

## The use of italics as a tool of the critical-curator speaker in the poetics of Luis Eduardo García.

El uso de itálicas como herramienta del yo poético crítico-curador en la poética de Luis Eduardo García.



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### Abstract.

The work of the Jalisco poet Luis Eduardo García is characterized by focusing on the reflection of poetry itself. *Armenia* (2014) and *Dos estudios a partir de la descomposición de Marcus Rothkowitz* (2012) are two metapoetic works in which he employs the use of italics as a key typographic resource to develop his metapoetic proposal. The italics allow for the introduction of external voices and critical commentary within the poem, consolidating the figure of the *critical-curatorial lyric self*. This strategy reinforces the three axes of metapoetry according to Ramón Pérez Parejo: criticism of language, fiction and authorship. García dialogues with various artistic disciplines such as film, painting and music, generating a diversity of textual registers. In his poetry, the lyric "I" unfolds to question the poetic tradition and intensify the ironic effect of the poems through a critical distancing by the poetic "I". In conclusion, the italics in García's work not only diversify the lyrical voices, but also reinforce the critical dialogue about language, tradition, and the role of the poet in contemporary literature.

**Key words:** Current Mexican poetry. Metapoetry. Art. Critical-curator self.

### Resumen:

La obra del poeta jalisciense Luis Eduardo García se caracteriza por centrarse en la propia reflexión de la poesía. *Armenia* (2014) y *Dos estudios a partir de la descomposición de Marcus Rothkowitz* (2012) son dos obras metapoéticas en las que se emplea el uso de itálicas como recurso tipográfico clave para desarrollar su

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propuesta metapoética. Las itálicas permiten introducir voces externas y comentarios críticos dentro del poema, consolidando la figura del *yo lírico crítico-curador*. Esta estrategia refuerza los tres ejes de la metapoésía según Ramón Pérez Parejo: la crítica al lenguaje, la ficción y la autoría. García dialoga con diversas disciplinas artísticas como el cine, la pintura y la música, generando una diversidad de registros textuales. En su poesía, el yo lírico se desdobra para cuestionar la tradición poética e intensificar el efecto irónico de los poemas a través de un distanciamiento crítico por parte del yo poético. En conclusión, las itálicas en la obra de García no solo diversifican las voces líricas, sino que también refuerzan el diálogo crítico sobre el lenguaje, la tradición y la función del poeta en la literatura contemporánea.

**Palabras clave:** Poesía mexicana actual. Metapoésía. Arte. Yo crítico-curador.

In this paper we will make an analytical approach to the poetry books *Armenia* (2014) and *Dos estudios a partir de la descomposición de Marcus Rothkowitz* (2012) by the poet Luis Eduardo García with the aim of investigating the typographic element of the use of italics in both books. It is worth mentioning that Luis Eduardo García's poetics could be typified as *intermedial* (Pimentel, 2012) since it brings together terminology and references from different artistic disciplines such as cinema, conceptual art, music and painting. Such plurality of discourses and voices are introduced in some cases through the use of italics in order to be discussed by the lyrical I, which acquires a role of critic-curator<sup>1</sup> in which the use of such typographic resource is fundamental. This use of the lyric self as critic-curator is a characteristic resource of the metapoetic writing that the author performs. According to Ramón Pérez Parejo (2007), the three constitutive axes of metapoetry are 1) the critique of language, 2) the critique of fiction and 3) the critique of authorship. In this way, the reflection of the poetic phenomenon becomes the axis of construction and structuring principle of metapoetry (Scarano *et.al.*, 1996). From this perspective and taking into account the above mentioned, my reading proposal in this research article is that the use of italics in the poetics

<sup>1</sup> The term lyrical critic-curator self is defined in this work as a lyrical self that is characterized by its work of selecting dialogues and intertexts to shape the total discourse of the work, in which artistic criticism will be one of its main constitutive elements.

of Luis Eduardo García turns out to be a resource of poetic construction that allows the lyric I some distance from the poetic writing in order to raise questions about the artistic creation itself from an ironic perspective, as well as to make a critical approach to the artistic tradition with which it dialogues.

The poetic work of Luis Eduardo García delves into the three questions raised by Pérez Parejo with the peculiarity that it does so not only through literary references but also through the dialogue of poetry with other artistic disciplines, as mentioned above, which makes the discussion more complex. In this way, it can be affirmed that the use of italics in the poems *Armenia* and *Dos estudios a partir de la descomposición de Marcus Rothkowitz* is a tool of irruption of another lyrical voice to the poem with the purpose of introducing critical comments of the lyrical self and in some occasions to expose the ironic tone of the poem in question, with which the metapoetic character of the poem is reaffirmed through the diverse representations of the poetic self.

Bakhtin M. (1989) in the chapter "The Word in the Novel" of *Theory and Aesthetics of the Novel*, states that novelistic prose contains an "internal dialogization of the word". In this way, "the word [...] sounds and dissonates with the different aspects of the multilingual socio-verbal consciousness that surrounds the object and, at the same time, is introduced polemically into the objectual and axiological horizon of the reader" (p. 100). In this fragment, Bakhtin resorts to Tolstoy's novel to exemplify this phenomenon of dialogization, in which dissonance and consonance of tone become a fundamental part of his prose style. For Bakhtin, the lyric genre denies the historicity of the word because "there is a pure and direct expression of its intention", so there is no "critical attitude" towards language. However, I believe that in the case of Luis Eduardo García there is such a critical attitude towards language, and in fact it is a fundamental component of his poetics.

Pérez Parejo (2007), for his part, mentions that the *dissemination of the voice* is one of the resources used by the authors of metapoetry to achieve the questioning of the concept of authorship and fiction, through whose splitting of the lyrical self (alternating preterit/present self; multiplication or pluralization of the subject; deliberate fictionalization

of the subject, use of objective correlates, etc.), a split self is constructed in contrast to the monolithic and omnipresent "I" of modern poetics (p. 103).), a *split self* is constructed in contrast to the *monolithic and omnipresent "I" of modern poetics* (p. 103). The irruption of diverse lyrical voices in Luis Eduardo García's poetry is a tool for the dissemination of the voice through which a reflection on the poetic phenomenon is generated.

"La oscuridad no es una llanura" (p. 11) present in *Dos estudios a partir de la descomposición* by Marcus Rothkowitz is a short poem with simple language that stands out for its ecphrastic character since it poses an intersemiotic relationship between visual and written language, as Luz Aurora Pimentel (2012) states in her article "Écfrasis y lecturas iconotextuales". Therefore, it can be affirmed that in this poem there is a *generic referential ekphrasis* (Pimentel, 2012, p. 207) of topographic character in which darkness is compared with landscape elements such as the plain. In this way, an image of what darkness is is described, a concept that the author employs due to its lyrical historicity and its load of symbolisms and connotations related to the unconscious, the occult and the void: "In the darkness there is fury and wounded horses [...] it is a cliff that calls us." (García, 2012, p. 11)

Said poetic image that is constructed in the poem cited above, is rewritten and critically commented in the text of the following page of the collection of poems: "Sketch of 'The darkness is not a plain'" (García, 2012, p. 12). In the first instance, it is worth noting that the title uses terminology typical of the visual arts with the word "sketch", a term that according to the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy (s. f) comes from the Italian *sbozzare*, which refers to a sketch prior to the final work. In this poem this term is used in the sense that the text is deconstructed in verses to be commented, criticized and analyzed, so that, in addition to referring to a moment prior to the writing of the final poem, it is a critical dissection and discussion of the verse that gives rise to the final text.

*Darkness is a plain where we know nothing.*

There is something artificial in that verse

the plains are not scary, they are like small and tame horses.

[...]

*It is a cliff that calls to us.*

It is a strange image, but convincing  
 cliffs symbolize very well the idea of the insignificance of man; when contemplating  
 one, the feeling of suffocation can be so great that we just want to get away from it.  
 But how to get away from one that calls us? (García, 2012, p. 12).

As can be observed, in the collection of poems, the use of italics is employed as a tool to differentiate the plurality of voices (*split self*) that intervene in the poetic text: that of the lyrical self that enunciates the lines of the poem, and the lyrical self that discusses those lines of the poem. These voices are differentiated by their visions of poetry, notorious in the assessments of the poetic self when stating that "there is something artificial in that verse" (García, 2012, p. 12) and later when questioning the idea expressed in the verse "the plains are not scary, they are like small and tame horses."

Subsequently, the verse "*It is a cliff that calls us*" is incorporated in italics, which in turn closes the poem "Darkness is not a plain". In this way, the dialogue of the poetic voices becomes more complex, since in this verse there is not a contraposition of poetic positions as in that of *La oscuridad es una llanura/La oscuridad no es una llanura*, but rather the idea raised in the previous poem is now embedded to be commented on: "It is a strange image, but convincing" (García, 2012, p. 12). I consider it relevant to mention that after that verse a reflection of the cliff and its presence throughout the history of art is incorporated. This topographic element has a high symbolic charge in certain artistic traditions such as the Romantic, for which it represents the binomial humanity-nature and the way in which man relates to his insignificance before the immensity of emptiness in such natural landscapes.

Because of this, the element of the cliff reinforces the generic referential ecphrastic character (Pimentel, 2012, p. 207) of the poem, since the topographical description directs the reader towards the Romantic artistic tradition that sees in nature a symbol of human insignificance, "an inner nature [that] reveals itself in the mirror of the abysses of the outer" (Safranski, 2009, p. 95). As a sample of this statement we can refer to pictorial works that are now distinctive of Romanticism such as *Walker on a Sea of Clouds* or *White Cliffs on*

*Rügen* (1818) by Caspar David Friedrich, in which the cliff is the central element and the counterpoint to the human elements present in the paintings. Furthermore, the verse with which the poem ends "But how to get away from one that calls us?" problematizes the dialogue between both poetic voices, since by means of such rhetorical question the curatorial poetic I guides the reader to the paradoxical questioning of the image posed in the verse "*It is a cliff that calls us*", as well as to the comment "the feeling of suffocation can be so great that we only wish to get away".

On the other hand, in the poem entitled "Some Considerations on Pain II" from *Armenia* (p. 25), the poetic self makes a reflection regarding the ethical responsibility the author should have when dealing with the subject of human pain in his work:

Pain can be material for a poem, just like flies, god or painters from distant countries. As proof of this it is enough to remember that any metaphor about pain can achieve a powerful effect; example:

*pain is a rain of ashes on open eyes.* (García, 2014, p. 25.)

In said fragment, the same mechanism previously employed in the poem "Esbozo de 'La oscuridad no es una llanura'" can be identified, in which italics are employed to introduce lines that are enunciated by an external poetic I and subsequently commented upon by the poetic I of the poem in question. It is also relevant to mention that there is an ironic tone in this poem, since the poetic I equates human pain, one of the great themes of literature, with flies, a foul insect related to the low and dirty, which has also been widely explored as a literary motif. This approach generates an ironic tone in the light of Pere Ballart (1994) through the contrast of the "ineffable" (pain) and the "mundane" (flies), with which the "dignity" of lyrical themes is questioned, since in turn, there is a whole literary tradition in which the fly has acquired a high symbolic charge not only in poetry but also in narrative and theater.

The figure of the fly, due to its connotation regarding the mundane and insignificant, is incorporated in the poem with an ironic tone, but at the same time this poetic I is appealing

and referring once again to the historical load contained in that word. This is how through the figure of the fly, the poetic voice acquires again that function of critic-curator, since he asserts himself as an expert in literature that shows his knowledge regarding an extremely broad literary tradition that plays with this element in his literature (Asiain, 2024), such as Jean Paul Sartre with the play *Las moscas* (1950), Emily Dickinson (1999) with the poem *I heard a Fly buzz - when I died* and Antonio Machado with the poem *Las moscas* (2006). In addition to playing his role as a knowledgeable critic of the tradition, the lyric self also develops his role as a curator by guiding the recipient's reading of the poem by implicitly referencing such works and showing the reader what references to have in order to approach the text.

Subsequently, the italicized verse is introduced as proof that "any metaphor about pain can achieve a powerful effect" (García, 2014, p. 25.), thus reaffirming the ironic tone of the poem, as the italicized verse stands out for its metaphorical display and search for beauty, which is contrasted with the referential and direct language used in the rest of the text. Through this enunciation of the poetic "I", whose language is even didactic due to its expository tone in the manner of poetic writing instructions, the author refers to how the theme of pain has been exploited and trivialized as a literary theme to the point of becoming worn out and cliché because it will always have that "powerful" effect. That is to say, the author manages to distance himself from the enunciation of the poetic "I" to achieve this ironic tone in the text. Because of this, in this poem we find the peculiarity that various levels of enunciation are deployed between the poetic self: that of the fragment embedded in the poem, the poetic self of the poem in question, and the distancing of the author's vision, which also hints at his poetic stance through the ironic tone according to Pere Ballart's theory, in which irony is constructed from the contrast of meanings and intentions in the literary text (1994).

Through this critical discussion and contraposition of visions regarding poetry, the poetic self comes to the conclusion that every subject should be able to be dealt with by

poetry, both human pain and flies, because "purity has only led us to suffering" (García, 2014, p. 25.):

The only thing that can represent an obstacle is the ethical stance of the reader.

There are those who assert that anything that pretends to aestheticize something so serious

only succeeds in dirtying it. Then, any metaphor about pain would be a failure, since pain must be

failed, since pain must maintain its purity.

But purity has only led us to suffering (García, 2014, p. 25.).

In this way, the poem, like the previous one, closes with a paradox, since, on the one hand, pain is a theme that ensures a powerful effect and has therefore been worn out in the literary tradition. However, the impossibility of speaking about pain because of the ethical problems it entails is also a form of censorship for trying to maintain the "purity" of a subject that seems to be unspeakable and ungraspable by words, beyond the vital experience.

The use of italics as a way of introducing a line that contrasts with the rest of the poem and thus reaffirms its ironic tone is employed once again in "One in ten thousand (taken from newspaper poetry)" (García, 2012, p. 24) from *Two studies from the decomposition of Marcus Rothkowitz*. In it, the poetic self comments on and ironically refutes a scientific study that tries to give a rational and even physiological explanation to the phenomenon of creativity and poetic imagination: "Scientific studies in Germany showed that the poetic impulse resides in a certain area of the brain / We could remove it in Houston for twelve thousand dollars + taxes or live with it forever, *oh ligerísimo*" (García, 2012, p. 24). In this way, it exposes and plays with the reductionist character of such positivist scientific explanations that the author approaches as anachronistic.

The irony in this poem, as already mentioned, is constructed through the mention of such scientific studies that presume to have found the place in the brain where the "poetic impulse" is found, to later raise the possibilities of extirpating it or accepting what seems to be a condemnation. Furthermore, in the closing of the poem the phrase in italics "*oh*

*ligerísimo*", has the function of enhancing the ironic effect as it is an expression whose syntactic and grammatical construction seems anachronistic and archaic nowadays due to the interjection "oh" and the use of the superlative "ligerísimo", which together represent the cliché of the solemn tone with which it is linked to the poetic expression.

As can be observed, the use of italics in the poems *Armenia* and *Dos estudios a partir de la descomposición de Marcus Rothkowitz* by Luis Eduardo García is a typographic element that is fundamental in the conformation of his poetics. This is used in very particular situations that are repeated systematically throughout both collections of poems with the functions of introducing verses of external origin to the poem itself, from which the poetic "I" has a certain distance, and in turn, sometimes the author himself also distances himself, even achieving a third level of enunciation. By means of this, he manages to contrast and problematize different notions of poetry through critical comments in which, as Bakhtin states in "The Word in the Novel", the historical weight of the word allows this consonance or dissonance with the object and the reader. In this way, we see that García is not only aware of the historical and symbolic weight of the words he uses in his texts, but that this internal dialogue is a fundamental element in his poetics. Through this internal dialogue a critical review of the history of words in the artistic tradition is made, as we could see with the figures of darkness, the cliff, pain and flies.

This historical review through a critical perspective of language is in turn guided by the poetic self, which also fulfills the function of curator by expressing the references with which the poem is dialoguing. In addition, as part of this function of the poetic I as critic and curator, the use of italics also serves as a tool to expose the ironic tone of the poem by presenting lines that are different from the tone and language used in the rest of the text, which is usually direct and referential, as opposed to the metaphorical and solemn language that in some cases is used.

In short, I believe that the study of the tools and resources of poetic construction typical of current literary writing is extremely relevant to understand in greater depth the state of contemporary writing and the way in which the canon of our present is being shaped.

In the case of the Jalisco poet Luis Eduardo García, the intermediate character, the ironic tone and the metapoetic questioning are peculiarities that make up a poetics that is not only consolidating in our literary tradition, but also influences and generates an impact on new generations of creators through the poet's work as a workshop leader and cultural disseminator.

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