

of England's "long revolutionary season" (136) of the seventeenth century. The book concludes by suggesting that this recurring appearance of female prophets, who speak the language of reform and succeed in forcing a theogico-political discourse (even if they are ultimately silenced), situates them at the very center of the process of creating modern political reality.

Those whose interests extend to political theory and gender studies will find food for thought in Cappuccilli's book because, in the end, this is a thoroughly theory-driven study. As historical analysis, however, *La strega di Dio* is less successful. Ample space is given to suggesting metahistorical models and theories of religion and patriarchy, but far too little time is spent delineating the life and writings of Caterina Mattei herself in a manner that would give substance to the claims made for her here. The reader who is not already familiar with Caterina will struggle to get a sense of the content or chronology of her visions or the shape of the works that recount her story, and will grow frustrated at bald statements that are left unsupported—as when we are told that there is a clear lineage (a "red thread") from Savonarola to Caterina, but are given no indication of how the *frate's* influence might have communicated itself, or when we are run at breakneck speed through select episodes from the English prophetesses' lives. This is a monograph more comfortable in the secondary literature and theoretical constructs than it is with the sources themselves. Whether that is seen as a virtue will depend largely upon the reader.

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The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila: A Biography. Carlos Eire.

Lives of Great Religious Books. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019. xvi + 260 pp. \$26.95.

Recent scholarship has examined the life and writings of Saint Teresa of Avila, the sixteenth-century Discalced Carmelite mystic and religious reformer, from a variety of perspectives. In his excellent study of the *El libro de su vida* (Book of her life), Carlos Eire demonstrates the inseparability of the written text from the identity of the flesh and blood woman in a clear and highly engaging fashion. In so doing he provides a fascinating history of the book's composition, publication, reception, and afterlife, as well as their consequences for the changing image of the saint over more than four and a half centuries.

In the first three chapters Eire discusses the difficulty of categorizing this text, finally designating it as both "autohagiography" and mystical treatise on prayer (59). Addressing the problematic nature of the book's original composition at the mandate of confessors and of mystical experiences such as trances and seeming levitations, he illustrates the difficult and even dangerous terrain that the saint negotiated in attempting to re-create them in a manner acceptable to church authorities. Eire

elaborates on some of the mystical experiences in chapter 3, placing them within the context of sixteenth-century Spanish Catholicism. He concludes that Teresa and her book embodied certain central Catholic beliefs and practices (miraculous events, mingling of matter and spirit, ritual) and were the equivalent of “a thermonuclear bomb in the arsenal” against Protestantism (96).

The final section of the book focuses on the *Vida*'s varied reception and influence from 1600 to the present. Beginning with a detailed account of its link to Teresa's beatification and canonization, Eire examines the book's impact upon such “wayward” or unlikely disciples as the Jansenists at the Port Royal Convent in France and, more indirectly, Quakers (125). In his view, the *Vida*'s influence may be seen in a “seismic shift” toward mysticism among certain branches of eighteenth-century Protestantism (127). The *Vida*'s visual impact was for many greater than that of the written text. From the early engravings to Bernini's Baroque sculpture, Eire explores the symbolic power of the transverberation described by Teresa in chapter 29. He concludes that Bernini's masterpiece unifies the central themes of love, ecstasy, martyrdom, and Catholic superiority seen in previous works, but also conjectures that the sensuality of the experience itself may have been a form of “female assertiveness” in the “new and difficult times” in which Catholics needed “a good measure of outrageousness” (162).

Chapters 6 and 7 trace the changing image of the saint as interpretations of her mysticism responded to historical circumstances and intellectual currents from the Enlightenment to modernity. In chapter 6 the author brings together admirers such as Dorothy Day, Edith Stein, and Evelyn Underhill, and “psychoanalysts and other diagnosticians” such as William James and Freud (177). He also outlines the transformation of Teresa into a symbol of Fascist femininity during the Spanish Civil War and Franco regime. Nationalized and weaponized by writers such as Pilar Primo de Rivera, Teresa became an avatar of *la raza*, or Spanishness, in conservative Catholicism. The *Vida* underwent many editions, but like its author was closely associated with Franco's repression.

The book concludes with an analysis of some recent post-mystical approaches to the saint and the *Vida*. While Eire clearly values the important historical and literary studies that have appeared in what he terms the “intermillennial period,” his assessment of some of the postmodern versions of Teresa (i.e., Julia Kristeva's novel) is at times somewhat wry. Nevertheless, he disparages none of them, comparing Teresa and the *Vida* to a Rohrschach inkblot, open to many interpretations. That they continue to elicit new, if disparate, readings and representations is, in his view, proof of their enduring significance. Eire leaves no doubt that for him the *Vida* is above all a great religious book.

Written in a very accessible style, *The Life of Saint Teresa of Avila* is an excellent introduction to Teresa and her *Vida* for the general public, but will also be of great interest to Teresian scholars and students of literary and religious history.

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