

Essay: from history to the genre characteristics in the literary sphere

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Abstract:

The essay genre is a discursive modality with a malleable shape which can circulate in different spheres of human communication. In the literary field, the essay blends concepts and opinions, figures and metaphor, critique and analyses. It is characterized as a discursive reflection, nurtured by a process of artistic subjectivation whose product results in a profound contemplation of a theme and/or the analysis of a piece of work, period, or style. Despite being recognized as an argumentative genre, there are few large and detailed studies about the essay's characteristics. In that sense, this work aims at presenting a categorization for the genre based on the Bakhtinian perspective of discourse genres, since it observes linguistic-enunciative marks, production conditions, thematic content and compositional construction. The compilation of *corpus* for analysis is derived, methodologically, from the following steps: i) investigation of texts-statements/works entitled as essays and/or that approached the term essay; ii) diagnosis and appreciation of that material; iii) selection and studies of representative texts of the genre; iv) organization of the essay characteristics in the literary sphere. In this perspective, the genealogy of the essay is discussed together with a presentation of an organization of the regularities and instabilities of the genre based on the texts-statements analyzed.

Keywords:

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INTRODUCTION

In the Portuguese language teaching and learning field, concrete statements deriving from speech genres are paths towards literacy, in the sense that, being reflections of authentic texts found in our daily lives, they demand understanding of enunciative objectives, organization and styles reached out concretely by means of social, historical, institutional, technological and ideological conditions. In this perspective, genres – relatively stable types of utterances (BAKHTIN, 2003) – can act as means of social transformation and ways to explore and enrich communicative possibilities. After all, it is in the production of utterances and through them that we (re)produce social practices.

Although being relatively stable, Bakhtin (2003) points out three elements from genres which are interconnected and intrinsically related to the socio-historical context: thematic content, compositional structure and style.

Context comprises the environment of utterance creation, the real conditions that determine enunciation. It involves constituent factors of discourse and its representations, such as: relationship between author/enunciator and interlocutor/enunciator and the social role they play in the moment of interaction; as well as the image the author projects from their interlocutor, the way the enunciator creates representation of the other with whom they try to interact¹; the discursive purpose, that is, the author's aim when they interact with the interlocutor, considering the role they play in a given context; the time and place of enunciation/publication and circulation of the statement, since social and historical factors, motivate and interfere in the enunciative production, determining, for example, compositional, textual, syntactic, and lexical choices. Besides the considered elements, the context is inserted in a discursive field/sphere/domain, which, in turn, can propitiate its own support. Support consists in the physical or virtual means for creation and disclosing a statement, responsible, sometimes, for determining² the genre.

¹ Bakhtin (2003, p. 301) recalls that the representation of the other, made by the enunciator and its influence on the statement, determines the composition and, in particular, the style of the utterance.

² The locus of publication / circulation of a statement is often decisive in naming a statement. For example: "I need to speak urgently with you, please contact me as soon as I can, Joan"; written on a small piece of paper, may be a note; sent by mobile phone, an MSN; left on the answering machine, a message.

Thematic content does not correspond to the topic being discussed, although it comprises different attributions of meaning and its possible extracts for a specific speech genre. Bakhtin (2003) says that the theme is an object of meaning, ideologically formulated, according to what Rojo (2005) indicates, and so it is evaluative and interactionally constructed among the interlocutors (PERFEITO, 2012).

Intensely related to the theme, there is the style dimension. To Bakhtin/Volochinov (2004, p. 144), style organizes in its way the discourses from others and language elements, not denying the individuality of the author, but never ceasing to be seen as a social phenomenon, since it always relates to someone else's utterance. Therefore, to researchers, all styles are linked to a genre, but can reflect the enunciator's individuality, that is, personal style. In this sense, when selecting and combining certain speech genres, according to the action spheres in which they are performed, the speaker also chooses the textual, lexical and grammatical resources. Through their expressiveness, they also resume and modify what has already been said about the topic.

According to what was exposed, style is one of the traits which characterize genre, as well as the enunciator choices. Because of that, to allude to the proper style of the speech genre, we name linguistic traits, which act as representative elements, such as the choice of verbs. In order to represent the traits that distinguish the author's style, we refer to them as enunciative marks, which mean the choices made by the author, but not necessarily genre traits, such as a concise discourse, word font style (bold, capitalized letters, underline or italics), notes, etc. that define author's particularity in writing.

Compositional structure is related to the ways in which the utterance is organized; they are devices that refer to the structure and finishing. It can refer both to visual aspect and writing style. In other words, the "image" of the text-utterance, many times, determines the genre only with a fast observation of spatial arrangement and its support, such as, for instance, when we look at the structure of a letter, an advertisement, a note on the refrigerator, poem verses. In these cases, even before we read, we can understand they are a letter, an advertisement, a note, and a poem.

We understand that utterances – socially produced – need to be studied/analyzed from the spheres of activity in which they are produced, from the dialogical relationships they establish, from the linguistic choices made by the enunciator – consequence of their objective, from the interlocutor with whom they aim to interact, from the text support, from the thematic content, which are determined by the utterances' context of production and, above all, in accordance with Bakhtin/Volochinov (2004), for the speaker's valuation appreciation in reference to the theme and interlocutors in the discourse.

In this perspective, this article presents a proposal, from the dialogical analysis of speech (BAKHTIN, 2003), considering the study of text-utterances of the essay genre in particular. The aim is to organize a categorization for the speech genre essay in the literary sphere, in order to answer the following question: what is an essay and how does it constitute as a speech genre in the literary sphere?

We justify the selection of the literary essay for two reasons. First of all, provoked by the enigmatic discursive structure reflected by the utterances in the shape of essays; mysterious discourse, without strict format, of flexible outlines, capable of expatiating of many topics, in the most varied spheres. The second reason is related to the absence of studies that look at genre characteristics. It corresponds, thereby, to a discursive modality little investigated by the Brazilian scientific-academic sphere, although produced by renowned names of national literature.

In an attempt to better understand the essay genre traits, we discuss in the next section the socio-historical context that originated the genre.

A GENEALOGY OF THE ESSAY AS A SPEECH GENRE

Michel de Montaigne is considered the “creator” of the essay because he was the first to name a set of texts as essays. For most critics, Montaigne is the father of the essay, since he published in 1580 a collection of texts – written in colloquial tone – which he called *Essais*. In this work, we can observe the “progressive gestation of a new type of literary communication”, as postulated by Cruz (1997, p. 50, our translation).

In contrast, Moisés (2007), in spite of considering Montaigne as the genre creator, also points out that the French were preceded by Plutarco, calling him the “patriarch of essayists.” To the author, in a certain way, Montaigne was also preceded by Aristotle, Plato, Marco Aurelio, and others, as well as by the copious “literature of adages, ‘examples’, apothegms, circulating in the course of the sixteenth century” (MOISÉS, 2007, p. 72, author’s emphasis).

García Gual (1991) is another researcher who believes in Plutarch’s influence in the essayist production of Montaigne. To the author, the moral reflection and the colloquial tone of the French author are taken from the cynical and stoic production of Seneca and Plutarch, thinkers who had an influence on him during the Renaissance.

Likewise, Soares (2006) stresses that, though Montaigne is considered the father of the essay since he was the first ever to conceptualize and use the term to name his own work, the Old Age had great essayists, who still have an impact in the roots of occidental thinking. The classical texts, in a certain way, seem to have contributed to the development of the genre studied. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the period in which *Essais* was born corresponds, literarily, to the Renaissance³.

Renaissance’s society (end of the fifteenth to the sixteenth century) is characterized especially by “the revelation of a reality that is based on logic. The classic poet likes to think,

³ It is important to remember that in some literature manuals, the term Renaissance is also synonymous with Classicism. As in Classicism / Renaissance, Baroque and Neoclassicism there was also the cult of “classic” writers, we chose to use Renaissance.

in order to understand [...] The writers are ‘intellectuals’, or better yet, intellectualized” (PROENÇA FILHO, 1985, p. 129). It is the period in which scientific knowledge – theoretically explained and proven – wins a prestige position in relation to religious explanations.

Historically, it corresponds to the context of great maritime conquests and mercantile contact with Asia, which broadened trade and enriched merchants, who started to sponsor artistic productions. In the cultural scene, the period is marked by the discovery of typography in the middle of the 15th century, accelerating “prodigiously the diffusion of ideas and news, and constituted in a powerful factor of ideological transmission” (SARAIVA; LOPES, 1997, p. 171). In the face of offshore exploration, the old world discovers a new world. The transoceanic discoveries extend the geography of the past. The Renaissance civilization becomes essentially maritime and the spirit of expansion dominates the men of that time. Men rediscover themselves, are adventurous, exploring and curious.

The birth of the essay genre stems precisely from the new spirit that moves mankind: the journey and the path (GALÁN, 2002). The discovery of new ways, of new worlds and of a new man, are the schools of wisdom. Montaigne himself, in his rehearsals, says there is no better school than the paths of a journey, which can bring about a new attitude.

Galán (2002) furthermore emphasizes that the characteristic gesture of the traveler is closely related to the reflective and essayistic process. In fact, the trip would be only a metaphor, to represent experiences that we allow ourselves to know. That would be the essence of the essay, to let know, to exteriorize a personal reflection, to venture in the action of thinking, in the experimental and unique teaching. “To experience means now, not only to prove but to put oneself to the test, that is, to rehearse oneself” (GALÁN, 2002, p. 9, our translation).⁴ It was necessary to dare. It was a daring civilization, as Camões himself describes in *Os Lusíadas* “Oh bold people, more than many / In the world they committed great things”.

The verb *to dare* accurately characterizes all the revolutionary impetus of the “modern man”; the latter, disconnected from the medieval ties, children of tradition and authority, dares to embark, solitary, on new paths, in an endless adventure to which the unforeseeable and the danger give painful taste. It will be *boldness* the Reformation, *boldness* the literary resurrection of pagan antiquity, *boldness* the heliocentrism, *boldness* the exile of the peripate, *boldness* the physical mathematics, *boldness* the critical experimentalism of “nuova scienza”, *boldness* the political realism, *boldness* the theological consecration of usury, etc. (LIMA, 1964, p. 18).

Artistic-cultural production is also influenced by “expansions,” and seeks to produce something new, even if it is based on the examples of the classical tradition. We must think,

⁴ “Experimentar significa ahora, no solo probar, sino ponerse a prueba, esto es, ensayar-se”

produce something personal and not an echo of the old productions. It is important to note that the Montaignan production is not a copy of the classic thoughts, but a meeting, a spontaneous convergence of opinions.

Montaigne *does not imitate* the ancients: what he does is to adapt to life a mental attitude *analogous* to that of the classics: to analyze “d’après Le nu”, “d’après la nature”. He does *as* they did, but his judgment is original, that is, it stems from the interiority of the self as *origin* (LIMA, 1964, p. 76).

It is from the Renaissance that Martínez (1964) considers that the essay begins to be configured. The researcher believes that, with Montaigne’s name, the word essay, inserted in a new context, began to crystallize a new paradigm, therefore, a new discursive “production”. More specifically, Cruz (1997, p. 51) believes that the essay arises precisely at the end of the sixteenth century, rooted in argumentative prose of doctrinal character, but metamorphosing treatments of some of the common principles of the argumentative genre. The search for a thought that translates into art.

This will make possible the misconception established in the closest cohabitation of ideological discourse and artistic discourse and, consequently, the relative freedom (in the sense given by Hegel) that characterizes the representative mode and language of the Essay genre (HARO, 1992, p. 116, our translation).⁵

Haro (1992) even defined that the essay is a product of modernity, constituting itself as a process of progressive evolution of modern culture, from its origin. For the scholar, the contemporaneity of the essay is based on “the true freedom of judgment over the prescriptions of the old cultural order received from the ancient world and disintegrated by modern art and thought” (HARO, 1992, p. 119).

Although discussions reign among theoreticians as to the origin of the essay, intricately defining its full trajectory, Cruz (1997) states that essays did not appear in Ancient history, being a fruit of modernity.⁶ After all, Montaigne does not find in the letter, in the epistle, in the dialogue, in the treatise, in the medieval genres a way of saying, of exposing. He creates, from them, a new “form”, and the essay is born. As Todorov (1980, p. 46)

⁵ Con ello se hará posible el desprejuiciado establecimiento de la más estrecha cohabitación de discurso ideológico y discurso artístico y, consiguientemente, la relativa libertad (em sentido que a este punto pudiera darle Hegel) caracterizadora del modo representativo y de lenguaje del género del Ensayo.

⁶ It is important to redeem the concept of modern within the historical perspective, so that it is not confused with Modernism, belonging to the divisions of literary schools. It is called the Modern Age the period between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, the period of transition from the medieval feudal world to the bourgeois capitalist world. From the nineteenth century onwards, history calls it the Contemporary Age.

postulates, “A new genre is always the transformation of one or several ancient genres: by inversion, by displacement, by combination.”

That being said, the essay is born as a result of modernity, both the word and the concept. “Montaigne, by using the term for the first time in the literary domain, clearly and forcefully reflects the specific *individualism* and *dynamism* of the European Renaissance” (LIMA, 1694, p. 58, emphasis added). It is noteworthy that after Montaigne’s *Ensaïos*, essays *on*⁷ philosophy, politics, geometry, physics, chemistry, history, botany, physiology, economics, art, agronomy, metallurgy, among others appeared, which allows us to point out that the essay genre, in fact, is embodied with the *Essais* of Michel de Montaigne.

Although born in French territory in the sixteenth century, the essay expanded in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries among Anglo-Saxon writers. Due to the number of sympathizers of the genre and its diffusion by the European countries and in other continents, in 1711, the genre gains the first magazine dedicated entirely to the essay, *The Spectator* (MOISÉS, 2007). At the same time, it spread throughout England.

In Italian territory, the procession is formed especially through Alfieri and Foscolo. In Spain, belatedly, the essay implies in the midst of the discourse, the letter or letter, prayer, among other genres. After that, renowned names aimed for efforts and the essay finds “the ideal climate to develop and reach high levels, thanks to the appearance of European and international figures [...] more recently, the number of Spanish cultists of the trial” (MOISÉS, 2007, p. 72-73).

The American society solidifies and propagates the genre in the eighteenth century, due to the pioneers Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, and others; in the following century, with Washington Irving. And finally, by the most influential American essayist Emerson, followed by H. D. Thoreau, Oliver Wendell Holmes, James Russell Lowell, H. L. Mencken, George Santayana and several others of the last and current century (MOISÉS, 2007).

In Portugal, the old Brazilian metropolis already outlined the genre in the Middle Ages through D. Duarte (The Loyal Counselor). However, in the 18th century it acquired more complex contours through Verney, Antônio Nunes Ribeiro Sanches, Cavaleiro de Oliveira, and Matias Aires. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Herculano stands out for essays full of historical erudition, accompanied by Antero - popular for the rigidity of analysis and for a utopian philosophy of a legitimate essayist. As for Lusitanian essayism in the last century, Moisés (2007) points out that the Portuguese essay had lived its apogee, having as peculiar essayist Antonio Sergio, who stood out by the consistent propensity to the genre.

In Brazil, according to Moisés (2007), the trajectory of the essay begins at the time of the discovery by the Portuguese, with the first text representing the genre being the letter

⁷ We will explain later the emphasis given to the word *on*. For now, we only point out that there are *essays of* and *essays on*.

of Pero Vaz de Caminha, followed by the “observations of missionary travelers and settlers to respect for the uncultivated and primitive land: Dialogues of the greatness of Brazil (1618), attributed to Ambrósio Fernandes Brandão; Culture and Opulence of Brazil (1711), by Antonil” (MOISÉS, 2007, p. 74).

Although we insist on tracing the paths of the essay in green and yellow territory, Portella (2000), Moisés (2007), Guerini (2000), remember that it is a question of uncovering incomplete and obscure paths. And, as Portella (2000) points out, which essay are we talking about? In general, we have sought to present a representative sketch of the trajectory of the word essay to its configuration as a speech genre. In this sense, it is worth remembering, although our focus in this study is the literary essay, so far, we have drawn the agitation of the essay in Brazil and in the world.

Corroborating Portella (2000), Antonio Candido (1980) considers the phase of modernism as the most representative period of the essay in national territory, making the genre stand out at that moment due to the concern of the modernists in trying to interpret Brazil. For the well-known literary critic, “it is characteristic of this generation that it all tends to the essay. From the chronic controversy [...] to the long historical and sociological essay, which incorporated the movement into national thought” (CANDIDO, 1980, p 123).

The quest for the decoding of the tropical country, however, was already outlined among the pre-modernists. In the periods in question, the objective was to understand Brazil from the choice of themes and problems that were common, since in the Modernist period, “the resources available for research were modified or improved, providing greater textual freedom, a more gregarious sense of the intellectuals and the incorporation of new canons” (GAIO, 2004, p. 17).

The various manifestations of the essay of disparate forms, different from that of its conception, reflect the natural evolution of utterances, which seek to adapt to historical contexts. Avila (2007), in this regard, adds that one cannot think that a genre can remain pure for centuries and centuries. Therefore, according to the researcher, there are several proposals of typology of the essay.

Given some information about the process of creation and propagation of the essay genre, we outline the paths of our analysis in the following section.

Methodology and Corpus Constitution

The stages of the study of the genre essay produced for the literary field determined three moments: i) investigation of texts self-titled as an essay(s) and/or approached essay-statement; ii) diagnosis of the material; iii) selection and analysis of representative texts of the genre.

In the first moment, we covered libraries, bookstores and, mainly, physical and virtual second-hand bookstores. Our form of searching consisted of the word essay. Every time we came across the word, we filtered only the works that could be related to our object

of study, ignoring, for example, titles / subtitles or any reference to the term “essay” related to other fields, since we found essays on philosophy, history, psychology, law, medicine, among others. Even these were investigated to find any possible relationship with the literary context.

The word essay led us to literary works that present collections of the genre, but that do not adopt the term in their title, for example, *Crivo de Papel* (Paper Sieve), of Benedito Nunes, who invokes the word in the book’s presentation: “it reunites fifteen of the most recent essays”; or *Filosofia Mínima* (Minimal Philosophy), by Luís Augusto Fischer, who also describes the essay as an enunciative form present in the collection.

In the beginning, however, we confess that it was enough to have the term essay as a title, subtitle or reference to the texts presented to select the work. Little by little, we realized that this alone was not enough since we found works called essays which did not present at least one example of the genre, leading us to verify that the term is usually used with different meanings. For this reason, before we arrived at the statement, we began to verify whether the author, through his biography, was also considered an essayist. In this way, we arrived at a total of nine works.

Many essays are based on the reflection of works, authors, literary schools and styles. We emphasize, however, that works sometimes dealt with both *literary essays of subjective expression* and *literary essays of critical expression*.⁸

Five authors were significant in our analyzes: Paulo Leminski, *Ensaaios e Anseios Crípticos* (Essays and Cryptic Anxieties); Augusto Meyer, *A forma Secreta, No tempo da flor e Augusto Meyer* (The Secret Form, In the Time of the Flower and Augusto Meyer): Selected Essays; Luís Augusto Fischer, *Filosofia mínima, Para fazer diferença: ensaios e Crivo de Papel* (Minimum Philosophy, To Make a Difference: Essays and Paper Sieve); Benedito Nunes, *O dorso do tigre* (The back of the tiger); and José Geraldo, *Ensaaios Literários* (Literary Essays). In all, we have weighed the characteristics of seventeen essays by the said writers, which were randomly chosen, yet we always tended to those whose title attracted us, though selecting the production of essays from the subjective expression. The essays were studied based on the analysis criteria of Bakhtin’s (2003) speech genres: the context of production; thematic content; compositional structure and linguistic-enunciative marks. With the survey of characteristics from the Bakhtinian criteria, we try to answer: “What is an essay and how does it constitute a discursive genre?”, our research question, and thus meet our goal of categorizing the literary essay genre.

Ultimately, what is a literary essay? In the next section, we present a survey of the most stable characteristics of the genre, the essence that allows differentiating it from other genres and also some reasons to consider it a literary text.

⁸ It will be better discussed in the next section.

The Speech Genre Essay in the Literary Sphere

The essays, in general, propagate a reflective vision. It is critical in essence, organized especially in prose. As the essayist seeks to be brief, his extension is considered short. For the researcher Maria Elena Arenas Cruz (1997, p. 17, our translation), “[...] his compositional freedom and apparent formal indetermination have conditioned his reputation as unclassifiable.” Many researchers and scholars classify the essay’s essence through word etymology, constructing its definitions as a genre characterized as a sketch, attempt, draft, unfinished project, among others.

In the literary sphere, the essay is marked by expressiveness.⁹ Working with words artistically requires that the interlocutor becomes an accomplice of the essayist, instigating them to interact actively and not to be a mere receiver. Such complicity causes the enunciator to accept the writer’s discourse, without intervening in their linguistic creation, which is born in a sphere and is organized from a genre that gives them freedom of creation.

In the case of the essay that deserves to be called literary, the expressive resources continue to fulfill this aesthetic function or connotative deautomation that attracts the recipient’s attention to the text itself. However, since ingenious creation is fused with speculative reasoning and persuasive vocation in the essay, the aesthetic function of the expressive resources of language is amalgamated with its argumentative function. In this way, the expressiveness of the essay is, besides a source of pleasure, a source of knowledge and a factor of persuasion (CRUZ, 1997, p. 360, our translation).¹⁰

There are two forms of manifestation of the essay in the screen domain: the first turns to the Montaigne production, through which the essayist analyzes a certain subject, producing their thesis, in the words of Eulalio (1992, p. 67), a statement-essay “of general ideas, conceived in an artistic prose content”. The second has been embodied over the years, has hybridized over time and undergone transformations that have broadened the dimensions, contexts, purposes and genre themes. In this case, the literary essay also manifests itself as literary criticism in which the author formulates their appreciation for a work (book(s); poem(s); author(s); set of works; artistic and literary movement; artistic, such as

⁹ We understand expressiveness as a set of elocuting phenomena and devices that make the text more attractive to the reader/listener.

¹⁰ En el caso del texto ensayístico que merece ser llamado *literário*, los recursos expresivos siguen cumpliendo esta función estética o de desautomatización connotativa que atrae la atención del destinatario sobre el propio texto. Sin embargo, dado que en el ensayo la creación ingeniosa está fundida con el razonamiento especulativo y la vocación persuasiva, la función estética de los recursos expresivos del lenguaje se amalgama a menudo con a la función argumentativa de los mismos. De esta manera, la expresividad del texto ensayístico es, la vez que una fuente de placer, una fuente de conocimiento y un factor de la persuasión.

painting, music, sculptures, and art in general). This is an essay on “specific literary fact”, as Eulalio (1992, p. 67) points out. In any case, the essay is pure reflection. We shall call the first essay *literary essay of subjective expression*; while we shall call the second model *literary essay of critical expression*.

National productions, under the title of essay or otherwise labeled as such, broadly address the critical expression. They are texts that are directed toward literary judgments. In Eulalio’s words (1992, p. 12), the critical literary essay consists of an “aesthetic discussion of the literary fact, in the form of studies, analyzes, news, reviews.” This is the case, for example, of the literary essay *Um brasileiro contra a paisagem* (A Brazilian against the landscape), by Moysés Vellinho (2001), in which the essayist analyzes the life and work of Machado de Assis, weaving judgments about the reasons that Machado had to approach negatively some themes, the social context, Machadian subjective life, as the following excerpt illustrates:

Let us not be too categorical in asserting that the work of Machado de Assis is the result of exclusively subjective conditions, not to say pathological... External factors are, as a rule, so necessarily present to the whole creation of the spirit that, if in relation to a particular work they retract or neutralize, this circumstance must be considered by their own work. It is true that the books of Machado de Assis - those of the last phase plunge their deep roots into the lonely and embittered soul of the great writer. No greater external relief, as if closed to any compromises like the fashions of the time, the work of the creator of *Quincas Borba* resembles those distressed trees of the Northeastern desert, that grow tragically downwards, going inland in search of the humidity that the atmosphere does not have to give them. The lymph that circulates in its covertly cold pages comes from deep, bringing to the surface the reek of all the poisons that pollute the dark slopes of the spirit. Those who lived condemned to quarrel within themselves, in the obsessive torture of hiding themselves in their own eyes, could only have accomplished a rooted personal work. No one would dare to challenge it without incurring a gratuitous paradox in the face of an issue that is undoubtedly the most serious, the most relevant of Brazilian literature. (VELLINHO, 2001, p. 47-48).

The critical literary expression framed by the contours of the essay genre, in particular, focuses on personal reflection, on the essayist’s judgment of the life/work/style of a writer. However, the same literary criticism still advances when it seeks, at times, to analyze how a specific theme is approached by several authors, by writers of a literary period, in some cases correlating the theme with historical and philosophical concepts. In order to illustrate this essayist approach produced by Brazilian writers, we selected excerpts from the essay *The Carpe Diem in Brazilian Poetry*, by José Geraldo (2005, p. 140-141):

The cogitations that I have been doing about the insistence with which the theme of *carpe diem* appears in Brazilian literature are not recent, even if we consider it restricted to the texts of consecrated authors. [...] In our culture, the Latin expression *carpe diem quam minimum credula postero* (seize the day without relying on tomorrow) is attached to the council directed by Time to the Epicureans, in the sense that time should not be wasted. [...] I have

already affirmed to have verified the insistence with which the subject of which I am dealing presents itself in our poetry, which implies its registration in the chronological succession of our poets, and in this, I base my interest in the subject. It is not a singular case, because it is in the continuity of certain themes that we can support to say that today, as in the past centuries, man manifests love, indifference, hatred, solidarity, aspiration, interest, spite, slander, anxiety, things that have nothing to do with the state of progress or the technological advancement of the different epochs, being this observation one of the arguments on which the affirmation that art is timeless is sustained. [...] The conclusion is that the *carpe diem* in the man/woman relationship is closely linked to the fleetingness of time, to the use of the now, since nobody knows the uncertainties of tomorrow...

In the text-statement in question, the essayist analyzes selected poems that stand between the Baroque and the Pre-Modernism - a period that the author delimits at the beginning of the essay - to confirm his thesis that the *carpe diem*, in the poetry of the listed period, in relation to the relationship between man and woman, is configured as a “fugacity of time”.

It is important to highlight that we do not aim to analyze each production relentlessly with regard to how literary essays may manifest; our focus is on illustrating how the approach occurs in the concrete statements of literary essays when we consider the essays we analyze.

The literary essay can also be produced “a la Montaigne”. In this case, essays of subjective expression, through which the essayist reflects on a broad subject in a subjective way, not limited to one author, set of works, literary period, or even a subject present in the literature. This does not mean that the writer cannot resort to literary works and writers to corroborate the thought he seeks to sustain. The literary essay as a subjective expression discusses, analyzes, ponders, reflects its object of study. *Epistle to Porphyry (Epístola a Porfírio)*,¹¹ by Augusto Meyer, was the essay selected to demonstrate the aforementioned case. The following excerpt is the first paragraph of the essay:

The best thing about these writing and learning is to begin by modesty, recalling Charles Bailly’s remark: “In fact, the most educated person knows at most a third of the words cataloged in dictionaries, and far away are the dictionaries of a complete record of the words of a language. “The reading of dictionaries is at least to show that you, poor reader friend, are currently on the lookout for a bridgehead to the Russian side and already dating the Arabian, do not yet know this strange native land called the Portuguese language. (MEYER, 2009, p. 18).

¹¹ Augusto Meyer, according to Alberto da Costa e Silva, was one of “the greatest essayists we have ever had.” He was the master of the short essay. He was concise and approached subjects with extreme depth, as he knew how to merge the harmonious essence of the subject into a few words and pages.

The characteristics listed up so far and the extracts of essays as *subjective expression* allow us to reach the following conclusion: the purpose of the essay is to unveil the object of analysis, be it a feeling, a fact, people, genres, subjects, works, literary periods or artistic, authors, in short, essayist's day-to-day things or that relate to art and culture.

The text-statements of the essay genre of the literary sphere have two dimensions: a) logic; and b) aesthetics. The logical dimension of the genre is the personal analysis of a single theme and the consolidation of ideas. The aesthetic dimension is the perspective responsible for mastery of the language and for the use of expressive resources. In other words, it artistically divulges the thesis achieved.

In this study, we focus on the *literary essay as a subjective expression*. For the analysis, as previously mentioned, we observe discursive aspects, basing ourselves on Bakhtinian concepts as: thematic content; compositional structure and style,¹² linked to the context of production; and ii) expressive aspects.

In the first topic – discursive aspects – we present characteristics of the genre related to elements that permeate the enunciation and determine the choice of the enunciator. Thus, based on Bakhtin (2003), we debate about the purpose of the genre, its context of production, compositional structure, about the essayist and its social role, its interlocutor, the thematic choice - since it is related to the socio-historical context in that the utterance is produced and, therefore, determinant of the choices made by the enunciator.

Haro (1992) idealizes the essay as *free reflective discourse* since it is configured from a structured discourse in the margin of scientific theories or conventions. Here is the purpose/objective of the genre: to present a personal reflection, regardless of the communicative paths that it may follow. “The essayist proves and puts to the test, in a word, has the experience, living in themselves and by themselves, what gives them the human condition” (GALÁN, 2002, p. 6-7, our translation).¹³ The will that moves the essayist rests on unveiling the object of analysis. After all, the essayist discourse “is born with a clear will to communicate, to reach as many people as possible, which leads its author to accommodate the expression of the intellectual capacities of a public who imagines themselves to be cultured, but not specialized” (CRUZ, 1997, p. 357, our translation).¹⁴

Under the panorama presented, the essayist writes for a type of interlocutor who does not require technicality, nor a particularized scientific language, for that reason, imposes certain restrictions on the subject by virtue of his enunciate.

¹² As we approach the style, we will also discuss the expressiveness present in the essay-texts of the essay genre in the literary sphere.

¹³ “El ensaísta, prueba y se pone a prueba, en una palabra, se experimenta, viviendo en si y por si mismo lo que da de si la condición humana” (GALÁN, 2002, p. 6-7).

¹⁴ “El discurso ensayístico nace con una clara voluntad de comunicabilidad, de llegar al mayor número de personas posible, lo cual lleva a su autor a acomodar la expresión a las capacidades intelectuales de un público que imagina culto pero no especializado”.

The essay is addressed to ‘cults in general’ whatever the specialty of each, reading an essay requires no specialization. The generality of the cults corresponds to the “generality of themes” that can be treated in the style of essay and the generality in the style of treatment. The essayist can know, on the subject chosen, much more than it is fair to say in the essay. The obligation to make oneself understood implies only a care with the formal clarity, without the elimination of all those technical aspects, if any, whose understanding would imply in the reader a specialized preparation (1961 apud CRUZ, 1997, p. 358, our translation).¹⁵

Although their thematic is extremely heterogeneous, the essayist narrows down their thematic repertoire in function of the enunciate that they project virtually. In addition, the social field in which they are inserted, added by the projection of the other (reader / listener) and their social role at the moment of enunciation restrict the subjects to be essayed.

Therefore, essay art is considered a literary genre that deals with a single or multidimensional framework of references with varied possibilities of intertwining different intellectual visions. Themes that invite freedom of interpretation because they present many plans of reading, juxtaposing opinions of their own and others in varying degrees of perception and understanding (LAGO JR, 1990, p. 7).

The essay is a free aesthetic commentary, proclaimed from a very minute critical judgment of developed literary prose. Perhaps, by this definition, Eulalio (1992, p. 12), classifies the sphere of the genre as being “fine arts”. In this context, according to Moses (2007, p. 89), the essayist is

a problematizing one, insofar as it raises the problem where conformism had installed its realm of axioms, postulates, and dogmas, or distinguishes problems where there seems to be only the vague longing for the future: the *world* as problematic space, *being* as a problematic entity, *culture* as a problematic epiphenomenon, these are the coordinates that guide the essayist.

In discovering within himself, the word reteller employs, as well as the creator of the genre – Montaigne –, in the “causerie” style, a kind of chat, since this style consists of

¹⁵ “Una de las primeras reglas tácitas es la que prohíbe decir algo que no se entienda em seguida. Cada género delimita el campo de sus posibles oyentes o lectores. Siempre hay o debe haber una cierta consonancia entre la forma y el fondo de un género y el carácter de los lectores. El ensayo se dirige ‘a la generalidad de los cultos’. Sea cual sea la especialidad de cada uno, la lectura de un ensayo no requiere en ninguno la especialización. A la generalidad de los cultos corresponde la ‘generalidad de los temas’ que pueden tratarse en el estilo de ensayo y la generalidad en el estilo mismo del tratamiento. El ensayista puede saber, sobre el tema elegido, mucho más de lo que es justo decir em el ensayo. La obligación de darse a entender no implica solamente un cuidado de la claridad formal, sino la eliminación de todos aquellos aspectos técnicos, si los hubiere, cuya comprensión implicaría en el lector una preparación especializada.”

a “*more efficient, intimate, direct, penetrating instrumental process, with communication between me and another self. [...] is a writing where the heat, the breath, the color and the timbre of a voice are impregnated*” (LIMA, 1964, p. 54, emphasis added). Thus the “I” is a striking presence in the essay, an “I” who writes and seeks to reflect a “self” that the essayist themselves do not know.

Language to the ears, as it is addressed to an interlocutor and not to a reader. From where the grammatical and stylistic property is at the service of dialogue, never to argue in order of itself. The essay is to keep a core of conversation if you do not want to immerse yourself in sterility as a result of the sterilization of language: to write as one speaks highly of various subjects, as if one had the gift of natural and simple eloquence, as if the writer did not lose sight of the man who addresses his fellow men through dialogue (MOISÉS, 2007, p. 96).

In this perspective, the essayist externalizes their subjectivity in the essay, wishing that the enunciate, at least, understands their way of thinking as a possibility to see the object under analysis, hence the preference for current issues. As the author projects themselves in the statement, the first person’s use of discourse is recurrent. On the other hand, the “I” that interacts with the essayist through the concrete statement seeks to find new perspectives, new ways of approaching a theme. You are an active participant. That said, the essay is a subjective statement. Its subjectivity, according to Moisés (2007, p. 88, emphasis added), is based on imagination, on emotion, “*understood not as a dogmatic and polemical passion, but as the disposition to empathically adhere to the topics [...] the essay claims emotivity.*”

Expressively, the literary essay, as a “speculative and interpretive conjecture” (HARO, 1992, p. 21) translates into an artisanal, dialogical and artistic language. In this way, rehearsing Haro’s studies (1992, p. 117), the essay reflects a verbal “*artistization*” and reflective exposition, in which we are faced with the individual experience, reflected from a universal approach, in which a critical autonomy predominates. In other words, the experimental experience of universality, through a mental autonomy. The essay language, in general, translates metaphorically. For this reason, the style of the essay is pure creation,

since it is nourished with ever new sap, and it is already from this angle - beauty and form - that the essay is inscribed in the literary perimeter: here, language that perpetually recreates, makes appeal to the imagination, the effort of the ‘I’ to say and communicate to the reader through the regular use of the metaphor (MOISÉS, 2007, p. 96, emphasis added).

Linguistically, the constituent sentences of the literary essay are very organized. Its ideas are ingeniously drawn, articulated and proven, giving and confirming the argumentative essence. Haro (1992) points out that it is necessary to recognize the harmonious phrases that make up the essay, which are the gears for the whole work. The phrases in the enunciated texts of the genre in question are formulated in a compelling way, which brings the prose essayer closer to poetry.

In the essay-literary discourse, the personal-experimental opinion of the essayist can be corroborated by the discourse of authority. According to Lima (1964: 74), “the process of reading for a better understanding of the subject does not mean that what has been read will be repeated, but just as the bee makes honey from the nectar of various flowers, so the essayist produces their criticism.” In addition, the critical judgment of the genre in question, carried out by a persuasive dialogical character, incorporates a “rambling, sinuous and familiar tone of confession or confidence, of natural warmth and subjective life” (LIMA, 1964, p. 82). However, the spirit who analyzes is brief, “the essayist is brief because antipode of the nefelibata, brief because realistic” (MOISÉS, 2007, p. 82). The brevity of the text is quality of veracity or adaptation to reality.

The essay requires brevity, the brevity proper to a structure in which and by means of which the mind intuits fragments of reality and is satisfied with its abstraction: brevity is equivalent to taking a photo, which is sufficient in the apprehension of the minutiae and refuses panoramas, either because they overflow the frontiers in which the chamber moves (of the essayist), or because the analysis matters more than the synthesis. *The essay is the assault on reality understood as an infinite sum of details, without being separated from its totality; the intelligence that chooses it as an instrument of gnoseological apprehension is briefly desired to be whole and it soon desires the object of knowledge in order to capture it in its fragrance and immediacy* (MOISÉS, 2007, p. 82, emphasis added).

In addition to the considerations above, the essay falls within the sphere of discussion, so it relies on argumentation to reflect critical thinking. Thus, the essayist exposes judgments of value on an object of study, specifying its positioning through examples, evidence, and contrasts. They demonstrate the causes or the reasons for their discernment by explaining them. The genre, therefore, requires support, refutation and/or negotiation.

The texts-statements of the essay genre are organized in general in prose and are marked by brevity. In the essay, there is no compromise with evidence, but the development of a logical, intuitive writing, in search of original knowledge. The essayist writes, “in verbal concretization, to what extent their understanding of the problem in focus is defensible” (MOISÉS, 1982, p. 177).

In order to know if the thought that inhabits the mind is original, it structures the text in which it appears as authentic or absurd: in writing to think, or thinking to write, the essayist can only evaluate the idea that pops the intelligence in the very act of writing. They write to better understand what they think and to know if they think correctly. Hence the essay is an exercise or a manifestation of humility, and it makes brevity and clarity of style its mainstays: the essayist knows from experience the limitations of human knowledge, and that abstemious phrasal tournaments, the specious and Byzantine vocabulary, the forced neologisms, etc. often hide the intellectual emptiness (MOISÉS, 1982, p. 177).

In seeking to build their considerations, the essayist wants to be as clear and concise as possible because they know that the best argument is one that does not require many

words, not even many explanations. Therefore, they are also a master of words, for they chastise them in the right measure, do not delude themselves, nor do they impetrate obscure speeches. Words are often employed without extreme erudition and are organized with harmonious labor, forming a beautiful writing, marked by the delicacy of a humble speech. To be an essayist is above all to be a “good writer”, as Moisés (1982, p. 177) points out.

In the midst of the expositions we have already set out, we are guided to configure the regularities/irregularities that characterize the essays of the literary sphere, from the analyzes made by us, shown in the following table:

Literary essay characteristics

LITERARY ESSAY	
Context of production and relationship author-reader-text	
Author-enunciator	Represented by the social position of the essayist.
Possible audience	Readers of literary works
Means of circulation	Books and some websites. Sometimes it can circulate in newspapers and magazines, but it is usually produced for more perennial circulation supports.
Probable purpose of the interaction	To present a personal reflection regarding a topic/an idea, through an artistic style.
Thematic content	
Variable and evaluative and interactionally constructed.	
Compositional structure and style	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graphic level: disposition of words in prose, of moderate extension, with a creative title – to arouse the interest of the reader; presentation of the subject; development – arguments, references, examples, etc.; denouement, part in which the author ends his reflection without the pretension to exhaust the subject and to present exact answers, but to ratify the conclusion arrived after an absolute analysis; • Lexical level: a lexical choice made by the essayist, with a preference for a not very scholarly language; • Syntactic level: preference for short periods; syntactic changes (or syntax or construction figures); • Semantic level: figures of speech, intertextuality; • Discursive level: in general, a conversational tone is used; the essayist takes a didactic, propedeutic and sometimes theoretical bias; disaffection and serenity; critical and reflexive positioning. 	

Source: Prepared by the author.

In summary, the essay is a literary genre in which the aesthetic purpose appears intertwined with the reflective process, in which one does not sacrifice the other. Its

production is concentrated in the hands of renowned literati, who organize it through a clear and accessible language, punctuated briefly with circulation, commonly in the literary-cultural sphere, or as Eulálio (1992) mentioned, “fine arts”.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The work with genres (speech or text), in the contemporaneity, should guide the teaching and learning practices of the Portuguese language, according to official documents such as the National Curricular Parameters (BRASIL, 2007, 2008) and the Curricular Guidelines of the State of Paraná (2008). Nevertheless, although the genres are gradually entering the classrooms, some or many, still require more delimitations in order to allow a more fruitful approach in the school context.

The essay is a discursive modality that is constantly misunderstood and still does not present deep theoretical notions capable of eliminating the different conceptions attributed to it. The disorientation occurs not only among brave writers who venture to write it but also between literary theorists and critics. In 2012, when presenting a book of essays, Folha de São Paulo made the following comment: “Taken by the complicity of an informal conversation, essays may be the best friends of a writer. The literary genre still relatively little exercised in Brazil”.

Under such a focus, motivated by the enigmatic form of the essay, we try to traverse the paths that outline this discursive modality. Although in this article we present a study that has led us to a possibility of categorization for the literary essay, we emphasize that the contours delineated for the genre are fruits of the path taken in our research, readings, and analyzes. Perhaps there are other brands, perhaps other relevant information, perhaps other important aspects present in other essays. However, we believe that the study undertaken allows us to delineate the characteristics of a genre considered difficult to characterize. In any case, we present a proposal that can be complemented in future studies.

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