



A Case Study in Eloquence: Teresa of Avila's *Libro de la vida*

Raquel Trillia
Universidad de Lethbridge

RESUMEN:

En el *Libro de la vida* (1562-65) Teresa de Ávila expresa conciencia de que el estilo de escritura importa a la hora de aspirar a la comunicación clara. Frases como «paréceme lo he dado a entender» señalan su deseo de comunicarse con exactitud, tanto como expresan sus dudas acerca de su forma de escribir. En la España de la Contrarreforma el estilo de un texto podía ser de consecuencia. Teresa necesitaba persuadir a su lector para ganarse su apoyo. Con este propósito se vale de las discusiones clásicas en torno al lenguaje creando una retórica de la claridad que pone de relieve la simplicidad, la sinceridad y la autenticidad de su texto. Aunque ella no recibió instrucción formal, Teresa aprendió de sus lecturas, particularmente de Agustín. La *Vida* de Teresa hace eco de las enseñanzas del *De doctrina christiana* en cuanto a estilo y elocuencia, en especial con respecto a la simplicidad y a la claridad de un texto cuando se busca persuadir. Y porque Teresa intenta escribir con «llaneza y descuido» también entabla un diálogo con el debate filológico del siglo XVI acerca del uso correcto del castellano con el deseo de encarnar la simplicidad y naturalidad de estilo abogada por los teóricos de su día. Por tanto, su *Vida* puede leerse no sólo como un tratado espiritual pero como uno acerca de la elocuencia. Además, al ser la claridad uno de los objetivos de su escritura, Teresa cuenta con la dicotomía luz/oscuridad —y sus concomitantes— para demostrar que su escritura se ajusta a la verdad de Dios y a la doctrina católica ortodoxa.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Teresa de Ávila, Agustín, retórica, claridad, simpleza, lenguaje.

ABSTRACT:

Aiming for clarity, in the *Libro de la vida* (1562-65) Teresa of Avila expresses awareness that writing style matters. Phrases such as «paréceme lo he dado a entender» signal her desire to communicate accurately, as well as expressing her doubts about her manner of writing. Writing style mattered in Counterreformation Spain. Teresa needed to persuade her reader in order to gain his support. To this end Teresa draws on classical and current discussions around language, thereby creating a rhetoric of clarity that sought to underscore her text's simplicity, truthfulness and authenticity. Although she received no formal education, she did learn from reading others, particularly Augustine. Her *Vida* echoes the teachings of *On Christian Doctrine* regarding style and eloquence, specifically concerning a text's simplicity and clarity when the goal is to persuade. And because Teresa's aim to write with «llaneza y descuido» also engages the sixteenth-century philological debate around the proper use of Castilian, wishing to embody the simplicity and naturalness of style advocated by language theorists of her day, her *Vida* might be read not only as a spiritual treatise, but also as one on eloquence. Furthermore, by using clarity as one of the focuses of her writing, Teresa relies

on the dichotomy light/darkness—and its concomitants—to show that her writing aligns with God's truth and orthodox Catholic doctrine.

KEY WORDS: Teresa of Avila, Augustine, rhetoric, clarity, simplicity, language.

Although in sixteenth-century Europe it was generally held that scientific, theological and political issues or topics touching on revealed truths could only be duly and appropriately discussed or explained in Latin (Nougue 457), many wrote about the proper use of vulgar languages. In the Iberian Peninsula, from the time of the publication of Nebrija's *Gramática* in 1492 and its defence of Castilian as a national language, the vulgar language begins to be seen as a scientific language which must be defended, cleansed and improved. Thus the humanists opined on topics such as whether to admit new words and by which criteria, and what norms a speaker or writer should observe (cf. Juan de Valdés 121). Titles published in sixteenth-century Spain, such as Antonio de Nebrija's *Reglas de ortografía* (1517), Andrés Flórez' *Arte para bien leer y escribir* (1552) and Martín Cordero's *La manera de escribir en castellano* (1556), among many others, are evidence of these concerns. In this paper I shall examine Teresa of Avila's (1515-1582) own linguistic preoccupations regarding language and writing, and how—drawing on the teachings of Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*—her rhetoric of clarity at once participates tangentially in this philological debate and aligns Teresa with God and orthodoxy.

The sixteenth century saw much spiritual change and reform, in addition to anxiety over language and rhetoric. The study of the art of preaching brought these two issues together. In Spain, Juan de Avila (1500-1569), in his first *Memorial* to the Council of Trent (1551), concerns himself with the education of priests *qua* preachers and thus oratory. In *De Corrupta Rhetorica* and in book III of *De Ratione Dicendi* Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540) presents his ideas on «el arte del bien decir» (qtd. in Martí 25). Vives laments the current state of oratory and criticizes classic rhetoricians such as Quintilian for limiting themselves to specific examples and concrete rules instead of aspiring to universal rules (Martí 25). Garcilaso's (c1501-1536) praise of Juan Boscán's (c1490-1542) translation of Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (1534) speaks to the value placed on Castilian as opposed to Latin: «Guardó una cosa en la lengua castellana que muy pocos la han alcanzado, que fue huir del afectación sin dar consigo en ninguna sequedad, y con gran limpieza de estilo usó de términos muy cortesanos y muy admitidos en los buenos oídos, y no nuevos ni al parecer desusados de la gente» (qtd. by Reyes Cano 46). This valuing of the vulgar language and plain style is echoed in Valdés' (c1490-1541) *Diálogo de la lengua* (1535) in which he endeavours to vindicate Castilian and promote simple and clear speech. Valdés tells Marcio that he cannot answer him unless «primero no me dezís claramente qué es lo que queréis de mí» (Valdés 118), and Torres suggests, «[d]exémonos de andar por las ramas, mejor sera dezirle claro lo que hace al caso» (Valdés 262). That is to say, Valdés advocates clear and natural writing, in Castilian. Thus he states that the *Amadís de Gaula* does not lend authority to the language because «en el estilo peca muchas vezes con no sé qué frías afectaciones que le contentan» (Valdés 125, cf. 248), and he approves of the style of *La Celestina*, because «va bien acomodado a las personas que

hablan [...] ningún libro ay escrito en castellano donde la lengua ste más natural, más propia ni más elegante» (Valdés 255).¹ Valdés also notes that the most important feature of a text is that it be understandable: «para mí harto me basta aver conocido por vuestras respuestas que avéis entendido lo que he querido dezir en mis cartas» (Valdés 128). Similarly, Castiglione, in presenting the qualities the ideal *cortesano* ought to have, concerns himself with linguistic problems: «Así que nuestro Cortesano será tenido por ecelente y en todo terná gracia, especialmente en hablar, si huyere la afectación; en el cual error caen muchos» (106, cf. 108). Furthermore, writing should mirror speaking and be clear if it is to be understood (Castiglione 107-8). Like Valdés, Castiglione promotes the avoidance of affectation. For both authors clarity and «limpieza de estilo» must govern writing. In Castiglione's words, «[l]a facilidad y la llaneza siempre andan con la elegancia. [...] Y si le acaeciére hablar en alguna materia oscura o difícil, conviene que, con las palabras y sentencia bien distintas, declare sotilmente su intinción, y con una cierta manera diligente y no pesada, desembarace y dexé llana toda forma de hablar dudosa» (112). As Menéndez Pidal stated, in the sixteenth century, «domina una norma de sencillez y naturalidad en el lenguaje, seguida por todos los principales escritores de entonces» (37).

The sixteenth-century debate on language drew on the classical tradition inherited from Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian, and from the Church Fathers. Although Teresa was not schooled in rhetoric, she was, to use Augustine's expression, «unlearnedly learned» (*On Christian Doctrine* IV.vii.). And we may confidently state that she was familiar with the work of Augustine, and through his work (perhaps unconsciously) with that of classical writers and rhetoricians. Because Teresa was not a man, and received no formal education (nor did she read Latin) she probably read neither Quintilian nor Aristotle. She may not have read Vives or Valdés either, but she did listen to preachers, and spoke extensively with lettered men and confessors (cf. *Cuentas* 53.3, 11-12, *Camino de Perfección*, Pról.1). And she lived in a convent, in which reading and books were part of daily life. As Ronald Surtz has pointed out, even during the Middle Ages the illiterate had access to written culture, for in a religious community, «in an effort to make every moment count, one member [...] would read aloud to her companions during meals» (13, cf. *Cátedra* and Rojo 115, 157). So, even though writing women were academically disadvantaged, in addition to having to overcome «severe psychological barriers to written expression» (Surtz 5), they were not completely ignorant. In Teresa's case we know she did know Augustine's work. In the *Libro de la vida* she tells of the effect of reading the *Confessions*.² And she had lived in an Augustinian convent: «En este tiempo me dieron las *Confesiones* de San Agustín, que parece el Señor lo ordenó, porque yo no las procuré ni nunca las había visto. Yo soy muy aficionada a San Agustín, porque el monasterio adonde estuve seglar era de su Orden» (*Vida* IX.7). In this passage she first tells her reader that she had not procured the book herself (not wishing to portray herself as actively seeking books and learning), and in the next sentence says she is fond of Augustine (note she

1.- Valdés also states that the purest Castilian is to be found in its «refranes» (186). Their best quality is that they originated in the «vulgo,» «los más dellos nacidos y criados entre viejas tras del fuego, hilando sus ruecas» (15). It is interesting to note that it is to old and confined women to whom he ascribes the origin of the purest language.

2.- As Chorpenning reminds us, Augustine's *Confessions* are «the most obvious precedent and the most influential model for Teresa's autobiography» (3, cf. Fernández 291).

does not say fond of the *Confessions*).³ Furthermore, by her own admission she was always «amiga de letras» (*Vida* v.3, cf. IV.9, XII.4, XIII.16-18, *Camino* v.2 [Cod. de Valladolid]), in spite of her many disclaimers to that effect, for example, «no alcanza mi saber a darme a entender [...] Yo me supiera declarar si como he pasado por ello lo entendiera. Gran cosa es el saber y las letras para todo» (*Moradas* IV.i.5), or «ni aun yo sé cómo darlo a entender, porque para hartas cosas eran menester letras» (*Vida* XIV.6).⁴ She mentions books and reading throughout her *Vida* (e.g., III.7, XIV.7) and names (a few) specific titles she had read, such as Francisco de Osuna's *Tercer abecedario* (IV.6), Bernardino de Laredo's *Subida del Monte Sión* (XXIII.12) and the «libros pequeños de oración» by Francisco de Alcántara (XXX.2, cf. XXX.6). Teresa also listed «libros buenos» that the prioress ought to make available to the nuns of the reformed Carmelite convents, including «*Cartujanos, Flos Sanctorum, Contentus Mundi, Oratorio de religiosos, los de de fray Luis de Granada y del padre fray Pedro de Alcántara*» (*Constituciones* XXXI.13). Indeed, Cátedra and Rojo, in their study of sixteenth-century women's libraries and readings, underscore the advantage that religious women had when it came to having access to books: «parece evidente que determinados grupos de mujeres podían relacionarse mucho más intensa y libremente con el libro que otros. Se podría decir que la profesión religiosa en sus varios niveles de dedicación se valía de los libros no sólo en los aspectos formativos, sino también de ocio y como prácticas superiores de santidad y espiritualidad» (155). Therefore, Weber is able to state that «[a]lthough Teresa never studied rhetoric, in an unsystematic fashion she may have absorbed from sermons or conversations with learned friends⁵ certain kinds of classical argumentative procedures» (51), in addition to what she had learned from her own varied and vast readings. Indeed, even Augustine was aware that learning need not be acquired formally, «[f]or those with acute and eager minds more readily learn eloquence than by following the rules of eloquence» (IV.iii). This indeed applies to Teresa, whose *Vida* reflects familiarity with both classical and contemporary issues around language and writing. So, although Teresa never claims to have read Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, it is not implausible to suggest she was familiar with it, or at least with some of its main themes.

For the purposes of this essay there are two rhetorical issues that Augustine addresses that are particularly relevant: persuasion and perspicuity, the idea that the most important goal of style is that the orator/writer be understood if the listener/reader is to consequently be persuaded. Accordingly Augustine reflects on the art of writing in his *On Christian Doctrine*. Since persuasion is paramount, «in this labour of words [...] aims are to be carried out as the cause requires» (IV.iv). To this end, Augustine continues, a good orator/writer will vary his style to ensure that his discourse is effective. To accomplish this, the senses of his audience must not be permitted to «cool or languish,» and the listeners'/readers' minds must be «sufficiently aroused» (IV.xxii). Furthermore, echoing Aristotle and Quintilian,⁶ Augustine states that if «those who hear [or read] are to

3.– Cf. *Vida* XL.6, *Camino de perfección* XXVIII.2, *Moradas* VI.vii.9.

4.– Cf. «[C]omo no tengo letras, mi torpeza no sabe decir nada» (*Moradas* IV.i.5, cf. *Vida*. x.7, XI.4, XXV.17, XXVI.3).

5.– See *Vida* XXX.5: «Este santo hombre me dio luz en todo y me lo declaró, y dijo que no tuviese pena»; cf. XXX.4.

6.– See Aristotle III.i.5, and Quintilian VIII.Pr.7.

be moved rather than taught [...] so that they may fully accept those things which they acknowledge to be true, there is need for great powers of speaking. Here entreaties and reproofs, exhortations and rebukes, *and whichever other devices are necessary to move minds must be used*» (IV.iv, my italics). Augustine adopts a strong position: persuasive ends justify all rhetorical means. One imagines Teresa of Avila taking such advice to heart. If in *On Christian Doctrine* Augustine seeks a hermeneutical principle that will allow him to read the Scriptures and discern, particularly, the figurative from the literal meanings of the text (Tracy 282), and, in the interest of conversion, a way in which to speak and write, Teresa is seeking a way of writing that will allow her to simultaneously deal with her fear of writing and her need to write clearly so that her texts are understood and classified as orthodox. Indeed, David Tracy points out the «strange combination of simplicity and complexity of *De Doctrina Christiana*» (269), something that could be equally said about Teresa's writing which is why her texts continue to fascinate scholars.

For Augustine, the speaker «should not consider the eloquence of his teaching but the clarity of it. The desire of a person seeking such clarity sometimes neglects a more cultivated language, not caring for what sounds elegant but for what well indicates and suggests what he wishes to show» (IV.ix-x). Furthermore, speakers/writers should not offer themselves:

up for interpretation. But in all their utterances should first of all seek to speak so that they may be understood, speaking in so far as they are able with such clarity that either he who does not understand is very slow or that the difficulty and subtlety lie not in the manner of speaking but in the things which we wish to explain and show, so that this is the reason why we are understood less, or more slowly. (IV.viii)

Augustine goes on to explain that when seeking to avoid obscurity and unclear language, a vulgar word must be employed if the Latin equivalent lends itself to ambiguity (IV.x). To achieve clarity, the unlearned term is preferred if necessary. Augustine insists that the writer should find «the correct words which are understood» by those with whom one is conversing, or to whom one is preaching, for «[w]hat profits correctness in a speech which is not followed by the listeners?» (IV.x, cf. IV.xiv). All Augustine's suggestions indicate that simplicity of language and clarity of speech are the chief merits of a discourse that seeks to persuade. The, perhaps contrived, naturalness and simplicity of Teresa's language suggests her familiarity with *On Christian Doctrine*. Her concern over *how* she wrote also insinuates Teresa's debt to Augustine.

All of this to say that Teresa's recurring concerns regarding the clarity and simplicity of her writing—all of it in Castilian—are a reflection of her awareness of the philological issues of her time, and that her readings had given her the rhetorical tools to write with specific goals in mind. Thus, her discourse participates tangentially of the debate among language theorists regarding the proper usage of language and style. If Castiglione and Valdés defend the principle of naturalness in language and define writing as a reflection of spoken language, Teresa's *Vida* embodies these standards as she strives for plain language: «decir simplemente el discurso de mi vida» (x.8). She advocates for her nuns «llaneza en el hablar» (*Visita* 42, cf. 22), and addresses simplicity of speech when explaining the

difficulty of clearly revealing her experiences to men of letters and her confessors: «yo respondía con llaneza y descuido» (*Vida* xxviii.17, cf. xv.8). By *descuido* we must understand without artifice or pretence (*poco cuidado*) in addition to inattentiveness («descuido» Cov.). And she concludes her *Vida*: «heme atrevido a concertar esta mi desbaratada vida [...] puniendo lo que ha pasado por mí con toda la llaneza y verdad que yo he podido» (xl.25, cf. vii.22). In fact, the same Menéndez Pidal who acknowledged that simplicity was cultivated in the sixteenth century faulted Teresa for the naturalness of her language: «Santa Teresa adopta una *posición extrema*, particularmente notable por su *máxima espontaneidad*» (37, my italics). For this critic, Teresa's naturalness and simplicity of language is not a rhetorical compositional technique.

But her awareness of herself as a writing subject demands that we study Teresa's discourse. Indeed, much has already been written about Teresa of Avila's rhetoric. Edgar Allison Peers, who spoke of the «naturalness with which she wrote» (87), claims her use of imagery implies «no straining after originality or effect» (91), that her syntax «is less that of a professional writer than of a good talker» (103, cf. 94, 113), and that «very rarely is the author [Teresa] consciously or unconsciously literary» (114). Thus, as Alison Weber put it, Peers «defended the paradigm of an essentially oral style and unconscious artistry» (7). As noted above, Ramón Menéndez Pidal studied what he called the «indomable espontaneidad» of her style, her «improvisación llevada al extremo» (40). Víctor García de la Concha, acknowledging Teresa's «principios de conciencia estética y voluntad literaria,» spoke of her «concertado desconcierto» (184). Weber wrote that Teresa's «writing does indeed impress one as spontaneous» (5) but that her «writing is also paradoxically deliberate» (6), and offered an analysis of what she called Teresa's rhetoric of femininity according to which Teresa «perhaps wrote as she believed women were *perceived to speak*» (11, Weber's italics), a strategy which employed «certain stereotypes about women's character and language» (11). Gillian Ahlgren interpreted her strategy of subordination as one in which Teresa «adopted several strategies to underscore her humility» such as «her colloquial style» and the «repeated submission of her doctrine to the judgement of representatives of the institutional church» (69, 71). And according to Juan Antonio Marcos, Teresa wrote «según sus intereses y propósitos. [...] Todo vale con tal de ganarse al lector» (13-14).⁷

One of Teresa's more recent readers, Elena Carrera, believes that García de la Concha and Weber go too far, declaring that their «exaggerated belief in Teresa's ability to choose her style as she pleased appears to be a reaction to the previous view that, as a saint, she was incapable of deception» (15, n.5). However, Carrera also states that «Teresa's intentions as a writer were indeed relevant in a context in which writers could be punished, imprisoned, burned, praised or regarded as a saint, depending on the judgement passed by the interpreters of their texts» (2). Whatever the view regarding Teresa's intentions—which we cannot know—scholars agree she understood the importance of *how* she wrote.⁸ Teresa's use, time and again, of the verbs *escribir*, *hablar*, *declarar* and *de-*

7.— One is reminded of Augustine's above stated suggestion for writing in light of the author's objectives (iv.iv).

8.— In the Prologue to the *Camino de perfección* (Valladolid Codex) Teresa addressed her Carmelite sisters in the reformed convents: «me han tanto importunado [mis hermanas] que diga algo de ella [la oración], que me he determinado a las obedecer, viendo que el amor grande que me tienen puede hacer más acepto lo imperfecto, y por mal *estilo* que yo les dijere, que algunos libros *que están muy bien escritos* de quien sabía lo que escribe» (1, my italics).

cir, and *entender*, *aprovechar* and *encarecer* alone, as she tries to deal with the subjects at hand—mystical doctrine and experience—are evidence of her awareness of the importance of style. Her hopes that her book will serve «de aviso» (*Vida* XXII.1) and her own reliance on books to develop spiritually (*Vida* XIV.7, cf. XXIII.15) are also evidence of her awareness that writing style mattered (cf. *Vida* XXX.22).

The success of Teresa's discourse is due in part to her rhetoric of clarity: an accumulation of phrases such as «está claro,» «claridad y verdad,» «he visto claro,» «entiende claro,» «veo claro,» etc.,⁹ serve to convey her anxiety about expressing herself adequately and to reinforce the divine origins of her experiences. She was aware, like Aristotle, that clear meaning is the «chief merit of rhetorical language. [...] That speech [or text], if it does not make the meaning clear, will not perform its proper function» (III.2), which according to Cicero «seems to be to speak in a manner suited to persuade an audience» (XXXI.v.6). In Counter Reformation Spain the ability to persuade was crucial. Teresa, writing in the second half of the sixteenth century, knew she needed to arouse her readers—they must be *affected* in order that they trust her and support her. She recognized the «tiempos recios»¹⁰ (*Vida* XXXIII.5, cf. VII.22) in which she lived—referring particularly to women visionaries and their fate. She acknowledged that God gives graces that cause suspicion (*Vida* XXVII.9). Hence, she needed to persuade her readers that God's grace—not the devil—moved her, and that her ways of prayer were orthodox. As Bakhtin indicates, an utterance can only be fully understood if heard or read in its own context (92). And because verbal/written expression is directed toward someone, the speaker/writer will actively consider the addressee(s) while constructing his/her text: «Accounting for the addressee and anticipating his responsive reaction are frequently multifaceted processes that introduce unique internal dramatism into the utterances» (Bakhtin 96). Bakhtin holds this to be true particularly for certain genres, such as the autobiographical and the confessional, with which we are dealing in the case of Teresa's *Libro de la vida*, which «can be seen as an autobiography complicated by rhetoric intended to forestall accusations» (Smullin Brown 21). One imagines, as Carol Slade assumes when reading Teresa, that Teresa «constructed her prose and chose her words with care [...] and for specific rhetorical purposes» (123). To paraphrase Roger Celis, Teresa of Avila's discourse goes beyond rhetorical strategies with the intention of circumventing the severe scrutiny of her potential critics to defend her ways of prayer and convince her confessors that she had a place within the Catholic religious hierarchy and doctrine. Teresa herself insinuates as much partway through the *Vida*: «No sé si hago bien de escribir tantas menudencias. Como vuestra merced [García de Toledo]¹¹ me tornó a enviar a mandar que no se diese nada de alargarme ni dejase nada, voy tratando con claridad y verdad lo que se me acuerda» (XXX.22). This is a clear instance of Teresa casting herself as writer (if not as

9.— Similarly, the reader is overwhelmed by the excessive self-deprecation, and by the excessive deference to confessors, etc. Additionally, Teresa of Avila's *tentative* style is also achieved by the use of adjectives such as «casi,» and qualifiers such as «me parece,» in order to invest her voice with modesty, instead of authority (cf. Ahlgren 70-71).

10.— Only two years prior, in 1559, the Inquisition had initiated proceedings against the Archbishop of Toledo, Bartolomé Carranza, Antonio Cazalla's *auto da fe* took place in Valladolid, and the (in)famous *Valdés Index* of prohibited books was published.

11.— García de Toledo was the primary addressee of the *Libro de la vida*, and her confessor when she began writing in 1562.

author), concerned about what she writes («tantas menudencias»), how much she writes («alargarme») and *how* she writes («tratando con claridad y verdad»), all while stating that she writes out of obedience («me tornó a enviar a mandar»).

In her *Libro de la Vida*, her concern for style—the *manner* in which she was to express herself—is present from the outset. In the prologue she uses the word *claridad* twice: first, to state what she wished she could write about: to *clearly* tell of her great sins (Pról. 1); second, to request God's grace to «con toda claridad y verdad yo haga esta relación que mis confesores me mandan» (Pról. 2, cf. xxx.7). Here Teresa synthesizes her most important writing objectives: that her readers be persuaded that she writes in obedience to her confessors,¹² and that they be persuaded by the truth¹³ and clarity of her writing.

Teresa constantly alerts her reader to the fact that she is thinking about writing clearly, particularly when she is trying to describe the ineffable. When attempting to describe the divine she states: «no sé cómo lo comparar» (*Vida* xx.6); or, «no sé yo si atino a lo que digo, u si lo sé decir» (*Vida* xx.15). The notion of clarity that permeates her discourse allows Teresa to simultaneously deal with the difficulty of conveying meaning clearly and establishing the divine origin of her experiences by virtue of the fact that clarity also conveys the notions of transparency and honesty, light and truth. Since God is light *means* God is Truth,¹⁴ Teresa relies on the dichotomy light/darkness—and its concomitants—to show that her writing aligns with God's truth and orthodox Catholic doctrine. Consider the representation of God as light represented by a diamond: «Digamos ser la Divinidad como un *muy claro diamante*, muy mayor que todo el mundo, o *espejo*, a manera de lo que dije del alma en estotra visión, salvo que es por tan más subida manera, que yo no lo sabré *encarecer*; y que todo lo que hacemos se ve en ese diamante, [...] en aquella *limpieza de claridad* [...]» (*Vida* xl.10, my italics). Clarity and purity, a diamond and a mirror signify the light that is God. In another passage she explicitly equates God with light: during prayers of quiet—the second stage of the mystical way of perfection—«el entendimiento está entonces, de verse cerca de la *luz*, con grandísima *claridad*, que aun yo, con ser la que soy, parezco otra» (*Vida* xv.7, my italics). God equals both light and clarity. In this instance the clarity is not only associated directly with God but with the (good) state of Teresa's own soul.

After all, since the book of *Genesis*, God has been associated with light. God's first act, according to the Old Testament, was to create light. Furthermore, He «saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night» (*Genesis* 1:4-5, cf. *John* 1:5-6). Since God is light, Teresa also calls him *sol* (sun), as in the following passage in which she conveys how she knows that God is indeed the source of her graces: «bien se entiende en la sobra de las mercedes que ha sido grande la claridad del sol que ha estado allí, pues así la ha derretido [al alma]» (*Vida* xviii.12). God is equated with «claridad del sol.» Teresa had already suggested the comparison of God with the sun in an attempt to describe the ineffable:

Quisiera yo poder dar a entender algo de lo menos que entendía, y pensando cómo puede ser, hallo que es imposible; porque en sólo la diferencia que hay

12.– Cf. for example, *Vida* xv.7, xvi.6, xxviii.3 and xxxii.12.

13.– Cf. *Vida* xxviii.4.

14.– *John* 14:6: «I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.»

de esta luz que vemos a la que allá se representa, siendo todo luz, no hay comparación, porque la claridad del sol parece cosa muy desgustada. En fin, no alcanza la imaginación —por muy sutil que sea— a pintar ni trazar cómo será esta luz. (*Vida* xxxviii.2)

As in any comparison, the things being compared share some similarities and differences. For Teresa, God is like the sun, but so much better, for He shines much more brightly and He is *only* light (cf. *Vida* xxxviii.2, xxv.19). In a similar passage, when explaining that her vision of Christ's humanity is from God and that she has not deceived her confessor, she indicates that she saw «muy claro» his «blancura y resplandor» (*Vida* xxviii.5). Her descriptions of God as light and God as sun reinforce the idea of clarity. By infusing her text with the notion of clarity, in addition to suggesting that her prose is easy to understand and that she desires to speak only the truth, Teresa counts on the reader to inevitably conjure up the opposites light/darkness, day/night, God/Satan, good/evil, truth/falsity, transparency/ambiguity, illumination/obfuscation, clarity/obscurity and, most importantly, orthodoxy/heterodoxy. So, to further the association of God with clarity, light and goodness, Teresa uses its opposites to describe spiritual weakness: «Otras veces estoy de manera que ni siento vivir ni me parece he gana de morir, sino con una tibieza y escuridad en todo» (*Vida* xl.21). In a similar way, when the devil torments her, she experiences «una aflección y escuridad y tinieblas en el alma, que yo no lo sé encarecer» (*Vida* xxxvi.8). Darkness is also associated with spiritual distress.¹⁵ It is also the salient feature of hell: «[n]o hay luz, sino todo tinieblas escurísimas» (*Vida* xxxii.3). Interestingly, Teresa puzzles over the fact that she can see in this darkness and understand God's message (*Vida* xxxii.3). A passage from the *Moradas del castillo interior* suggests she was aware of the power of opposites to highlight each other:

Y a mi parecer jamás nos acabamos de conocer, si no procuramos conocer a dios; mirando su *grandeza*, acudamos a nuestra *bajeza*, y mirando su *limpieza*, veremos nuestra *suciedad*; considerando su humildad, veremos cuan lejos estamos de ser humildes. Hay dos ganancias en esto: la primera, está claro que parecer una cosa *blanca* más muy blanca cabe la *negra*, y al contrario, la negra cabe la blanca [...]
(i.ii.9-10, my italics, cf. *Vida* xxxv.10)

Although Teresa was not schooled in rhetoric, one is reminded of Quintilian's claim regarding contrasting pairs: «the nature of virtue is revealed by vice, its opposite, justice becomes yet more manifest from the contemplation of injustice, and there are many other things that are proved by their contraries» (xii.i.35). Because it is difficult to speak of light without thinking of darkness, Mehtonen suggests that «contrast indeed becomes a strategy in thought and writing [...]; black and white appear to us as they are in relation to each other» (17). That is to say, light is revealed by darkness and vice versa. Thus, by associating herself with clarity and light, Teresa distances herself from darkness, bad spirits and heterodoxy. Interestingly, Covarrubias defines *claro* by means of opposites: clarity is that which opposes darkness—«[l]o que se opone a lo oscuro, tenebroso y dificultoso»—light, and by extension, transparency, purity, coherence and intelligibility. The fact that

15.— Of souls that have fallen into mortal sin, Teresa writes that they are «todos hechos una escuridad, y así son sus obras» (*Moradas* I.ii.2).

blanco and *limpio* (in the above passage) also connote purity, chastity and the morally uncontaminated further the opposition dark/light to enhance God's brightness and Teresa's association with what is orthodox and true.

Should Teresa reader not be convinced of her sincerity and orthodoxy by the end of the *Vida*, in the epilogue she reminds her reader of her writing circumstances and their effect on her text: «puede ser vayan algunas cosas mal declaradas y otras puestas dos veces; porque ha sido tan poco el tiempo que he tenido, que no podía tornar a ver lo que escribía» (3). Teresa was concerned that she has not expressed herself correctly or clearly, due to lack of time to re-read and edit what she had written. This is further evidence that, to her, style and clarity were a matter of importance, and something that could be worked on. To corroborate the fact that Teresa was aware that clarity is fundamental to the meaning of a text and to the ability to remember it we can turn to the *Moradas del castillo interior*, in which Teresa addresses how she knew that the locutions she received were from God: «Es tan en lo íntimo del alma y parecele tan claro oír aquellas palabras con los oídos del alma a el mismo Señor [...] porque deve ser diferente en la claridad de la habla, que lo es tan clara que una sílaba que falte de lo que entendió, se acuerda, y si se dijo por un estilo o por otro, aunque sea todo una sentencia» (VI.iii.12). Thus, clarity was as important to Teresa when she was receiving a message as when she wrote (cf. *Carta* 284.7).

Consigny's study of Aristotle's ideas about clarity led him to state that the function of style is «to demarcate a site within which the listener will accept the rhetor's instruments for fabricating meaning. [...] He] must effect the illusion of transparency [...] and [...] he] will best achieve this goal if he persuades his audience that he is speaking quite 'naturally,' without artifice» (417-418). The listener/reader must be led to believe that «he is seeing things 'clearly' [so that] he becomes so involved in the style that he is unable to perceive beyond its tropes and topoi» (Consigny 418). Domingo Báñez' *Censura* (1575) of the *Vida* suggests that Teresa did indeed get at least some of her readers to see things 'with clarity' by means of a *simple* writing style: «Visto he, con mucha atención, este libro en que Teresa de Jesús [...] *da relación llana* de todo lo que por su alma passa, a fin de ser enseñada y guiada por sus confesores, y en todo él no he hallado cosa que a mi juicio sea mala doctrina» (190, my italics). He is confident in this belief because Teresa has always «buscado luz y letras en sus confesores» and because «habla tan llanamente, bueno y malo, y con tanta gana de acertar, que no dexa dudar de su buena intención» (190, my italics). Aligning herself with God as light and arguing that she sought to write clearly convinced Báñez of the authenticity of her experiences and her orthodoxy.

Others were convinced too. Fray Luis de León, her first editor, was certainly persuaded by her writing, since he never knew her personally (unlike Báñez). Yet Fray Luis *felt* he knew her. He began his 1587 letter to the Discalced Carmelite nuns (letter which prefaces the 1588 edition of Teresa's works) indicating that Teresa's books contained no deceptions and equating Teresa with her books: «la conozco y veo casi siempre en dos imagines vivas que nos dejó, que son sus hijas y sus libros, que, a mi juicio, [...] carecen estas dos cosas [de engaño]» (17). This perceived intimacy and perceived equality between Teresa the person and Teresa's writing style is one of the reasons to which Allison Peers attributed Teresa's success: «she had a remarkable personality, which, since she wrote with almost complete naturalness, gave her writing the same force, vigour, persuasiveness and grace that charac-

terized her dealings with all the people, high and low, whom she met» (82). Published in 1953, Allison Peers' view is testimony to the enduring power of Teresa's *natural* style.

To return to Fray Luis' letter, although in it he ascribed the mastery of Teresa's writing to the intervention of the Holy Spirit, he praised her writing style and her works. For Fray Luis, this style is a rare example of Castilian: «porque en la alteza de las cosas que trata, y en la delicadeza y claridad con que las trata, excede á muchos ingenios: y en la forma del decir, y en la pureza y facilidad del estilo, y en la gracia y buena compostura de las palabras, y en una elgancia desafeitada, que deleita en extremo, dudo que haya en nuestra lengua escritura que con ellos se iguale» (19). The aspects of Teresa's language and style that make it noteworthy are its simplicity, its clarity, and its ease. It is pleasurable because it is unaffected. His assessment is reminiscent of Valdés' or Boscán's views of good writing.

To conclude, a statement from a letter by Teresa to Doña María de Mendoza, dated June 1571, can best capture the importance of clarity in Teresa's spiritual and writing life. Teresa wrote of her relationship with her confessor: «[g]ran alivio es andar con claridad con el que está en lugar de Dios» (*Carta* 31.9).¹⁶ This statement reminds us that Teresa was a pragmatic woman. So, when faced with the difficulty of writing for an audience, primarily of clerics, who believed in the power of God's grace, yet found it hard to believe that this all-powerful God would grace a woman, Teresa developed a writing style that dealt (effectively) with her confessors concerns regarding orthodoxy. She created a rhetoric of clarity that underscores her understanding/s, but also, more importantly, aligns her with the orthodox beliefs of the Catholic Church. Moreover, her discourse of naturalness and simplicity implicitly made Teresa a participant of the theoretical discussions around language and eloquence in the tradition of Aristotle and Augustine, Juan de Valdés and Baldassare Castiglione. Her rhetoric of clarity allowed her to write about matters which could potentially be perceived as unorthodox, or which a woman should not be writing about in the first place, such as ways of prayer and supernatural experiences. Clarity allowed Teresa to draw not only on classical and current rhetorical traditions, but also on a religious history in which God is equated with light, and thus clarity. And clarity, of light or text, implies transparency. This suggests, in the case of light, brightness, brilliance and purity, and thus that which is easy to see; and in the case of a text, intelligent, easy to understand and having only one correct interpretation. This is exactly what Teresa needed the reader to believe: the *correct* reading of the *Libro de la Vida* is that God is the origin of Teresa's supernatural experiences, that her spiritual ways are orthodox, and that she was conveying this in truth and humility out of obedience.

16.– Cf. *Fundaciones* II.2, *Camino* [Valladolid Codex] xxxvii.4, xl.4.

Works Cited

- AHLGREN, Gillian T. W. *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1996.
- ALLISON PEERS, E. «Saint Teresa's Style: a Tentative Appraisal.» *Saint Teresa of Jesus and Other Essays and Addresses*. London: Faber and Faber, 1953. 81-135.
- ARISTOTLE. *The 'Art' of Rhetoric*. Tr. J. H. Freese. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1926.
- AUGUSTINE. *On Christian Doctrine*. Tr. D. W. Robertson, Jr. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1958.
- BAKHTIN, M. M. *Speech Genres and Other Essays*. Tr. Vern W. McGee. Eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.
- BÁÑEZ, Domingo. «Censura del P. Domingo Báñez en el autógrafo de la 'Vida.'» *Obras completas. Teresa de Avila, Santa. 1515-1582*. Madrid: BAC, 1967. 190-191.
- CARRERA, Elena. *Teresa of Avila's Autobiography. Authority, Power and Self in Mid-Sixteenth-Century Spain*. London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2005.
- CASTIGLIONE, Baldassare. *El cortesano*. Tr. Juan Boscán. Ed. R. Reyes Cano. Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1984.
- CÁTEDRA, Pedro M. and Anastasio Rojo. *Bibliotecas y lecturas de mujeres. Siglo XVI*. Salamanca: Instituto de historia del libro y de la lectura, 2004.
- CELIS, Roger. «Teresa de Jesús y el *Libro de la Vida*: Más allá de la retórica confesional.» *Espéculo. Revista de estudios literarios* 40 (2008): n. pag. Web 13 June 2014. <<https://pendientedemigracion.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero40/steresa.html>>.
- CHORPENNING, Joseph F. «St. Teresa of Ávila as Allegorist: Chapters 11-22 of the *Libro de la vida*.» *Studia Mystica* 9 (1986): 3-22.
- CICERO. «De Inventione.» *Cicero in Twenty-Eight Volumes*. Tr. H. M. Hubbell. Vol. 2. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1976. 3-346.
- CONSIGNY, Scott. «Transparency and Displacement: Aristotle's Concept of Rhetorical Clarity.» *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 17.4 (1987): 413-419.
- COVARRUBIAS, Sebastián de. *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*. Ed. Ignacio Arellano and Rafael Zafra. Madrid: Iberoamericana-Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert, 2006.
- FERNÁNDEZ, James D. «La *Vida* de Teresa de Jesús y la salvación del discurso.» *MLN* 105.2 (1990): 283-302.
- GARCÍA DE LA CONCHA, Víctor. *El arte literario de Santa Teresa*. Barcelona: Ariel, 1978.
- LUIS DE LEÓN. «A las madres priora Ana de Jesús y religiosas Carmelitas Descalzas del Monasterio de Madrid.» *Escritos de Santa Teresa*. Madrid: Atlas, 1952. 17-22.
- MARCOS, Juan Antonio. *Mística y subversiva: Teresa de Jesús. Las estrategias retóricas del discurso místico*. Madrid: Editorial de Espiritualidad, 2001.
- MARTÍ, Antonio. *La preceptiva retórica española en el Siglo de Oro*. Madrid: Gredos, 1972.
- MENÉNDEZ PIDAL, Ramón. «El estilo de Santa Teresa.» *Santa Teresa de Jesús. Obras completas*. Madrid: Aguilar, 1957. 37-50.
- MEHTONEN, Päivi. *Obscure Language, Unclear Literature. Theory and Practice from Quintilian to the Enlightenment*. Tr. Robert MacGilleon. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2003.
- NOUGUE, Andre. «Teorías de los españoles del siglo XVI sobre la evolución de su lengua (o claridad y afectación).» *Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos* 75 (1972): 457-77.
- QUINTILIAN. *Institutio Oratoria*. Tr. H. E. Butler. Vol. 4. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1961.

- REYES CANO, Rogelio. «Introducción.» *El cortesano*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1984. 11-57.
- SLADE, Carol. «Teaching Teresa of Avila's *Book of Her Life* in the Tradition of Western Spiritual Autobiography.» *Approaches to Teaching Teresa of Ávila and the Spanish Mystics*. Ed. Alison Weber. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009. 123-133.
- SMULLIN BROWN, Kevin. «A proposal of Saint Teresa de Ávila's rhetorical strategy in the twentieth chapter of *Libro de la vida*.» *Journal of Romance Studies* 9.1 (2009): 19-29.
- SURTZ, Ronald E. *Writing Women in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain. The Mothers of Saint Teresa of Avila*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995.
- TERESA OF AVILA. *Obras completas de Santa Teresa de Jesús*. Ed. Efrén de la Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Crisitanos, 1967.
- TRACY, David. «Charity, Obscurity, Clarity: Augustine's Search for Rhetoric and Hermeneutics.» *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in Our Time. A Reader*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1997. 254-74.
- VALDÉS, Juan de. *Diálogo de la lengua*. 9th ed. Madrid: Cátedra, 2009.
- WEBER, Alison. *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity*. Princeton, NJ: University of Princeton, 1990.

