

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Teresa of Jesus / Teresa de Jesús (1961)

Juan de Orduña (1900-1974)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Juan de Orduña was born and lived his entire life in Madrid. He was one of the most prominent film directors of Spain in the mid-twentieth century, although he also frequently wrote scripts and acted. Orduña specialized in historical melodramas during Franco's regime (1939-1976). Unlike other artists, Orduña remained in Spain throughout the dictatorship and refrained from writing any satirical or politically-charged scripts. As a result, his filmography is frequently equated with Francoist propaganda. Nonetheless, it is rumored that Orduña was a homosexual and hinted at his repressed sexuality in some of his later films. In any case, his adroitness at creating historical epics contributed greatly to European cinema of the twentieth century.

Film *Teresa of Jesús* (1961) is a black-and-white historical drama set in sixteenth-century Spain. The plot involves a young woman who is forced to join a convent when her father discovers her love affair with her cousin. She then becomes arguably the most famous and influential Spanish nun of the European Renaissance. Although the screenwriters did not adapt the screenplay from a play (as is often the case in Orduña's filmography), the story of Teresa's life in the film mirrors events from her autobiography entitled *The Life of Teresa of Jesús* (1550) and her contributions to mystical poetry of the sixteenth century.

Background *Teresa de Jesús* is one of Orduña's later historical melodramas, but still retains many of his trademark themes and style. The film stars one of Orduña's favorite lead actress, Aurora Bautista, who also famously interpreted the "mad queen" Juana in Orduña's highly successful historical drama, *Madness of Love* (1948). Orduña attempted to make *Teresa of Jesus* right after *Madness of Love*, but government censorship and criticism from the Carmelite order delayed production for many years. While not as famous as his earlier dramas and musicals, *Teresa of Jesus* did win a special award given by the National Film Syndicate of Spain, a film organization formed in 1942 and maintained during Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975).

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Teresa	young woman who becomes a Carmelite nun
Anunciación	nun arrested by the Inquisition
Mother Superior	head of the convent of Ávila
Father Confessor	Teresa's counselor who takes her confession
Father Francisco de Borja	Jesuit priest who believes Teresa
Doña Guiomar de Ulloa	benefactress of Teresa's new order
Princess of Éboli (Ana)	noblewoman and leader of the convent in Pastrana
Don Francisco de Salcedo	bishop of Málaga
Álvaro	suitor who visits Teresa in the convent
Pedro	Teresa's cousin and suitor
Jerónimo Garcíán	Andalusian priest and Teresa's ally
Recuero	coachman who drives Teresa around Spain

SYNOPSIS

Teresa is a young noblewoman who is being courted by two suitors: her cousin, Pedro, and her childhood friend, Álvaro. Although she is interested in marrying Álvaro, Teresa's father discovers her flirtations and sends her to the local convent in Ávila.

After six years as a nun, Teresa follows an extreme regiment of self-flagellation and fasting, which causes her to feel weak and provokes several fainting fits. Despite the mandates from the Mother Superior and her Confessor, Teresa insists that she is receiving messages from Jesus and that she wishes to adopt an austere lifestyle—including walking barefoot and sleeping on hard cots.

Eventually, Teresa gains permission to found her own order and recruits several acolytes. She travels around Spain and meets several allies. She manages to found many convents in Castile and even a few in Andalucía with the priest Jerónimo Garcíán. Due to her rebellion against traditional Carmelite orders, Teresa is arrested and interrogated by the Inquisitors of the Spanish Inquisition. She answers well enough to continue proselytizing for the rest of her life, and she dies peacefully after returning to Ávila.

SCENES

The Inquisition Arrests Sor Anunciación at the Convent There is an exterior shot of the gates of Ávila in central Spain, then a close-up of an official knocking on the convent door. A group of Inquisitors march into the private chambers of an older nun. The inquisitors interrogate her about claims of stigmata, and she shows them her bleeding, wounded, hands. They also ask whether it is true that she has managed to survive only on communion. One of the officials searches a chest at the foot of her bed and finds a knife covered in blood under a sheet, and another finds a bowl of sausages and bread. The Inquisitors arrest her for heresy and escort her out into the public square.



Álvaro Courts Teresa Teresa watches the arrest of the nun from the balcony of her garden and looks down to see Álvaro looking up at her from the street. Teresa shows sympathy for the nun and admits that she is afraid of the inquisitors. Álvaro assures her that the nun was probably a Lutheran or another type of heretic, and Teresa would not be targeted because she is a good Christian. Álvaro asks passersby about why she was arrested. Teresa descends to the patio and speaks intimately to Álvaro through the gate. Álvaro reminds Teresa that he has professed his love several times to her, and she replies that she has not yet decided to whom she will give her heart. The two trade flirtations until Teresa's cousin, Pedro, interrupts their conversation. Álvaro and Pedro threaten each other and suggest a possible contest. After Pedro leaves, Álvaro notes Pedro's intentions and suggests that they could elope and live together in another town. Teresa does not fully acquiesce, but she agrees to meet him that night. She agrees to give him a rose as a sign of her affection.



Pedro Also Pursues Teresa After Álvaro leaves, Pedro enters the garden just as Teresa is going inside. She turns around and meets him halfway in a coquettish fashion. Pedro repeats the report about Anunciación's arrest, then goes on to confront her about her meeting with Álvaro. Teresa becomes annoyed with his jealousy and starts to walk away. He grabs her and professes his love. As with Álvaro, Teresa refuses to commit to his proposal but promises to meet him at 10:00. Pedro also asks for her flower, and she tosses it to him as she goes inside.

Álvaro and Pedro Duel At 10:00, Teresa emerges and sees Álvaro. She borrows her maid Juana's rose to give to him. He insists that she give him a direct answer about a proposal, but Teresa evades an answer. Instead, she offers him the rose and asks him to leave before her father sees them. Pedro enters and confronts Álvaro; both men notice that Teresa has given them roses. They begin to duel despite Teresa's protests. Teresa's father intervenes and declares that Teresa will not marry anyone. He further explains that there is a family tradition of chaste women, and he demands that Teresa guard her "honor" above "worldly" experiences. He tells Teresa that she will join the convent of Ávila in the morning.



Flashforward to Teresa de Ahumada at the Convent There is an abrupt cut to Teresa, now a nun, explaining to a group of novices that she did indeed join the convent the next day. She explains that it was a difficult process leaving behind the outside world. The nuns ask her

which gentleman she preferred, and Teresa responds that she was unsure. She further explains that Álvaro visits her frequently, but she decided that it was better to enclose herself in the convent and avoid outside distractions. One of the nuns interrupts to say that her uncle has brought Teresa a present.

Uncle Pedro Advises Teresa Teresa appears at the gate to greet her uncle, and he gives her a book. When she laughs at the thought of sharing it with the others, her uncle chides her for being too merry and joyful in her service to Jesus. Teresa considers her uncle's advice and admits that she has always wanted to cry for Jesus's sacrifices, but she has been unable to do so. Her uncle advises her to read the book about San Jerónimo in order to find divine inspiration. Teresa immediately goes to her cell and starts reading. She loses sense of the time.

Teresa Experiences Masochistic Pleasure and the Mother Superior Intervenes

The camera cuts to a prayer session in which the nuns sing devotions in chorus. Teresa faints suddenly, and the Mother Superior commands that she be returned to her cell. The Mother Superior confronts Teresa about starving herself and asks whether Teresa is attempting a prolonged suicide. Teresa explains that she is trying to suffer in service of Jesus; she also says that despite her self-flagellation, she does not feel pain. The Mother Superior accuses her of lying and demands that she speak directly to the image of Jesus on the cross. Teresa does so, and she further confesses that she experiences pleasure from her regimen—and that she speaks to Jesus. The Mother Superior reminds her that in the Carmelite order, all the sisters are equal. She further mandates that Teresa cease fasting and all other “torments.” When another sister brings her food, the Mother Superior reminds Teresa that she must eat. Teresa assents half-heartedly, and the Mother Superior tells her that her performance of sacrifice is, in fact, pride.



The Mother Superior Exhorts the Confessor The Mother Superior goes directly to the Confessor and asks him to take Teresa's confession. She explains that Teresa has a rebellious streak and may be going down the wrong path. She also warns that Teresa might be attempting to “rise up” too quickly. The camera cuts abruptly to Teresa fainting yet again in front of the cross.

Teresa is Bedridden Teresa is confined to bed due to an increasing weakness. The other nuns try to feed her, and her father hires a group of doctors to survey her condition. Teresa confesses to the Mother Superior that she would like to die and fly to Jesus's side, but the Mother Superior reminds her that God made humankind to live—and that she is reveling in prideful behavior again. The doctors report to Teresa's father that they have attempted various scientific practices, which has not been effective. Teresa's father suggests that they bring in a curandera to cure Teresa. They journey together to Becerras, and Teresa is transferred to a different bed.



Teresa Fears the Devil and Remains Ill After seeing the curandera, Teresa reports that she still feels ill. She explains to a fellow nun that she fears that the devil is pursuing her and that she is still unable to cry. Teresa's father and uncle visit her and give her another testimonial—this time about Francisco. Teresa gets out of bed once her visitors have left. She sits by the fire, reading, and she begs Jesus to give her tears. When it doesn't happen, Teresa falls into despair.

Teresa Moves the Local Priest The next day, a local priest arrives to hear Teresa's confession. He is surprised at her frail state. She admits that she has sinned in many ways, including a sense of pride. She goes on to explain her ideology regarding the behavior of nuns: that they should suffer more for Jesus and imitate his sacrifices. The priest asks her if she has committed other sins, and she mentions rage against Jesus. Upon listening to Teresa's purity, the father breaks down and realizes that he is the true sinner. Shaken, he takes his leave of the convent.

Álvaro Rescues Teresa and Juana On the way back for Becerras, Teresa begins to feel stronger. The carriage wheel hits a rock, and the passengers are stranded on the plains temporarily. A group of nobles rides up to assist them. Álvaro and Teresa recognize each other, and



Álvaro approaches to greet Teresa. He tells her that he remains devoted to her and has kept the rose she gave him. He also asks why she will not see him when he visits the convent, and she replies that she denies herself visits. He asks her to promise to see him the next time he visits. There is an abrupt cut to the gate where the nuns receive visitors. The other sisters chat eagerly with their relatives and are happy to receive presents. Álvaro presents Teresa with a bouquet of roses, but she says that she will always throw them at the feet of her husband, Jesus.

Teresa Speaks to Jesus There is a wide shot of a party with music in the atrium portion of the convent. Teresa surveys the richly dressed guests and retreats to her chamber with the crucifix. She speaks directly to Jesus and complains that the nuns do not bleed enough for Him; moreover, the other nuns condemn her for cherishing her moments with him as “husband and wife.” Teresa bows before the crucifix and asks again for tears. Her prayers are answered, and there is a close up of her wet, devoted face.

Teresa Breaks with Álvaro Teresa emerges to find Don Álvaro waiting for her. She approaches and breaks ties with him. The Mother Superior, observing her behavior, chides Teresa for offending an esteemed gentleman. Teresa retorts that Jesus is the only gentleman she cares about. The Mother Superior approaches Álvaro to tell him that she will insist that Teresa come out to greet him tomorrow. Álvaro replies that he will never come back, as he has seen the anger in Teresa’s eyes. The Mother Superior replies that no one knows God’s will or what the future brings.

The Confessor Counsels Teresa The Confessor enters the chamber where Teresa continues talking with Jesus. He asks her about her behavior and conversations, and he warns her about indulging in pride. The confessor also remarks that Teresa should not in judgement of other’s prayers and piety. Teresa tries to contradict him, but the Confessor demands that she beg Álvaro’s pardon—but she refuses to do so. Teresa declares that she will never speak to men again. She remains defiantly quiet as the Confessor continues to demand explanations and confessions.



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The Catholic Leaders Discuss Actions The Confessor prays for her, then goes to the bishop to report on Teresa’s ideology. The bishop recommends that they call for theological experts to comment on Teresa’s visions and demands. He recommends Francisco de Salcedo, but a nobleman recommends another scholar named Gaspardaza. There is an abrupt cut to Gaspardaza’s chambers. The scholar warns the bishop that Teresa’s new ideology can spark an uprising. He also worries about a Reformation in Spain and a reactionary fervor from the Inquisition.

Teresa Testifies in Court Gaspardaza interrogates Teresa in court about her spiritual experiences. He asks whether she experienced pain and whether she spoke with the devil. When Teresa answers no, he asks her why she is performing masochistic punishments on herself when Jesus sacrificed for that very reason. Teresa replies that she is imitating sacrificial saints. When asked about speaking to God, Teresa confesses it freely. She describes how she feels the “light” of His words rather than actual language. Teresa reiterates her preferred reforms for a new order. Gaspardaza accuses her of sabotaging the Church and the truth. He also warns her that she might be convening with the devil disguised as God’s voice.



The Convent Punishes Teresa When the inquisitors leave, Teresa begins to doubt what she hears and wonders whether the devil is taking Jesus’s form. In a fit of panic, Teresa tries to cast out the devil by yelling “No!” at the crucifix. She also reports to the Mother Superior what happened, but Encarnacion only accuses her of hurling insults at Jesus. Teresa admits that the confessors might be correct, and the Mother Superior accuses her of infecting the convent with her rebellious ideology.



The Mother Superior sends Teresa to her chambers to find peace. The Confessor visits her and burns her books about Jeronimo and Francisco; he also commands that she “burn” her memory. As penance, Teresa writes her thoughts in a journal.

Francisco de Borja Visits Teresa As he waits to see Teresa, Francisco chats with the Mother Superior and the bishops. The Mother Superior comments that along with being a former duke, Francisco also has the reputation of being a trusted advisor to the emperor. Francisco replies that he is as humble as a worm despite his reputation. When he goes in to interview Teresa, the other nuns gossip about what he will recommend. Francisco and Teresa emerge together, and Francisco gives his report in front of everyone: that Teresa should continue to converse with God and obey his will, and that she should found her own order despite the obstacles that others put in her path. The bishop and the Mother Superior listen, astounded. Teresa returns to kneel before Jesus on the crucifix, and there is a wide side-angle shot of a literal ray of light that penetrates Teresa’s body at a diagonal angle.



Doña Guiomar Agrees to Patronize the New Order Dona Guiomar, a noblewoman, tells her priest that she has been inspired to help found a new order. When the priest asks for more details, she explains that a nun from the convent of Encarnación has convinced her. The priest asks to meet Teresa, and she enters just as the priest throws bread and grapes to children playing below. At first the priest advises that she give up on her plans, but he sees that Teresa is determined. When the priest visits another bishop, the bishop rejects the plan by claiming that there is not enough money in the coffers—and that Ávila has too many convents as it is. The bishop agrees to quash the new order and visit Teresa in person, but upon leaving the convent, he reports that he could not deny her—and that he said yes.

A Miracle is Reported Fray Pedro, the priest who visited both Teresa and the bishop, walks into the desert and disappears as he passes through an arch. When the bishop asks after him at the convent, one of the monks reports that Fray Pedro could not have been in Ávila, as he was gravely ill and lying in bed in his own monastery—in Burgos. The bishop marvels that he met Pedro in person, and the monk reveals that Teresa also interacted with the apparition.



Teresa Moves into a Humble House Doña Guiomar visits Teresa in Ávila and reports that they are still waiting on purchasing the house that they wanted. Teresa replies that she found a humble home that they can purchase immediately. The women agree to put up the money for an immediate purchase. They take a tour of the humble house and are pleased to see that the bell rings. When Guiomar visits the convent again, she reports to Teresa that the pope has given permission to found a new order. Immediately, a nun named Ana agrees to join the new order, and Teresa gives her the name of Ana de San Juan. Teresa and a group of new acolytes leave the gates of Ávila.



Backlash from the Town An angry mob from Ávila swarms the hall and complains about the new order robbing the city coffers. The officials agree with the crowd, but one priest dissents and says that there is no threat to five nuns praying together. He rejects the notion that Teresa is possessed by the devil, and he demands that the bishop weigh in. The camera cuts back to the convent where Teresa is summoned to a hearing about the loss of four nuns to her new order. The judge Baltasar and her fellow Carmelite nuns accuse her of calumny against the order. He chides her for defying the order and her prideful rebellion. She simply replies that she was eager to serve Jesus and that the Pope has given her permission to forge ahead. During the mass at the new convent, the townspeople storm the door carrying torches. The ringleader enters, sees the altar, and removes his hat in reverence. He tells the crowd that there is a higher power at work.

The Order Flourishes and Expands The women work together in the garden under Teresa’s watchful eye. Two Franciscan monks visit the convent and praise Teresa for pursuing her austere lifestyle. They explain that Francisco also reformed the monastery according to a similar ideology, and they also

describe their missions to convert people in the Indies (New World). Teresa replies that her mission remains in Spain working with the “old Christians.” She adds that she will find spots for other convents.

An Extended Pilgrimage Teresa hires a coachman to travel across Castile in an extended pilgrimage. They first travel to Medina, where Teresa meets a Carmelite monk. She explains that without austerity, the clergy cannot fully imitate Jesus. The Prior recommends a simple abode where they can establish a sect of the new order. A young monk, Juan de Santa Matías, accompanies the nuns and vows to become a member of the barefoot order once a monastery is established. There is an extended montage of the nuns carriage travelling across the country, interspersed with Teresa writing in her journal. She describes how they were successful in founding multiple convents and monasteries. Recuero, the coachman, continues to help them find food, including buying sardines for their journey.



A Luxurious Convent in Toledo Eventually, the nuns arrive at the majestic cathedral of Toledo. The priest gives Teresa an audience but rejects her request for a local convent. She shames him with an argument about humility over riches, and he gives in to her request. Teresa and the nuns are introduced to a noble family giving a luxurious party. The hostess, Ana de Mendoza, wears an elegant dress and an eyepatch. She explains to Teresa that she wants to help found a convent in Pastrana and maintain a severe austerity. Teresa doubts her sincerity. Ana describes how the façade of the convent will be gilded in gold and will host many parties. Once the convent opens, Teresa leaves on another pilgrimage. Although she is annoyed that Teresa won't lead her convent, Ana loans the nuns another carriage for their journey.



Teresa Blesses the Father Garcíán As they are travelling, Recuero and another coachman fight over who has the right of way on the tracks. The other coachman claims that he is carrying a priest, who is in a hurry. Recuero protests, but Teresa emerges from the coach to introduce herself and defer to the priest. Jeronimo Garci, blinded by Teresa's grace, bows before her in order to kiss her habit. He explains that he is a colleague who represents Andalucía. He asks to accompany the nuns as they found new convents. The two travel to Beas and open a new convent. Jerónimo urges Teresa to travel to Sevilla, where the sin flows as freely as gold. She agrees, but tells him that her first order of business is to fix the convent in Pastrana, which has also fallen into sin.

Teresa Confronts Ana at Pastrana The nuns at Pastrana report on Ana and say that she is constantly throwing parties, including hiring a fool to entertain her. When Teresa enters Ana's cell, the noblewoman shows her pages from her journal and makes fun of Teresa's description of the devil. Teresa chides Ana for her luxuries and for not obeying the order's mandates. Teresa throws Ana out of the convent despite her patronage, and she tells Ana that she will take all of the sisters with her. Ana vows vengeance as she leaves.



Teresa Tries to Lead the Convent in Seville Now in Seville, Jerónimo and Teresa work to maintain order in their new convent. Teresa jokes that between the heat and the guitars, it is difficult to concrete on abolishing sin. She confronts a young nun named Mariana about bringing in contraband from the outside. When Mariana tries to hide a piece of paper, Teresa demands that she confess what she was writing and to whom. Mariana resists and says that she will only confess to a priest.

The Inquisitors Storm the Convent in Seville The Inquisitors show up at the convent and demand that Teresa and the sisters testify at court. The camera cuts to the trial in progress. The gluttonous priest from Teresa's early days appears and declares that she is a saint. The Inquisitors interrogate Teresa about her letters and journal entries. Teresa bids them to look at her face and see her suffering in her wrinkles. The Inquisitor asks her why she didn't abandon her convents as ordered.



She answers that she was led by God. The Inquisitor counters that she conversed with the devil and considered herself a saint. When Teresa denies the accusations, the Inquisitor asks the counsel to provide an attorney in order to get straight answers. Teresa vows to defend herself and her actions, but she does admit her pride in attempt to imitate Christ.

Teresa is Absolved In the midst of the trial, Teresa sees visions of priests who praise her devotion and proclaim that her writings will be studied for centuries to come. The camera cuts to a monks' rectory where they marvel that the Inquisitors absolved Teresa. Father Garcíán visits the order and asks for a union among Carmelites—both shoed and barefoot. He is cast off and condemned for partnering with Teresa. Garcíán declares that he will continue proselytizing at her side, and the counsel excommunicates him.

Final Trip Home After the trial, Teresa and Gracián continue their pilgrimage. When Teresa senses that she is dying, they travel to Ávila for her to be buried in her hometown. Teresa reports that the Duchess of Alba has supported her reforms more than any other noble. Garcíán urges her to keep going, but she tells him she knows she is at death's door. The sisters and Recuero rush to get Teresa to her final resting place. When she presents herself to the duchess, she faints. The priest who testified on her behalf brings her a chicken to stave off death. When he sees the sisters walking in a funeral procession, he realizes she is about to die, and he cries.

Teresa's Last Breath The camera cuts to Teresa on her death bed asking forgiveness from her daughters. She dies asking to be reunited with Jesus, and upon taking her last breath, her face miraculously becomes young again. Recuero bursts in, prostrates himself at her feet, and runs outside to ring the bells of the church. The last shots are those of the sky and the revolutions of all the bells of the cathedrals in Ávila.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

TERESA

Teresa begins as a beautiful and naive noblewoman, then becomes the most influential nun and saint in Spanish history. Although other clergy accuse her of being prideful, Teresa shows an extreme devotion to her new order and ideology. She frequently sacrifices her own body in her efforts to imitate Jesus.

Proud Nearly every character in the film accuses Teresa of the sin of pride. Not only does Teresa found a new order, she is also accused of thinking she is better than her fellow nuns and the townspeople of Ávila. Teresa herself admits her pride when she speaks to Jesus (particularly when she prays to be able to cry), but she denies the charge that she is founding a new order to fuel her ego or become a saint.

Devoted Throughout the first half of the film, Teresa starves herself and engages in self-flagellation. Although the Mother Superior accuses her of performative pride, Teresa persists in her fast until she almost dies. Later, she adopts an ideology of hardship in order to imitate Jesus's own pain and sacrifices. As a new Mother Superior, Teresa ensures that her "daughters" follow the rules of the new order.

Sacrificial Almost all of Teresa's actions are meant to show her devotion through sacrifice. She wishes to cry (both literally and figurately) and experience pain alongside her husband—Jesus. In addition, she gives up her chance at comfort and married life to roam the plains of Castile and found new orders.

MOTHER SUPERIOR OF ENCARNACIÓN

The Mother Superior of Encarnación is the elder leader of the convent of Ávila and a defender of the traditional Carmelite order. For the majority of the film, she chides Teresa for her pride and rebellious nature. The Mother Superior is strict and exacting. She becomes the doubting Thomas to Teresa's Jesus.

Strict The Mother Superior mandates that the nuns follow a prescribed schedule and that their prayers are not interrupted. She also insists that the nuns come out to greet their loved ones during

visiting hours. When Teresa rebels and engages in extreme masochism, the Mother Superior punishes her by taking away her favorite books and forcing her to eat meals.

Dubious Until Teresa breaks away and founds a new convent, the Mother Superior doubts her sincerity and contradicts her preferred methodology. At first, she thinks Teresa's prolonged fast is an effort to gain attention and place herself above the other nuns. Later, she believes that Teresa has been conversing with the devil instead of Jesus, and she places Teresa in confinement. The Mother Superior frequently disagrees with Teresa's ideas about sacrifice.

JERÓNIMO GARCÍA

Jerónimo is a young priest from Andalucía who offers to join Teresa's sect. He shows loyalty by accompanying Teresa on her pilgrimages and follows her teachings in a sincere and virtuous manner.

Loyal This Andalusian priest is arguably the most loyal acolyte of Teresa's new order. He helps her to found multiple convents and continue to proselytize around southern Spain. He accompanies her in her travels and acts as a cultural advisor. He also follows her new methodology.

Virtuous García actually believes in the new ideology and tries to model the proper behavior as a leader. When he is threatened with excommunication, García stands up to the Inquisitors and defends Teresa.

THEMES

SOCIETY

Religion There are multiple aspects of religion at play in the movie (on both a macro and micro level). Most broadly, the Spanish clergy are contending with the Protestant Reformation and a realignment with Catholic doctrine, as well as the nature and number of monastic orders in Spain (see **POLITICS** below). Like the Protestants in other parts of Europe, Teresa is offering a new order with a new ideology, which constitutes a threat to the elder clergy. Teresa's ideology involves imitating Christ in a number of ways, including walking barefoot, wearing old or torn clothes, and experiencing physical discomfort. In addition, Teresa mimics Christ in her continual pilgrimages throughout Spain, and similarly to Jesus, she converts and collects several followers in the later years of her life. In the last scenes of the movie, the Inquisitors interrogate Teresa in a similar form as Pontius Pilate and Herod challenging the veracity of Jesus's miracles. Like Jesus, Teresa denies that she calls herself a saint (just as Jesus did not call himself God). On a more intimate level, Teresa engages in several rituals of self-purification: fasting, self-flagellation, fighting off the devil, remaining in silence for long periods of time, separating herself from her sisters and men, and communicating with God via vibrations and light. In her poetry, Teresa often describes her communications with God as somewhat erotic and even orgasmic: in a sense, she is being "penetrated" by God's light. While the film shies away from Teresa's more erotic imagery, there are several moments in which Teresa bows before the crucifix and a beam of light shines into her torso. This imagery not only suggests Teresa's divine inspiration, but also alludes to the centuries-old trope of the Virgin Mary portrayed as a glass that is penetrated by light (but not broken). In addition to Teresa's miracles, there is the key moment when Fray Pedro appears and disappears in Ávila even though his body lies in Burgos.

Illustrative Moment: Teresa Receives Divine Inspiration (and Tears) From Jesus

There is a wide shot of a party with music in the atrium portion of the convent. Teresa surveys the richly dressed guests and retreats to her chamber with the crucifix. She speaks directly to Jesus and complains that the nuns do not bleed enough for Him; moreover, the other nuns condemn her for cherishing her moments with him as "husband and wife." Teresa bows before the crucifix and asks again for tears. Her prayers are answered, and there is a close up of her wet, devoted face. This is one of Teresa's key epiphanies early in the film. After performing several masochistic rituals and penance, Teresa is able to communicate directly with her "husband" and receive divine inspiration, which spurs her to create her own order. Moreover, her unwavering faith allows her to finally be able to cry.



POLITICS

Conflict Sixteenth-century Spain was characterized by an enormous expansion of territory under the Hapsburg dynasty. In addition, Spanish territory was also expanding in Europe into what would eventually become Belgium and the Netherlands. Despite the breadth of Spanish wealth and power in the period, there remained a fear of Protestant movements and rivalries for control of the Americas. The film couches the anxiety of the Spanish Empire through the conflict between Lutherans and the counter Reformation within the Catholic Church. Several clergymen try to sabotage Teresa's new order because they see it as another rebellion against the Church and the State. The Catholic leaders worry that Teresa's reforms will incite public riots and uprising, which underscores the connection between religion and political power in the European Renaissance. In addition, the Carmelite characters in the film wish to appease the noblemen so that the rich continue to patronize the Church financially. The Spanish Inquisition also wishes to discount Teresa's new ideology in order to maintain control over Catholic doctrine. The fact that the Inquisitors arrest Anunciación (and perhaps unfairly) in the first scene of the movie underscores both the power of the Inquisition and the rigidity of Catholic doctrine in Renaissance Spain. In this way, Teresa becomes a threat to the existing monastic orders, the control of Castilian villages, and the success of the Counter-Reformation.

Illustrative Moment: The Bishops Fear an Uprising

An angry mob from Ávila swarms the hall and complains about the new order robbing the city coffers. The officials agree with the crowd, but one priest dissents and says that there is no threat to five nuns praying together. The judge Baltasar and Teresa's fellow Carmelite nuns accuse her of calumny against the order. He chides her for defying the order and her prideful rebellion. She simply replies that she was eager to serve Jesus and that the Pope has given her permission to forge ahead. During the mass at the new convent, the townspeople storm the door carrying torches. The heated debate in the town hall (and the hearing that follows) indicate that Teresa's new ideology is a threat to her original convent in Ávila, the secular townspeople, and to the regional and national church officials. The fear is that Teresa will inspire rebellion in the convents and monasteries and a possible uprising or even revolution among the people of Castile.



RELATIONSHIP

Marriage During the first scenes of the film, Teresa's storyline involves her choice of a husband: her cousin Pedro or the other suitor Álvaro. While Teresa is drawn more to Álvaro, she recognizes that she will have more financial stability if she marries her cousin. Both suitors pressure her to marry them, and Álvaro even persists in visiting her in the convent. The implication is that Teresa could have left the convent and married Álvaro against her father's wishes. However, Teresa's time in the convent has transformed her into a would-be saint who wishes to cast off a worldly existence outside the church. Instead, Teresa obsesses about her marriage to Jesus, and she continually refers to herself as his wife. Teresa wishes to serve her "husband" by imitating his sacrifice. This devotion to Jesus drives Teresa to leave the convent and found a new order; in addition, she renames herself "Teresa de Jesus," which seals her marriage in faith to her husband. There are also the subtle references to spiritual orgasms in which Teresa describes speaking to Jesus and experiencing a form of ecstasy as if she were having marital relations.

Illustrative Moment: Teresa Rejects Álvaro Twice

The carriage wheel hits a rock, and the passengers are stranded on the plains temporarily. A group of nobles rides up to assist them. Álvaro and Teresa recognize each other, and Álvaro approaches to greet Teresa. He tells her that he remains devoted to her and has kept the rose she gave him. He also asks why she will not see him when he visits the convent, and she replies that she denies herself visits. He asks her to promise to see him the next time he visits. There is an abrupt cut to the gate where the nuns receive visitors. The other sisters chat eagerly with their relatives and are happy to receive



presents. Álvaro presents Teresa with a bouquet of roses, but she says that she will always throw them at the feet of her husband, Jesus. Even though Álvaro continues to court Teresa as a nun, and even though he rescued her on the plains, Teresa severs ties with her preferred suitor. Whereas Álvaro wishes to return to the past, Teresa considers that her only marital bond is with Jesus; therefore, her “rose” is only for Him.

FLAWS

Pride / Obsession Nearly every character accuses Teresa of pride. Her actions of sacrifice are interpreted as performative, or showing off (or showing up) her fellow sisters. The Mother Superior warns Teresa that she should not consider herself better than her sisters or even those in the outside world. Teresa also confesses to feelings of superiority and rage, especially in her attempt to cry for Jesus. Later, the Inquisitors accuse Teresa of trying to gain sainthood or rebel against the Church. Specifically, they think she wants to be as famous as the saints whom she admires. Teresa replies that she only wants to serve Jesus according to an austere schedule, but her actions are interpreted as feeding her ego. While the extent of Teresa’s righteousness is in doubt throughout the film, there is also pride in the form of vanity. The other nuns in the convent sometimes express a desire to wear fine clothes or receive fancy gifts from their relatives. The danger of greed and vanity is exemplified by the one-eyed noblewoman Ana, who turns the Pastrana convent into an extended party for the rich.

Illustrative Moment: The Mother Superior Takes Teresa to Task for Her Performative Masochism

The camera cuts to a prayer session in which the nuns sing devotions in chorus. Teresa faints suddenly, and the Mother Superior commands that she be returned to her cell. The Mother Superior confronts Teresa about starving herself and asks whether Teresa is attempting a prolonged suicide. Teresa explains that she is trying to suffer in service of Jesus; she also says that despite her self-flagellation, she does not feel pain.



The Mother Superior reminds her that in the Carmelite order, all the sisters are equal. She further mandates that Teresa cease fasting and all other “torments.” When another sister brings her food, the Mother Superior reminds Teresa that she must eat. Teresa assents half-heartedly, and the Mother Superior tells her that her performance of sacrifice is, in fact, pride. Whereas Teresa considers her masochistic acts a show of devotion, the Mother Superior interprets her fasting as an attempt to get attention and show herself to be “better” than the other nuns. Although Teresa insists that she only wishes to imitate Christ, she also admits that she commits the sin of pride.

QUEST

Introspection / Search Throughout the first half of the film, Teresa seeks to define herself spiritually. She is unsatisfied with the rituals and routines of the convent, and she feels as though the nuns lack true devotion. Her yearning to communicate with Jesus directly emphasizes her own spiritual quest to find meaning. Despite her connection to Jesus, she continually questions whether she may be speaking to the devil instead. For this reason, she studies other saints’ lives, writes in a journal, and frequently confesses to the bishops and friars. Teresa’s ability to sway clergymen in her favor suggests that her colleagues also wish for self-enlightenment, and they sense the light of God’s spirit in Teresa. Once Teresa has determined the ideology for the new order, her quest becomes a journey in which she searches for acolytes and locations for new convents. She continues to roam the plains of Castile and later, Andalucía until she is at her deathbed. This continual pilgrimage becomes her life’s work.

Illustrative Moment: Teresa Unites with Father Garcíán

As they are travelling, Recuero and another coachman fight over who has the right of way on the tracks. Teresa emerges from the coach to introduce herself and defer to the priest. Jerónimo Garcíán, blinded by Teresa’s grace, bows before her in order to kiss her habit. He explains that he is a colleague who represents Andalucía. He asks to accompany the nuns as they found new convents. The two travel to Beas and open a new convent. Jerónimo urges Teresa to travel to Sevilla, where the sin flows as freely as gold. She



agrees, but tells him that her first order of business is to fix the convent in Pastrana, which has also fallen into sin. This moment in Teresa's pilgrimage encapsulates her literal search for convent locations and allies, as well as her internal quest to serve Jesus by fostering and ensuring that the ideology at her new convents is followed. In her quest for new convents, Teresa also searches for monks, nuns, and benefactors who will help her on her spiritual journey.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why does Teresa starve herself?
2. How is Teresa's spiritual journey similar to Jesus, Mary, and the other saints whom she studies?
3. Why is Teresa's journal important to the story?
4. Why is Teresa a threat to Spanish governance and the Inquisition?
5. How does Orduña use close-ups and cuts effectively throughout the film?
6. How is the religious history of Castile in the sixteenth century relevant for Franco's dictatorship in mid-twentieth century Spain?
7. Why are Teresa's memoirs and poetry required reading in Spanish literature classes?