

The (Non) Specific in Literary Discourse Analysis / *O (in)específico na análise do discurso literário*

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to problematize some of Dominique Maingueneau's lines of argument about the constitution of a theoretical and methodological device to study literature from a discursive perspective. To this end, we drew from the comparison of his theses using founding assumptions of French discourse analysis and contemporary propositions of literary studies. On the one hand, Maingueneau's proposal represents an important systematization of guiding conceptions regarding the literary discourse. On the other hand, it is neutral concerning the need for an epistemological consideration given the specificity of literary discourse. Therefore, it risks a historical and social mischaracterization of literature.

KEYWORDS: Literary discourse; Dominique Maingueneau; Literariness

RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo é problematizar algumas linhas de força da argumentação de Dominique Maingueneau sobre a constituição de um dispositivo teórico e metodológico para o estudo da literatura na perspectiva discursiva. Para isso, partimos do cotejamento de suas teses com pressupostos fundadores da análise do discurso de tradição francesa e com proposições coetâneas dos estudos literários. Se, por um lado, a proposta de Maingueneau figura como uma sistematização importante de concepções norteadoras de uma análise do discurso literário, por outro, posiciona-se lateralmente quanto à necessidade de consideração epistemológica pela especificidade do discurso literário, gerando o risco da descaracterização histórica e social da literatura.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Discurso literário; Dominique Maingueneau; Literariedade

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Introduction

Although the incorporation of literary texts in discourse analysis studies is dated as of 1980, it represents an episodic research object within the field, without a consensus on method or even on its usefulness for the area. These standpoints currently orbit around two well-marked, mutually avoided poles. On the one hand, literary scholars have been indifferent about the theoretical notes deriving from the field of discourse analysis, by drawing on methods and concepts developed within their own domain and in dialogue with areas such as sociology, psychoanalysis, history, other arts, and even linguistics. On the other hand, discourse analysis theorists are reluctant to appropriate these methods and concepts, seeking to legitimize their own with regard to the literary object. However, regarding the current theoretical scene, the approximation of discourse analysis to subjects such as sociology, anthropology, psychoanalysis, rhetoric, and political sciences, for instance, arouses fewer objections than its approximation to literary or aesthetic theories. This context may be justified by the need to legitimize the autonomy of a discourse science in the face of areas closest to it, that also prioritize the study of language. In our analysis, this dualism disrupts the comprehensive understanding of social, human, and artistic phenomenon of literature, and it fails to contribute to the progress of the matter.

In this paper, the discussion around the constitution of a field for *literary discursive analysis* will be delimited by Dominique Maingueneau's proposal. He certainly is the most well-known researcher engaged in the theoretical systematization of relations between discourse analysis and literature for over three decades. The idea is to problematize his concise book *Discurso Literário* [Literary Discourse] (2006).¹ This work aims to establish the foundations of literary approach through discourse theory, drawing from the French tradition. Therefore, it is a representative theoretical framework of literary discursive approach. In this context, this paper seeks to problematize Maingueneau's contribution in establishing and legitimating literature as an object of discursive approach. We will, then, propose a productive dialogue with his ideas and at the same time replicate some of his propositions reinforcing the importance of his work.

¹ As some of the works quoted in the original Brazilian Portuguese version of this text do not have translations to English, we opted to translate some of the quotations directly into English, which will be referenced on the footnotes as OT (Original Text).

As acknowledged by Maingueneau, the study of literature stemming from a discursive framework is still under way (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, p.7). It is an open space for adversarial thoughts, fostering discussion in favor of strengthening the discursive theory as a proper device to broaden the understanding of literature as a stylized social fact.

1 Literary Discourse Analysis according to Maingueneau

The interest in literary texts crosses, albeit nonexclusively, Maingueneau's entire academic production. In the 1980s, he was already committed to a dialogue between linguistics and literature in his *Elementos de linguística para o texto literário* [*Linguistic Elements for the Literary Text*] (1986). In it, there is a slight aspect of linguistic categories, organized in a device to analyze literary texts departing from enunciative matrixes. Thereafter, he released a series of works aimed at that subject, from which we highlight *Pragmática para o discurso literário* [*Pragmatics for Literary Discourse*] (1990); *O contexto da obra literária* [*The Context for the Literary Work*] (1993); and, lastly, *Discurso literário* [*Literary Discourse*] (2006). The latter is a collection of the author's previous propositions, now systematized in a project that focuses on the position of a theoretical matrix for the discursive analysis of literature. Thus, Maingueneau attributes centrality to the emergency conditions of literary works and highlights literature as an object of interest to discourse analysis. He positions himself ostensibly against what he regards as an institutional tendency that relegates to this field the so-called transitive discourses. Such a tendency would represent, then, a pragmatic extension beyond the verbal basis that sustains discourse.

Aiming at rooting the discursive analysis of literature into the broader tradition of literary studies, Maingueneau briefly reviews other research fronts. Nevertheless, his propositions should be analyzed cautiously since the theoretical framework with which he is dealing and his examples of literary works refer to the French context only. Thus, when he attacks critical currents such as Structuralism, Stylistics and the Marxist approach, or comes closer to certain epistemological frameworks, he is often referring to compatriots of his. Namely, he addresses critiques to Benveniste, Ducrot, Barthes, Bourdieu, Todorov (born Bulgarian, but Paris-based), Deleuze, Grammont, Guiraud, Genette, Foucault, Althusser, Goldman among others who compose his referential

universe. Therefore, when he attacks Stylistics, he does not do it in its totality. Rather, he addresses more particularly Grammont and Guiraud's French Stylistics (although he also mentions Spitzer). When the target is Marxist critique, he is actually referring to Goldman's, Althusser's and Balibar's readings. In this sense, it is proper to say that his critique is not complete, since the currents noted above surpass the French referential. They present characteristics determined by more than one delimited thought tradition.

That being said, as a rule, the conceptual group against which Maingueneau invests in order to establish distance is what he believes to be the framework of "representations imposed by romantic aesthetics,"² still valid up to the present day according to his view. A major premise of this aesthetics would be the sacralization of literary works, which "[would] aspire to a statute of exception,"³ in contrast to the "buzz of vain, 'transitive' words, whose finality would be/is found outside themselves" (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, p.59).⁴ From this angle, he emphatically opposes characterizations such as those of literary writers imbued with mystical powers, whose inspiration and ability would be gifts reserved for the chosen few; the literary work as worldview of an age, a manifestation of collective consciousness; and that of artistic texts as tangible reflections of the external conditions of their production.

In favor of moving away from this paradigm, Maingueneau advocates the conceptual integration of author, audience and material support of texts. He also defends the indivisibility between textual genre and message, between the author's life and the writer's statute, and between creative subjectivity and writing activity. Ultimately, he supports the amalgam composed of institutional space and literary text. Following this reasoning, the notion of literary institution would appear as the main theme of his theorizations. Maingueneau, then, affirms that the analysis of literary discourse is "obliged to introduce a third party, the Institution, to contest these deceptively compact units, which are *the* creator or *the* society [...]" (2006, p.98; emphasis added).⁵

There is no doubt that fair judgments of the aesthetic composition of texts are a common desire for a large part of literary critics. But although this evaluation includes the various external factors that condition it, its scope depends on the analytical

² OT: "representações impostas pela estética romântica."

³ OT: "aspira[ria] a um estatuto de exceção."

⁴ OT: "burburinho de palavras vãs, 'transitivas', cuja finalidade se acha[ria] fora delas mesmas."

⁵ OT: "obrigada a introduzir um terceiro, que é a Instituição, para contestar essas unidades ilusoriamente compactas, que são *o* criador ou *a* sociedade [...]"

procedures that are put into practice. For this purpose, Maingueneau makes use of a series of theoretical constructs of polyvalent nature, such as paratopia, enunciation scene (encompassing scene, generic scene, and scenography), *ethos*, language code (plurilanguage, interlanguage, supralanguage, infralanguage), and the (writer's) stand in the aesthetic field. Nonetheless, these categories do not guarantee the two dimensions of literary works in combination. Furthermore, by dealing more directly with verbal processes of literary texts, the author uses a set of traditional notions of enunciative and pragmatic theories, such as polyphony, shifters, intertextuality, argumentative processes, anaphoric relations, conversational maxims, and laws of discourse. Indeed, most of these general concepts could be employed for the analysis of a significant part of the discursive productions of society, as Maingueneau states (2006, p.60). It depends only on the analyst's interest of clarification. The question, though, is whether these concepts are enough to access the meanings that emerge from the specificity of literary discourse considered in its dialectical relationship with the spheres of human activity that produces it.

By removing from the scope of literary analysis the consideration for any inherent property,⁶ it can be inferred that its analytical treatment should not be very different from the one political, journalistic and advertising discourses receive, since singularities would be derived, ultimately, from the institutional framework of each discursive domain.⁷ That said, Maingueneau suggests the examination of the surroundings of works and of the elements that participate in the "communication device" of this type of text as a duty of literary discourse analysis. In this domain it is included

⁶ Later we will comment on Maingueneau's notion of 'literary language' and 'language code,' linguistic constructs that would be proper to the literary text.

⁷ In the interest of demonstrating the indistinctness of the "literary enunciation" related to other discursive manifestations, Maingueneau states, then, justifying the use of pragmatic analytical categories: "Whether or not to address the 'speech laws,' the 'speech contracts,' the 'threats of positive or negative influence,' literary enunciation does not escape the orbit of rightness. The speech and the right to speak intertwine. Where the speech legitimately comes from, to whom it is intended to be addressed, under which modality, when, where – from this no utterance can escape. And the writer knows this better than anyone, he whose speech never establishes its right to fully exist. He whose speech justifies the unjustifiable from which it derives. He who fuels the speech by wishing to reduce it" (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, p.43). OT: "Invoquem-se ou não as 'leis do discurso', os 'contratos de fala', as 'ameaças de influência positiva ou negativa'. A enunciação literária não escapa à órbita de direito. Fala e direito à fala se entrelaçam. De onde é possível vir legitimamente a fala, a quem pretende dirigir-se, sob qual modalidade, em que momento, em que lugar – eis aquilo a que nenhuma enunciação pode escapar. E o escritor sabe disso melhor do que qualquer pessoa, ele cujo discurso nunca acaba de estabelecer seu direito à existência, de justificar o injustificável de que procede e que ele alimenta desejando reduzi-lo."

[...] everything that is done around reading practices and the social and historical frameworks of reception, the material conditions for the inscription and circulation of utterances, and the speeches produced by the various institutions that contribute to evaluate and endow the production and consumption of literary works (in particular, the media and the school) (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, p.8).⁸

It is clear in Maingueneau's words that such an approach is not interested in "what works mean, but under which circumstances literary facts are feasible, and literary texts can be open to interpretation" (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, p.323).⁹ His postulate conditions all methodological devices created from it, conditioning also literary facts. This proposition deserves attention, and most of the objections developed in this paper will be against it.

2 Literature as Discourse

The concept of discourse, in its most common and current sense, is a product of contemporaneity. As it is well known, the new outline of the concept is born in the epistemological framework of French Post-structuralism in the 1960s. The concept was conceived in the confluence of debates that above all correlated sociology, psychoanalysis and linguistics within a larger project of political analysis.

In this scenario, we highlight the contributions of Althusser, Foucault, and Pêcheux. However, it is consensual today that many of their propositions were revised through an intimate dialogue between discourse analysis and enunciative theories, a result of the linguistic turn. We do not have intentions, though, of discussing here the assets of each author or theoretical precedences of one over the other for the constitution of discourse analysis. Our interest at the moment is on registering the origin of the current notion of *discourse* to better evaluate the consequences of the position of the adjective *literary*.

⁸ OT: "[...] tudo o que é feito em torno das práticas de leitura e dos quadros sociais e históricos da recepção, das condições materiais de inscrição e de circulação dos enunciados, de discursos produzidos pelas diversas instituições que contribuem para avaliar e dotar de sentido a produção e o consumo de obras literárias (de modo particular, os meios de comunicação e a escola)."

⁹ OT: "o que as obras significam, mas em que condições o fato literário é possível, e os textos literários podem abrir-se à interpretação."

Delimiting the origin of discourse analysis to one particular theoretical field (or, more commonly, to a combination of Saussurean Structuralism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Althusserian Marxism) is not enough and may lead to misconceptions. The changes of paradigm, which had contributed to its emergence as theory or subject, had more complex and multifactorial reasons. The origin of discourse analysis reflects social and political disturbances that occurred in France on the period it emerged. Initially, it marked the opposition to centralism in Gaulle's government and the aggravation of class struggle in the context of resizing processes of capitalism. Then, it evolved to an uprising against conservative academic structures, excessive conventional moralism, rigid asymmetry between generations, as well as widespread and diffused authoritarianism. Aligned with these occurrences, and deriving from them, a series of changes in the theoretical fields was proposed, producing a movement known as Western Marxism, with developments in England, Germany, Italy, etc. This movement aimed at reformulating or updating classical Marxism in the face of economic and cultural imperatives of advanced capitalism.¹⁰ Althusser was, among others and their different and influential propositions, an important name of Western Marxism. He was responsible for developing a logic of comprehension of the social reality based more on cultural factors (superstructures, in Althusser's own words, in accordance with the Marxist jargon) than on economic ones (base).¹¹

Closing up this brief reasoning, the articulation of the fundamentals of French discourse analysis with Marxist epistemology requires an explanation on the nature of their approximation. Western Marxism is predominantly conceptual and anti-empiricist, more reformist than revolutionary, which results in significant consequences to the theory of discourse and to literary discourse analysis, particularly. The movement was, then, a reformulation of classical Marxism in its founding claims, such as the rule of "concrete" and the notion of *praxis*. Moreover, all dialectical inflection is undone when protagonism is given to theorization and, within it, to the superstructure.¹² The epistemic-ideological

¹⁰ See Anderson (1976). The full reference is: ANDERSON, P. The Advent of Western Marxism. In: *Considerations on Western Marxism*. New York: Humanities, 1976, pp.24-48.

¹¹ See, for example, Althusser's Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (2014). The full reference is: ALTHUSSER, L. Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. Translated by Ben Brewster. In: ALTHUSSER, L. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. Translated by G.M. Goshgarian. London: Verso, 2014, pp.232-272.

¹² Commenting on Althusser's Marxist reading, Merquior states that "Within such a Marxist culture, the originality of Louis Althusser (b. 1918) was two-fold. First, unlike many Marxist philosophers in France,

position adopts a reformist character insofar as it dismantles historically constituted objective determinations. This stand attenuates the bond between them and the discursive conformation, admitting reality in the discourse about this conformation. Consequently, the theoretical conception in which “everything is discourse” is legitimized, blocking any possibility of critical reflection from the outside.¹³ Such a conception may lead (and has led) to a weakening of the effective bond between utterance and historical, political and social substance, the interface of the materiality of power relations and subordination. Moreover, in discursive analyses of literature, such a view may prioritize the clarification of the language gear, despising or reducing the power of social representation of this cultural object. At last, more relevant than taking sides, it is crucial to follow a line being aware of the direction where it leads, trying to dialectically integrate the complexity of each pole of discourse analysis.

In a nutshell, with due reservations, the shift of theories of language to theories of discourse takes place hand-in-hand with the debate related to verbal interaction. It emerges in a context of ideological and social conflicts in France, from which such theories had their concepts and modes of operation formulated. Drawing on these prerogatives, discourse acquires political connotation as it is comprehended as the material manifestation of ideology and subject’s positioning (conscious or not). Therefore, for its critical understanding, there is a need for a linguistic approach that could go beyond the trending Structuralist conceptual limits of the time (although this demand is not yet Althusser’s).¹⁴ Taken up in other terms by Foucault, Pêcheux and other

Althusser was by no means a rebellious communist — on the contrary, he extended his loyalty to the party through May 1968 and the crushing of the Prague Spring, well until the middle of the next decade. Moreover he was no humanist. Indeed, while sharing the widespread rejection of historicist beliefs, he flaunted a blunt and highly polemical anti-humanism. Marxism, he claimed, was strictly scientific; it could have no truck with woolly humanisms” (MERQUIOR, 1991, p.146). The full reference is: MERQUIOR, J. G. *Western Marxism*. Edited by Justin Wintle. London: Paladin Books, 1986.

¹³ The poststructuralist propositions, born in the context of the 1960s, as aforementioned, take their final form under the rubric of “postmodern.” Lyotard, heir to this discussion and its premises, programmatically formulated the consequences of such changes, returning to the main issues and systematizing their implications for the various fields of knowledge. See Lyotard (1984). The full reference is: LYOTARD, J-F. *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge*. Translated into English by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

¹⁴ According to Mussalim, “Linguistics, then, comes up as a horizon for the Althusserian project in the following manner: as ideology must be studied in its materiality, language presents itself as the privileged place in which ideology is materialized. Language stands for Althusser as a way through which the functioning of ideology can be understood.” OT: “A linguística, então, aparece como um horizonte para o projeto althusseriano da seguinte maneira: como a ideologia deve ser estudada em sua materialidade, a linguagem se apresenta como o lugar privilegiado em que a ideologia se materializa. A linguagem se coloca

continuators (supporters of the epistemological rupture with Structuralist linguistics), discourse analysis is established as a political project, then, in Althusserian molds. This is how it has been consolidated as an overcoming field to philology and stylistic hermeneutics.

French discourse analysis is born, thus, as a tool to discuss politics and its methodology was developed due to the specificities of this field of human action.¹⁵ As of now, we have made our point that changes in objects of study demand new arrangements in theoretical and methodological devices. With this in mind, without conceptual adjustments or even substantial reformulations resultant from the dialogue with other fields, it does not seem reasonable to apply to literature the same analytical categories of political and aesthetic discourses. This argument will be resumed later on; but for now, we return to the historical development of the concept of discourse.

Today, in a few words, discourse can be defined as the “effect of meaning among speakers” (ORLANDI, 2012, p.21)¹⁶ considering the particular psychosocial, cultural and historical conjuncture from which it emerges. In other words, closer to the term in its time of origin, discourse can also be defined as an “action, resulting from a set of determinations regulated at a given time in its complex bundle of relations with other discursive and non-discursive actions” (MALDIDIER; NORMAND; ROBIN, 1994, p.82).¹⁷ Such a notion can house an abundance of theoretical approaches that would exceptionally put together sociolinguistics, pragmatics, conversation analysis, speech act theory, ethnography of communication, certain semantic and even literary approaches, as a few examples. Therefore, Mussalim claims that, at first glance, talking about discourse analysis “can mean basically anything” (MUSSALIM, 2006, p.101).¹⁸ Although later ramifications have produced divergent approaches within the field, the current characteristics of French discourse analysis are aligned exactly with the ones proposed in its origin, even if reconfigured. Since then, many other discursive domains have been incorporated by the area, going beyond the traditional analysis of political discourse.

para Althusser como uma via por meio da qual se pode depreender o funcionamento da ideologia” (MUSSALIM, 2006, p.104).

¹⁵ For further information, see Maldidier (1994).

¹⁶ OT: “efeito de sentido entre locutores.”

¹⁷ OT: “prática, resultante de um conjunto de determinações reguladas em um momento dado por um feixe complexo de relações com outras práticas, discursivas e não-discursivas.”

¹⁸ OT: “praticamente pode significar qualquer coisa.”

Today, we can refer to discourse on media, advertisement, pedagogy, law, religion, humor, hate speech, and, among many other possibilities, the analysis of literary discourse.

Returning to Maingueneau's work devoted to this latter object of study, the author begins his discussion by problematizing the notion of "literary discourse." According to his reading of the tradition about the topic, literary production has become a well-defined institutional field only around two centuries ago. Thus, its own rules of operation (from creation, non-compliance with economic laws, publishing, circulation, and consumption) (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, p.9)¹⁹ are still recent. Facing that, Maingueneau decides to establish a conceptual distinction between literary *discourse* and literary *discursivity*. The first one encompasses literary discourses produced within institutions; the second one would encompass literary discourses produced in other times and under other determinations. Consequently, he points out the problem of generalizing his proposal without adjustments, to any work, regardless of the time and space of its creation (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, p.9). He defines, then, literary discourse as a subgroup of the general universe of utterance. Therefore, as well as any speech act, it needs resources to be legitimized. In his own words:

[...] considering the literary fact as 'discourse' is contesting the central character of this fixed item, of its origin 'without communication with the outside' - evoking a famous formula from Proust's *Contra Sainte-Beuve* - which would be the creating instance. To do so means renouncing the ghost of the work *itself*, in its two-fold sense of autarchic work and of fundamental work of creating consciousness; it is to restore the works to the spaces where they become possible, where they are produced, evaluated, managed. The conditions of *saying* pervade what was *said*, and what was *said* refers to its own conditions of enunciation (the writer's statute associated to his or her positioning in the literary field, the roles linked to gender, the relationship with receivers built through the work, the material medium and the circulation modes of utterances...) (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, p.43).²⁰

¹⁹ It must be clear that, in this case, Maingueneau considers only literature produced in the context of bourgeois hegemony. Other reasonings may support institutional manifestations of literature at other junctures.

²⁰ OT: "[...] considerar o fato literário como "discurso" é contestar o caráter central desse ponto fixo, dessa origem "sem comunicação com o exterior" – para retomar uma célebre fórmula do *Contra Sainte-Beuve*, de Proust –, que seria a instância criadora. Fazê-lo é renunciar ao fantasma da obra *em si*, em sua dupla acepção de obra autárquica e de obra fundamental da consciência criadora; é restituir as obras aos espaços que a tornam possíveis, onde elas são produzidas, avaliadas, administradas. As condições do *dizer* permeiam o *dito*, e o *dito* remete a suas próprias condições de enunciação (o estatuto do escritor associado

The major premise is the indivisibility between literary institution and discourse, works being the “positioning vectors” in the space of its enunciation. However, this proposition, emphatically proposed, is suspended by Maingueneau himself. He denies the relevance of instances he characterizes as “quite distant from literature,” such as “social classes, mentalities, historical events and individual psychology.” Maingueneau stipulates instead that “reflecting in terms of discourse forces us to consider the immediate environment of the text (its rites of writing, its material medium, its enunciation scene...)” (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, p.44).²¹ There is, then, a contradiction of principles: sometimes his arguments favor the peculiar independence of literature; sometimes they favor its interaction between internal and external factors. The origin of this disagreement can possibly be found in the abstract and general character the concepts of “environment,” “space,” “circulation” and “literary institution” acquire in the theoretical system noted beforehand. Albeit comprised on the level of determined social and cultural relations, controlled by specific historical contradictions, these concepts are deprived of their objective, concrete and nominalist-adverse essence. The motivations for this position in Maingueneau’s work are not clear and prove to be questionable. Literature, as enunciation, is produced within a complex network of social, historical, cultural, psychological and aesthetic determinations. If so, then it is also capable of representing the basis of class relations, mentalities, historical events, and individual psychology (using the author’s own examples) and many other manifestations of intersubjective relations. Moreover, when discourse analysis is “obliged,” as he says, to consider only “the immediate environment of texts,” it has its critical dimension of its knowledge softened, going against its close relationship with society, which is historically established.

In order to distinguish the methodology of discourse analysis from other approaches of literary texts, Maingueneau warns that it presents similarities to Bourdieu’s literary field sociology. However, for him, they are also distant, since the first one is based on discursive activities that privilege utterance, text and the relationship between text and

a seu modo de posicionamento no campo literário, os papéis vinculados com os gêneros, a relação com o destinatário construída através da obra, os suportes materiais e os modos de circulação dos enunciados...)”
²¹ OT: “refletir em termos de discurso nos obriga a considerar o ambiente imediato do texto (seus ritos de escrita, seus suportes materiais, sua cena de enunciação...)”

context. It is also close to sociopoetics, although non-exclusive to literary texts, since it is an adaptation of general discursive methodologies. Lastly, Foucault's archeology and discourse analysis have matching points, but the latter is particularly interested in language sciences. Again, Maingueneau's theoretical system seems to produce another contradiction: trying to establish procedures that attribute singularity to the analysis of literary discourse, he overlooks the singularity of literature itself (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, pp.46-55).

Consequently, the author formulates the idea of *constituent discourse*, a notion that could equally encompass literary, religious, scientific, and philosophical discourse. His argument is based on the assumption that these discourses share "a number of invariants," or "properties relative to their conditions of emergence, function, and circulation" (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, pp.60-61).²² The constituent discourses function as dynamos of the assortment of discursive genres in societies. They are conceived as irrefutable sources of forms and meanings. Since these discourses produce their own enunciative scene, they are able to authorize themselves. However, Maingueneau's formulation lacks emphasis on the historicity of constituent discourses. As well as the philosophical, scientific, and religious discourses, literary discourse is not established spontaneously. It is the result of the social conjuncture framework from which it emerges. Even the works configured by an intimate scenography of psychological immersion respond to social defiances (historical, political, cultural, aesthetic, moral, ethical, religious, etc.). They refer and are often subordinated to other sources of discursiveness.

These discourses aim at certain purposes, such as "saying something about society, truth, beauty, existence" (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, pp.68-69).²³ They claim for themselves a privileged position over the forms of knowledge. From this point of view, studies on the constituent discourses "must account for the functioning mode of groups that produce and manage them" (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, p.69).²⁴ After all, according to Maingueneau, the analysis of literary discourse should be able to investigate and discuss the modes of interaction between the producing subjects (writers) and the managers of this discourse (critics, teachers, booksellers, librarians, editors, etc.). Hence,

²² OT: "propriedades relativas às suas condições de emergência, de funcionamento e de circulação."

²³ OT: "dizer algo sobre a sociedade, a verdade, a beleza, a existência."

²⁴ OT: "deve dar conta do modo de funcionamento de grupos que os produzem e gerem."

we once again approach the scope of enunciation, the territory of the literary field,²⁵ but the confrontation with the contexture of the literary utterance is postponed.

3 The Quarrel over the Specificity of Literature

In terms of methodology, literary studies have historically been associated with three main approaches. The emphasis can be on the context of a work, or on its verbal materiality; or, in other cases, on a dialectical understanding, which is achieved with the integration of both dimensions. Each of these options responds differently to the assumed evidence of specificity in textual genres.

It is well-known that the Russian Formalists were the ones who gave new focuses to the issue. They pushed away the impressionist bias of literary studies that prevailed until the early twentieth century, in which aesthetic judgement was based more on the analyst's erudition than on definite concepts and clear methodology. In fact, since the late nineteenth century, because of the Geneva school, specific methodology and concepts for the comprehension of linguistic phenomena has been sought. In the mid-1910s, two major research centers continued and developed the initial effort. Both were Russian: the Moscow Linguistic Circle, which had Roman Jakobson as one of its founding fathers, and the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (OPOJAZ), in St. Petersburg. The research centers were located in different cities (two important cultural centers, with well-developed universities and advanced studies in phonetics and phonology) and were interested in distinct aspects of the study of language. There had been fruitful collaboration between them, though, setting the tone of the ongoing theoretical change. Their linguistic studies took into account the inventive factor of language, prioritized in literature. Hence, literary studies departed from technical assumptions of language that would tackle the issues of form and style. The effort of the Formalist school, then, consisted in delimiting the premises of literary analysis. Eikhenbaum addresses the issue in the following terms, foreseeing the modern meaning of literary criticism: "the object of literary science [...] must be the study of those specifics which distinguish it from any

²⁵ As a reminder, the notion of literary field houses the whole surroundings of literary works: authorship, processes of creation, circulation and consumption of works. It is a movement closer to literary history, renamed by Maingueneau as "paratopia."

other material” (1965, p.107).²⁶ Eikhenbaum indicates that his thesis is supported by the achievements of the Moscow School of Linguistic Studies. He quotes Jakobson’s text which advocates for literariness: “the object of the science of literature is not literature, but literariness – that is, that which makes a given work a work of literature” (JAKOBSON, 1921, p.11 *apud* EIKHENBAUM, 1965, p.107).²⁷

The Formalists started their studies comparing poetic language to daily language. Producing a device capable of revealing the distinctive elements of literary texts was their main purpose. Shklovsky, for instance, warns that a text can be written as prosaic, but perceived as poetic and vice versa. Thus, he highlights the eminence of perceiving the aesthetic constitution of an object rather than inferring literariness of its constituent elements. For this reason, he points out that unfamiliarity and the function of de-automating perceptions would be typical in literary art, as remarked in his well-known article *Art as Technique*:

“If the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been.” [...]

And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar,” to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. *Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object: the object is not important.* (SHKLOVSKY, 1965, p.9; italics in original).²⁸

Consequently, the artistic product is conceived of as the result of particular procedures employed in order to guarantee its aesthetic perception. In other words, it is an intentional and persuasive combination of material elements which could lose aesthetic dimension when isolated. In that case, it becomes unproductive to describe peculiarities of literary texts by listing linguistic resources (such as figures of language, types of

²⁶ EIKHENBAUM, B. The Theory of the “Formal Method” [1927]. In: OLSON, P. A. (ed.). *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. Translated by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1965, pp.99-1139.

²⁷ Fore reference, see footnote 26.

²⁸ SHKLOVSKY, V. *Art as Technique* [1917]. In: OLSON, P. A. (ed.). *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. Translated by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1965, pp.3-24.

metaphors, syntactic arrangements, imagery figuration and mimicry), thus mixing functional, formal, thematic, institutional, and other criteria. As Stempel evaluates,

[...] no one else today can or wants to defend the conception of thematic or elemental poeticity. Hence, the 'poetic' characteristic cannot be attributed in advance to certain motives or perhaps to certain words, to word chaining, etc. (STEMPEL, 1983, p.411).²⁹

Therefore, the analyst either accepts the constant reformulations of the concept or denies the objective reality of works for the sake of pure theory. By all means, the evaluating assemblies that classify texts as literary and non-literary are circumstantial. They involve a complex chain of determinations, proper to the conjuncture of the historical moment in which the concept is formulated. As a result, the judgement over the aesthetic density of a text will depend on a series of factors, such as the ruling system of human relations, the collective representations, the ethical and aesthetic beacons, the trending stylistic rituals, the quality of reading reception, the institutional gear that regulates that judgment, among other constraints to which literature is subjected. Once configured, the literary discourse acts in reverse over the social thickness that produced it. It includes subsequent contexts, since literary discourses have the power of re-signifying themselves in other reception horizons as a consequence of overlapping layers of meaning.³⁰ However, apparent indetermination does not mean full negation towards the specificity of literary discourses; it only deprives the discourse of positivist conveniences, which draw up inventories that would imprison the object in predefined categories, granting scientific appearance to the methodology and legitimacy to the analyst.

Many were the characteristics of the literary text elected to attest the concept of literariness, such as its mimetic nature; fictional character; cathartic function or effect of enjoyment and symphronism; systematic use of symbol, of allegory, of imagination and multipurpose words; displacement of meanings, constructs of images that cause unfamiliarity and de-automatization of perception. Literariness could also dwell in the

²⁹ OT: “[...] ninguém mais hoje quer ou pode defender a concepção de uma poeticidade temática ou ligada a elementos. Em consequência, não se pode atribuir de antemão a característica ‘poético’ a motivos determinados ou talvez a palavras determinadas, a encadeamentos de palavras, etc..”

³⁰ See Iser's (1978) fundamental study. The full reference is: ISER, W. *The Act of Reading: A theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978. See also a more comprehensive study for origins, influences and repercussions in Gómez (1989).

particular combination of syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes; in the predominance of poetic function over other functions of language; in arrangements of rhythm and sense-intensifying sounds in their harmonious and evocative context; in the conciliation of morphemes and phrases in favor of a well-woven aesthetic plan; and in the other countless and apparently distinctive features of literary texts.³¹ At first the theses emphasized the displacement of literary studies in relation to aestheticism, historicism and psychologism and were oriented towards linguistics [“science bordering on poetics,” according to Eikhenbaum (1965, p.108)].³² However, due to the gradual development of this “literary science,” aesthetic, historical and psychological studies have been reincorporated into the fundamental axis of literature analyses. What could mean a drawback, then, became a qualitative change in the movement, in accordance with contemporary historical transformations.

These paradigm shifts in language studies occurred right next to decisive historical – political, economic, and cultural – transformations. They corresponded to these transformations in an unnoticeable way, building a multi-faceted and multi-determined product. Among the correlated events there were: the outbreak of the First World War (and the facts that led to it, such as the development of production techniques, the geopolitical market struggle, and the resizing of capitalism); the Russian Revolution; and the emergence of a disruptive avant-garde aesthetic code. The development of a self-sufficient theory of language (literary or not), a universe that could create its own meaning, would cause a rupture with the facts on which the theory itself depended before. With this in mind, theoretical insurgencies against language routinization turned out to be part of the critique of cultural *status quo* raised by capitalism.

After some early theoretical breakthroughs, the framework of the issue gradually shifted to a more complex and dynamic notion of ‘literary form.’ On the one hand, the matters of literariness had been put in the background. On the other hand, evidence fell on recognizing and understanding the connections of social reality transformation. The theoretical displacement happened within the Formalist field itself, which was not homogeneous. In it, there were contradictory perspectives coming from Bakhtin,

³¹ See the essays from the founding Formalist text collection: OLSON, P. A. (ed.). *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. Translated by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1965.

³² For reference, see footnote 26.

Medvedev, Trotsky and others that, alongside the purges promoted by Stalinism, dissolved the group.

Maingueneau, differently, invests in the search for the materiality of a “literary language” consummated in a “language code.” He stated that “languages have markers specialized in the apprehension – if not literary, at least aesthetic – of the world” (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, p.204).^{33, 34} The author lists a series of linguistic phenomena (compiled from the French language) that could be clear indicatives of the literary discourse. He mentions certain verb tenses; noun phrases with indefinite articles associated with uncountable nouns; a series of adjectives; prepositional groups; and some plurals (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, pp.204-205). In his words, “literary production, whether it wants to or not, tends to produce, upon accumulation, bundles of linguistic marks that determine their belonging to literature, certain literary genres or positionings” (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, p.205).³⁵ Therefore, Maingueneau advocates in favor of “limited sets of ways of saying”³⁶ in lexical, discursive, and grammatical nature with the same “literary pattern” (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, p.208),³⁷ which in our view deviates from the specific purpose of literature.

Literary discourses are complex and ever-shifting cultural signs. They are hardly apprehensible by means of “invariants,” which would supposedly be able to transform them in constituent discourses. In Candido’s (1993, pp.31-32) words, these cultural signs are “specific systems of meaning, which can be convergent, parallel, or divergent from world systems.”³⁸ Even if the role of institutional groups that regulate and are regulated by literary discourses are considered, it would be characterizing them by their negative side. Hence, they would be seen through the poorest perspective of representation of literary discourses as symbolic objects of meaning in human development, qualifying them in the face of real readers. Given these points, literariness and aesthetic perception of discourses are performed only via the formal chain of each particular utterance. They

³³ Apparently, this theoretical option corroborates the intention of applying a “text theory” to literary discourse, a procedure lacking in many traditional approaches to literary texts.

³⁴ OT: “as línguas dispõem de marcadores especializados na apreensão, se não literária, ao menos estética do mundo.”

³⁵ OT: “a produção literária, queira ou não, tende a produzir, ao se acumular, feixes de marcas linguísticas que marcam o pertencimento à literatura, a determinados gêneros literários ou posicionamentos.”

³⁶ OT: “série limitada de modos de dizer.”

³⁷ OT: “padrão literário.”

³⁸ OT: “sistema específico de sentido, que pode ser convergente, paralelo ou divergente em relação ao sistema do mundo.”

also include possibilities of reception, since they are resistant to conceptual generalizations. If the literary discourse is the one that can mimic, reproduce, deform, and reform all dictions, dialects, genres, formulas and styles, then the way of accessing its meanings can equally rely on ventilated and pluralistic epistemology. Therefore, it can fit the premises of discourse analysis which, in spite of all variations, is essentially characterized by interdisciplinarity. Yet, by absorbing several discursive modes of human interaction (which could justify its indiscriminate treatment), literary regimes cast them into aesthetic frameworks. Literature, thus is capable of reconfiguring them by itself.

Maingueneau defends the use of pragmatic categories, being coherent to his proposal of using general categories of discourse analysis to understand literary facts as methodological procedures. He understands that literary discourses are subjected to the same determinations present in daily prosaic discourses. For this reason, the constant transgressions to conversational maxims, typical of literary discourses, could suffer a sort of “overprotection” from the critics. They would tend to acquit any compositional flaw, assuming latent intentionality (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, p.86). Consequently, the transgression of conversational principles, such as “digression,” “repetition,” or “hermeticism” – examples given by the author (1996) – would immediately trigger an examination that identifies “hidden meanings.” For the most part, Maingueneau disregards the whole tradition of studies about literary form and aesthetic theory.³⁹ Such studies investigate symbolic and, in some cases, allegorical representations of compositional options that are part of the organicity of works and are independent from correspondences within spheres of daily discursive interactions.⁴⁰

Without minimizing the importance of Maingueneau’s contributions to the establishment of the literary discourse field, however, we believe that the apex of his studies on it focuses on the notion of *scenography*. Closely related to dramatic action, scenography means the moving enunciative framework established by ephabulation, and with which readers have their first contact. Thus, certain thematic contents can be uttered

³⁹ It would be too extensive to name all authors and works devoted to this issue. It is more relevant to understand that the dimension of this long-established tradition begins in Aristotle’s *Poetry* and Plato’s *Republic* (especially chapters III and VII).

⁴⁰ There are examples such as Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) and Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), or yet Brazilian references, such as Oswald de Andrade’s *Memórias sentimentais de João Miramar* [*Sentimental Memories of João Miramar*] (1924) and Guimarães Rosa’s *Grande Sertão: veredas* (English version: *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands*) (1956), which, in pragmatic terms, would violate a series of discourse laws and conversational principles, but within reasonable stylistic and aesthetic projects.

through the scenography of intimate journals, travelogues, bonfire conversations, letters, etc. The countless possibilities state the position of subjects, time, and space in utterances (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, p.252). They refer to chains of knowledge, values, beliefs, and positions inside works.

Unlike what it may suggest at first glance, the scenography is not a static frame in which literary enunciation could be expressed. It acts, though, simultaneously as framework and as process. According to the author, “the ‘content’ comes up inseparable from the scenography that supports it” (MAINGUENEAU, 2008, p.51).⁴¹ However, the elucidative relevance of the concept for literary texts is effective only if “content” is conceived of as a structured piece within a dynamic form. Even in one of the few excerpts from which such a concern could be inferred, the correlation established between works and society is tenuous and not exactly systematic:

[...] scenography must be actively and directly linked to the historical setting in which it appears. The types of mobilized scenography communicate obliquely how works define their relationship with society and how one can legitimize the exercise of literary speech within this society (MAINGUENEAU, 2006, p.264).⁴²

Still, Maingueneau does not take the axiom to its proper consequences. He does not accurately present research programs aimed at investigating correlations established between *literary forms* and *social processes*. This is a line that could broaden the understanding of literary discursivity without tearing apart the object of study in favor of the integrity of theory.⁴³ Additionally, this approach would allow managing the entire epistemological repertoire of discourse analysis, which, in objective terms, is concerned with “internal” and “external” aspects of language, combined through analyses that are not artificially paired. In other words, an approach to literary texts that seeks the dialectical placement of external within internal through the operational notion of

⁴¹ OT: “o ‘conteúdo’ aparece como inseparável da cenografia que lhe dá suporte.”

⁴² OT: “[...] a cenografia deve estar ativa e diretamente vinculada à configuração histórica na qual aparece. Os tipos de cenografias mobilizadas dizem obliquamente como as obras definem sua relação com a sociedade e como se pode, no âmbito dessa sociedade, legitimar o exercício da fala literária.”

⁴³ Regarding the correlation between literary form and social process, there is an important group of authors who devoted themselves to the issue and focused on it through the prism of dialectics. Among them are Lukács, Auerbach, Adorno, Benjamin, and the Brazilians Candido and Schwarz.

scenography is timely appropriate, bearing in mind the theoretical and methodological uniqueness of discourse analysis since its materialist origins.

Then, analysts of the literary discourse can rely on a series of discursive premises that guarantee the integrity of meaning in works. Even after their laboratorial analysis, the reflection about classes of “categories of analysis,” prescribed regardless of the feature presented in any particular work, would not be saturated. Perhaps, the most elementary effort exists in maintaining the primal bond between the literary utterance and the society that animates it.

After All, We are Still at the Beginning

The refusal of specificities of the literary utterance, or its consideration in terms of “literary language” or “language code,” triggers discursive analyses of literature with the insertion of a series of general categories in the texts. This is based upon genetic rites that involve artistic creation and upon analyses of their impact on works, without extensive pondering.⁴⁴ Furthermore, such procedures risk treating literature as a decorative corpus within the “literary field,” which is better accepted as an appropriate object for discourse analysis. As a consequence, the excessive prescription of methodological procedures that could ensure the belonging of literature to the field of discourse analysis can irreparably limit the explanatory scope of this exact same field. If the objective of the study is to amplify social, emotional, cultural, and aesthetic effects, which literary works, due to their specificity of form, potentially keep, as a result, it may have its functionality reduced.

If the methodology attributes protagonism to institutional constraints experienced by literary facts, then, despite all Maingueneau’s refusals, what we have is a discursive approach to literary sociology. Things change, though, if the core of the theory is in fact the literary discourse, considered in its humanistic function as framed language within spheres of human activity and permeated by a set of other spheres. Then, protagonism must be given to the social function of works, considered since the constitutive singularity of their aesthetic forms. Echoing Maingueneau’s perception, we are still transitioning into

⁴⁴ We mention here, among many other contributions, the concept of “scenography,” discussed by Maingueneau, full of explanatory consequences for literary texts in their discursive dimension.

open territory, in a field under development and a space for methodological experimentation.

With this in mind, we can say that the *discursive approach to literature* is also, with no need of theoretical innovation, a sort of literary criticism, thought as an interpretation experience. Therefore, it is mostly grounded on enunciative and discursive principles of human language. However, neglecting the particularity within literary facts should not be admitted. It is neither “sacred” nor does it have “shamanic origin”; nevertheless, it should not be undifferentiated from other types of discourse, such as advertising, journalistic, familiar, philosophical, and scientific discourses. Each one has its own demands in order to access senses conveyed by them, strictly because discourses represent a large scope of human enunciation. Lastly, theory should not foreshadow object if the intention is to be critical and useful outside the rhetorical routines of closed academic circles.

In conclusion, assuming that the matter of methodology prescription is still necessary, in our view, the only “obligation” literary discourse analysis should have – by its own means – is to expand the meanings of its object of analysis: the literary work and the life that dwells in its lines.

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