



## Essay Genre and Montaigne's Essays



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### Abstract

Originating in the cultural accumulation of antiquity, the essay is a literary genre that found its own form in the Middle Ages. Montaigne's *Essays* written in the 16th century are considered the prototype of the genre. From past to present, the essay has always been a genre that emphasizes the individual and the sense of self. In this respect, it has an important place in modern literature that puts the individual at the center. The personal opinion, feeling and interpretation observed in Montaigne's work is the key to the relationship of the essay with other literary genres. This article will briefly touch upon the history and general characteristics of the essay. Then, the nature and theme of Montaigne's book will be shed light on. The conclusions reached as a result of the review are that the essay is a functional and actual literary genre; Montaigne, on the other hand, presents a subjective text that reflects the characteristics of the genre. With the aspects expressed, the *Essays* are now part of the Western canon. Montaigne's work is important as it is a founding text and exhibits the dominant characteristics of the genre. On the other hand, *the Essays* are one of the most widely known and read works of all times. Considering that the work has a history of more than four centuries, it can be predicted that it will continue to nourish art for generations as a universal cultural heritage with its literary values.

**Keywords:** Essay, Montaigne, Literature, Art.

## Deneme Türü ve Montaigne'in Denemeleri

### Özet

Kökeni antikitenin kültürel sermayesine dayanan deneme, orta çağda kendi formunu bulmuş bir edebî türdür. Montaigne'in 16. yüzyılda yazdığı *Denemeler* türün prototipi kabul edilir. Deneme geçmişten bugüne hep bireyi, ben duygusu öne çıkartan bir tür olmuştur. Bu bakımdan bireyi merkeze alan modern edebiyatta önemli bir yer tutar. Montaigne'in eserinde gözlemlenen şahsi görüş, duyuş ve yorumlama denemenin diğer edebî türlerle ilişkisinin anahtarıdır. Bu makalede denemenin tarihçesine ve genel özelliklerine kısaca değinilecektir. Ardından Montaigne'in kitabının niteliğine ve tematiğine ışık tutulacaktır. İnceleme neticesinde varılan sonuçlar denemenin fonksiyonel ve aktüel bir edebî tür olduğu; Montaigne'in ise türün karakteristiğini yansıtan öznel bir metin ortaya koyduğudur. Dile getirilen yanılarıyla *Denemeler* artık Batı kanonunun bir parçasıdır. Kurucu bir metin olması ve türün başat niteliklerini sergilemesi bakımından Montaigne'in eseri önemlidir. Diğer yandan *Denemeler* her zamanın en çok bilinen ve okunan eserlerinden biridir. Eserin dört yüzyılı aşkın geçmişi olduğu düşünülürse, sahip olduğu edebî değerlerle evrensel bir kültürel miras olarak yine nesiller boyunca sanatı beslemeyi sürdüreceği de öngörülebilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Deneme, Montaigne, Edebiyat, Sanat.

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## 1. Introduction

Essay is one of the most preferred forms of modern literature. For writers, essay has a structure that allows them to easily express thoughts or feelings. It does not require objectivity or scientificity while writing. It does not seek to persuade. On the other hand, there are also essays that try to persuade. It should be said that essays are diverse in terms of subject and style. For readers, it can be said that the atmosphere that draws the person in and does not tire them while reading is an important reason for preference. Reading essays helps to benefit from the personal experiences of others and is a way of making good use of time. It provides people with knowledge. It is observed that essays have emerged as a popular genre from past to present. Below, the history and characteristics of this genre will be discussed based on its definition; then, Montaigne's book *Essays*, which provides the first essay example, will be examined. The main purpose of the article is to provide panoramic information about the genre and to comment on the characteristics and quality of the *Essays*. The literary aspect, thematic features and contribution to cultural accumulation of the genre and its object of study, *Essays*, are the basic perspective in this study.

## 2. Definition - Historical Course and Characteristics of the Form

The article is based on a qualitative research. In this context, the information previously stated about the essay type will be taken into consideration and this information will be interpreted. After the information that will form the basis of the review is given, the focus will be on the main object of the review, the *Essays*.

The essay belongs to the category of non-fiction narrative. As a literary term, it is explained as follows:

"Any short composition in prose that undertakes to discuss a matter, express a point of view, persuade us to accept a thesis on any subject, or simply entertain. The essay differs from a 'treatise' or 'dissertation' in its lack of pretension to be a systematic and complete exposition and in being addressed to a general rather than a specialized audience; as a consequence, the essay discusses its subject in nontechnical fashion and often with a liberal use of such devices as anecdote, striking illustration, and humor to augment its appeal." (Abrams & Harpham, 2015: 116).

The examples and developments of the genre in the East and the West are different. For example, in the Chinese literary tradition, the essay is a short composition whose style is emphasized. It is said to have more than ten varieties. For example, prose poems, philosophical explanations, official writings such as petitions and reports all served the development of this genre and were treated under the name of essay. It is known that the first essays were written in China before 200 BC. It has a history of two thousand years (Eberhard, 1992: 9-30). In the West, on the other hand, no matter how far back the essay is taken, its beginning is generally attributed to the Middle Ages. This article will be based on the history and development of the essay as a modern literary genre in Western literatures.

Although the essay as a literary genre started with Montaigne (1533-1592), in fact, when one reads Montaigne's writings, it can be argued that he, too, introduced this genre inspired by Greek philosophers. It would be appropriate to look for the writings of Seneca, Cicero and Marcus Aurelius in the origins of the genre. Plutarch, who is assumed to have been Seneca's

pupil and whose writings include essays and biographies on philosophy and history, should also be included among these names. The words, letters and speeches of Greek and Roman philosophers can be said to be the origin of the essay. In fact, Montaigne (2023: 460, 152, 462) frequently refers to them and their writings in his own work:

"...it is Plutarch and Seneca who taught me to regulate my behavior and my tastes... both of them were teachers to two Roman emperors... In their teachings philosophy is presented very well, simply and consistently."

"I have never been associated with any important books except those of Plutarch and Seneca."

"I also like Cicero's Letters to Atticus because it not only gives a lot of information about history and the issues of his time, but also reflects his personal feelings and thoughts."

The sentences above are very clear. It points to Montaigne's sources and starting points. It explains who and how the author, who is considered the pioneer of the essay genre, was influenced by. In short, it sheds light on the origins of the genre by explaining the primary motives behind Montaigne's turn towards the essay.

The essay has been a controversial genre from the very beginning. In Western literature, it is also known that the word essay means article. Again, writings in the criticism genre are presented under the title of essay. Some newspaper articles are also considered within this scope. The essay has a transitory form due to its ambiguous boundaries. Therefore, interestingly, it appears side by side or intertwined with many literary genres. For example, it can be argued that the essay and autobiography, the essay and diary, or the essay and memoir have intricate relationships and lines that cannot be easily separated. Isabel Duran (2023: 48), for instance, thinks that the essay is a reflective piece of autobiography. Considering Montaigne's writings, this idea is not to be dismissed lightly. Duran says that the essay has a flexible intertextuality with other literary forms. The essay is autobiographical to the extent that it is personal. It has a structure conducive to autofiction, biography and personal history writing (Duran, 2023: 61).

When it comes to the essay, two important authors are referred to in Western literature. The first is Lukacs. In his famous essay *On the Nature and the Form of the Essay*, Lukacs (2010: 17) clearly states that he sees the essay as an art form:

"I want to try to define the essay as astrictly as is possible, precisely by describing it as an art form." In describing it, he emphasizes its artistic aspect. However, the formal classification of the essay is difficult. It is characterized as a hybrid form (Chadbourne, 1983: 133).

Adorno, the other name cited, also analyzes this aspect of the essay more. According to him, the essay is an unsystematic type of writing. Moreover, it is distant from aesthetics. He meets Lukacs' views with caution. Perhaps the most important observation in Adorno's *Notes to Literature, The Essay as Form*, is that the essay has a structure that is contrary to the four main rules laid down by Descartes in the *Discourse on Method*. It does not divide the subject into parts in order to understand the problem. It does not have a gradual intellectual progression. Finally, it does not offer an overview of the issue it deals with. As a result, Adorno (1991: 3-23) finds it anachronistic. He accuses it of carrying the meaning of timelessness. In short, he analyzes the term in a rather abrasive way.

It is argued that the essay is anti-authoritarian because it opposes all the rules codified since Descartes. It is even said to contain a defeatist aspect in that it is a rejection of mastery. The following observation about the ethics of the essay is worth noting:

"The ethic of essay is most stringent: it demands the rejection of mastery. The rejection of oneself as master. Even the disappearance of the self..." (DuPlessis, 1996: 16)

The anti-authoritarian structure of the essay inevitably opens the door to creative writing. It is possible to say that the essay is the free field of creative writing. The relationship between the literary forms mentioned above and the essay is important. Thanks to the creative imagination, the content processed in the essay gives birth to different styles. The fact that the essay is a free and flexible form has attracted different literary minds and caused them to focus on this genre. From the very beginning, essays talk about oneself, one's own ideas, feelings and outlook on life. Here, personal biography, and even the personal adventures one goes through, come into play. From this point of view, the idea that the novel was born in Western literature as a result of the processing and improvement of the essay was put forward. Indeed, it is significant that the first example of the modern essay is given by Montaigne in 1580 and Cervantes' work is dated 1605. There is a chronological coherence.

The sense of self is at the forefront in the essay. No matter what is mentioned, there is always "me" at the center. As a writer, there is the individual and a text shaped in the perspective of the individual. If it is remembered that modern literature also has an individual-centered birth, the importance of the place of the essay in modern literature can be understood. The essay is undoubtedly about individuality, but the individuality in essays has a public aspect. When Montaigne was talking about himself, he was sure that he would be read by the masses and that there was something to be learned from his writings. From this point of view, there should be no doubt that the voice in the essays is the voice of the "I" that turns into the "we". Therefore, the magical side of *Don Quixote*, which deals with personal adventures and directs the central sense of self in the essay towards us, requires a focus on the relationship between the novel and the essay. In this respect, the essay is perhaps the most productive genre in the development of modern literature. In fact, it can be predicted that the essay adds dynamism and innovation to every literary genre that comes into contact with it due to the breadth of its boundaries, its inclusiveness and its being a comfortable form.

Montaigne's monumental three-volume work was completed in 1588. Translated into English, the work resonates in England. The essay becomes a genre followed. In 1597, Francis Bacon (1561-1626) borrows the word "essay" from French and publishes a work of the same name. Both are avant-gardes of the essay in their own language, but Montaigne writes in a sincere, frank, even somewhat chatty or disorganized style. Bacon, on the other hand, is bookish. He does not proceed in a spontaneous way. The unity of subject and thought is immediately noticeable in his writings. His style is coherent. He writes in a preaching style. Philosophical thoughts are much more. His sentences are clever and didactic. Unlike Montaigne, apart from Latin writers, he quotes from the *Bible*. He tends to persuade. Bacon speaks in a more formal tone in his essays than Montaigne. His essays are more dignified and objective.

When Bacon's essays are analyzed in outline, the following observation is made:

"His essays are revolved around three major ideologies: Man in relating to his creator, Man's relation to world and society and Man relating to him." ([Sahibzada, 2020:17](#)).

Looking at the historical development of the form, it is clear that the contributions of Montaigne and Bacon made the essay a busy, consulted, exemplary modern genre. Montaigne was twenty-eight years older than Bacon and wrote his work seventeen years before him. Before Bacon published his book titled *Essays*, Montaigne was already famous as an essayist in France. Therefore, Bacon is Montaigne's successor in the field of essays. He is the second important name who introduced and developed the genre. In fact, the fact that he himself pronounced Montaigne's name in his essays is proof that Bacon was a natural follower of Montaigne (Ratté, 1940).

After Bacon publishes the ten-part *Essays*, he continues to work on his book. He worked on it all his life. He develops and changes both its content and its form. He publishes his book in thirty-eight chapters in 1612. In 1625, *the Essays* were reprinted. In its final form, his work is now fifty-eight chapters (Ferrari, 2016: 219). This work, a product of painstaking labor and thought, became a model for Enlightenment philosophers. For example, David Hume (1711-1776), one of Bacon's successors, wrote just like his predecessor. His book of *Essays* also resembles Bacon's style. Philosophy, judgmental logic, exhortations and a cool tone characterize his book. The categorical view in his book is immediately apparent. Epicureans, Stoics, Platonists and Skeptics are mentioned under separate headings. Antiquity and modern culture are occasionally compared (Hume, 2021). Such essays, which reason and conclude, will be much more functional in later periods.

It is a fact that two important names such as Montaigne and Bacon made a great breakthrough in essay literature. Montaigne is the representative of two different styles with his unprompted, colloquial style and Bacon with his formal style. Jonathan Swift, Mark Twain, Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, George Orwell followed Montaigne's soft, colloquial style in later periods. Bacon's authoritarian and explanatory style is followed by Joseph Addison, Samuel Johnson, Mathew Arnold, John Stuart Mill, Emerson and Thoreau (Balci, 2020: 176).

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the essay assumes the missions of criticism and political sensitization. It is used to guide society. In the 19th century, the essay focuses mainly on the concept of culture. Defining culture, addressing the problems of the society in which one lives, philosophical problems, and the joy of living become prominent themes of essays. In this direction, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), Miguel De Unamuno (1864-1936), Jose Ortega Y Gasset (1883-1955), Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965), Alain, Emile-Auguste Chartier (1868-1951), Andre Gide (1869-1951), Albert Camus (1913-1960) are prominent names in the essay field.

In the 20th and 21st centuries, the thematic reservoir of essays has expanded considerably. All kinds of subjects are covered in the essay form. It is even observed that the form is stretched. Essays are placed within another literary genre. Gürsel Aytac (2007: 53-54) reports that Max Frisch (1911-1991) evaluates the essay as a means of expression in his novel *Mein Name sei Gantenbein*. He states that Herman Hesse's novels *The Bead Game* (*Das Glasperlenspiel*) and *Steppenwolf* feature novelistic essayism in informative passages. Elias Canetti (1905-1994) gives examples in the essay genre by writing author portraits. All these give an idea about the historical course of the form, its diversity and characteristics.

### **3. About Montaigne's Essays**

Montaigne belonged to a wealthy family. His father was the mayor of Bordeaux. He raised him with private teachers. In this way, Montaigne gained a command of Latin and Greek literature. He joined the ranks of the bureaucracy at a young age. Later on, he becomes the

mayor of Bordeaux, a position also held by his father. He fulfills this duty for two terms. He was mayor between 1581 and 1585. He lived in the midst of internal strife and religious wars. The political turmoil of his time closely affected the artist. He was imprisoned in the Bastille in 1588. In his last years, he retires to his home and devotes himself to writing. Montaigne retired as a judge in 1571 and went back to his library, but circumstances drew him back to the political scene. In addition to serving as mayor, he worked as a negotiator for the state (Keohane, 1977: 34-367). Along with his political career, he continued to write. After 1571, it is understood that he continued to write the *Essays*, albeit with interruptions. The first volume of his work was published in 1580 and the last volume in 1588. It is known that he worked on his work until his death in 1592. He added new writings to it and constantly updated his book. All his works were published in 1595 after his death (Montaigne, 2023:1).

### 3.1. Regarding the Origin of the Essays

What he wrote in the *Essays* is the most authentic first-hand source about Montaigne. In his book, the artist explains how he was educated. He was handed over to a German physician who did not speak French but knew Latin. This person is always busy with him. In addition, two other teachers were hired to help this German physician. Montaigne speaks Latin with them all the time. He learns Greek at home through games. He tells that his interest in books started with Ovidius. Vergilius, Lucretius, Catullus, Horatius are his favorite poets. He admires Terentius (Montaigne, 2023: 183 - 185, 457).

The reason why the *Essays* frequently refer to ancient Greek and Roman history, historical figures and philosophers who lived in those periods for examples is that Montaigne received such an education.

*The Essays* consist of three volumes. The first volume contains fifty-eight essays, the second volume thirty-seven, and the last volume thirteen. The first and last volumes are equal in volume. The second volume is the most voluminous.

Some passages in the work provide information about the main features of the *Essays*. The artist states that what he tells in the book are the lessons he has learned from life. He implies that he did not write them in a hasty manner. Just as one dresses, combs and takes care of oneself before going out in public, Montaigne, as a writer, states that he shows the same care in his writings. (Montaigne, 2023:422-423). This indicates that he thinks that what he writes will be read. He cares about being attentive, but according to him, the most important thing is not to lose his authenticity:

"But how I show myself is not so important, as long as I show myself as I am. That is what I want." (Montaigne, 2023: 728).

What follows gives the most fundamental characterization of the work:

"I want to expose and show every part of me, every side of me, everything of me, without discrimination." (Montaigne, 2023: 902).

The sentence above explains what the work aims to achieve. *The Essays* is a self-centered work. Already at the beginning of the work, Montaigne states that the subject of his book is himself. He immediately tells the future reader what he will encounter. He reinforces this idea with what he declares afterwards:

"Everyone else looks ahead, I look inward, I am only preoccupied with myself, I am constantly examining myself, analyzing myself, evaluating myself."

"This is my metaphysics and my physics." (Montaigne, 2023: 733, 1174).

*The Essays* are the product of this inward concentration. In doing so, Montaigne gains two benefits. The first is to know himself. Self-knowledge is a maxim of life that has been recommended since the sages of ancient times. It is obvious how much the artist values this. The second gain is to be able to create a work.

Montaigne is content to focus on himself. He even thinks that this endeavor can be a goal or a profession for man. In his essay "About Denial", he suggests keeping a file while concentrating on oneself. According to him, such an occupation is not wasting time in vain. One will get to know others through oneself. He will understand humanity. It is useful to record one's own mood changes and habits.

Based on his views, it is possible to consider Montaigne's *Essays* as a kind of emotional seismograph or intellectual barometer. The sensitivities and personal focal points of the artist can be identified one by one. This creates a large corpus. *Essays* already reflect the intellectual adventure of the modern individual. Montaigne introduces himself as he is with his orientation towards the self, not hiding his contradictions, skepticism, pleasures and anxieties. For the artist, knowing oneself and being satisfied with oneself means reaching perfection. Montaigne even prefers understanding himself to understanding Cicero, whom he admires so much (Montaigne, 2023: 1175).

Finding oneself in all its simplicity can be a source of inspiration for others. The artist hopes that with this work he can perhaps benefit someone else. If it attracts interest and if one wants to learn about his character, his writings on this occasion will be read carefully. These lines, in which he spills his intimacy, will be enlightening for people. Montaigne is sure that his book will give experience to others as he tells his story without hiding himself. He claims that the knowledge that can be acquired through years of friendship can be learned from *the Essays* in three days, and in a true and reliable way (Montaigne, 2023: 1080). This claim of the artist is his own proof that he really writes honestly and without hesitation.

He criticizes himself freely throughout his work. He lists his shortcomings and flaws without hesitation:

"Besides forgetfulness, I have other defects that increase my ignorance: My mind works slowly, I comprehend something too late; a little doubt or trouble hinders my mind... I say this in order to criticize my own mind, because there is no one who is more incapable and ignorant than I am, whether from weakness or lethargy, in many things that would be considered shameful not to know." (Montaigne, 2023: 727).

He openly states that he cannot calculate, cannot even recognize and distinguish money, and does not know the names of household appliances. The way he talks about himself in physical and psychological details and even his confessions suggest that he creates a kind of self-portrait. In terms of presenting his narcissism, contradictions and self, Montaigne is compared to Rembrandt, that unique artist of self-portraiture (O'Neill, 1985: 217).

Montaigne also gives information about how he wrote his essays. He wrote his book in intervals. Intervening works prevent him from writing. When he returns to writing again, he

revises his ideas. He does not prefer to change what he has written. The reason for this is to capture himself in all his simplicity. He does not touch what he writes because he wants to see the stages of development. He explains that he interferes with one or two words at most (Montaigne, 2023: 842).

He noted that he made use of ancient cultures in his writing. He intersperses poems between his essays. In this way, he wants to show poetic power and poignancy. This is how he aims to embellish his words and attract attention.

### **3.2. Thematic Attention to the Work**

Education is emphasized in the *Essays*. Especially the essay titled "About the Education of Children" is remarkable. Montaigne is a skeptic and wishes education to pass through the filter of doubt. According to him, the teacher should teach the child to approach everything he hears with skepticism. At this point, Montaigne is understood to be one of the pioneers of Cartesian thought. It should be underlined that he determined the place of skepticism in education and philosophy even before Descartes. This illuminates Montaigne's role in the adventure of modern thought.

He does not think memorization is right. Memorization does not mean learning or knowing. To memorize is merely to commit to memory, which Montaigne judges to be dysfunctional. Educating children does not mean making them memorize. Sometimes it is also through travel. Children who are taken on trips from a young age learn languages and are exposed to different cultures. Education also requires discipline. The artist is in favor of a sweet and hard education. The individual who uses his/her mind and means can eventually become brave and wise. The goal of wisdom is virtue. The most obvious characteristic of a virtuous person is a cheerful countenance. Montaigne draws a path from skepticism to wisdom in the education of children. The attainment of happiness requires wisdom, and the acquisition of wisdom requires intellectual competence. His thoughts on education are articulated and systematic.

His skepticism makes him critical. He criticizes the society he lives in. He finds the French understanding of education lacking depth. He does not hold back from criticizing the nation he belongs to. He complains about the prevalence of lying in society. Lying and perjury have become a habit of speech. He does not approve of this. People act as if they know everything even though they are superficial. He mocks those who do not understand poetry claiming to know poetry. He humorously approaches the fact that the French train more poets than poetry critics. It is easier for people to write a poem than to understand a poem. That is why there are poets everywhere. This situation is unhealthy. Even though everyone claims to understand poetry, art is difficult to understand. Montaigne touches upon the strange situations he is in with a sarcastic style. Therefore, humor is a characteristic of his style.

The artist expresses his opinion on many topics. From the prophet of Islam to medicine, from retirement to ancient wars, he writes on various subjects. For example, he does not approve of people retiring before the age of fifty-five or sixty. Working life should be organized according to the public interest. As someone who has worked as a public servant, it is understandable that he is concerned with public law. However, rational thought is not always consistent in the *Essays*. Montaigne also has some ideas that are difficult to agree with. Despite being a person who values reason and science, his anti-medical views are surprising. He makes generalizations and criticizes medicine by exemplifying negative cases. He argues that once people start to follow the rules of medicine, they get diseases they did not know they had. What he says about this is contradictory. On the one hand, he does not find the word of



medicine credible, on the other hand he says that he respects physicians. Then he says, "I am not angry with physicians, I react to their 'profession'" (Montaigne, 2023: 864).

This ambivalent and difficult to understand attitude is also observed in his other essays. The artist, who does not have a problem with old age, is content to grow old. Old age is peaceful because it reduces desires and anxieties. Montaigne, who glorifies reason and wisdom throughout his book, is convinced that learning is unnecessary in old age. This is another contradiction. Old people who try to learn the alphabet or acquire new knowledge are fools for him. He considers old age as a condition that prevents learning or active living. However, he is wrong to think this way. Montaigne's ideas are entirely personal and shaped by the characteristics of his own time. We cannot defend the same views today. Especially nowadays, when old age is delayed and lived in a healthy way thanks to medicine, it is not easy to find elderly people who would agree with these ideas. One of their erroneous views is that the prophet of Islam supposedly forbade science to the believers. In fact, the prophet has said many words encouraging science. Montaigne's untruthful attitude here is evidence of his subjectivity.

Another point to be mentioned in the *Essays* is the artist's relationship with religion. The artist, who was Jewish on his mother's side, preferred Catholicism. In the century he lived in, there was a religious war between Catholics and Protestants. Montaigne's three brothers were Protestants. Despite the different preferences in his family and the ongoing religious war, he remained loyal to Catholicism throughout his life. Religion and reason do not conflict in his essays. On the contrary, religion and reason are side by side and religion is reached through reason.

Montaigne is not a person far from religion. In one of his essays, he brings the subject to religion by proceeding with examples. He says that he has come to a decision as a result of the examples he gives and his reading of Plato. Life and philosophy, that is, experience and reasoning, convince him of the necessity of the idea of religion. His words are exactly as follows:

"Plato and these examples lead us to the conclusion: The belief in God is formed in us either by love or by compulsion. Atheism is in a sense a perverse, unnatural, extremely arrogant and corrupt proposition, difficult to impose on human thought." (Montaigne, 2023: 492).

He goes on to say that atheists are unfortunate and brainless people. He rejects atheism. He shares the idea that human beings can never equal or even approach the divine. What is essential is the divine. "The eternal, that is, that which has never been born and will never die; that which time can never change" (Montaigne, 2023: 673). Therefore, man must turn to the divine, to the truth or reality that never fails. This is salvation. In the artist's own words, the encompassing and compassionate nature of the divine is described as follows:

"There is nothing easier, softer and more convenient than the divine law; it calls us, no matter how sinful and disgusting people we are." (Montaigne, 2023: 365).

His words give rise to the conviction that Montaigne has a religious personality: "We are all Christians in the same way, whether we are from Périgord or German" (Montaigne, 2023: 491).

Montaigne's attitude of uniting Europe on the basis of religion in an age when religious wars divided people is important. The perspective he offers is aimed at producing solutions to

problems. He witnessed how societies were hostile to each other in his era. Therefore, he exhibits an embracing and solution-oriented attitude that appeals to both his era and later periods. For this reason, Montaigne is considered to be a source of inspiration for the intellectuals of later generations. Emiliano Ferrari (2019: 8) makes the following observation on this subject:

"Rather than reading the personal life of the author into his work (and conversely), understanding Montaigne through the descriptive narrative of literary history, or examining the economic, social, and religious causes underlying his writing, American authors from the 18th to 21st century are concerned with the *Essays* as a cultural artifact helping them to frame their current problems, to meet new challenges, and to find valuable solutions for the present and future of a young democracy."

Montaigne and his work have always maintained their popularity thanks to these features we have outlined. *The Essays* is a unique work with its warm-hearted approach, reasonable evaluations, solution proposals, and a structure that makes us discover individuality. Its ability to stand out among so many works written in more than four centuries and to maintain its place among distinguished works is also related to this originality.

#### 4. Conclusion

As a result of the analysis, it can be predicted that the essay is the most current genre of modern literature. This has to do with its structure and history. The essay has a fertile structure. It interacts with other genres. Its boundaries are unclear. It is often difficult to determine whether a piece of writing belongs to the genre of essay or criticism. Likewise, the essay develops an intricate network of relations with biography, diary and memoir. The main characteristic of these genres is that they center on the individual. At the center of the essay lies the individual view. In short, the essay has a structure and history that kneads individuality. As mentioned above, the thesis that the modern novel emerged with the processing and development of the essay makes the essay an actual, popular genre that is being thought about - in other words -, it is current. The essay has gone through various phases in terms of form and content. Even today, this change continues. The genre still does not have a fixed table of characteristics. Its boundaries and qualities vary. Its transitive and fertile structure brings it into interaction with every writing genre. In the 21st century, it should be considered that other features may be included in essays in different geographies. For instance, it should not surprise researchers that an essay can be presented in the form of a cartoon or a graphic, or that a story can be written in the style of an essay. The essay has already been used as an expression technique in different literary genres. Since it is a flexible genre, it is not easy to predict what the future may bring to the essay genre. It should be stated that the essay is a favorite genre of modern literature due to its characteristics.

If the object of study, Montaigne's *Essays*, is taken into focus, a great deal of information is obtained about the book's origins, colorful style, and subjectivity. Montaigne, who is considered the founding father of the essay in Western literature, tells frankly how he developed this style of writing. Seneca, Cicero, Marcus Aurelius, Plutarch were his influences. The letters and discourses of the Stoics inspired him. Montaigne feeds on antiquity. He acquires his formation through Greco-Latin culture. That is why there are so many references to them, to history and historical texts in his work.

Montaigne's *Essays* are considered one of the monumental works of modern literature. Harold Bloom counts *the Essays* in the Western canon. The book's greatest contribution to

contemporary thought is its ability to always fix the concepts of the individual and doubt in a central position.

*Essays* is the rising voice of the thinking individual. It is perhaps the most innovative text in the Middle Ages, a time of religious wars. It is proof that there is an individual's opinion outside the official theses, a person who thinks outside the conventional discourse. Montaigne evaluates the opinions of many people who are considered authorities in his own way. He is skeptical. He judges what is said and expresses his personal interpretations. He is comfortable in writing, has no complexes and does not mince his words. It opens up topics for discussion and comments from others.

In his work, one encounters a wide basin of details from his personality to his daily routine. Many subjects such as his love of Paris, his ability to ride horses, his kidney pains, his fear of being dependent on someone else come before the reader. In every situation, he expresses his own ideas and comparisons. The Latin phrase "In me omnis spes est mihi", which means "My only hope is myself", is characteristic of his writings. With his *Essays*, the artist builds his own personal tradition. He reasons before making a judgment. He proceeds in the light of knowledge. In a way, he reveals his own philosophy. While his personal philosophy is one side, he does not use a philosophical language in his writings.

The order of the subjects in his book does not contain a certain order. The essays cover a wide range of unrelated topics, from the feeling of fear to the big toe. This lack of system paves the way for moving quickly from topic to topic. While talking about the imagination, he brings up how habits change from one society to another. Suddenly, he begins to explain with striking examples how difficult it is to change established behaviors. In the *Essays*, many themes, from the individual to the social, from metaphysics to science, change at a dizzying pace. The artist's desire to speak and his lack of discipline in doing so is perhaps a handicap for the modern reader, but it must be admitted that today Montaigne is read more for pleasure than for learning. With the exception of researchers, those who read him are a general and average audience who turn to his books to acquire the minimum general culture.

Montaigne talks about himself in the *Essays*, as he states at the beginning of his book. Solitude and free time were necessary to write these essays. The artist makes solitude about self-worth. Solitude does not mean privacy. One can be with others even when alone. Montaigne does this by writing. He makes his ideas public. So it can be said that this is an interestingly socialized solitude.

Montaigne's essays are extremely simple and sincere. In fact, they are unpretentious texts. Latin quotations draw attention to the writings. Historical references add seriousness and credibility to the words. Personal opinions blended with references from the past attract the reader. Its easy readability and ability to convey its message in a simple way make *the Essays* one of the indispensable books of all times.

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