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Dossier

Essayists in Latin America: Ana Pizarro

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Our interest in the essay genre has long-standing roots. Why study a genre that has always been regarded as second-class, undervalued since Adorno published the paradigmatic *The Essay as Form* in 1954? A non-genre, as some would call it. What is most compelling about the essay is precisely the opportunity it provides to explore this unique form of writing that, unlike any other, opens space for free thought and reflection while also incorporating fiction, poetry, philosophy, and history.

Quintessentially boundary-crossing genre, it has been practiced by thinkers, writers, poets, artists, playwrights, and intellectuals in general. As the Mexican poet and essayist Alfonso Reyes put it, the essay is "that centaur of genres, where everything exists and everything fits, the whimsical offspring of a culture that can no longer respond to the circular and closed world of the ancients but rather to the open curve, the ongoing process..." (Reyes, 2000 [1963], p. 456).

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It is true that the essay has always been considered a minor genre or simply not read as literature. However, in Latin America, this genre has been practiced by prominent intellectuals throughout our literary history, shaping an essayistic tradition, especially with reflections on the paradigms of identity construction. Since the 19th century, essayists have played an important role in intellectual and political life, and the Hispanic American essay has been essential in fostering reflections on issues of identity, nationhood, and the continent. Not infrequently, essayists have held positions in the public and political life of the young nation-states.

Markedly written by men, the essay genre has, since the last decades of the past century, been increasingly practiced by women who have left their mark, particularly because they often approach it from the intersectionality of gender, race, and class, in addition to themes related to literature and culture. Initially, the aim of this issue was to highlight some of these names—women who, both in Brazil and in the Hispanic world, have, through their essayistic writing, helped us understand and translate the continent. This would involve reading more closely the works of Brazilian writers like Lélia Gonzalez and Sueli Carneiro, Black essayists who revolutionized the way race and gender issues are understood in Brazil. It would also involve reflecting on figures like Beatriz Sarlo, an essayist who has shed light on the phenomena of Argentine literature and culture, among others. However, Ana Pizarro's work and the direction of this issue of *Revista Gragoatá*, which we are co-coordinating, have shifted the focus and objectives of this essay. The Chilean essayist's oeuvre and the importance she has gained in literary and cultural studies in and about Latin America have become the central focus of our work. Ana Pizarro's texts have taught us how to understand and interpret this continent in all its complexity and cultural richness.

To consider Pizarro's work is to consider Latin America itself—a region she has studied, delved into, and illuminated with new angles of analysis and original approaches that help us translate this vast, culturally rich space. It is a space teeming with diverse textualities and imaginaries that, at once, unite and separate us through their singular identities.

Her work as a comparativist *avant la lettre* led her to organize what we dare to call the most significant work on comparative studies in Latin America: the trilogy *América Latina: Palavra, Literatura e Cultura* (Pizarro, 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1995). These books have profoundly shaped literary and cultural studies of Latin America. Published in the 1990s, the trilogy was preceded by two other pivotal works: *Hacia una historia de la literatura latinoamericana* (1987) and *Literatura latinoamericana como proceso* (1985). These earlier works brought to the fore the complexity of debates and reflections that emerged among critics convened by Pizarro, with the support of Antonio Candido, in two meetings—one in Caracas in 1982 and another in Campinas in 1983. Their goal was to reflect on and define the nature of a new history of Latin American literature, one capable

of addressing, among other elements, the complex dichotomy of unity versus diversity within the continent.

These debates highlight the process of constructing this "new history" that was being conceived. Through the dialogues among critics, we can discern the guidelines that shaped this ambitious project and the complexities that ultimately generated the reflections that guided it. These reflections, in truth, form the root of a profound questioning of Latin America in all its multiplicity and heterogeneity. These are the first Latin American works of historiography and criticism that, without abandoning the perspectives of comparative study, aim to broaden, problematize, and deepen the notion of literature and culture in Latin America. The unprecedented nature of the project radically transformed the study of comparative literature in the region.

Ángel Rama observed that placing Spanish- and Portuguese-language literatures side by side was already something so innovative that "simply doing this in Latin America is an intellectual adventure that, without exaggeration, I might call revolutionary" (Rama, 1982, p. 85). Undoubtedly, as the Uruguayan critic points out, this is the challenge. This was the challenge that served as the backbone and framework of the trilogy.

The first issue at hand is the very nature of the subject: what is meant by a "History of Latin American Literature"? The problem is tied to the complexity of the concept of Latin America itself—that is, we are dealing with the delimitation of the area to be studied. Originating in France, the idea of "latinity" emerged to name an entire continent that encompasses not only a plurality of countries but also a vast diversity of cultural areas, both within and beyond national borders. This is the first difficulty of historiography: attempting to delimit the study area while addressing the necessity of organizing it based on notions of inclusion and exclusion. In this regard, traditional criteria—be they linguistic, political, or geographical—cannot fully account for the literary domain. To address this, the project incorporated cultural parameters as the organizing framework for the Latin American literary system. Moreover, in defining the scope of what constitutes the *History of Latin American Literature*, a dynamic approach was required—one that, in contrast to traditional historiography that limits its corpus to the cultivated literary system, incorporated voices from indigenous and popular origins. This marks the project's first major achievement: considering cultural areas beyond geography and geopolitics. It included, in addition to Brazil's literary system, the French Caribbean and Chicano voices from the United States—voices that had previously been excluded from the complex construct of Latin America.

It is important to emphasize that the debates, that is, the processes and reflections at the root of a project like this, can often be more innovative than the result itself. This was evident in the discussions regarding the delimitation of the area that defines a literary and cultural

history of the continent, as they subverted traditional notions of canon and corpus in literary and critical studies. What is being questioned, beyond the delimitation of the study area, are the notions of the Latin American continent, the regional, the national, the canon, and literariness itself.

In this sense, the project played a revolutionary role, as Ángel Rama described, within the tradition of literary and cultural studies in Latin America.

Another aspect arising from this initial reflection, as the issues raised are in some way interconnected, concerns Latin American comparatism. What kind of comparatism can and should be developed, given a corpus of national literatures that are so heterogeneous yet share a colonial history and a similarly shaped relationship with their former metropolises? At the time, in the 1980s, comparative study was almost nonexistent in Latin America. The proposal to approach analysis from this perspective represented a bold vanguardism, which, in turn, was also tied to the political notion of Latin America, particularly after the 1960s—a period when Latin American studies were already more advanced in the field of social sciences due to the numerous transformations in the continent's history and society.

The comparatist perspective aims to work through the forms of appropriation that literature has developed, shaped by transcultural processes that subvert European literary structures, language, and discourse inherited from its colonial and dependent past. This means respecting transcultural processes as forms of literary creation that incorporate other cultural elements—Indigenous, African, and mythical nuclei that generate new imaginaries and textualities.

Another proposal that brought originality to the project relates to the notions of national, regional, and Latin American literature. In this case, the project considered "the need to observe the process of Latin American literature as an integral part of the social process in Latin America" (Pizarro, 1987, p. 192). This implies understanding the literature produced on the continent as a contradictory totality, while respecting the diversity of distinct national and regional literary systems. This broadening of the corpus also entails a critique of traditional historiographical studies, which often privilege high literature while neglecting systems rooted in oral traditions.

As a critique of Latin American historiography, the project sought to revise the analyses and practices of traditional historiography, which, conservatively reductive, adopted mechanistic approaches and flawed criteria for inclusion and exclusion. In this sense, a possible history of Latin American literature pointed to the need for an interdisciplinary approach, involving contributions from social sciences, history, anthropology, sociology, and linguistics, as well as the inclusion of other systems of representation—oral, Indigenous, African, and those of other minorities. In the realm of literature and its relationship with history, the project recognized the importance of maintaining this connection, given that the continent's literature has always been "committed, in a specific

sense: not as an ideological mandate, but as an effort to contribute to the construction of national identities through culture" (Pizarro, 1987, p. 194).

In this way, Latin American literature positions itself between two perspectives: as a continuation of metropolitan literatures and as a rupture in relation to them. "Its historical function is that here, among other things, it has been an instrument of domination and simultaneously a means of reacting against that domination" (Pizarro, 1987, p. 194).

A brief glance at the three volumes is enough to confirm the outcome of the original proposal. Initially, supporting the idea of integration, the texts that comprise the three volumes were published in the two languages in which they were written: Portuguese and Spanish. There are no translated texts. The volumes are organized by historical periods, namely: "The Colonial Situation," "The Emancipation of Discourse," and "Avant-garde and Modernity." Unlike traditional literary histories, which are organized by stylistic periods or by authors—or by authors and periods—the choice to relate literary moments to the historical process already signals that we are dealing with a different type of literary history.

The first volume, "The Colonial Situation," features a selection of 22 articles addressing aspects of life and culture in the formation of the colonial world. The volume begins with a chapter titled "Formation of the Image of America," which highlights indigenous cultures and their presence in the formation of colonial discourse. The Baroque, in its Hispanic and Portuguese manifestations, transplanted to the New World and shaping new mestizo identities, is also a subject of study in this first volume. The inclusion of reflections addressing the role of women's discourse in the colony is undoubtedly a novel approach, one that is generally absent from the pages of literary histories. In another innovative move, Volume I, in addition to reflections on literature produced in the colonies, also includes texts that aim to examine the role of languages at that time. Symbolically, the volume concludes with a version of the iconic text "The Lettered City" (1993) by Ángel Rama.

The second volume, with 35 texts, is titled "The Emancipation of Discourse" and is based on the understanding that, in Latin America, the emancipation of discourse occurred before the political emancipation of the young nations and served to legitimize their autonomy, affirming their independence. Being original was a stance that contributed to the construction of nations, and intellectual independence signified the possibility of political independence. The volume includes analyses of texts by some of the leading thinkers of the 19th century, such as Sarmiento, Andrés Bello, Altamirano, and Norberto de Souza. It also introduces an innovative approach by incorporating marginal, popular, and Amerindian textualities into its corpus alongside traditional literary genres such as poetry, narrative, theater, and essays. Like the other volumes, this one includes texts from Brazil and the Caribbean in addition to the Hispanic world.

The third and final volume, "Avant-garde and Modernity," as its title suggests, focuses on the processes of language modernization that occurred in Latin America, particularly following the explosion of avant-garde movements in the 1920s. These avant-gardes, which spread across the subcontinent, represent a unifying moment amidst diversity. Through their proposals to break with Iberian and French norms that had previously dominated, the culture and literature of different countries began to develop their own models and produce works deeply connected to issues of identity, rooted in their own cultural memory. This volume includes texts that showcase various experimental languages and the tension generated by the impact of modernization. The shaping of imaginaries is achieved through a local grammar that interacts with a universal syntax. The final volume contains 30 texts by different authors.

As a work, *Latin America: Word, Literature, and Culture* constitutes a response to traditional historiography of a positivist nature while simultaneously addressing a series of questions posed by the fields of literary and cultural studies. It also formulates new questions that arise from the dynamic process of reflecting on the subcontinent. The volumes further demonstrate an effort to reconcile internal aspects tied to textual analysis with external, contextual factors, following the example set by Antonio Candido in his classic work *Literature and Society* (1965): "The external becomes internal, and criticism ceases to be sociological, becoming purely criticism" (Candido, 1975, p. 19). These are works where the political and the social integrate and collaborate in shaping imaginaries and literary production.

Following a concern emphasized by Ángel Rama, the work takes a clear Latin Americanist stance—not only by incorporating regions previously neglected, such as Brazil and the Caribbean, but also because it recovers critical traditions from these areas in an evident integrative effort.

As is evident, this text does not exhaust the subject. The intention here was merely to review the primary parameters that guided the execution of the project for a (possible) History of Latin American Literature and to provide a brief overview of the results achieved with the publication of the work. A detailed analysis of each text across the three volumes remains a task for another occasion. However, some conclusions can be drawn from this overview, underscoring the significance of the work organized by Ana Pizarro.

The innovative proposal succeeded in bringing together, within a single work, the results of Latin America's literary production in its true sense: multilingual and multicultural. The volumes present a vast wealth of texts, both in terms of quantity and the relevance of the themes addressed, unlike any other work or literary history in the subcontinent. They incorporate the imaginaries of minorities previously overlooked in works of this magnitude, such as Indigenous textuality, women's writings, and oral traditions. This is no small feat.

Fortunately, more than 40 years later, we can observe that, both in today's Brazil and in many universities across the Hispanic world, unlike when the trilogy was conceived, numerous groups of researchers and professors are engaged in comparative analyses of the literatures and cultures of different regions of Latin America. These efforts have been influenced by the openness and paradigm shifts introduced by the work conceived and organized by Ana Pizarro, which significantly contributed to the current stage of comparative studies in Latin America.

In addition to the works discussed thus far, Ana Pizarro's critical and theoretical output, spanning almost six decades dedicated to reflecting on Latin America, has broadened our understanding of the continent. Her contributions include new reflections on the Caribbean, the Amazon, and the continent's cultural regions. She has also enriched the critical discourse surrounding important poets such as Vicente Huidobro and Gabriela Mistral. Furthermore, she brought to light a new interpretation of the artist and writer Marta Traba, offering alternative perspectives on Indigenous culture. In 2023, Pizarro published her most recent work, *The Flight of Tukui*. As the author explains in the preface to this latest book:

> The hummingbird, known as *pica-flor* or *beija-flor* in Portuguese, is more sweetly called *beija-flor* in Brazilian Portuguese. It originates from and inhabits the Americas, from the North to the far South. In the Karib language of the Amazonian ethnic groups, it is called *tukui*, also *tucusi*. The flight of the tukui is like the journey of the essayist. It needs to nourish itself greatly to sustain a flight that pauses in front of each flower or fruit in a nervous agitation for a few seconds, before moving on to another and hovering again in front of the attraction of a different species. The flight of the tukui is like the journey of the essayist. It needs to nourish itself greatly to sustain a flight in front of each flower; this flight is with an openness to a greater diversity of colors and shades perceived as the gaze expands. (Pizarro, 2023, p. 23).

The metaphor of the tukui, chosen by the author to translate the way her most recent work was produced, is enriched by the metaphor of the condor, the colossal Andean bird, known for its high and long flights. In the space of Pizarro's writing, this image integrates with the small Amazonian tukui. While the hummingbird, in its delicacy, sustains its flight from flower to flower, the Andean bird soars high, covering vast distances and a territory. Thus, this work is like the delicate flight of the tukui, from flower to flower, and the flight of the condor, strong and powerful across different landscapes and latitudes.

In this work, Ana Pizarro revisits her entire previous body of work, doing so with beauty and erudition, while incorporating new perspectives, additions, and connections into her extensive work of literary and cultural criticism. She helps us, in a remarkable way, to translate the complexity of this unique continent.

O voo do tukui suggests other, freer flights, more open, committed to nature, and teaches us that we must understand it, as Krenak tells us, as forms of culture in this rich, multiple, diverse, and plural continent.

To conclude this essay, which is also a presentation of this issue of *Revista Gragoatá*, the first ever dedicated to the critical work of a Latin American intellectual, we must confess our joy in being able to, with this volume of the journal, perform a symbolic gesture that aligns with the proposals of Latin American literary and cultural comparatism put forth by Ana Pizarro in her work: placing the diverse cultural and linguistic zones of the continent in dialogue.

This volume brings together essays from intellectuals and professors from different countries, written in both Portuguese and Spanish, without distinction. The work of the Chilean researcher has also been analyzed from different perspectives and themes. The innovative comparatism of the work *América Latina, palavra, literatura e cultura* appears in more than one article, as do studies on the Caribbean, the Amazon, and the cultural areas of the continent. The journal is completed with a beautiful interview and an original text, in which Pizarro presents us with new challenges to Latin American thought.

In other words, we managed to gather in one volume works that represent the legacy left by the texts and works of Ana Pizarro. Even better, she remains active and writing, and I am sure that many new essays are on their way.

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