



The She-Apostle: The Extraordinary Life and Death of Luisa de Carvajal

Glyn Redworth, British Hispanic Foundation Visiting Chair at the Complutense University in Madrid for the academic year 2008-9.

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The She-Apostle: The Extraordinary Life and Death of Luisa de Carvajal Glyn Redworth, British Hispanic Foundation Visiting Chair at the Complutense University in Madrid for the academic year 2008-9. Before dawn one morning in June 1612, an elderly Frenchman took charge of a carriage carrying a precious cargo near Tyburn Fields, London's notorious place of execution. It was heading for a house in Spitalfields, where a wizened Spanish woman was waiting to receive the mortal remains of freshly-martyred Catholic priests. Her name was Luisa de Carvajal and this book tells her story.

Born into a great Spanish noble family, Luisa suffered a horribly abusive childhood and from her early years hankered to become a martyr for her faith. For almost 20 years she struggled to become possibly the first female missionary of modern times.

In 1605 - the year of the Gunpowder Plot - she was secreted into England by the Jesuits, despite the fact that she spoke not a word of English. To everyone's surprise including her own, she steadily assumed a prominent role within London's underground Catholic community, setting up an unofficial nunnery, offering Roman priests a secure place to live, consoling prisoners awaiting execution, importing banned books, and helping persecuted Catholics to flee abroad. Throughout this time she ran the grave risk of imprisonment and execution, yet she miraculously managed to avoid this ultimate fate in spite of being arrested on a number of occasions.

This vividly written biography, the first to give equal treatment to her double life in Spain and England, is based on Luisa's own autobiographical writings, her sparkling collection of poems and letters, and the detailed reminiscences by dozens of people who worked with her. In parts humorous, the book contains Luisa's biting descriptions of the cost of living in Shakespeare's London, the poor quality of food in the capital, as well as the weekend rowdiness of the English.

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