



## **Simone Weil: A Penguin Life (Penguin Lives)**

*Francine du Plessix Gray*

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Francine du Plessix Gray's biography of the Marquis de Sade, *At Home with the Marquis de Sade*, was hailed by The New York Times Book Review as a "boldly imaginative retelling" of his life and garnered the critically acclaimed author a Pulitzer Prize nomination. In *Simone Weil*, du Plessix Gray vividly evokes the life of an equally complex and intriguing figure. A patriot and a mystic, an unruly activist plagued by self-doubt, a pampered intellectual with a credo of manual labor, an ascetic who craved sensuous beauty, Simone Weil died at the age of thirty-four prematurely after a long struggle with anorexia. But her tremendous intellectual legacy foresaw many of the twentieth century's great changes and continues to influence philosophy today. Simone Weil traces this seminal thinker's transformation from privileged Parisian student to union organizer, activist, and philosopher as well as the complex evolution of her ideas on Christianity, politics, and sexuality. In this thoughtful and compelling biography, du Plessix Gray illuminates an enigmatic figure and early feminist whose passion and pathos will fascinate a wide audience of readers.

## **Simone Weil: A Penguin Life (Penguin Lives) Details**

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## **From Reader Review Simone Weil: A Penguin Life (Penguin Lives) for online ebook**

### **David M says**

This book is just terrible. The most condescending biography I've ever read. The author clearly thinks she's smarter than Weil and, just as clearly, she's not. So you can throw around a lot of terms from pop psychology. Big fucking deal. Weil taught herself to read Sanskrit, studied Ancient Greek and followed advanced mathematics, and developed her own original theology. She may have been crazy, but just possibly you with your smug liberal stupidity could stand to learn something from a crazy person.

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### **David says**

This may be the only 5 star book on my list. This is not a good read: it is a powerful read. I think that I am talking more about the life depicted than the writing. However, I will say that the writing was concise and flowed. It was understated and held my attention through all the anger and pain evoked.

Beginning the book I wanted to throw it across the room because of Simone's self-centeredness and being so spoiled. Then I wanted to throw it across the room because of her naive political ideas. Then I could not stop reading the book as she moved from agnostic Jew to heretical Roman catholic. That move took up about 1/2 the book as she moved into the War and the parents' and her escape.

There are more ups and downs, confessions, moves, nasty letters, confrontations, you name it in the book.

Through the book, I was moved to anger, to sadness, frustrations, pity, confusion, and more. However, I never did come to appreciate her thought or her approach to live. However, fascinated I remain. Unlike many I do not consider her one of the great philosophers of the 20th century. However, I do imagine that she influenced many.

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### **Charlene says**

20th century woman you must know.

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### **I. says**

Simone Weil (unfortunately) really resonates with me. The biography was somewhat annoyingly written (stop with how Simone Weil could have been beautiful if she tried, jfc) but it's a concise and relatively detailed account of the life of a fascinating person

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## **John Wolfe says**

I'm on page 150 ...now I think we're going to hit the real crazy stuff. So far, du Plessix Gray is doing a great job defending Weil, showing how her attitudes and behaviors fit into the temper of her times -- and how they generally are supported by fierce, passionate thinking (it's like, her neuroses are channeled into fierce thought ...) I'm interested to see if she can keep up this tone for Weil's final years.

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## **Kasey Jueds says**

The second Penguin Lives biography I've read in the past month. Both have been smart and readable and fascinating, this one in particular (the other was Kathryn Harrison's biography of Therese of Lisieux, which wasn't quite as rich as this one, maybe just because Therese didn't live that long) (which wasn't Kathryn Harrison's fault). Anyway, I did love this book--I knew almost nothing about Simone Weil, and found her life, as described by du Plessix Gray, moving and terrifying and admirable and deeply sad.

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## **Maggie says**

i am sooo glad to have read/listened to this biography on her b/c i truly knew nothing about her. now i know something which gives me a context to continue reading her words and reading about her. she was very very intense. love of god can do that to you, perhaps. but of course love of god is the source that balances us out to a better equilibrium too. which is a type of salvation -- saving us from our selves i.e. moving us from our distortions to our better selves and letting everything else fall away.

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## **Adam Marischuk says**

The best parts of the book are the quotations

Simone Weil is fascinating. Whether one is Catholics, Jewish or Atheist, conservative or bolshevik there is something about her life story that will resonate with every thinking person today. Her life as prodigy child to philosopher to teacher, factory worker, mystic and (near) convert to Catholicism is the story of a woman who grappled with everything she came across. One is reminded of the St. Augustine quote: "Our heart is restless until it rests in You".

du Plessix Gray's biography is decent, acceptable and generous without being overly flattering. It gives a good outline of Weil's life and times but is relatively less memorable than the quotations from Weil which are scattered throughout like seed scattered on rather average soil.

This book serves as a good introduction if one has not heard of Weil nor has any idea of the socio-political-historical era which forms the anvil for so much of Weil's hammer of a life. The best I can say about the book itself is it spurred me to get *Gravity and Grace*.

Some quotes for fun (from Weil, not du Plessix Gray):

"When I think of the Crucifixion, I commit the sin of envy." (p. 217)

"God could create only by hiding himself, otherwise there would be nothing but himself." (p. 215)

"To die for God is not a proof of faith in God. To die for an unknown and repulsive convict who is a victim of injustice-that is a proof of faith in God." (p. 186)

"When I think that the great bolshevik leaders proposed to create a free working class that...none of them-certainly not Trotsky, and I don't think Lenin either-had ever set foot inside a factory and thus hadn't the faintest idea of the real conditions that create the worker's servitude or freedom-well-politics appears to me a sinister farce." (p. 100)

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### **Stephanie says**

This was a well-written account of the life of a fascinating woman. It focuses on her life and not her work, with a couple of small factual errors I noticed that made me wonder a little bit how carefully it was edited. It can't have been easy to make such a readable and interesting account of the political and historical events participated in by Simone Weil. The biographer expressed a couple of opinions about her subject that seemed out of place to me, but on the whole I enjoyed the book very, very much.

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### **Meredith Payne says**

Fascinating biography of this complex, influential, paradoxical, and at times maddening philosopher.

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### **Jan says**

Great little biography. It would be hard to write a dull book about Weil, but du Plessix Gray's analysis is also first class. Head elsewhere if you want a hagiography.

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### **Padraic says**

Weil has been bugging me since 1976 when Simone Petremont's full biography was issued in translation. Reading Petremont, however, is like hearing about someone from an ex-spouse - the question of objectivity never seems very far away. Gray is balanced, objective, and well-researched - no small matter when the subject is as unbalanced, subjective, and mysterious as Weil. Short, too - did I mention short? End result: Weil still bugging me. Progress, of a sort.

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**Andy says**

Weil's story itself is fascinating, which kept me going through the book. As a biography it was good in places but overall mediocre. Among other things, the author seemed intent on convincing readers that Weil was essentially anorexic. Perhaps it's true, but I didn't pick up this book for a retroactive diagnosis of Weil's eating habits.

Overall I don't at all regret reading it, but maybe it's worth investigating a different biography of Weil.

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**Bevan says**

Ms. Weil was certainly one of the most complex and profound thinkers of the 20th century. Her intellect was astonishingly forceful and direct, beyond the depth of many of her contemporaries. At the same time, she must have been maddeningly childish and stubborn, insisting as she did so often on self-abnegation and almost martyrdom. According to the author, she had what is now regarded as a classic case of anorexia nervosa, a malady which was not well understood at the time. She has become widely read and influential in political circles. A fascinating read.

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**Susan Berchiolli says**

offshoot of existential cafe. Well-written, challenging subject but fairly easy read. Troubled, brilliant woman.

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