still very little (even though one person told me I was too young to be reading books in the adult section). I can't remember if this book was accurate or not, but from what I recall I believe it was fairly accurate to the true story of Saint Teresa of Avila.
