

## Teresa de Jesús: Life is a Dream

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**Abstract:** The cultural topic of life is a dream has been broadly and recurrently used as a metaphorical frame to host a variety of contents by authors of all times and places. From the Greeks to our days, Teresa de Jesús' original treatment of the theme life is a dream as linked to the also traditional topic of (feigned) madness has been effaced by editors and scholars persistently. In this work we show that Teresa de Jesús' texts stand in a relation of transtextuality, as an intertext (Barthes 2009) with those which preceded them and those produced later since, as linguistic acts fixed in writing (Ricouer, 1975) they establish a dialogic communication with its tradition (inasmuch as it actualizes it as a discursive act) as well as with the reader (because of its semantic dimension), thus creating a referential polyphony. Despite the relevance and indisputable modernity of Teresa de Jesús, her works and her identity as an author and as a poet were to be rehabilitated by the French symbolists first and later by US scholars as Alison Weber (1990).

**Keywords:** life is a dream; feigned madness; evaluation; intertextuality; polyphony; mystic communication.

**Resumen:** El tema la vida es sueño ha sido amplia y recurrentemente tratado como marco metafórico por autores de todos los tiempos y de todos los lugares para acoger contenidos diversos. Desde los griegos a nuestros días, el original tratamiento que aporta Teresa de Jesús ligándolo al igualmente tradicional tema de la locura fingida ha sido ignorado por críticos y editores persistentemente. En este trabajo mostramos que los textos de Teresa de Jesús mantienen una relación de transtextualidad, como entretexto (Barthes 2009) con aquellos que lo precedieron y con aquellos producidos posteriormente, ya que como actos lingüísticos fijados en la escritura dialogan con su tradición (en tanto que la actualizan como acto discursivo) y con el lector (por su propia dimensión semántica), generando una polifonía referencial. A pesar de la relevancia e indisputable modernidad de Teresa de Jesús, sus obras y su identidad como autora, como poeta, hubieron de esperar a ser rescatadas por los simbolistas franceses, en primer lugar y, después por estudiosos estadounidenses como Alison Weber (1990).

**Palavras Chave:** la vida es sueño, la locura fingida, dialoguismo, intertextualidad, polifonía, comunicación mística.

### Introduction

In this article, we will show the original treatment of the topic life is a dream as linked to that of (feigned) madness is an outstanding poetic innovation by Teresa de Jesús to the culture of all times. The author's emotional narratives, named in García Buendía 2015 as mystic communications, are thus naturally situated in a relation of interdiscursivity or transtextuality with the texts which preceded them and those of later elaboration.

We postulate that Teresa de Jesús' mystic communications would play the role of an intertext (Barthes, 2009) since despite the relevance and indisputable modernity of the author, her works and her identity as an author (Read 1967) has been effaced or placed obliquely by editors and scholars up to the moment when it was

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rehabilitated by the French symbolists first, and then by US scholars as Alison Weber (1990).

Intertextuality is used here in the Kristevian's term 'transposition' as Teresa de Jesús in her treatment of *Life is a dream* adopts a new enunciative and denotative position; *i.e.*, she articulates the thetic introducing at the same stroke of the compass, a new "revolution of the poetic language"<sup>2</sup>. Teresa de Jesús elaborates an ex-novo language that has been assumed as a mystic register and adopted as such by all mystics ever since (García Buendía 2015).

### **The theme Life is a dream**

Aristotle states in *On dreams* that the dream is a kind of parallel reality which is only perceived as real as long as one is not aware of being awake or asleep since at this latter state, reason –as Plato also affirms- ceases to operate in the conscious mind. Once awake and having regained consciousness, one is able to differentiate the two states and to realize and define the dream as a fake reality or as an illusion of the mind.

The fictitious dream, taken individually or associated to a fantastic or imaginary journey (understood as a personal or fictitious experience) has been frequently utilized from Antiquity as the perfect poetic frame within which to introduce an intellectual reflection or criticism by an author who needs to construct a virtual world where to take an ideological or aesthetic stance without risking their life.

In this context, where reality and desire intermingle, verisimilitude plays an essential role. In Teresa de Jesús' period, as well as during the Middle Ages, the dream and the journey were an efficient way utilized to write satires. Juan de Maldonado, for instance, wrote his *Somnium* in 1532, one of the first fictional vernacular accounts of a journey to the moon (*Quaedam opuscula nunc primum in lucem*, edita Burgos: Juan de Junta, 1541). The moon functions as a utopian *locus amoenus* from where to observe human life and to criticize its contingency at a moment of deep spiritual crisis within the Catholic Church. Thus the journey to the moon, impossible at the time, describes the Erasmian utopia of a happy island where one of the favorite *topos* of the Renaissance takes place, that of the *beatus ille*. As Alexander the Great did before, Juan flies over the earth; upon the accidental encounter with a reef, his boat capsizes and the main character awakens from his dream. The prophetic dream was frequently utilized by the so-called female masters of spirituality that preceded Teresa de Jesús, such as Isabel de la Cruz, María de Cazalla or Magdalena de la Cruz and Lucrecia de León, among many others. These visionaries expressed their Christian ideology through the rhetorical device of a dream and ended in the dungeons of the Inquisition or burnt at the stake during in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Like them, Teresa de Jesús uses parallel states of conscience called *arrobamientos* (raptures) in order to express (staging a scene created as an *ad hoc* frame for her virtual, theatrical, spectacular, fictitious supernatural experience) her ideological stance-taking and her aesthetic attitude.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Vid F. Rielo "Mis meditaciones desde el modelo genético". En *Filosofía*, 12. 2012. Fundación F. Rielo. Madrid.

<sup>3</sup> The metaphor of life as a theatrical representation is a recurrent *topos* among stoic philosophers. Stoic ethics greatly influenced Christianity and resurfaced again during the Renaissance among humanists such as Erasmus or Vives. St Teresa also shows a clear stoic attitude in her writings.

Artemidorus of Daldis (II c. AD) made famous a classification of dreams in his *Oneirocritica* which was later amply disseminated throughout the Middle Ages through Macrobius' (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c.) *Commentarium in Somnium Scipionis*, the standard work of reference on dreams. According to Artemidorus (and later Macrobius), there are two types of dreams: the enigmatic dream, prophetic vision and oracular dream; and the nightmare and apparition (or vision). Only the first triad could be interpreted by the art of divination. Teresa de Jesús' mystical communications (when seen in its narrative *denouement*) can be interpreted as narratives staged in a frame that resembles an oneiric experience (García Buendía 2015).

According to Arén Janeiro (261) “la elección del marco metafórico del sueño no es arbitraria, ya que mediante éste se presentan una serie de cuestiones filosóficas que provocan, en cierto modo, el estado anímico del poeta”. Poets' thoughts are externalized through the images that remain from the dream after being awoken. Each image provokes an alteration in their mood because it actualizes what perturbs or alters their memory. In Teresa de Jesús' case, it is the Beloved and the desired union with Him, her intense need to accomplish her compromise as a mystical reformer of the Church. According to Arén Janeiro, “producto de la fantasía, el individuo puede caer en un estado emotivo desconcertante, pues, en el sueño, se reviven experiencias indeseadas y deseos quiméricos”.

### **The concept of intertextuality**

The concept of intertextuality traces its origin to the first analyses on language. It has been traditionally defined with different terms, such as *imitatio* (Horace), *oratio* or ‘quoted discourse’ (in the classical rhetorical tradition) or as *influence* (in contemporary literary theory). We owe the term *intertextuality* and the concept of *dialogism*—their equivalence is amply accepted nowadays—to the post-formal critic M. Bakhtin, who defends that every text is an absorption and transformation of another text and that every text is therefore a mosaic of quotations. Julia Kristeva (439) says that “instead of the notion of intersubjectivity that of intertextuality takes over, and language is read at least as *double* because dialogism is, according to Bakhtin, an interaction among subjects, among consciences through writing and the text”.

According to Paul Ricoeur, the text, as a speech act, establishes a dialogic communication with its tradition (inasmuch as it actualizes it as a discursive act) as well as with the reader (because of its semantic dimension). Being a linguistic act fixed in writing, it is significant and evocative for the reader at the time of reading and within her /his sociocultural frame, thus creating a referential polyphony. Beristáin (37) observes that that “mosaico de citas, absorbidas primero para poder alcanzar su propia transformación en un texto autónomo, en cuanto se relaciona con su tradición, se convierte en un hipotexto y su relación con los textos posteriores a él, lo constituyen en hipertexto.”

As a linguistic act, the text is a resonance box because it is determined in its content and its form by the concepts of contextuality and intertextuality (Alba-Juez and Thompson) and therefore the *ideologeme* that constitutes it is not only literary but also philosophical, political, social and, above all, linguistic, as it is included in a complete spatiotemporal axis “como principio de toda subversión y productividad textual contestataria” (Kristeva128).

Evaluation also plays an important part in the texts under analysis here. The polyphony of a text considered as an evaluation act is an inherent characteristic of that text because it structures it and typifies it at the same time in its discursive context. That affects the final evaluative meaning at the moment of its production as well as during its reception as an evaluative act (Alba-Juez and Thompson).

In sum, the text does not exist in itself but in relation to other texts. Reading and writing are not disingenuous acts. To be the *intertext* of another text means, in Barthes' terms (78), that its referents (not its filiation) are "citas anónimas, ilocalizables y, no obstante, ya leídas antes: son citas sin entrecomillado".

In this article we defend that Teresa de Jesús' *Libro de la vida* is an *intertext* of other texts not only because of its referents (in the sense given to the concept by Barthes) but also if we understand structuring polyphony as an evaluation act (Alba-Juez and Thompson) and because the text as a whole constitutes a speech act, and act of intellectual stance-taking of Teresa de Jesús as an author in the intensive and extensive meanings of the word.

### **The *Libro de la vida***

In *Libro de la vida* Teresa de Jesús offers her own treatment of the theme *life is a dream* related to the concept of (feigned) madness. That is her intellectual contribution to the European thought. In this sense, this rather complex work is a clear example of intertextuality and contextuality, even though it is written with apparent and overwhelming simplicity, with images from daily life which convey and at the same time are used to explain difficult theosophical concepts.

Teresa de Jesús constructs her texts with images and uses them to make also a theosophical contribution, for "in all things there is a portion of everything else" as stated by Anaxagoras. Poetry is the spirit of God that dwells in the kitchen pots, thus confirming the saying of María Zambrano (43), who states that "la poesía desciende a diario sobre la vida, tan a diario, que a veces se la confunde con ella."

Some images are powerful in their simplicity, such as the rapture and the levitation. That is Teresa de Jesús' theological outlook. These poetic images are construed using her experience with a particular social group (the convent) and the contradictory and dangerous society in which she lived. With these images Teresa de Jesús generates, in a recursive and dynamic fashion, a significant experience that is perceptible in the rhetorical apparatus that the author uses to produce the instances of mystic communication in which she makes apparent her mood in parallel levels of consciousness:

"...Cuando me saca el Señor de mí; ni creo soy yo la que hablo desde esta mañana que comulgé. Parece que sueño lo que veo y no querría ver sino enfermos de este mal que estoy yo ahora. Suplico a vuestra merced que seamos todos locos, por amor de quien por nosotros se lo llamaron". (*Vida* 16, 6)

The cultural images of the period are in the contemporary cultural mentality and determine the collective mindset and that of Teresa de Jesús as well. This is the broad concept of contextuality that is handled in this article. Thus, contextuality is a

fundamental characteristic of the compositional task of Teresa de Jesús. And together with the relational projection of her work I show that intertextuality, forged with the cultural icons, forms the collective imaginary of her time, taking into consideration the social implications that condition, determine and construe genres and texts (Bajtín 1986).

Teresa de Jesús was an avid reader of the Christian authors. Among them we should highlight St Augustine<sup>4</sup>, who in his sermons has as his main objective the instruction of his flock. In order to do so he sacrifices rhetoric (of which he was a masterful expert) for the sake of a simple language intelligible for his audience. St Augustine speaks of a *diligent negligence* (Pascual 39), assumed by Teresa de Jesús and practiced throughout her work with the use of a personal “hermit’s style” as termed by Menéndez Pidal, or a “sermo humilis” as referred to by García de la Concha<sup>5</sup>(48). St Augustine knows how to reach the heart of his audience as well as how to entertain them. His *Complete Works*, edited in 1526 by J. Froben, are prefaced by a letter from Erasmus addressed to Archbishop of Toledo Fonseca. Teresa de Jesús knew this work well (Pascual 39-40). It is also possible that she wanted to emulate St Augustine in the way he argues without personally attacking and she does so through the use of tenderness as an inherent characteristic of her *Libro de la vida*.

The mystical experience is expressed in common language and serves the triple classical purpose of *docere, delectare* and *movere*, and uses words that pertain to the realm of Nature to explain the supernatural experience of the encounter, the direct communication and the union with God. Teresa de Jesús, as do all mystics, relies on images, similes, metonymies and metaphors that establish the archetypical value of fundamental associations, such as that of light and the origin (God) or that of darkness and the Devil, the doubt and the difficulty as stumbling blocks on the path towards God. The dream, according to Teresa de Jesús, is a category of the imagination, an ulterior state and the consequence of a rapture.

St Augustine affirmed that imagination is an independent power whose prototype is the dream:

Removet se anima ab his sensibus certo intervallo temporum et eorum motus, quasi per quasdam ferias reparans, imagines rerum, quas per eos hausit, secum catervatim et multipliciter versat et hoc totum est somnus et somnia.

### **The paradox of life is a dream and the *Libro de la vida***

The metaphor *life is a dream* is a literary, philosophical and socio-political convention is typified as an evaluation act in chapter XL of *Libro de la vida* (García-Buendía 2015). It is extremely surprising not to see it utilized in any of the standard handbooks of literary history used by university students of literature, theory of literature or linguistics, nor in those used by pre-university students. Conversely, the definition of life as a dream has been amply quoted and utilized with regard to Calderón’s *La vida es sueño*, in particular in what refers to Segismundo’s monologue

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<sup>4</sup> Vita ista somnus est: divitiae istae velut in somnis fluunt., said St Augustine, in his Sermon CCCXLV (alias inter Sirmodianos, 32

<sup>5</sup> The word *sermo* as well as the Greek term *homily* mean a ‘familiar conversation’.

(forgetting the words of Rosaura regarding this topic in the same play). This can be explained as a result of a misogynistic attitude whose analysis is not the purpose of this article.

The equation life is a dream is an old cultural *topos*. Among other authors, St Augustine used it in his Sermon 345 (on the rejection of the world) which he wrote in Carthage between 416 and 428: “Esta vida es un sueño; estas riquezas se escurren como en sueños. Escucha el salmo, ¡oh rico extremadamente pobre!: *Durmieron su sueño, y nada hallaron en sus manos todos los varones ricos.*”<sup>6</sup>

Fray Luis de Granada, another favourite author of Teresa de Jesús’, in vol. I, chapter IX of his *De la Oración y consideración* says:

Porque muy pocos días después de acabada la vida, se acaba también con la vida la memoria, por muy resplandeciente que haya sido la persona. Finalmente parecía tan breve a muchos de aquellos sabios antiguos esta vida, que uno dellos la llamó sueño; y otro, no contento con esto, la llamó sueño de sombra, paresciéndole que era mucho llamarla sueño de cosa verdadera, no siendo a su juicio más que sueño de cosa vana (“De las miserias y condiciones desta vida; y primero de la brevedad de la vida”, 8).

The expression “sueño de sombra” in this text is equated by the author to a “sueño de cosa vana”, to the vain shadow. In Teresa de Jesús “sueño de sombra” is an ascetic metaphor of the physical and tangible life that is perceived through our senses. This neo-Platonic meaning could have been taken from St Augustine, and understands this world as the anteroom to true life, as a distraction, a realm of shadows to which we pay full attention while the true relevance lies in the light that projects them and that originates somewhere else, a light that is the essence and origin of everything.<sup>7</sup>

In Teresa de Jesús, as opposed to San Juan de la Cruz, we can perceive -in her explanation of the way towards the union with God- a certain movement towards the light which is represented in her *Libro de la vida* and *Las moradas* with the well-known metaphors of the chrysalis that becomes a butterfly and her immediate death after the transformation. On the other hand, in the works of San Juan we can perceive a movement toward darkness “en su interpretación de la trascendencia inaccesible. San Juan de la Cruz es el místico-poeta de la noche, mientras que Santa Teresa de Jesús refleja en su obra una mística de la luz.” (Fernández Leborans 53-54).

No alcanza la imaginación –por muy sutil que sea- a pintar ni a trazar cómo será esta luz ni ninguna cosa de las que el Señor me daba a entender con un deleite tan soberano que no se puede decir; porque todos los sentidos gozan en tan alto grado y suavidad, que ello no se puede encarecer, y así es mejor no decir más. (*Vida* 38, 3)

The dream is sometimes a state that comes after a supernatural experience, “porque no hay razón que baste a no sacarme de ella cuando me saca el Señor de mí; ni creo soy yo la que hablo desde esta mañana... Parece que sueño lo que veo...”

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<sup>6</sup>In his Sermo 345, *Tractatus sanctii Augustini De Comtemporibus temporalium rerum, habitus in Natale Martyrum Turburbitanarum*, we can read: “Vita ista somnium est; divitiae istae velut in somnis fluunt”.

<sup>7</sup> I owe this idea to Omar Esteban Luna, a suffi mystic (personal communication).

(*Vida* 16, 6). Its consequence is a type of lucidity, divine revelation, epiphany (in a theosophical sense) of the true meaning of the world and of life in God:

“Que todo el mundo me parece que no me hace compañía, en especial cuando tengo aquellos ímpetus. Todo me parece sueño lo que veo, y que es burla, con los ojos el cuerpo; lo que ya he visto con los del alma es lo que ella desea y, como se ve lejos, éste es el morir” (*Vida* 38, 6-7).

Teresa de Jesús forges her personal identity in a transcendental Christian sense and from there, when she is already 50 years old and takes up the pen, she ascertains her aesthetic identity. According to the tradition of her time, she is an artist, a Christian and a Carmelite when she expounds and proclaims in her texts that Jesus speaks through her as an instrument and channel (Read 9): “Ya en los textos platónicos hallamos testimonios de cómo los artistas eran inspirados y hasta arrebatados por un daimon o espíritu que les llegaba de lo alto, aunque también pudiera ser por un demonio, [...] y esto sucedía especialmente entre músicos y poetas [...] [entre] pintores y escultores” (Galán 16-17).

Accordingly, life and dream overstep each other as a transposition of personal conscience: “Y hame dado una manera de sueño en la vida, que casi siempre me parece estoy soñando lo que veo; ni contento, ni pena que sea mucha no la veo en mí” (*Vida* 40, 22).

It is also possible that our author is pointing here to the difficulty of separating the true and apparent knowledge in general, a problem which she has overcome through her identification with a concept of the divine. In the myth of the cave, Plato (*Republic* VII, 514a - 516d) presents his doubts on reality and what appears to be real. From Plato onwards, philosophy has continued wondering about the nature of knowledge.

Is it possible that what is evident is not true and that what we perceive as real is only a first impression (as the truth of our dreams) of a deeper concept? Teresa de Jesús accepts to be inside an oneiric realm when defining the real, physical, sensorial life as the anteroom to eternity, which is the real life for all Christians: “Porque ya mi alma la despertó el Señor de aquello, que por no estar yo mortificada, ni muerta a las cosas del mundo, me había hecho sentimiento, y no quiere su Majestad que se torne a cegar” (*Ibid*).

Teresa de Jesús associates the topos of *life is a dream* with the equally traditional and recurrent theme of feigned and lucid insanity:

“...Cuando me saca el Señor de mí; ni creo soy yo la que hablo desde esta mañana que comulgué. Parece que sueño lo que veo y no querría ver sino enfermos de este mal que estoy yo ahora. Suplico a vuestra merced que seamos todos locos, por amor de quien por nosotros se lo llamaron”. (*Vida* 16, 6)

It would seem that Teresa de Jesús is establishing a consecutive relationship that we could paraphrase as *I dream, therefore I feel, inasmuch as I feel<sup>8</sup>, I am*. It is a definition that assumes an in-temporal *I* that contains the Renaissance definition of

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<sup>8</sup> The study of emotion in the language of Teresa de Jesús is beyond the reach of this article. I is being studied in a forthcoming work.

the hic-et-nunc *I* and transcends it. Does the same occur with other authors or are they only intent on wondering about the meaning of life?

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