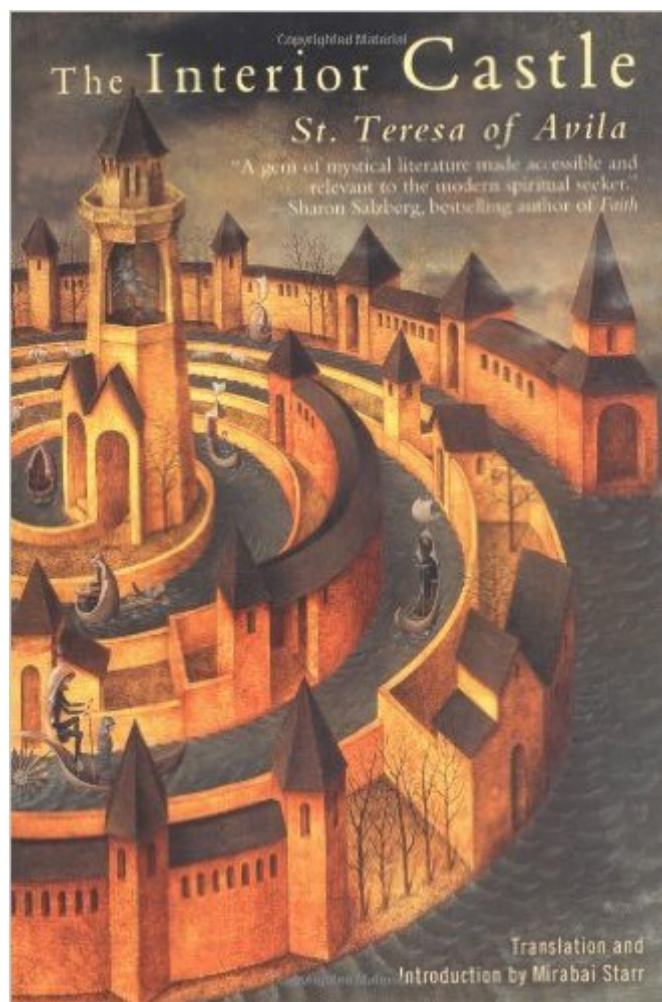


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The Interior Castle



Synopsis

The acclaimed modern translation of St. Teresa of Avila's classic book on spiritual awareness and guidance. Celebrated for almost five centuries as a master of spiritual literature, 16th-century saint Teresa of Avila is one of the most beloved religious figures in history. Overcome one day by a mystical vision of a crystal castle with seven chambers, each representing a different stage in spiritual development, Teresa immediately wrote *The Interior Castle*. Probably her most important and widely studied work, it guides the spiritual seeker through each stage of development until the soul's final union with the divine. Free of religious dogma, this modern translation renders St. Teresa's work a beautiful and practical set of teachings for seekers of all faiths in need of spiritual guidance. It also places this classic book on spirituality — "a gem of mystical literature" — made accessible and relevant to the modern spiritual seeker" — "Sharon Salzberg" in a contemporary context, reasserting its literary importance even after more than 400 years.

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Customer Reviews

Teresa of Avila was a Carmelite nun living in the 1500s who wrote the "Interior Castle" (known as "The Mansions" in her native Spain) at the request of her confessor. A mystic who communed intimately with God, she had experienced a vision of "a most beautiful crystal globe, made in the shape of a castle, and containing seven mansions, in the seventh and innermost of which was the King of Glory, in the greatest splendour, illuming and beautifying them all. . . outside the palace limits everything was foul, dark, and infested with toads, vipers and other venomous creatures." This castle became Teresa's metaphor for the soul. "Interior Castle" explores each of the seven

mansions in great detail. Her intended audience were the sisters who made up her cloistered religious community, however her insights offer much to the world at large. Teresa wrote reluctantly and felt that she had little to offer that had not already been said. She believed that "Our Lord will be granting me a great favour if a single one of these nuns should find that my words help her to praise Him a little better." She focuses on the beauty of the soul and laments that we spend so much attention on our physical body and so little on the divine spark that is within. Teresa focuses on gaining self-knowledge, but not in the way we in the 21st century interpret that term. For her, self-knowledge means coming to know the soul within. It means understanding our dependence on God and gaining humility by acknowledging that we are nothing without Him. The route to self-knowledge and entry into the interior castle comes through prayer and meditation. As one progresses through the mansions, one comes to know and long for God more and more and to reject the world and its attractions.

Teresa of Avila is one of the more remarkable figures in the history of Christianity. Living in a perilous time, when the Roman Catholic church was suspicious of anything that might develop into Protestant heresies and schisms, she walked a fine line between obedience to the political structure and obedience to God. It is often the case that mystics and spiritual giants are at odds with church structures of the day (this is rather ecumenical, reaching across Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant lines). Teresa lived at time shortly after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain (which occurred in 1492). Her own family was a converso family; hence, there were different dimensions to the wariness of the powers in the culture toward her activities. Being a woman at the time didn't help matters, either, as she defied the stereotypes in several ways, by seeking education and leadership opportunities, all the while being part of the discalced Carmelites, who strive to cultivate humility and poverty. Teresa's life was not an easy one; she suffered physical ailments and political difficulties. However, she was also a sought-after advisor, spiritual leader, and fairly prolific author. Her various writings made her famous in her own day, but the towering achievement that has lasted over time is without doubt 'Interior Castle'. This text shows a spiritual journey on the inside, developing different walks through aspects of spiritual life and prayer developed in seven stages, or mansions. The life of prayer is the castle, with seven stages of development. The first three stages are pieces that humankind can practice with their own efforts; the final four stages are those which are given from God, and God alone - no human effort can reach these places.

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