



Letter of profession: Coelho Netto in charge of the Drama School (1910-1934)¹

Cartas do ofício: Coelho Netto à frente da Escola Dramática (1910-1934)

Letras del oficio: Coelho Netto al frente de la Escuela Dramática (1910-1934)

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Abstract

The aim of the present article is to interpret the work by Henrique Maximiano Coelho Netto, as director and professor at the Drama School. Accordingly, his correspondence at the National Library Foundation and at the Brazilian Academy of Letters was assessed, since his life intertwined with the literary and educational scene of Rio de Janeiro City, when it was still the capital of the Republic. Thus, the present work started from the history of the written culture perspective to interpret his letters by reflecting on the addressees and senders during the time he ran the school, as well as on the purpose and context of writing; on the relationship he had with his interlocutors and the previously mentioned school. The aim of the present study is to broaden the knowledge on the history of the herein addressed institution, which was created in the First Republic and, most of all, on Coelho Netto himself, who had his teaching performance overshadowed by his other facets.

Keywords: Coelho Netto. Letters. Drama School.

¹ The present article is the very result from *Coelho Neto: um homem de letras na cena escolar (1911-1934)*. Project, which is coordinated by Professor Ana Chrystina Mignot and funded by *Cnpq, Prociência (Faperj-UERJ)* and *CNE Faperj*. Among the academic works resulting from it, one finds the Master's Degree dissertation by Shayenne Silva, namely: *Mestre das palavras: missão educativa de Coelho Netto na política, na imprensa e nas escolas*, concluded in 2017, at the Post-Graduate Program in Education of State University of Rio de Janeiro (*ProPEd/UERJ*). English version by Good Deal - Consultoria Linguística (Deyse Miranda e Tatiane Abrantes). E-mail: contato@gooddealconsultoria.com

Resumo

Interpretar a atuação de Henrique Maximiano Coelho Netto, enquanto diretor e professor da Escola Dramática, é objetivo do presente artigo. Para tal, recorreremos à correspondência desse homem de letras localizada de forma dispersa na Fundação Biblioteca Nacional e na Academia Brasileira de Letras, na qual a vida desse sujeito se entrecruzava com a cena literária e educacional da cidade do Rio de Janeiro, então capital da República. Trabalhamos, assim, na perspectiva da história da cultura escrita, o que nos possibilitou interpretar essas missivas, refletindo sobre os destinatários e remetentes desse professor, enquanto diretor da escola; a finalidade e o contexto da escrita; bem como a relação que ele mantinha com seus interlocutores e a escola em questão. Deste modo, pretendemos ampliar o conhecimento acerca da história desta instituição criada na Primeira República e, sobretudo a respeito de Coelho Netto que teve sua atuação no magistério ofuscada frente às suas outras facetas.

Palavras-chave: Coelho Netto. Cartas. Escola Dramática.

Resumen

El propósito de este artículo es interpretar la obra de Henrique Maximiano Coelho Netto como director y docente de la Escuela Dramática. Para ello, utilizamos la correspondencia de este hombre de letras ubicada de manera dispersa en la Fundación Biblioteca Nacional y en la Academia Brasileña de Letras, en la que se entrelaza la vida de este sujeto con la escena literaria y educativa de la ciudad de Río de Janeiro, entonces capital de la República. Así, trabajamos desde la perspectiva de la historia de la cultura escrita, que nos permitió interpretar estas cartas, reflexionando sobre los destinatarios y remitentes de este docente, como director de la escuela; el propósito y contexto de la escritura; así como la relación que mantenía con sus interlocutores y la escuela en cuestión. De esta manera, pretendemos ampliar el conocimiento sobre la historia de esta institución creada en la Primera República y, sobre todo, sobre Coelho Netto, quien tuvo su actuación en el magisterio ensombrecida por sus otras facetas.

Palabras clave: Coelho Netto. Cartas. Escuela Dramática.

Initial words...

Figure 1. Coelho Neto's caricature, drew by J. Carlos, *Para Todos*' cover, from April 21, 1928



Source: Personal archive of scholar Coelho Neto/ ABL²

The caricature opening this article was drawn by J. Carlos³, it is among the several ones used to represent Henrique Maximiano Coelho Neto, who was granted the title of “Prince of Prosaists” by an election promoted by *O Malho*, in 1928. This caricature shows, besides his outstanding eyebrows and mustache, the suit and the glasses as elements often present in his pictures, satire or images, as well as the feather pen, which is an object featuring a man who has lived on his writings. The sight by the caricaturist catches the same image outspread by several of his biographers, in other words, a man who has published a lot, in a very diversified

² We could find the same caricature in an edition by *O Malho*, from April 21st, 1928, ed. 1336, p. 32. [Hemeroteca Digital da Fundação Biblioteca Nacional]

³ José Carlos de Brito e Cunha (RJ, 1884 – RJ, 1950) - caricaturist, cartoonist, illustrator, publicist and comedian. He published his art pieces in the *Careta*, *Para Todos*, *Fon-Fon* and *Almanaque Tico-Tico* magazines, among others, where he had shown “with beauty and elegance the daily life of the city and of its residents”, according to the website of Instituto Moreira Salles, which has in its inventory part of this artist’s pieces. Available at <https://ims.com.br/acervos/iconografia/> [Accessed on February 08th, 2021].

way: novels, chronicles, parliamentary speeches or speeches of other sorts, articles in journals, tales and stories for children⁴. He also wrote theater plays such as *Pelo amor!*, *Ártemis*, *Hóstia*, *Bonança*, among others that were influenced by Western erudite classics, such as highlighted in the study by Carvalho (2009) about the theater renovation advocated by Coelho Netto. His relationship with writing and theater also took place through his theatrical critics. In his pages at *Fagulhas*, where he signed as N., Coelho Netto used to criticize the audience's excitement with popular theater plays, which were full of licentiousness, sexual connotation, sexual dances, and short in quality. According to him, "spectacles of this genre did not teach anything good to the public that, through them, would lose some of its vocabulary and would keep in its memory the useless beauties of a scenario and the immoralities lived in the scenes by the artists" (CARVALHO, 2009, s/p). On the other hand, the artists who use to perform as professionals often came from popular social classes and went to theater "to mangle the sweet and beloved Portuguese Language. We do not have a single artist ready for the theater – it is the cast of *parvenus*" (Coelho Netto, 1897, p. 3 apud CARVALHO, 2008, s/p).

His dedication to writing was so intense that he published more than two hundred literary pieces throughout his life, and used several nicknames, such as Puck, Ariel and Caliban (at *Cidade do Rio* newspaper), Vítor Leal (used by a group of writers at *Paula Matos* feuilleton), Charles Rouge (at *Os narcotizadores – história verídica de um bando de ciganos* feuilleton), Henri Lesongeur (at *Gazeta de Notícias*), N. (at *Diário de Notícias* and *O Paiz*), Anselmo Ribas (at *O Paiz*, *A Notícia* and *Gazeta de Notícias*), Amador Santelmo, Alcide, Domonac, Blanco Canabarro, C., C.N., as listed by Silva (2017).

Part of this writer and teacher's time was dedicated to write letters, which was a recurrent task of men of letters⁵ from the late 19th century to early 20th century. Some of them were collected to fulfil the demands from the Municipal Drama School. Actually, many of them are the reason for sending letters, just as suggested by Petrucci:

Durant els últims 5000 anys, a les societats organitzades del món mediterrani i d'Europa occidental sempre hi ha existit una necessitat, major o menor, de correspondència escrita. La carta representa, per això, una de les practiques d'escriptura de méstra dició i estabilitat, a més de la principal manifestació de la comunicació escrita entre persones. Des de les classes acomodades fins a les persones comunes, els homes i dones que en algún momento de la seves vides han sentit la necessitat de comunicar-se a mitjançant l'epístola són infinits. (PETRUCCI, 2003, p. 93 apud CASTILLO GÓMEZ, 2013, p. 134)

⁴ Among books published for children and adolescents, one finds: *América* (1897), *Apólogos* – tales for children (1904), *Compêndio de Literatura Brasileira* – according to Gymnasio Nacional program (1905), *Pastoral* – gospel in 1 prologue and 3 frames (1905), *Teatrinho* (1905), *Alma* – female education (1911), *Mystério do Natal* (1911), *Breviário Cívico* (1921), and the pieces: *A Pátria Brasileira* (1909), *Contos pátrios* (1904), *A terra fluminense* (1898) and *Theatro Infantil* – comedies and monologues in prose and verse (1905), in partnership with Olavo Bilac.

⁵ When we entered the Personal Archives of *Academia Brasileira de Letras*' members, for example, we could find out how most of these sources are preserved, such as the letter these individuals sent out and received, like those by Machado de Assis; Lúcio de Mendonça; Olavo Bilac; Joaquim Nabuco; Graça Aranha; João Ribeiro; Silvio Romero; João do Rio; among others. Several letters were published in books, such as the case of *Machado de Assis & Joaquim Nabuco – Correspondence* (2003); *71 letters by Mario de Andrade* (1991); *Letters/ Letters: Lorenal Letters: Manaus* – about Euclides da Cunha's letter; *Cartas a amigos* (1949) – about Joaquim Nabuco; *Cartas a Alceu Amoroso Lima*; among others.

Among the most recurrent possibilities to approach the study of correspondences in its historical dimension⁶, one finds those using letters to rebuilt different biographies; to get to know the sociability networks created by epistolary axes, to get close to the experiences by such a subject; and to get to know the explicit or hidden feelings confessed in more intimate and personal missives (SANCHIS, 2000 apud CASTILLO GÓMEZ, 2014). The writing genre, “*responde a un orden textual bastante estable, mantenido con pocas variaciones desde su formulación embrionaria en algunos tratados de época clásica hasta casi nuestros días*”, as recalls Castillo Gómez (2014, p. 25). Yet, it adds to the perspective by Petrucci (2019), when he takes the act of writing epistolary texts as part of a millenary history⁷. By thinking about the letters, one can say they

se convierten en el elemento más representativo de la extensión social de las prácticas de escritura, debido a una difundida necesidad de escribir vinculada con fenómenos tan decisivos en la vida de cualquier persona como la emigración, la guerra, la prisión, la represión o el exilio [...] La escritura se convierte, ligada a estas circunstancias, en un medio de supervivencia, ya que supera las distancias y evita el olvido. (SIERRA BLAS, 2002, p. 124)

The practice of writing remains related to matters of distance and absence, since it discloses the fact that “letters move themselves between presence and absence, and at the same time, they keep the bonds within distance” (Bastos, Cunha and Mignot, 2002, p. 5). What are the bonds Coelho Netto can keep alive from his life through his personal correspondence?

⁶ In order to get to know more about research that approach letters in their historical dimension, check on GALVÃO, Walnice Nogueira, GOTLIB, Nádia Battella (Orgs.). *Prezado senhor, prezada senhora: estudos sobre cartas*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2000. Among articles in this collection, we can observe the article called “Carta de leitor. Reflexões a partir de uma seção do arquivo de Pedro Nava”, by Marília Rothier Cardoso, where the author calls the attention to paths that researchers must take in order to lean over the epistolary speech. The first of them lies on the correspondence between public personalities, since it pleases the voyeur side of researchers; and the second one, which are the personal letters exchanged between common citizens; this letters, in their turn, get loose from institutions’ power of rescue – it is demanding to wait for fate make them accessible to analysis; BASTOS, Maria Helena Camara, CUNHA, Maria Teresa Santos, MIGNOT, Ana Chrystina Venancio (orgs). *Destinos das letras: história, educação e escrita epistolar*. Passo Fundo: UPF, 2002; SÁEZ, Carlos, CASTILLO GÓMEZ, Antonio. *La correspondencia en la historia. Modelos y prácticas de la escritura epistolar*. 1ªed. Madrid. 2002; CASTILLO GÓMEZ, Antonio, SIERRA BLAS, Verónica. *Cartas – Lettres – Lettere. Discursos, prácticas y representaciones epistolares (siglos XIV-XX)*. 1ªed. Alcalá de Henares. 2014; CASTILLO GÓMEZ, Antonio, SIERRA BLAS, Verónica. *Cinco siglos de cartas. Historia y prácticas epistolares en las épocas moderna y contemporánea*. 1ª ed. Huelva. 2014; PETRUCCI, Armando. *Escribir cartas, una historia milenaria*. Buenos Aires: Ampersand, 2019; CASTILLO GÓMEZ, Antonio. *Aprendizaje, arte y prácticas epistolares en España durante la temprana Edad Moderna. Epistolarios de ayer. Diplomática de hoy*. 1ª ed. Guadalajara. 2019. p. 133 – 166; e SIERRA BLAS, Verónica. *Aprender a escribir cartas. Los manuales epistolares en la España contemporánea (1927-1945)*, Gijón: Ediciones Trea, 2003; among others.

⁷ Castillo Gómez and Sierra Blas (2014) added that the history of letters is as old as the writing itself. “Nascida esta para guardar registro de cosechas y raciones, para honrar la memoria de los muertos o para implorar la protección de los dioses, al poco de formalizarse en una tabilla de arcilla o en un fragmento de papiro ya sirvió para intercambiar órdenes, informaciones, experiencias y sentimientos” (p. 12). However, it would have only been in the Hellenistic Greece that the epistolary practice would start formalizing itself. The authors state that the massive use of letter was inseparable from the generalized increase in literacy observed from mid-19th century and early 20th century, “y que, a pesar de las grandes diferencias existentes entre unos y otros países, llevó a que em Europa se alcanza sentases de entre 60% y un 90% de alfabetizados, reduciéndose considerablemente el analfabetismo de siglos pasados” (idem, p. 15). More about the history of epistolary writing, please check: Castillo Gómez e Sierra Blas (2014) e CASTILLO GÓMEZ, Antonio. *El mensaje escrito: la carta como medio de comunicación a lo largo de la historia*. In: *XXI siglos de comunicación en España*. Madrid. 2016. p.13-29.

The choice for the present topic was mainly justified by the fact that the herein assessed character was previously approached in studies in the Literature, Compared Literature, Dramatic Arts and Social History fields; most of these research have emphasized the published pieces: chronicles, novels, theater plays, didactic books and speeches⁸. The goal was to herein take a different path, which could point towards the backstage of his actions as director and professor at the addressed teaching institution. As suggested by Sanchis, “*las cartas privadas – más o menos confidenciales – permiten esclarecer las relaciones de amistad o antipatía entre individuos o grupos, tanto en el campo político como en el cultural*” (2000, p. 18). Besides, this author highlights that “*muchas veces, los epistolarios contribuyen a conocer en profundidad el funcionamiento de las instituciones*” (SANCHIS, 2000, p. 20), and they tease the interpretation of letters that concern the school for actors’ formation in Brazil in the First Republic, which remains active. What were the strategies adopted by this man of letters to keep the Drama School with its doors open?

Missives located at the *Academia Brasileira de Letras (ABL)*⁹ – which were found in the Personal Archive of this scholar –, at *Fundação Biblioteca Nacional (FBN)*¹⁰ – which keeps most of his correspondence in its Manuscripts Section¹¹ – and, sometimes, at *Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa (FCRB)* – were taken as trigger to interpret the action of this character as

⁸ Among the studies published about writer Coelho Netto and his work, we highlight: LOPES, Marcos Aparecido. *No purgatório da crítica: Coelho Neto e o seu lugar na história da literatura brasileira*. (Dissertação Mestrado). Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Instituto de Estudos Linguagem, 1997; LAPA, José Roberto do Amaral. *Coelho Netto em Campinas (1901 – 1904)*. Conferência proferida no Instituto Histórico e Geográfico de São Paulo. 6 de fevereiro de 1960; PEREIRA, Leonardo Affonso de Miranda. Barricadas na Academia: literatura e abolicionismo na produção do jovem Coelho Netto. *Tempo*. Revista do Departamento de História da UFF, v. 5 (n.10), 2000, p. 15-37; PEREIRA, Leonardo Affonso de Miranda. Literatura em movimento: Coelho Netto e o público das ruas. In: *História em cousas miúdas: capítulos de história social da crônica no Brasil*. CHALHOUB, Sidney, NEVES, Margarida de Souza, PEREIRA, Leonardo Affonso de Miranda. Campinas, SP: Editora Unicamp, 2005; SILVA, Maurício Pedro. *A Hélade e o Subúrbio: Confrontos Literários na Belle Époque Carioca*. São Paulo: Editora Universidade de São Paulo, 2006; p. 201-237; MACHADO, Ubiratan. *Coelho Netto (Melhores crônicas)*. São Paulo: Global, 2009; CARVALHO, Danielle Crepaldi. “*Arte*” em tempos de “*chirinola*”: a proposta de renovação teatral de Coelho Netto (1897-1898). (Dissertação de Mestrado) Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Instituto de Estudos da Linguagem, 2009; PINHO, Adeitalo Manoel. O sistema literário de A Conquista: nomes, leitura e números para um romance de Coelho Neto. *Revista Literatura em Debate*. V.3, n.4, 2009, p. 109-128; HANSEN, Patrícia Santos. América. Uma utopia republicana para crianças brasileiras. *Estudos Históricos*, Rio de Janeiro, vol.22, n. 44, julho-dezembro de 2009, p. 504-521; VENTURELLI, Vanessa Kitizo. “*Fagulhas*”: uma coluna de crônicas de Coelho Netto na Gazeta de Notícias (1897-1899). Faculdade de Ciências e Letras de Assis (Dissertação de Mestrado), Universidade Estadual Paulista, 2010; MAYDANA, Claudia Jane Duarte. *Decifrando os enigmas da modernidade em Esphinge, de Coelho Netto*. (Dissertação de Mestrado). Universidade Federal do Rio Grande – FURG, Instituto de Letras e Artes, 2010; VIEIRA, Cleber Santos. Transfigurações Cívicas: *A terra fluminense, Contos pátrios e A pátria brasileira*. *Revista IEB*, n. 50, set./mar., 2010, p. 79-102; CARVALHO, Claunísio Amorim. *O insigne pavilhão: nação e nacionalismo na obra do escritor Coelho Netto*. (Mestrado em História Social). Universidade Federal do Maranhão, 2012; PEREIRA, Leonardo Affonso de Miranda. Um sertanejo na capital federal: Coelho Netto e o Rio de Janeiro dos primeiros anos da República. *Acervo*, Rio de Janeiro, v. 28, n. 1, Jan./Jun. 2015, p. 54-66; among others.

⁹ Located at *Academia Brasileira de Letras do Rio de Janeiro (ABL / RJ)*, the Personal Archive of Coelho Netto, chair # 2, keeps, among several subjects, the “personal correspondence” of scholar Henrique Maximiano Coelho Netto, folder 25-1-24.

¹⁰ *Fundação Biblioteca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro (FBN/ RJ)* holds drawer 4, in the manuscripts section, with 535 documents – correspondence by the titular and by third parts about several subjects linked to nominations to *Academia Brasileira de Letras*, theater plays, literary meetings, collaboration in journals, publications, translations of his work.

¹¹ There are also some letters to/from Coelho Netto preserved at *Fundação Casa de Rui Barbosa*, some of them deal with subjects from National Defense League, with personal issues, from the time when he was a Federal Congressman, among other subjects. However, as for the current article, given the topic focused on his actions as director of the drama school, it was not necessary using these sources, because none of the missives in them dealt with the herein assessed topic.

director and professor at the addressed institution. It was done without losing track of the need to compare them to other documents that have helped better understanding affinities and differences in the cultural field. The pioneer studies by Elza Andrade (1996, 2009 and 2014) about the referred school, among others that have approached, or that were correlated to it, were taken as reference. The interpretation of these letters allowed inquiring: who did Coelho Netto write to and who did he get letters from? What was the content of these missives? When and where were they written? What can they tell about his administration at the drama school?

Thus, the aim of the present study is to introduce Coelho Netto from his epistolary writings. It will be done in a broad fashion to later focus his administration on the herein addressed school. The goal is to contribute to widen the knowledge about the history of this institution, the trajectory of this man who had his actions as teacher overshadowed in the education history due to his other facets as chronicler, poet, writer, politician and journalist.

A teacher among disperse letters

Keeping is different from hiding. Keeping consists in protecting an asset from time corrosion in order to better share it; it means preserving and tuning into life pieces that, due to time passing, should be wore, forgotten, destroyed, turned into garbage (MIGNOT and CUNHA, 2006, p. 41)

It is possible wandering that, for many years, Coelho Netto would have kept the letters in his green-letter folder¹². Assumingly, some others were kept in a paper basket, preserved in his office at 79 Roso Street, where he lived almost half of his life; where he had room to “preserve his documents, to make his image eternal and to prepare his legacy to the future” (MIGNOT, 2014, p. 214). Regardless of the place where they were protected and preserved, such documents allow foreseeing the action of this man of letters and his daily tasks in his multiple facets. Among such facets, one can observe those from the time he ran the Drama School, from his time as scholar, journalist, writer, congressman, but also from those that point towards events in his life as a father, friend and husband.

Who was this man who used to write and receive numerous letters? This is the first question that comes to mind when we lean over his vast correspondence, because we are not interested just in the approached subjects when we work with this type of writing. From the written culture viewpoint, as recalls Antonio Castillo Gomes (2017), it is necessary interpreting the practices, representations and use of writing letters, and it implies inquiring about who has written them, the context they were writing in and the motivations to write, send and read them.

Thus, it is worth initially thinking about the aspects of Coelho Netto’s life, without the intention to draw a biography. According to one of his biographers, his son ‘Paulo Coelho Netto’, the writer started his career as journalist and joined abolitionist and republican campaigns, mainly those set by the literary circuit that, later on, would launch The *Academia Brasileira de Letras*. This group comprised Lúcio de Mendonça, Luís Murat, José do Patrocínio, Olavo Bilac, among many others, when Coelho Netto returned to Rio de Janeiro in 1885, after he left the medical school and the law school in São Paulo (COELHO NETTO, Paulo, 1957). Coelho Netto may have gotten important positions due to social relationships set

¹² Located in Safe 49, under the custody of *FBN/RJ*, one finds the original green-leather folder for documents that have belonged to Coelho Netto; it has some words on a metal plate: “To Dr. Henrique Coelho Netto from the Israeli Youth Club. Rio, April 21st, 1926”.

after he married Maria Gabriela Brandão, the daughter of educator Alberto Brandão¹³, on July 24th, 1890 - Hermes da Fonseca¹⁴ was his best man. Among these positions, one finds Rio de Janeiro State's Government Secretary - public position he held up to 1891. His father in law had important participation in Coelho Netto's nomination to commissioned positions. This process can be observed in his correspondence at FBN, where Alberto Brandão asks to some acquaintances, who had outstanding positions in the political scene at the time, for a position to his son in law. The request was not always fulfilled¹⁵; however, it allowed him to get at least one managerial position, such as that of Government Secretary.

It was only at the age of 37 that Coelho Netto applied for a contest to get the position of Campinas Literature College Lens, which is nowadays known as *Colégio Culto à Ciência*; he got to be an official servant, but he only taught every once in a while, in the past, as described by biographer Paulo Coelho Netto (1957, p. 7). This teacher's arrival in Campinas, according to Lapa (1960), meant that the referred city counted on a renowned man in the country's literary life, since he had already published works such as *Miragem*, *Inverno em Flor*, *A Conquista*, *O Rajá de Pendjab*, besides novels, tales, chronicles, theater plays and more. The biographer also states that he would have passed through teaching, and occupied the position of Fine Arts lens, in Rio de Janeiro. The main reason for Coelho Netto's moving to Campinas lies on the creation of courses that have opened several professorships in the local college; his articles in journals and book selling were not enough to afford his family, as described by Paulo Coelho Netto (1957). It is important emphasizing that Campinas, back in the 1900, was a provincial town, without much attractions for those who were used to the urban pole in Rio de Janeiro. The historian finally discloses that contests at Campinas College used to call the attention of everybody in the city, "mainly due to the names disputing the vacant seats" (LAPA, 1960, p. 28)¹⁶.

Coelho Netto was founding member of a guild in Campinas College, he named it "Center for Sciences, Letters and Arts" – he only remained as orator of this guild during the first Direction Board, in 1901¹⁷. He was also the editor of *Revista do Centro de Ciências, Letras e Artes de Campinas*, which was launched in 1902. This journal focused on showing Campinas City, *Centro de Ciências, Letras e Artes* (the original guild), and the founder and maintainer members of this institution and of the journal itself. Lapa (1960) highlights that the aim of Coelho Netto at the Sciences Center was to turn it into a house of culture, "at the service of the people of Campinas,

¹³ About Alberto Brandão, see: BESEN, Danielly Samara. *Os deslembados e seus apelos: uma história da profissão docente pelo viés do associativismo* (Santa Catarina/Brasil – final do século XIX início do XX). Tese de doutorado. UDESC, 2021.

¹⁴ Hermes Rodrigues da Fonseca (RS, 1855 – RJ, 1923) was the nephew of Marshal Deodoro da Fonseca – the first president of the Brazilian Republic (1889). He studied at RJ Military School; became general in 1900, and marshal in 1906; he took office as Ministry of War during Affonso Pena's administration (1906 – 1909); and was elected president of the Republic (1910-1914). In: *Dicionário Histórico Biográfico Brasileiro pós 1930*. 2ª ed. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. FGV, 2001. Available at http://cpdoc.fgv.br/producao/dossies/FatosImagens/biografias/hermes_da_fonseca [Accessed on January 20th, 2021].

¹⁵ In a letter found at FBN, from Serzedelo Correia (1858 – 1932) to Alberto Brandão (1848 – 1897), without a date in it (but based on the clues and stamp from the Office of the Justice Ministry, assumingly, this letter was written at some time close to 1892), the Ministry of Justice, at that time, informs the educators that the nomination of Coelho Netto would only happen if he would subject himself to a public contest, in other words, he refused to support him for a commissioned position to Alberto Brandão's son in law.

¹⁶ The following names disputed the Literature seat: Alberto Faria (1869, RJ – 1925, RJ) - journalist, professor, critic, folklorist and historian -, Antônio da Rocha Batista Pereira (1880 – 1960) – who was Rui Barbosa's son in law -, and Coelho Netto. Although test grades had favored another candidate, Coelho Netto won the contest and got the Literature seat in the college. According to Alberto Faria's biography, which is available at the ABL's website, he was the one ranking the first position in the contest (LAPA, 1960 apud SILVA, 2017).

¹⁷ Some missives found at FBN show Coelho Netto's moves in his sociability networks in order to get articles and/or other publications from friends to this magazine, such as the case of the letter from João Ribeiro to Coelho Netto, from May 14th, 1915, asking him to collaborate with *Revista do Centro de Campinas* [FBN].

rather than just into a closed Academy” (idem, p. 35). Accordingly, one of the propositions by Coelho Netto was to have this guild providing free classes of disciplines such as linear drawing, notions of architecture, choral singing, aesthetics and rudiments of history of arts.

Coelho Netto fought on behalf of both arts and the nation during his time at Campinas College. Arts, as the result from culture democratization, is what he expected to achieve through classes taught in outdoor places and provided for free to students who could not afford them, so they could have contact with arts. He therefore intended to contribute to beautifying the city of Campinas so that it could “civilize” itself according to European standards.

Another strategy adopted by Coelho Netto to legitimize himself as intellectual lied on joining associations, guilds, literary clubs, educational facilities and other diversified activities to broaden his sociability networks, “within a society where patronage was natural and expected at the time to exert actions for a specific group or for oneself”, as pointed out by Santos (2011, p. 77). This author discloses that, at several times, such a relationship was used when one intended to get a favor, a new job position or to make alliances. Thus, the letters written by individuals were one of the ways to perceive bonds that were set throughout time.

After his experience as associated professor at Campinas College, between 1902 and 1904, he returned to Rio de Janeiro in search for his professional and financial stability. He got a seat as Literature Lens at the External National College (current *Colégio Pedro II*); he became a fulltime professor in 1907, and became associated professor in this institution, without the need of a public contest, in 1909. Besides all these activities, he also transited in politics. A confidential letter from Coelho Netto to Rui Barbosa enables observing that he had the desire of joining the political environment in the capital of the Republic since 1899:

My dear master

There is no doubt of the boldness [...], I, without any other help rather than my name, ask for significant help from the steep strong feather pen, to outspread as the tale of a star, and to support as slab for many causes, that I consider dignifying by coming from my understanding to request help to the one who favors justice. Who am I to, at the political dawn, get help from a wizard like Your Honor? Outstanding presumption, might say Your Honor, and I will reply – unmeasurable will. Will of giving more strength to the doctrine I outspread with the feather pen, your attention, even if there are reasons for more, will put ahead barriers that mock on somebody’s suffering, on the one who took courage from indifference itself, and who chose to boost whenever it would be wiser to retreat. Man of letters, and nothing else (he is too little on this earth), I present my candidacy to voters in the 1st District for the position of municipal mayor, by giving as program, what actually seems a division and large one. [...] ‘I will honor my name’ [...] these words carry along great responsibility because they bring along the thoughtless dowry of a son, I would not play it if I did not have as caution, my conscience. I come before Your Honor to ask for my nomination to be honored with one [...] from such an enlightened master, I will even get to know proudly about my defeat and, whatever says Your Honor, I will attend my Curic Catechism of the new life that [...] for love to my ideas, which are the ones of an artist.

I reverently sign

Admirer of Your Honor

Henrique Coelho Netto. (January 17th, 1899, FCRB)

Figueiredo (2011), by dealing with the controversy about building the Municipal Theater, in Rio de Janeiro, highlights that it was Artur Azevedo who fought for it, he proposed Coelho Netto's candidacy as city mayor to make it possible having a political mobilization to turn his dream into reality, since he advocated for nationalizing theater in Brazil. In 1909, at the same year the Municipal Theater was launched, Coelho Netto was elected for the National Congress (by Maranhão State). He was reelected for three consecutive mandates. In order not to get a fourth mandate, he took office as General Secretary of the National Defense League - he performed remarkable actions in it¹⁸.

Saved letters

Coelho Netto was always grateful in his letters, he used to send books and greetings along it, he also used to make invitations, to express disagreements, to make recommendations and warnings, to regret (whenever necessary), to provide information, to make requests and to excuse himself (whenever necessary); it was so, because his correspondence was not homogeneous. There were different types of letters: official, public, private and intimate ones, a fact that forced the adoption of different discourse types and epistolary practices. According to Venancio (2002), letters can be categorized into three groups in order to better define their subjects; moreover, they could have enlightened us about the present study. The first group encompasses missives featured as the expression of friendships and political prestige; they can be subdivided into social (those comprising Christmas and Holidays messages, greetings and salutations) and political subjects (discussions on elections, opinions, among others). The second category comprised ordinary letters about representations of daily tasks; they describe the acquisition of necessary goods (mainly books), and the ones dealing with daily subjects (payments, loans, lawsuits, among others). The third, and last, category encompassed letters featured by the aforementioned author as those regarding readers' community and the groups of exchanges the writer belonged to. Among these last ones, it was possible finding those concerning intellectual matters (they deal with books, the request for articles, requests for book donations to libraries, invitations for writing prefaces, among others) and thank-you letters (mainly for books sent out as gifts).

The map of letter under *FBN's* Manuscripts Section custody showed that the amount of letters sent out by Coelho Netto was lower than that received by him in this institution – he sent out 47 letters and received 395. On the other hand, his personal archive as scholar, which was found at the *Academia Brasileira de Letras* had some missives in Series 1 (Personal correspondence), as well as in Series 3 (Institutional documents) – Series 3 letters addressed subjects related to his activities at *ABL*¹⁹.

¹⁸ “It was by taking part in this league, which was formed by fellows who have fought in favor for their common goals, such as Olavo Bilac, Pedro Lessa, Felix Pacheco, Miguel Calmon, Rui Barbosa, among others, that Coelho Netto foresaw the chance of turning Brazil into a modernized and civilized country, therefore, it was necessary struggling for education. By reaching the youth, we would be reaching a promising future to Brazil. Among the goals advocated by the National Defense League, they were outspreading a military institution; developing civism, the cult to heroism, activating studies on the Brazilian History and on Brazilian traditions, promoting the learning of the mother language; fighting illiteracy, among others. If all these goals were accomplished, Brazil would be then civilized” (SILVA, 2017, p. 192). See the letter between Coelho Netto and Rui Barbosa at FCRB's manuscripts section – both writers deal with several subjects, including the National Defense League and Coelho Netto's actions as its General Secretary.

¹⁹ Furthermore, there is the third possibility of finding Coelho Netto's letters in this institution, which lies on seeking letters in the personal archives of other scholars in this same institution, such as the archives of Machado

Of the 395 missives found at *FBN*, which composed Coelho Netto's passive correspondence, some suggest that all communication bonds would have been started by the writer as response to previous letters addressed by him. Thus, these replies became small pieces of a puzzle about to be interrogated and interpreted.

Among addressees one finds names that have occupied outstanding positions in the country's political and cultural life, such as Alberto de Oliveira²⁰, Euclides da Cunha²¹, Emídio Dantas Barreto²², Olavo Bilac²³, Medeiros e Albuquerque²⁴, João Ribeiro²⁵, Luís Murat²⁶, Paulo Barreto²⁷, among others. Their letters concerned several matters, such as election at the *Academia Brasileira de Letras*, translations of Coelho Netto's work into other languages, personal affairs and some letter commenting his books.

It is possible observing some difference between the saving of Coelho Netto's active and passive correspondence. The number of received letters is larger than the number sent out ones, since he was concerned about keeping them; moreover, his heirs took care of their preservation. They have embodied the mission of giving a new destiny to these documents, as highlighted by Schapochnik:

de Assis, Luís Murat, José Veríssimo, Mário de Alencar, Afonso Celso, Ramiz Galvão, Goulart de Andrade, Múcio Leão and Olavo Bilac.

²⁰ Antônio Mariano Alberto de Oliveira (RJ, 1857 – RJ, 1937) was a pharmacist, professor and poet, as well as founding member of *ABL*. Available at <https://www.academia.org.br/academicos/alberto-de-oliveira/biografia> [Access on Feb. 08th, 2021].

²¹ Euclides Rodrigues da Cunha (RJ, 1866 – RJ, 1909) graduated as military engineer and had bachelor's degree in Mathematics, Physical and Natural Sciences, at the military school. He was member of *ABL*, *IHGB* partner and professor of Logic in Pedro II College. For further information about the life of this man of letters, see: VENTURA, Roberto. *Euclides da Cunha: esboço biográfico*. Rio de Janeiro: Companhia das Letras, 2019; ABREU, Regina. *O enigma de Os Sertões*. Rio de Janeiro: Funarte: Rocco, 1998.

²² Emídio Dantas Barreto (PE, 1850 – RJ, 1931) was military, historian, journalist, novel and theater play writer, *ABL* member. Available at: <https://www.academia.org.br/academicos/dantas-barreto/biografia> [Accessed on February 08, 2021].

²³ Olavo Braz Martins dos Guimarães Bilac (RJ, 1865 – RJ, 1918) was journalist, poet, teaching inspector. Furthermore, he founded *ABL*. He was nominated official of the Interior Secretariat of Rio de Janeiro State; teaching inspector of the Federal District; delegate at diplomatic Conferences; Secretary of the Federal District's mayor in 1907; founder member of the National Defense League, along with Pedro Lessa, Miguel Calmon, among others, in 1916. More about Olavo Bilac, see: GARCIA, Lucia. *Para uma história da belle époque – coleção de cardápios de Olavo Bilac*. Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Oficial do Estado S/A; Academia Brasileira de Letras, 2011.

²⁴ José Joaquim de Campos da Costa de Medeiros e Albuquerque (PE, 1867 – RJ, 1934) was journalist, professor, politician, tale writer, poet, orator, novel and theater play writer, essayist memoirist. More about Medeiros e Albuquerque, see: VARELLA, Jacqueline de Albuquerque. *Instruir e Civilizar: Medeiros e Albuquerque entre práticas e redes de sociabilidade na Primeira República*. Dissertação (Mestrado) – Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Faculdade de Educação, 2018.

²⁵ João Batista Ribeiro de Andrade Fernandes (SE, 1860 – RJ, 1934) was professor, journalist, painter, writer, philosopher, historian, *ABL* and *IHGB* member. For more information on João Ribeiro, see: HANSEN, P. S. *Feições & fisionomia: A História do Brasil de João Ribeiro*. Rio de Janeiro: Access, 2000; RODRIGUES, Rogério Rosa. *Nos desvãos da história: João Ribeiro*. Jundiaí: Paco Editorial, 2015; RODRIGUES, Rogério Rosa. *Traços biográficos de João Ribeiro ou as muitas faces de João Viva a São João. História (São Paulo) v.32, n.1, p. 377-400, jan/jun 2013*.

²⁶ Luís Morton Barreto Murat (RJ, 1861 – RJ, 1929) was journalist, poet, philosopher and politician. Available at: <https://www.academia.org.br/academicos/luis-murat/biografia> [Access on Feb. 08, 2021].

²⁷ João Paulo Emílio Cristóvão dos Santos Coelho Barreto (RJ, 1881 – RJ, 1921) was known for his literary nickname: João do Rio, he was journalist, tale writer, chronicler and theater play writer. For more information on the chronicler, see: SOUSA, Patrícia de Castro. *João do Rio: o repórter com alma de flâneur conduz a crônica-reportagem na belle époque tropical*. (Dissertação de Mestrado). Universidade de Santa Maria. Programa de Pós-graduação em Letras, 2009.

From those who leave, oftentimes we say, remains the memories. However, we well know, memories and inheritances, whenever it is the case, are objects to be shared. [...] inevitably, some assets, because they are covered by a symbolic and affective dimension, stay under the custody of the guardian of “the family’s museum” [...] thus, the role played by the guardian is similar to that of an archive stuntman who gathers and provides pertinence order to the inventory. (1998, p. 460)

Assumingly, the guardian of Coelho Netto’s documents after his death was his son Paulo Coelho Netto who, for years, collected his father’s belongings to publish his biography, to make sure that his memoirs would be eternalized and never forgotten. The significant amount of letters found in his passive correspondence at *ABL*’s Scholar Archive made it possible concluding that it regards Coelho Netto’s concern with keeping them. Assumingly, he filed them, himself, and it allows seeing him as a great paper collector. After all, filing one’s own life is an autobiographical exercise; the individual exists to a future reader through its papers [be it authorized or not] (ARTIÈRES, 1998) – it evidences that Coelho Netto wished to perpetuate his legacy also through his letters.

The active correspondence by Coelho Netto, as previously observed, was preserved by third parties; it is so because, most of the time – when there was not a copy of the document – only the person who has received the letter could decide what to do with it: keep it, throw it away, tear it apart, strike it out, reply it, among others. In this case, among the numerous letters sent out by Coelho Netto, approximately 137 were saved at *FBN*, *ABL* and *FCRB*. Many might have gotten lost by their senders; some others are disperse in saving institutions, as already mentioned; therefore, they were already subjected to a selection process. Accordingly, deepening the reading and interpretation of these letters is essential to better understand the herein assessed man. Thus, it is also necessary to deconstruct the current logic observed in saving institutions to understand this man and his epistolary writing:

Despite what sometimes seem to imagine beginners, documents do not just come out, here and there, due to [unknown] mysterious decrees of the gods. Their presence and absence in such archives, like libraries, in this soil, result from human causes that do not scape, in any case, the analysis by technical exercises of those who touch, themselves, the most intimate sides of life in the past, because, what is put at stake, is nothing less than passing memories through generations. (BLOCH, 2001, p. 83)

Among the general missives exchanged by Coelho Netto, it was possible identifying the ones concerning issues at the Municipal Drama School, from the time he was its director and Dramatic Literature and History professor. Thus, it allowed reflecting about either the addressees of his letters and his senders, as well as their aims and writing contexts, and the relationship among Coelho Netto, his interlocutors and the referred school.

Between salutations and courtesies: Brazil gains a theater school

Snr, Dr. Henrique Coelho Netto,

After getting the best impression possible of the public test at the end of the school year in the Municipal Theater, in December 24 (p.) I am pleased to fulfil my duty to thank you for the expertise and extreme love [with which] you have been managing this important art institute, and it proves my correct action in giving you this hard task.

I ask you to extend my compliments to your honorable assistants in the body of professors, as well as to the students for the commitment they had shown.

Best Regards

Bento Ribeiro. (January 1, 1912, *FBN*)

Bento Ribeiro²⁸ sent a letter to Coelho Netto, as shown above, to compliment him for his competence to manage the Municipal Drama School after two years in charge of it. He also asked Netto to extend his compliments to teachers and students in the school. At that time, the Drama School, based on its regulations – set by the director, office personnel (secretary, office boy and servants) and professors: João Ribeiro (Prosody), Alberto de Oliveira (Speech class), Cristiano de Souza and Eduardo Victorino (art of acting), Fernando Magalhães (Physiology of passions) and Coelho Netto (Theater and literature history, and institution director)²⁹.

Despite the compliments, the fight for keeping the school running and as disciplined as he wanted it to be, was not an easy task, and it almost made him quit, as shown in a letter sent to mayor Serzedelo Corrêa on September 20, 1910, few months after its foundation. He quitted his position and complained about the bad management by Mr. Guilherme da Rosa, who was a businessman in charge of managing the Municipal Theater, at the time – he did not respond to the requirements by Netto about the theater school's demands. However, Bento Ribeiro did not accept his request, and chose to cancel the contract with Serzedelo Corrêa – right after that, he issued Decree n. 823, of art. 4, from June 1911, which deliberated about the school's regulations (ANDRADE, 1996).

The institution also took long to have a permanent head office, it first worked at Rio de Janeiro Municipal Theater; later on, it was moved to the Education Institute, to a room borrowed from Rio Branco Baron, few years later. Besides, similar to many other teaching institutions that embody different names throughout time, depending on political interests and education reforms, it received many different names, such as Coelho Netto School, Theater and Cinema School, Martins Pena Theater School and, nowadays – because it is part of the FAETEC networks -, it is known as Martins Pena State Technical School of Theater (MIGNOT, 2014)

²⁸ Bento Manuel Ribeiro Carneiro Monteiro (RS, 1856 – RJ, 1921) was military, mayor of the Federal District in 1910; he was the successor of Serzedelo Correia and replaced by Rivadávia Correia at the end of Hermes da Fonseca's administration, in 1914. (MESQUITTA, 2015). To get to know more about his mandate as mayor, see: <http://cpdoc.fgv.br/sites/default/files/verbetes/primeira-republica/RIBEIRO,%20Bento.pdf> [Accessed on February 08, 2021].

²⁹ Besides Coelho Netto, this institution was also the house of other directors, namely: Viana, Oduvaldo Viana, Klaus Viana, José Wilker, Sergio Sanz, Anselmo Vasconcellos and Marília Trindade Barboza. Of those who were also part of the group of professors, besides the ones already cited in the text, it was possible finding: Cecília Meirelles, Viriato Correia, Delorges Caminha, Heloisa Maranhão, Gustavo Dória, Arlindo Rodrigues, Alexandre Trik, Fernando Pamplona, Junito de Souza Brandão, Aderbal Freire Junior, Alcione Araújo, Paulo José, Sergio Sanz, Edu Lobo, Denise Stocklos, among others. (SEPÚLVEDA, s/d).

Figueredo points out that the history of the Drama School was linked to the Municipal Theater's construction, which was born "amidst polemic and was far from counting on unanimity, but impact; once built, it ended up to silence – or at least to intimidate – the critics" (2011, p. 46). This author highlights that, based on João do Rio, the Municipal Theater had provided the city with "its most beautiful building"; therefore, this author was favorable to its construction, which had caused so much controversy and divided the opinions of Rio de Janeiro's residents:

Part of this past started to fall at the pace of the fast urban renovation taking place in the city in the 20th century. By witnessing these demolitions with ambiguous feelings, Rio de Janeiro's residents were divided into progressists and nostalgic. Olavo Bilac definitely was not included in this last group. 'The city is still witnessing the demolitions' he celebrated, when he wrote a chronicle to *Gazeta de Notícias*, which was published in 1903. This chronicle registered, with some satisfaction, the arrival of that overwhelming wave over the old square site: 'now the already gone Guarda Velha street starts to be set free from the rush. Perhaps there are those who are sorry for the fall of that horrible building – because, in this extravagant world, there is no lack of those who like what is abominable. I, myself, confess that each blow of the demolition pickaxes makes my heart relieved. There is no one who loves traditions more than me, in this earth. But tradition, does not need to be materialized in horrible houses in order to live forever in bended streets, in examples of teratological architecture'. (FIGUEIREDO, 2011, p. 48)

Similar to Olavo Bilac and João do Rio, Coelho Netto also shared the idea that the Municipal Theater construction would be important to invigorate and modernize Rio de Janeiro City, which counted on few spectacle houses - Lírico, Apolo, Recreio, Carlos Gomes, Pálace, São Pedro, Exposição and Lucinda – for its population of 800,000 inhabitants, as recalls Andrade when he explains that, at the time it was created, the Federal Capital was dominated by a French profile that used to inform and conform "the ideas about literature education, fashion and leisure. The re-urbanization, itself, introduced the *art nouveau* architecture. But, simultaneously, there was the growing nationalist action in course since 1890, which mainly aimed at valuing the Brazilian man" (2009, p. 4).

At that time, Coelho Netto and Arthur Azevedo, among others, did not get tired of calling attention, in the press, to "the decadence of the national theater, for the need of creating a Brazilian group and a dramatic art school, when, assumingly, going to the theater was one of the best events in the city" (ANDRADE, 2009, p.4). In order to respond to the criticism he used to make about how actors were recruited to act in a play in Rio de Janeiro, Coelho Netto invited amateur artists to act in his play *Pelo Amor!* (1898); these artists were mainly students in higher education institutions and in guilds for amateur arts (CARVALHO, 2008).

It is in this very historical and social context that the Drama School was launched through Decree n. 1.167, from January 13, 1908, in Rio de Janeiro City – it was bond to the construction of the Municipal Theater:

Article 9 – The mayor will sponsor the creation of a drama school destined to studies on the Portuguese language, proper pronunciation, declamation and theater practices. The classes will be managed by professional experts and they will be provided to both sexes, for free. (ANDRADE, 1996, p. 73)

Based on Paulo Coelho Netto (1957), Coelho Netto's nomination as school principal resulted from his success in launching the Municipal Theater - this event counted on the presentation of *Bonança*, one of Netto's theater plays. The school foundation only took place two years later, on April 15, 1910, when Coelho Netto made his first speech, which was later published along with other of his speeches and conferences, in the book *Palestras da tarde* (1911), where he addressed the ends of the school by advocating that:

Here, the student will come to learn and reproduce human emotions, from laughing, in comedy, to the hallucinating and disfigured image in the tragedy; they will reflect like a mirror and, by reproducing happiness or suffering, they will be, at the same time, the interpret of our dramatic poetry, for so long humiliated, embarrassed by the obscene cord; they will refine the words in our prosody without, in any case, sacrificing the vernacular, but they will refine it in their speech; they will exercise the art of scenes by moving with elegance, by listening with discretion, by taking a short cut with a purpose, by talking with eloquence, by being aware of all attitudes, without compromising grace with the rough moves of the *pastran*, or by affecting, to the ridiculous, the position and ways; finally, they will have general ideas about the beauty, and will get to know the history, of theater, from is great Dionysiac days to the fever of the intense life of this century. It was time for us to have this didascaly (COELHO NETTO, 1911, p. 135).

In this publication, Coelho Netto also advocated that founding a school mean building the future, because he believed that it was at school that a people could be turned into a nation. He has justified that, although the school - about to be launched - was not of the kind that “starts intelligence to treat the letters” (idem), when he referred to elementary and basic education, his recommendation would be to eliminate them, in order to take the path to “knowledge of the soul” (idem). He adds to it by saying that governments should salute the launching of schools, because their construction meant prosperity and the defense of the nation.

Still about this matter, Marta M. Chagas Carvalho points out that the school model in place during the Republic, represented a new order to escape the darkness, obscurantism and oppression marked by the regime preceding it, and a bright future when knowledge and citizenship would walk together to accomplish progress. It was necessary having the school to allow seeing “how signs of the implementation of the new order, [...] given the importance of events at school launching [...] the launching pace would replace the implementing gesture” (1989, p.23). Accordingly, building a formation school for actors would also be a reform in the Brazilian theater, which was marked by the obscene theater that aimed the profit oftentimes pointed out by Coelho Netto in his discourses. According to him, the lack of motivation of few artists, who struggled for this cause in favor of art, gave way to “invaders” – he herein referred to foreigners who were in charge of theater companies in the country.

Thus, the role of actors would then be to interpret poetry, which, in its turn, would interpret the people, in such a fashion to interpret the time, by believing that it was the “life [shown] at the theater under more or lesser intense lightening – sometimes pale, sometimes

crimson, sometimes purple, but ways Life” (COELHO NETTO, 1911, p. 138). The enthusiasm for education observed among intellectuals during the First Republic, just like Coelho Netto, was substantiated by the very belief that it was through education that all issues of society would be solved. He also advocated for other writings, such as chronicles in journals, didactic books, children books, and others destined to the public. Thus,

The role of education was oversized: it aimed at giving shape to the amorphous country, by transforming its inhabitants into a people, by vitalizing the national organism, by building the nation. It was based on forging the authoritarian political project: educating was the way to mold the people, which was a shapeless and playable matter, set as the will of Order and Progress by a self-declared elite group that held the authority to promote it. (CARVALHO, 1989, p. 9)

Other missives that deserve emphasis, in order to go further on the ways drew by Coelho Netto in the Drama school, are the ones sent by João Ribeiro, which were received by the director and concerned Ribeiro’s replacement in the discipline “Prosody” (because of a trip) and another letter about a surgery he would be subjected to, among other issues³⁰. Silva and Clemente (2014) suggest that there is a reason why João Ribeiro would have accepted to take the Prosody seat at the theater school; it involved his relationship with Netto, and it may have been disclosed in his letters. In one of his letters, he addressed his license because of the surgery, and it is possible observing the informality in their communication:

My dear Coelho Netto,
I come to ask for a dam license for 25 to 30 days. I have a big bladder stone, but I did not know about it, although the suffering I have been through. Dr. Alberto Ramos determined that must not wait to go to [...] hospital (Passagem street) where I must be operated soon, because I’m facing the risk of a deadly infection.
I will go to the hospital this week and the rest depends on God’s mercy.
Best regards,
João R. (03/23rd/1913, FBN)

We can find six parts, such as the sender’s address, the addressee’s address, date, greetings, the text of the letter and the farewells, “*que acreditan la función comunicativa depositada en la producción epistolar y la sacralización de cuanto rodea dicha actividad*” (CASTILLO GÓMEZ, 2002, p. 15). In this letter we observed that the professor used an informal language, as he refers to Coelho Netto as “My dear”, in a lower quality paper, or without stamps to compose his message.

Based on Cunha, language in the letters, mainly in the personal ones, “lacks formality or fancy words” (2015, p. 279). It is similar to a dialogue between friends, and shows freedom of ideas and feelings. Therefore, we can say that letters between João Ribeiro and Coelho Netto were exchanged between friends, because the sender could ask for escaping work due to an illness, and wrote to Coelho Netto, because he was his boss:

³⁰ About the relationship between João Ribeiro and Coelho Netto, check on SILVA, Alexandra Lima da, CLEMENTE, Marcela Guimarães. Teatro das Letras: papéis de João Ribeiro para Coelho Netto. In: MIGNOT, Ana Chrystina V., SILVA, Alexandra L. da, SILVA, Marcelo G. da. *Outros tempos, outras escolas*. Rio de Janeiro: Quartet, 2014.

My Coelho Netto,
You arrive today at dusk; and I cannot go meet you. At [...] o'clock starts a small soiree in our house, where I have to host many people. We are celebrating Saint Cecily's day [...]
We will meet you and Gaby, later, who must be monopolized by such [...] kids.
Best regards.
João
P.S.
At the Drama School, we are finishing the exams. It went well.
(November 22, 1913, *FBN*)

The *post scriptum*, similar to all other elements composing a letter, demands interpretation, and, in this particular one, the fact that at that moment Netto was abroad is noticeable. Two notes published in the newspaper *O Imparcial*, on May 3, 1913, point out that the Drama School director would go to Europe and that he would temporarily leave João Ribeiro in his place:

honorably federal congressman Henrique Coelho Netto will leave to Europe, on the 27th of the current month, will board the German transatlantic "Sierra Nevada".

Coelho Netto has not been well lately, and due to recommendations by his doctor, and by two of his closest friends and admirers, he decided to take this trip, which will be, as we believe, very fruitful at giving him back his best health condition.

Along with him will also go his careful wife, Madam Gaby Coelho Netto, who is an ornament in the high spheres of Rio de Janeiro society. To both, we respectfully anticipate the best wishes of happiness.

Throughout this whole month, maybe at the 27th, will departure to Europe, Dr. Coelho Netto, director of the Municipal Drama School.

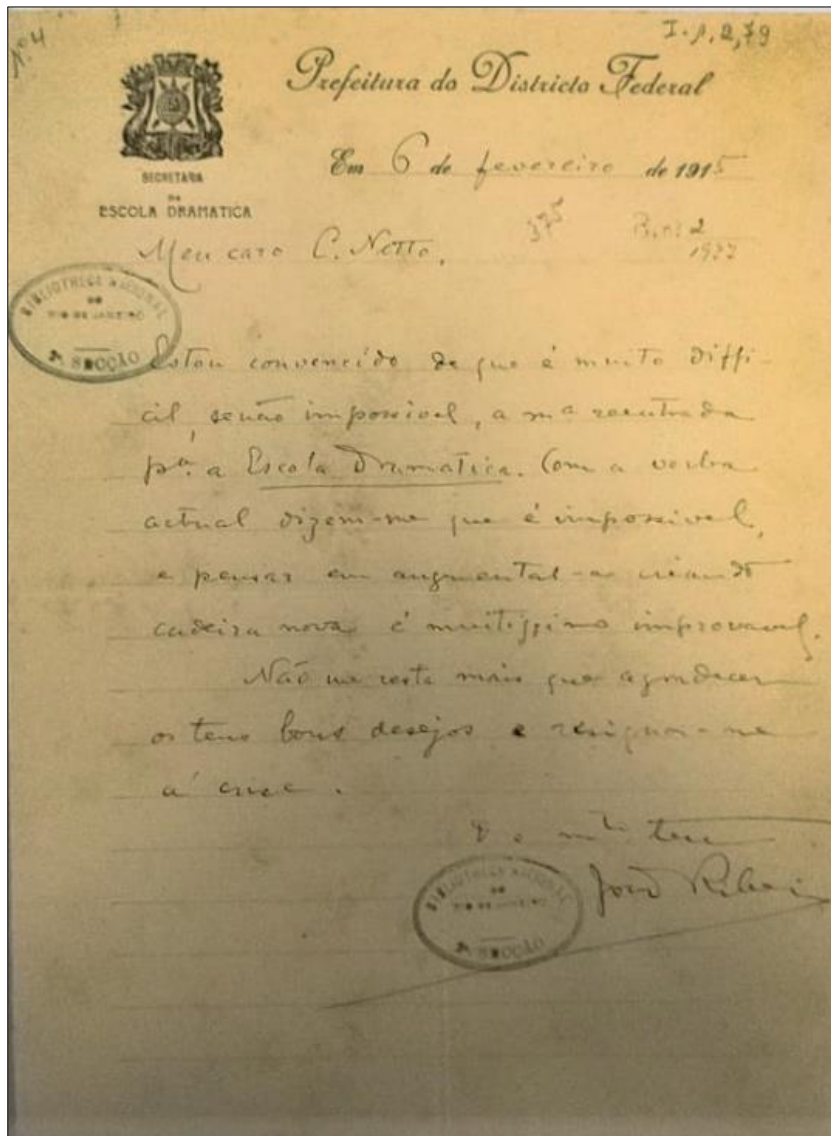
The honorably scholar, due to medical recommendations, will visit a water station in Vichy, along with his wife.

Throughout the absence of Dr. Coelho Netto, one of the professors at the Drama School will run the school.

It has been said that Dr. João Ribeiro will be the chosen one, and he will also teach the theater history course.

When he comes back from Vichy, we know that Dr. Coelho Netto, and Dr. Oliveira Passos, the director of the Municipal Theater, will, based on General Bento Ribeiro, seriously discuss the ultimate organization of the national theater. (*O IMPARCIAL*, ed. 00150, May 03, 1913, p. 8, Digital Newspaper Library of *FBN*)

Later on, due to a trip to Europe, João Ribeiro once again writes to his 'director' friend, on April 30, 1914, and, at this time, he requests to be exonerated from his position. He was sure about moving out to Switzerland, and that is why he wrote to his "boss, friend and excellent companion". When he came back to Brazil, due to the war, João Ribeiro tried to find a way to return to the Drama School, because - in a letter dated back to February 06, 1915 - the former professor of the "Prosody" seat stated to be convinced that the current budget of the school would not allow his hiring for a new seat in the institution.

Figure 2. Letter from João Ribeiro to Coelho Netto, February 02, 1915

Source: Manuscripts Section, FBN

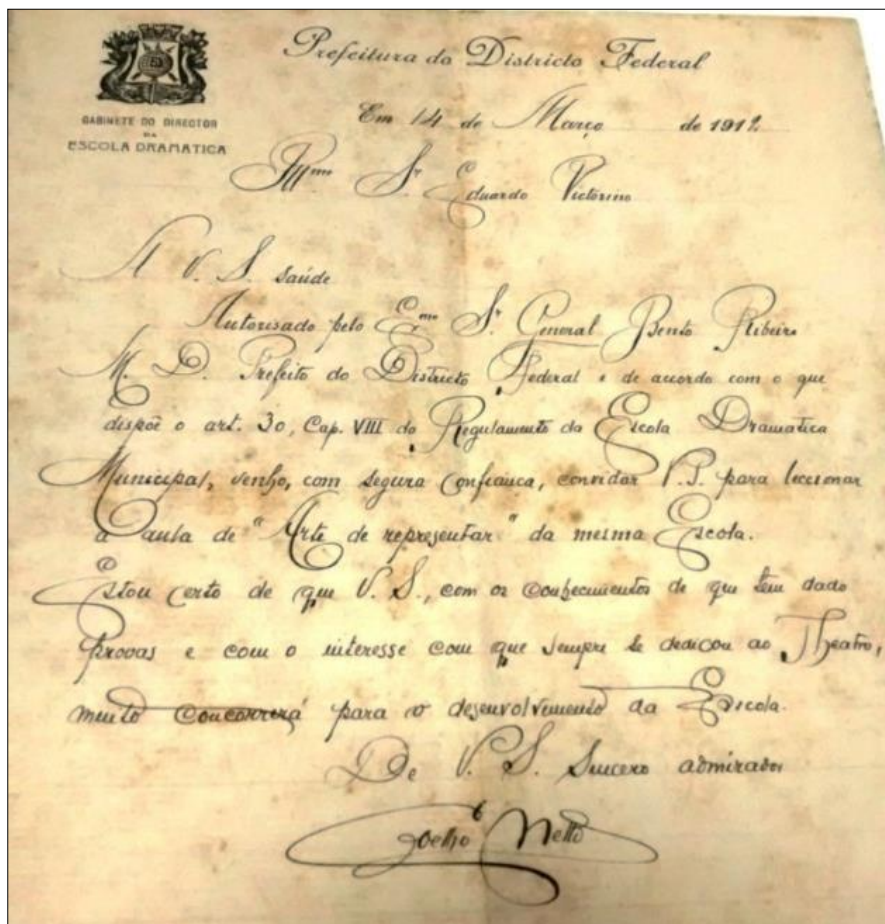
He ends the letter by regretting that he cannot do much than being grateful for the best regards from his friend and accepting the crisis, as it can be observed in Figure 2. When João Ribeiro came back to Brazil, he was longing for a new seat at the Drama School, because, assumingly, he knew that he was replaced by José Oiticica³¹, who was invited by Coelho Netto to manage the ‘Prosody’ seat. In a sign of gratitude, in a letter, professor Oiticica replied:

³¹ José Rodrigues Leite and Oiticica (MG, 1882– RJ, 1957) was a philosopher and professor, who started teaching at the Drama School in 1914. In 1917, he was nominated Portuguese Professor at Pedro II School. He taught Portuguese Philology at Hamburg University, Germany, between 1929 and 1930. Later on, he also taught at the Federal District University. He published *Princípios e fins do programa comunista-anarquista* (1919), *A doutrina anarquista ao alcance de todos*, *Estudos de fonologia* (1916), *Do método no estudo das línguas sul-americanas* (1930), *Roteiro de fonética fisiológica*, a technique of verse and diction, and *A teoria da correlação* (1955). Available at: http://cpdoc.fgv.br/producao/dossies/AEraVargas1/biografias/jose_oiticica [Accessed on February 8, 2021].

Illustrious Director of the Drama School, I greet your eminence.
 Deeply filled with the honorable invitation made by your eminence to manage the Prosody seat at the Drama School, in order to replace professor João Ribeiro, a reply to your eminence to thank your trust on me and to make myself available to take this noble effort, and to do my best not to lose such high incumbency.
 I am waiting for your eminence's orders.
 I subscribe myself
 Admired and grateful
 José Oiticica. (May 04, 1914, *FBN*)

On the one hand, João Ribeiro and Coelho Netto letters showed words exchanged between friends, but the letter from José Oiticica will point out the distance between them, given the formal attitude used by the sender who, in 1917, was nominated Portuguese Professor of Pedro II School. Coelho Netto was available for the school at that time, but he was still bond to the institution, and it indicates that the sociability networks among professors remained in both institutions.

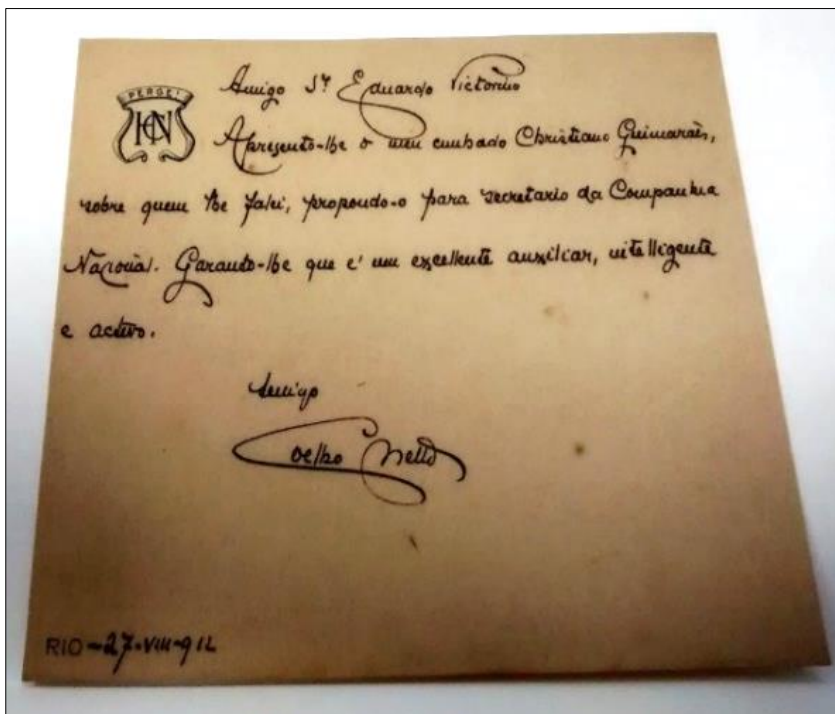
Figure 3. Letter from Coelho Netto to Eduardo Victorino, March 14, 1912



Source: Personal Archive of scholar Coelho Netto/ ABL

The same type of formality in the letter from Oiticica was observed in letters Coelho Netto sent to Eduardo Victorino³² - who, later, published a systematized material about what he taught in his classes; it was called *Compêndio da Arte de Representar* (1912)³³, it was reedited and broadened in 1916, and published by the name *Para ser ator* – to invite him to be the professor of the “Art of Acting” seat. It is interesting noticing the fancy language used by Coelho Netto, and designed handwriting and the formal treatment: “Illustrious Eduardo Victorino”, “Illustrious General Bento Ribeiro”, Your Eminence, besides the school’s letterhead, most precisely, that of the “Director’s Office”, on the top of the letter one sees “Federal District City Hall”. It points out that the letter could be an official one, i.e., a managerial letter to represent the contract sealed among the director, Coelho Netto and professor Eduardo Victorino.

Figure 4. Letter to Eduardo Victorino, August 08, 1912



Source: Personal Archive of the scholar Coelho Netto / ABL

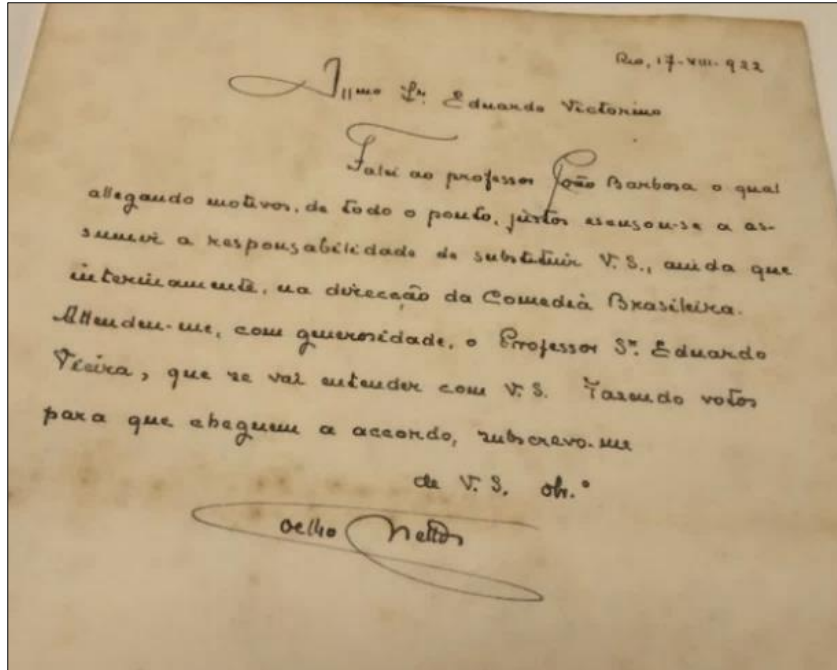
We have found, in this same archive, other letters from Coelho Netto, sent to this same addressee, as we will see next. Based on the date, it is possible seeing that Eduardo Victorino was already working as professor at the Drama School, and on the apparent format of the writing – lesser formal – point towards the fact that Coelho Netto did not communicate as a director, but as a friend. Among the missives located in the general inventories, we could find some letters where Coelho Netto presented someone to the addressee, as shown in the card of Figure 4, with the initials of his name in the letterhead – he sometimes asked and sometimes provided a favor to someone. In this case, Coelho Netto introduced Christiano Guimarães to Eduardo Victorino, he proposed that his

³² Eduardo Victorino (1869, Portugal – 1949, RJ) was a businessman, author and director of theater plays. He was hired by Rio de Janeiro City Hall to sponsor spectacles at the Municipal Theater due to the crisis created by manager Guilherme Da Rosa, in 1912. (ANDRADE, 1996)

³³ This book “is composed of 115 notes, most of them are short, and teach basic notions, but most of the time they regard extremely complex practices” (ANDRADE, 1996, p. 94). We can find this book at *FBN*, in the General Pieces section.

brother in law could fulfil the vacancy for secretary at the National Company, and made sure that he was an excellent assistant, intelligent and active. We can observe the implicit authority relationship in this letter, because Coelho Netto recommends his brother in law to work with Eduardo Victorino, and ensures that he would do a good job. How can one refuse a recommendation by the director himself?

Figure 5. Letter to Eduardo Victorino, August 17, 1922



Source: Personal Archive of the scholar Coelho Netto / ABL

With respect to the letter in Figure 5, we can observe that Coelho Netto changed his greetings to professor Victorino by using “Illustrious Mrs. Eduardo Victorino”, when he was talking about a professor that could replace the addressee in the Brazilian Comedy’s direction; however, he introduced another professor that would be kind to accept such a replacement and who soon would deal straight with him. In his farewells, Coelho Netto writes down “I hope you get to terms, I subscribe myself as *v.s. abr.º Coelho Netto*”.

On November 16, 1912, Coelho Netto once again wrote to the Drama School professor, but at this time, it was a letter with two full pages, with well-designed handwriting, and calligraphy characteristic of the sender, he used the same treatment adopted in the previous card “My Friend Mr. Eduarci Victorino”. As his feather runs, he makes compliments to the Art of Acting professor, and thanks him for having directed the play “O Dinheiro”, wrote by Netto; he mentioned to have made a dream come true:

When I invited you to be companion in this journey, and I introduced you to Illustrious Mr. General mayor as the man I, anxiously, sought, with strength of soul, to the formidable work of restructuring our theater, I already knew your intelligence for having felt it, clear and firmly, in your seat in the Drama School, that your expertise illustrates. The systematic and energetic didactics highlighted the fruitful manager, the meticulous essayist, the agitator of souls that showed off on the stage with the very originals of our writers, rather than *cordel* figures, but personalities, and moving them with the certainty of a master to

make a dead body, such as that of our Theater, a life that vibrates. Through your hands have passed 4 Brazilian originals and all of them had the lucky of the mud on divine hands. The authors have told you words of fair value. I come, at my turn, thank you for the interest and dedication that has shaped the play of my scarce crop. But it is not just as the author of “O Dinheiro” that I position myself as grateful, but mainly because I own you the possibility of making a dream come true. We are on the very edge of the grave of our Theater, staring at its very corpses. We lack a bold man to take it down to its crypt, the inert body must be risen on your arms, and it would be filled with breath and take light back to its eyes, its voice would be opened, its nerves would stretch back, its blood would be defined and, finally, it would shout the “Surge et ambula” of a miracle. That was the friend has done and he deserves great glory from this resurrection. Hosannah!

I own you a public testimony on my gratitude to the interprets of “Dinheiro”: Maria Falcão and Ferreira de Souza; Gabriella Montani and Antonio Ramos; Luiza de Oliveira and João Barbosa; Judith Saldanha and Carlos Abreu; Martha de Sousa and Alvaro Costa; Castello Branco and Antonio Sampaio and Jayme Silva, who have illustrated my work. I extend my gratitude to the others in the Company who, if not entered the play I have written, worked hard for the success of my idea, by advocating for it. To all, by gathering them in my embrace, I say, from the heart: Thank you! And to my friend, whose work starts and only ends at the day we will definitely have the Theater to our genius; what can I say? The words of my gratitude, I will say them in time, and its voice will echo in eternity.

The sincere and grateful friend

Coelho Netto. (November 16, 1912, *ABL*)

A letter Coelho Netto exchanged with other individuals has shown his authority as director of an education institution, even when letters were informal, personal or official, because - among the directors’ task -, based on the institution’s regulations, one finds: exerting higher inspection in the school by providing on all subjects concerning teaching and the disciplines, as well as choosing the group of professionals for the school, as explained in some previously cited missives. The Personal archive by Luís Murat, at the Brazilian Academy of Arts, holds a letter from Coelho Netto asking for the devolution of some books for him to use them in his classes at the Drama School, and for borrowing some books from Miguel de Carvalho for him to study the Amazonian Folklore³⁴.

Lima (2010) highlights that the contractual relationship enables elucidating the contradictions presented in texts from a giving missive in the field of letters; in other words, how the same individuals have different identity profiles: father, friend, professor, director, scholar, politician, among others. As for Coelho Netto, we must take into account that even by exerting his role as director, he also acted as Federal Congressman from Maranhão State. Thus, in the Congress, he could give visibility to issues of interest, as he did, systematically, by making speeches advocating for the cause of culture and of the nationalization of the Brazilian

³⁴ See descriptor at the Personal Archive of Luís Murat. [*ABL*]

theater. This fight has legitimized him for running a school that could qualify actors to occupy the stages in their own country, since it was the ideal also dreamt by Eduardo Victorino. As Director, Coelho Netto got to conciliate the advantages of being a politician; as congressman, he was acknowledged as “men of letters” acting as professor.

Coelho Netto aimed at educating actors to interpret the people, and to mold it, based on standards he believed ideal by acting as director and professor at the Drama School. The school was one of the means enabling him to put at practice the educational model he believed to be the most adequate for the country to accomplish progress; to civilize to thrive.

By sealing the envelop: the farewell

*Sincere and grateful friend,
Coelho Netto.*

(Letter to Eduardo Victorino, November 16, 1912,
ABL)

We sought Coelho Netto’s correspondence in inventories in Rio de Janeiro, such as that of *ABL* and *FBN* in order to get closer to the function exerted by Coelho Netto as director of the Drama School – a position he held for almost 20 years. By understanding that “writing letters demands time, reflection and discipline, because this is a way of sharing the most personal, intimate and mundane experiences” (BASTOS, CUNHA and MIGNOT, 2002, p.5), the herein investigated ones allowed going deeper in the other facets of this man and to privilege the letters by the director and professor, mainly when he was in charge of the Drama School, when he also exerted other activities in the cultural and political scene. It was possible surprising him while he was writing theater plays for adults and children, since he was a writer concerned with outspreading the vernacular language, with wide spreading and translating his books, and while he was speaking as congressman on behalf of art and education.

Coelho Netto acted as professor, congressman, journalist, as well as director of the Drama School when writing and reading letters; he followed the educational process in the country, since it was demanding to put at practice the republican project of launching schools after the republic was implemented. Acting in several fronts, mainly managing the school that would form “souls” to teach how the Brazilian people should behave in society, was the way to also put at practice what he believed to be an ideal civilization based on the European Models, mainly the ones coming from France.

Letters, just as any other document, do not bring along all that was lived, if one takes into account the difference among living, narrating and saving. They have fragments of experiences; they reveal and hide; they demand a close look on other documents that help interrogating the said and unsaid. Different from what we sometimes assume, they do not necessarily tell secrets, but they allow capturing, among information, confidences and outburst, some difficulties and strategies in course that, without letters, would be limited to the backstage. Furthermore, not all letters were read. The read ones were not necessarily answered. The written, read and replied ones were not always saved.

Therefore, we have worked with letters kept by Coelho Netto that made it possible following the beginning of his long term in charge of the Dramatic Art School – the first Brazilian school for actors’ formation. These letters highlighted exchanges with the ones who, just like him, belonged to the literate elite. The herein read and interpreted letters do not explicitly bring the names of professors that have worked in the school, not even the discipline matrix in place. However, individuals in Coelho Netto’s correspondence, and the language used in the letters, allowed understanding the composition of the group of professors hired for the Portuguese Prosody and Aesthetic Elements; Art of Saying; Art of Acting and Characterization;

History and Drama Literature; Psychology of Passions: Expressions of Emotions, Mimicking; Scenography and Theater Perspectives; Clothing and Technology; Free-body Exercising, Attitude and Fencing seats. We could observe that some of these disciplines remained in the institution overtime, only their names were changed and they “absorbed the transformations of new interpretation technologies” (SEPÚLVEDA, s/d, p. 3).

It was possible confirming the interpretation addressed in other studies by following the senders and addressees’ networks. According to these studies, his effort to define the group of professors counted on “immortals” of the Brazilian Academy of Arts, except for Cristiano de Souza and Eduardo Victorino, who were theater directors aimed at giving visibility and “credibility to the school, at attracting young individuals from the bourgeois class, whose families would certainly feel more confident and safer in having their kids guided by such illustrious [professors]” (ANDRADE, 2014, p.190). They organized the school discipline matrix based on the theater model they aimed at privileging. Coelho Netto was convinced that the work implemented at the Drama School accounted for changing the situation of the scene the Brazilian Theater was in; “we were at the very edge of our theater’s grave staring at the cold corpses”, as stated in the previous letter to Eduardo Victorino, from 1912.

The letters are also silent. In this case, they hide the names of students who had attended the school, and it demanded looking for other sources. Procópio Ferreira, Sadi Cabral and Tereza Rachel (SEPÚLVEDA, s/d) have passed the classrooms and stages of that actor’s formation institution. This finding suggests that Coelho Netto reached his goal of breaking with improvisation in theater scenes. One single letter suggests the difficulties faced by the Drama School under the direction of the Municipal Theater, and it lasted, as long as its functioning was not kept in the space it was created for. As time went on, it moved to other locations until having its own building.

We can state that Coelho Netto cultivated, through his epistolary writing, an intellectual exchange by conceiving such letters as “places of sociability”, because it was through his letters that “people, even physically apart, [could] touch ideas and affections, build mutual projects or discuss oppositions, and set agreements or controversies, and organize joint actions” (VENANCIO, 2002. p. 223). When they were sent to authorities, politicians, “immortals” at the *Academia Brasileira de Letras*, to interested professors or professors invited to teach at the school, the practice of writing letters in itself contributed to legitimize the Drama School as institution to form actors. While informing, Coelho Netto also claimed, fulfilled or denied requests, and legitimized himself as defender of both theater teaching and the Brazilian Theater.

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