



## Breaking barriers. The entry of women into Literary Academies<sup>1</sup>

Rompendo barreiras. O ingresso de mulheres nas Academias de Letras

Rompiendo barreras. El ingreso de mujeres en las Academias de Letras

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### Abstract

This article explores the processes of women insertion into the academies of letters, throughout the 20th century, establishing understandings of these processes at both national and local levels. To this end, it examines the insertion process of the first woman in the *ABL*, in the state academies, and, finally, the election of the first woman as an immortal of the *Academia Sergipana de Letras* (the academy of letters of Sergipe state). The historiographical research collected and transformed documents from physical and digital archives into sources. The election of Rachel de Queirós, in 1977, to the *Academia Brasileira de Letras* became a national milestone in women's achievement in this space of literary consecration. However, in previous periods, in the academies based on the Brazilian states, women had already achieved the academic status. In Sergipe, Professor Núbia Marques was elected in 1977, a milestone that paved the way for the electoral processes of female professors and academics at the *ASL* throughout the second half of the 20th century.

**Keywords:** Androcentrism; Academies of letters; Feminism.

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## Resumo

Este artigo explora os processos de inserção das mulheres nas academias de letras, ao longo do século XX, estabelecendo compreensões desses processos tanto em nível nacional quanto local. Para tal, examina-se o processo de inserção da primeira mulher na ABL, nas academias estaduais e, por fim, a conquista da primeira mulher eleita imortal da Academia Sergipana de Letras. A pesquisa historiográfica levantou e transformou em fontes documentos em acervos físicos e digitais. A eleição de Rachel de Queirós, em 1977, para a ABL, tornou-se um marco nacional na conquista feminina nesse espaço de consagração literária. Contudo, em períodos anteriores, nas academias sediadas nos estados brasileiros, mulheres já haviam conquistado a condição de acadêmicas. Em Sergipe, a professora Núbia Marques foi eleita no ano de 1977, uma conquista que abriu caminho para os processos eleitorais das professoras e acadêmicas na ASL ao longo da segunda metade do século XX.

**Palavras-chave:** Androcentrismo; Academias de letras; Feminismo.

## Resumen

Este artículo explora los procesos de ingreso de las mujeres en las academias de letras, a lo largo del siglo XX, estableciendo comprensiones de estos procesos tanto a nivel nacional como local. Para ello, se examina el proceso de inserción de la primera mujer en la ABL, en las academias estatales y, finalmente, la elección de la primera mujer inmortalizada en la Academia Sergipana de Letras. La investigación historiográfica recopiló y transformó documentos de acervos físicos y digitales en fuentes. La elección de Rachel de Queirós, en 1977, para la Academia Brasileña de Letras se convirtió en un hito nacional en la conquista femenina en este espacio de consagración literaria. Sin embargo, en períodos anteriores, en las academias de los estados brasileños, las mujeres ya habían alcanzado la condición de académicas. En Sergipe, la profesora Núbia Marques fue elegida en 1977, un logro que allanó el camino para los procesos electorales de las profesoras y académicas en la Academia Sergipana de Letras a lo largo de la segunda mitad del siglo XX.

**Palabras clave:** Androcentrismo; Academias de letras; Feminismo.

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## Introduction

Membership in an Academy of Letters used to be – and for many still is – a symbol of status and recognition in the literary field. For a long time, these cultural institutions were strongly influenced by androcentrism, especially noticeable in the barriers imposed on women's participation as academics. Considering this scenario, the article explores the processes surrounding the proposals for the inclusion of women in the academies of letters, establishing understandings of these processes at both the national and local levels. To this end, the article<sup>2</sup> examines the process of the inclusion of the first woman in the *Academia Brasileira de Letras*, in the state academies and, finally, the election of the first immortal woman to the *Academia Sergipana de Letras*.

The election of the writer Rachel de Queirós, in 1977, to the *Academia Brasileira de Letras* (ABL), became a national milestone in female achievement. However, in previous periods, in the academies based in the Brazilian states, women were already achieving the status of academics, breaking the androcentric barriers of these institutions. In the context of Sergipe, we observe the attempts of professor Núbia Marques in 1976, followed by her election in 1977, an achievement that paved the way for the electoral processes of female professors and academics in the *Academia Sergipana de Letras* (ASL) throughout the second half of the 20th century.

At the end of the 1970s, the women who joined the ASL were working in higher and/or secondary education, highlighting the identification of teaching as an intellectual category, at the same time that these professors/academics legitimized their field in the ASL space (MARTIRES, CONCEIÇÃO, 2020; MARTIRES, 2020). The concept of field is used in this research as a place of dispute and is part of the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu, who defines it as: “[...] places of power relations that imply immanent tendencies and objective probabilities. A field is not oriented entirely by chance. Not everything in it is possible and impossible at every moment” (BOURDIEU, 2004, p. 27). The concept of cultural capital (BOURDIEU, 2002b) is also used, in addition to the category of sociability network (SIRINELLI, 2003). The latter allowed, in the process of inserting women into academies of letters, a deeper understanding of the importance of the interconnections or social bonds that they established with intellectuals who shared interests, objectives and/or literary or professional activities in common within a given social context.

In order to understand the subject in question, methodological procedures of documentary research were used, resulting in the analysis of various types of historical sources, collected in the collections of institutions such as the *Academia Sergipana de Letras*, *Academia Brasileira de Letras*, *Instituto Histórico e Geográfico de Sergipe (IHGSE)* and *Instituto Histórico do Brasil*. In these collections, several documents were gathered and used as sources: statutes, regulations, minutes of meetings and committees, records of electoral processes and publications in magazines and newspapers. Likewise, interviews were used or produced. Furthermore, we sought to construct a “handled text” (Prost, 2014) through dialogue between these sources and the references (EL FAR, 2000; LACERDA, 2007; FANINI, 2008, 2009; MARTIRES, 2020) specialized in the theme that support the arguments presented throughout the article.

In addition to the introduction, the article is divided into four distinct subdivisions. The first, entitled The strength of tradition: obstacles, resistance and achievements, addresses aspects related to the obstacles, struggles, resistance and achievements of women in relation to their participation in the ABL. The second part, entitled Pioneering women: achievements in regional academies of letters, highlights the associations in which women, predominantly

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teachers, achieved academic status in a period prior to the *Academia Brasileira de Letras*. The third part, entitled *Clube do Bolinha*: (girls are not allowed in), highlights the obstacles encountered by female writers from Sergipe when trying to join the *ASL*, indicating resistance to the presence of women within the institution. The fourth part, entitled Núbia Marques, the pioneer in the *ASL*, emphasizes the contours of the achievement of the first woman and teacher to become an *ASL* immortal. The final considerations are then presented.

### The strength of tradition: obstacles, resistance and achievements

Established in 1897, the *Academia Brasileira de Letras*, through its members, restricted the right of women to participate in its immortal body. The founders' justification was that the *ABL* had appropriated the model of the French Academy of Letters, which prevented women from participating. However, researcher Alessandra El Far (2000) emphasizes that the structure of the *ABL*, implemented in 1897, was not a simple transposition of the French model and, yes, a recreation to meet the interests of Brazilian intellectuals. Thus, the founding intellectuals of the *ABL* inserted in article 2nd of the bylaws – cited below – the necessary requirements for entry into the Academy and began to interpret it in a restrictive manner in order to prevent access by women writers:

Art. 2nd - Only **Brazilians** who have published works of recognized merit in any genre of literature or, outside of these genres, books of literary value may be effective members of the Academy. The same conditions, except for nationality, are required for corresponding members. (ACADEMIA BRASILEIRA DE LETRAS, 1897, our emphasis)

The expression “Brazilians”, contained in the part of the bylaws cited above, was interpreted by the immortals of the *ABL* for more than 80 years as synonymous with the male sex. This interpretation, which resulted in women's ineligibility for membership in the association, represented the androcentric nature of the institution, as well as the views about women that permeated the late 19th and early 20th centuries, concepts that were linked to scientism, evolutionism, medical discourse, and religious views on the role of women in society. In other words, the female body structure was seen as inadequate for the activity of a writer. The instruction they received was for the good performance of their maternal functions. When a woman achieved success in her writing, she was considered an exception or was treated through masculine characteristics (FANINI, 2008; ELEUTÉRIO, 2005; SOUSA & PEDRO, 2012) of the manly type, masculine nature, professional writing, among others.

The first obstacle to the inclusion of women in the *ABL* occurred during its founding phase. When the founders were choosing the members who would participate in the association, academic Lúcio Mendonça, founder of the *Academia Brasileira de Letras*, wanted to include the name of the writer Júlia Lopes de Almeida, taking into account her literary production. According to Mendonça (1907):

When the Academy of Letters was founded, it was the idea of some of us, such as Valentim Magalhães and Filinto da Almeida, to admit people of the opposite sex; but the idea fell through, fiercely opposed by others, irreducible enemies of the macho women, according to the brutal name of one of our illustrious colleagues whose resourcefulness brought him the troubles that you know. (MENDONÇA, 1907, p. 249)

As Lúcio Mendonça points out in the excerpt from the article cited, the intellectuals who were behind the creation of the ABL considered nominating the writer Júlia Lopes to join the founding members, but the proposal was not approved, resulting in a backlash from the other members. The article notes that the French Academy of Letters is not cited as a model for the admission of members to the association, a justification used to prevent women from joining. Another aspect highlighted in the text was the adjective “butch” for women who stood out in the publication of works, representing the thinking of the majority of the immortals that writing and publishing books were masculine attributes.

Rodrigo Lacerda (2007), when writing about the 110 years of history of the ABL, reaffirmed the proposal to include Júlia Lopes' name at the time of its founding, "but due to an outburst of loyalty – in this case, excessive – to the French Academy model, which did not accept women, Júlia had her name removed from the forty members" (p. 31). According to Lacerda (2007), the justification supported by the French model of academia, put forward by men of letters, was excessive. Thus, the artifice of domination resulted in women's ineligibility within the ABL, as well as in some similar institutions, such as the *Academia Sergipana de Letras*.

Another moment in which the debate about women's participation in the ABL took place was in the election of a member corresponding to seat number 17, in 1911, when the proposal was made to nominate the philologist Carolina Michaelis for the position. Once again, the members decided to veto the participation of women as members of the ABL. According to Michelle Asmar Fanini (2009), the main argument used to justify the impediment on the inclusion of women was that, according to the procedural rules, the number of corresponding members of Portuguese nationality was already full. Carolina Michaelis' nationality was German, but she was considered Portuguese due to her marriage and her residence in Portuguese lands.

The first female candidate to apply for a seat in the ABL was Amélia de Freitas Beviláqua, who had a consolidated cultural capital through articles, books and participation in magazines. The writer's initiative went beyond the confines of the Petit Trianon (ABL headquarters), becoming a topic of discussion in Rio de Janeiro society. The immortal João Ribeiro published an article on the subject in the *Jornal do Brasil* on November 5th, 1930, entitled *Amélia de Freitas Beviláqua e a Academia Brasileira de Letras, Documentos histórico-literários – Rio – Bernad de Frére*, in which he reports about the discussions that took place in the Brazilian association when it refused to register Amélia Beviláqua.

In my personal opinion, **the Academy made the mistake of initially refusing to admit female writers**, no matter how illustrious, to our first *Grêmio de Letras*. Let us leave aside the abusive and unusual argument that the statutes of the Academy refer to Brazilian members and that this adjective does not include women, and rather excludes them. The fallacy is obvious; **speaking of Brazilians, the statutes do not refer to sex, but to nationality**. The adjective there appears in opposition to foreign. A better argument, although weak, was that of tradition. **The Cenacle, in fact, since its foundation, did not want to elect any women.** [...]. Of the founders of the Academy, there are only four or five who are fortunately alive and some of them always voted for the admission of women. What is tradition reduced to? [...] Several publicists and writers, such as J. Cavalcanti, Odylo Costa, Spencer Vampré, Rui Caracas, Pinheiro de Vasconcelos, Heitor Santos, J. H. de Sá Leitão, Carlos Xavier and others, protested against academic anachronism. (RIBEIRO, 1930, p. 12, emphasis added).

According to João Ribeiro (1930), the power of tradition contributed to the refusal to elect women to the ABL. According to him, the interpretation of the term “Brazilian”, contained in article 2nd of the ABL Bylaws – interpreted in such a way as to prevent women from entering the Academy – did not refer to the male sex but to nationality.

After her name was refused to run for election, Amélia Beviláqua wrote the book *Academia Brasileira de Letras e Amélia de Freitas Beviláqua, documentos históricos-literários* (BEVILÁQUA, 1930). In this work, the writer expresses her dissatisfaction with the ABL’s refusal, “[...] in the text, even though she was defeated, she thanks the various expressions of support she had received in the form of letters, books, newspaper articles, flowers, etc.” (ELEUTÉRIO, 2005, p. 74). In addition to configuring a protest against the academics’ view of female participation in academia, the book served to publicize the event, ensuring the social visibility of this process.

For decades, conservative thinking regarding female admission to the ABL persisted. In this context, in the speech given by academic Austregésilo d and Athayde during the award ceremony of the Machado de Assis Literature Prize in 1958, he was emphatic in defending the statute of the Academy and in justifying the prohibition of the election of women in the association, even recognizing the literary merit of the awardee, Rachel de Queiroz. Paradoxically, it was during his presidency of the ABL that the statutory change occurred that allowed, in 1977, the election of Rachel de Queiroz as the first immortal woman (ATHAYDE, 1958).

In 1970, the writer Dinah Silveira de Queiroz, owner of a vast literary production, including awards from the ABL itself, made the second attempt to register a woman to compete for a seat in the ABL. The writer was unable to overcome the barrier of androcentrism. The argument put forward by president Austregésilo de Athayde was that the statute did not allow the election of women. The writer used her social network to engage in an intense debate through the press to change the ABL's bylaws to allow women to stand for election.

It was only after 80 years of the ABL's existence that the first woman was elected immortal. The pioneer was the writer from Ceará, Rachel de Queirós. To this end, the ABL changed its rules and statutes (October 12, 1976), allowing the writer to be elected on August 4, 1977 for seat number 5, which she took office on November 4, 1977. In this regard, Fanini (2009) draws a parallel between the rejection of Dinah Silveira de Queiroz's candidacy and the election of Rachel de Queiroz, suggesting that, if the same academic composition that vetoed Dinah allowed Rachel's entry, it is plausible to infer that the discussions about changing the rules were conducted in a targeted manner, specifically aiming to welcome Rachel (FANINI, 2009).

It is worth noting that, in addition to her cultural capital (BOURDIEU, 2002), the social network (SIRINELLI, 2003) established by Rachel de Queirós was decisive, through her circle of relationships inside and outside the ABL, as well as her relationships with cultural institutions and the federal government itself, which contributed to her eligibility. It is worth noting that the entry of women into the ABL preceded the French Academy, a source of inspiration and model for the Brazilian *syllogeús*.

Referring to the French case, the election of the writer Marguerite Yourcenar as the first woman to join the circle of immortals of the French Academy of Letters, in 1980, is a significant milestone in France. Marguerite Yourcenar revealed details of this process in an interview with the literary magazine *The Paris Review*, given in 1988. On that occasion, she explained that the French immortal Jean D’Ormesson persuaded her to run for the position and she accepted, but imposed as a condition that she would not have to make formal visits to the other members of the Academy in search of votes. Thus, having lived in the United States since 1939, Marguerite conducted her campaign through the support of immortals who were in favor of changes in the French tradition, establishing a network of influence even outside of French territory. The Academy showed interest in having her as an immortal member due to her globally recognized cultural prestige (YUCCENAR, 2012). However, Claude Lévi-Strauss, another French

immortal, expressed a view opposed to the inclusion of women in the French Academy. As described by Emmanuelle Loyer (2018) in her biography of Lévi-Strauss, his position reflected the belief that the French Academy of Letters was an “organ for the deceleration of temporalities” (LOYER, 2018). This conception outlined the view that the function of the Academy was to preserve tradition, maintaining the same criteria established since its emergence in the 17th century.

### Pioneering Women: Achievements in Regional Academies of Letters

To what extent has the paradigm of female exclusion in the *Academia Brasileira de Letras* (ABL), based on the French tradition, influenced Brazilian state academies in terms of restricting women's participation? An analysis of the admissions of women as academic members in the various state academies reveals pertinent information regarding this issue. Before the election of the first woman to the *Academia Brasileira de Letras* (ABL), the survey revealed a significant scenario. Contrary to the tradition of female exclusion in the ABL, there was a notable and pioneering presence of women in state academies, representing a significant female achievement in these spaces, as shown in the following table.

**Chart 1** - List of immortals in state academies of letters, prior to the entry of women into the ABL.

Nº	FU	Academy of Letters	First Academic	Profession	Year of entry into the Academy
1	SP	<i>Academia Paulista de Letras</i> (1909)	Presciliana Duarte de Almeida	Poet	1909
2	PE	<i>Academia Pernambucana de Letras</i> (1901)	Edwiges de Sá Pereira	Teacher and Journalist	1920
3	SC	<i>Academia Catarinense de Letras</i> (1920)	Delminda Silveira	Teacher	1920
			Maura de Senna Pereira	Teacher	
4	PI	<i>Academia Piauiense de Letras</i> (1917)	Amélia de Freitas Beviláqua	Lawyer	1921
5	CE	<i>Academia Cearense de Letras</i> (1894)	Alba Valdez	Teacher	1922
6	MT	<i>Academia Mato-grossense de Letras</i> (1932)	Ana Luzia Prado Bastos	Teacher	1932
7	RN	<i>Academia Norte-Riograndense de Letras</i> (1936)	Maria Carolina Wanderley Caldas	Teacher	1936
			Palmyra Guimarães Wanderley -	Journalist	
8	RS	<i>Academia Rio-grandense de Letras</i> (1901)	Walkyria Neves de Salis Goulart	Escritora	1936
9	AM	<i>Academia Amazonense de Letras</i> (1918)	Violeta Branca	Escritora	1937
10	BA	<i>Academia de Letras da Bahia</i> (1917)	Edith Mendes da Gama e Abreu	Teacher	1938
11	MA	<i>Academia Maranhense de Letras</i> (1908)	Laura Rosa	Teacher	1943

12	AL	<i>Academia Alagoana de Letras</i> (1919)	Eunice Lavenère Reis	Teacher	1944
13	PA	<i>Academia Paraense de Letras</i> (1900)	Adalcinda Magno Camarão Luxardo	Teacher	1949
14	RJ	<i>Academia Fluminense de Letras</i> (1917)	Albertina Fortuna Barros	Teacher	1959
15	MG	<i>Academia Mineira de Letras</i> (1909)	Henriqueta Lisboa	Teacher	1963
16	MS	<i>Academia Sul-matogrossense de Letras</i> (1972)	Inah Machado Metelo	Teacher	1972
			Maria da Glória Sá Rosa	Teacher	1972
			Henedina Rodrigues,	Teacher	1972
			Oliva Enciso	Teacher	1972
17	GO	<i>Academia Goiana de Letras</i> (1904)	Regina Lacerda	Teacher	1973

Source: Martires (2020).

Analyzing the data in Chart 1, we obtain some information for the study in question. An example of this is the emphasis on the North/Northeast region of the country, with the majority of cases of female admissions to academies based in states in these regions, in the 1920s and 1930s. There were 17 associations that allowed women to enroll in a period prior to the *Academia Brasileira de Letras*. In other words, this number represents a percentage of 70%, taking into account the number of Brazilian states. The first woman to be elected immortal in an academy of letters, within the scope of the federated entities, was the poet Presciliana Duarte de Almeida in the *Academia Paulista de Letras*, in 1909. This data shows that the argument used by the *ABL*, based on the French model of admitting only men, was not followed by the state academies listed in Chart 1.

A pattern can be observed in the composition of the state academies, notably the preponderance of female teachers among the women elected, representing approximately 72% of the identified immortals. This data reveals that the majority of the women admitted had ties to teaching, followed by professions such as law, journalism and literature. Above all, the exercise of teaching served as a contribution and legitimization of female teachers/academics who gained recognition and election as immortals in academies based in the states.

It is also worth highlighting the generation of these academics from the 1920s and 1930s, who actively participated in the women's struggles of the early 20th century. Regarding the feminist movement in Brazil, Céli Regina Jardim Pinto (2003) points out that

it is possible to identify different strands in the movement. At least three are clear. The first of these, the strongest and most organized, is led by Bertha Lutz, whose central issue is the incorporation of women as subjects with political rights. [...] The second strand is what could be called diffuse feminism, which is expressed in the multiple manifestations of the alternative feminist press. [...] The third strand manifests itself in the anarchist and, later, communist movement (PINTO, 2003, p. 14).

The first manifestations of the feminist movement in Brazil emerged from international movements in defense of women's rights, known as suffragists. In the first of the three strands of the Brazilian feminist movement in the early 20th century, cited by Pinto (2003), women were elected to academies of letters based in Brazilian states. This strand, led nationally by



Bertha Lutz, was organized into state federations, had political support, newspapers, magazines and a political party created by women. This wing of the movement defended women's rights, such as the right to vote, without, however, questioning male domination in society. Through this strand of feminism, predominant in the 1920s and 1930s, female teachers expressed their ideals in periodicals, especially in articles published in women's magazines. Among the collaborators, the names of immortals from state academies stood out, such as Presciliana Duarte de Almeida (SP), Edhite Mendes Gama e Abreu (BA), Ana Luzia Prado Bastos (MT), Edwiges de Sá Pereira (PE), Amélia de Freitas Beviláqua (PI), Palmyra Guimarães Wanderley (RN) and Maura de Senna Pereira (SC).

“*Clube do bolinha* (girls are not allowed)”

The *Academia Sergipana de Letras* based its own structure on the normative regulations of the *Academia Brasileira de Letras*, restricting the admission of women. As a result, opportunities for integration for women did not advance, due to the limiting interpretation of the statutory requirements. When the ASL was founded, all members of the Sergipe literary association, called “*A Hora Literária*”, the entity that gave rise to the ASL, were automatically included in the Academy, with the exception of women. In this sense, the case of Etelvina Maria Siqueira Alves is exemplary: a member of “*A Hora Literária*”, the teacher and journalist was rejected as an academic.

Another case was that of the lawyer and teacher Maria Rita Soares. According to Anamaria Gonçalves Bueno de Freitas (2003, p. 153), “[...] in 1931, Maria Rita was nominated for the Academy by the academic Passos Cabral, but her name was rejected”. The academic Passos Cabral published an article in the newspaper “*A Ordem*” and in the “*Revista Renovação*”, also transcribed in the minutes of the sodality of January 15th, 1931, in which he defended Maria Rita Soares’ conditions to join the Academy.

Leaving the position, I held in the previous board of directors, leaving Aracaju to pursue my interests and concerns in Rio de Janeiro, I take this opportunity to suggest to my distinguished colleagues whether it would not be of real convenience to the Academy to replace the members who are permanently absent, and for them to be considered **corresponding members. If this were to be accepted, this is my suggestion, dictated by the desire for the prosperity of Sergipe literature, and, in the event that I were allowed to suggest a name capable of honoring this worthy institution, - I would mention that of Dr. Maria Rita Soares de Andrade, who, leaving aside any trace of feminism, is a real asset, a lucid intelligence and an inexhaustible activity** (Academia Sergipana de Letras, 1931, emphasis added).

It can be seen in the quote that Passos Cabral intended, due to his definitive move to another state, to exchange for the status of corresponding member. This intention, once approved by the academics, would result in the vacancy of his respective chair. In this case, he himself suggested the name of the lawyer Maria Rita. However, Passos Cabral's change to the status of corresponding member did not take place. The minutes of the ASL meetings from 1931 do not include any request for the resignation of the member. Only in the meeting of July 5, 1950, do the minutes record the death of Passos Cabral and the election process for his replacement. Therefore, the resignation was never formalized and/or accepted by the Academy.

Another issue that occurred at the same time as this event were the conflicts involving Maria Rita Soares de Andrade in the competition for the post of professor of *Línguas Latinas e Literatura do Atheneu Sergipense*. Maria Rita was approved after defending her thesis entitled “*A Mulher na Literatura*”. According to studies by Freitas (2003) and Souza (2016), the

competition took place in 1929, but the appointment was only made effective in 1931, during the government of Augusto Maynard's intervention. The disputes surrounding the competition, which ended up in the newspapers and in court, included insults involving Maria Rita, the director of *Atheneu Sergipense* and some teachers from the congregation of this secondary education establishment. After her appointment and victory in the lawsuit, Maria Rita Soares de Andrade wrote a letter addressed to Bertha Lutz, Carmem Portinho and Maria Luiza Bittencourt, leaders of the *Federação Brasileira para o Progresso Feminino* (FBPF), dated May 31, 1931, in which she stated:

With a competition held since October 1929, I had against me the Director of the *Atheneu*, the inspector, Professor Franco Freire, a son-in-law of a father-in-law who left him rich, Dr. Augusto Leite, the best surgeon of the most powerful family here, who was holding my chair, Dr. Aristides Fontes and above them Dr. Carvalho Neto, president of the *Instituto dos Advogados e da Academia Sergipana de Letras*, for whom Dr. Augusto held the chair. See? It was a strong and wealthy group of men against me, alone, poor and a woman. (ANDRADE, 1931 apud Freitas, 2003, p. 167).

In the excerpt from the letter under analysis, the involvement of a group of intellectuals from Sergipe interested in competing for a teaching position at the main secondary school in Sergipe becomes evident. In her letter, Maria Rita highlights the difference between herself and her opponents, emphasizing her prominent positions in local society. Despite her work as a lawyer and editor of the *Revista Renovação*, which provided her with economic, social and cultural capital, she sought to highlight the discrepancy in resources in relation to her opponents. Among the names that formed a “strong and wealthy group” against her were the doctor Augusto Leite, who occupied chair number 35 at the Academy; and the lawyer Carvalho Neto, the holder of chair number 25, who was the president of the ASL at the time. Therefore, if she really wanted to join the ASL, she would probably face resistance or, at the very least, embarrassment due to the competition involving the network of intellectuals from the Academy.

Professor Núbia Marques was the first woman to be elected to the ASL, in 1977. However, her struggle to join the association predated that date. She participated in two electoral processes in 1976 that were unsuccessful due to the restrictive interpretation of the rules by the academics, claiming that women could not join the association. Núbia Marques' first attempt to participate in the electoral process for the ASL occurred in 1976, with the death of the immortal Epiphânio Dória, on June 8th of the same year, who occupied chair number 40. Reports and columns published in the *Jornal da Cidade* and *Gazeta de Sergipe* (Gazeta de Sergipe, July 3, 1976; *Jornal da Cidade*, July 6, 1976; *Jornal da Cidade*, August 8th and 9th, 1976), during the month of July 1976, revealed this process. These newspaper articles reported Núbia's interest in running for the aforementioned position in the academy:

With the opening of applications for the position left by the death of researcher Epiphânio Dória, three names were put forward to occupy his chair in the *Academia Sergipana de Letras*. [...] Before that, the lack of interest of the restless journalist Orlando Dantas, who is already part of its staff, it had already doubled. Now, the journalist and writer near isolation has doubled and lawyer Ariosvaldo Figueiredo, reporting that he has already had a good portion of votes, including from journalist Orlando Dantas and also from academics José Augusto Garcez, Jorge Oliveira and Severino Uchoa. **The other two who have already**

**reported that they will run are professor and poet Núbia Marques (who wants to break the taboo that women cannot enter academia)** and professor Nunes Mendonça. (JORNAL DA CIDADE, June 6, 1976, p. 3, our emphasis).

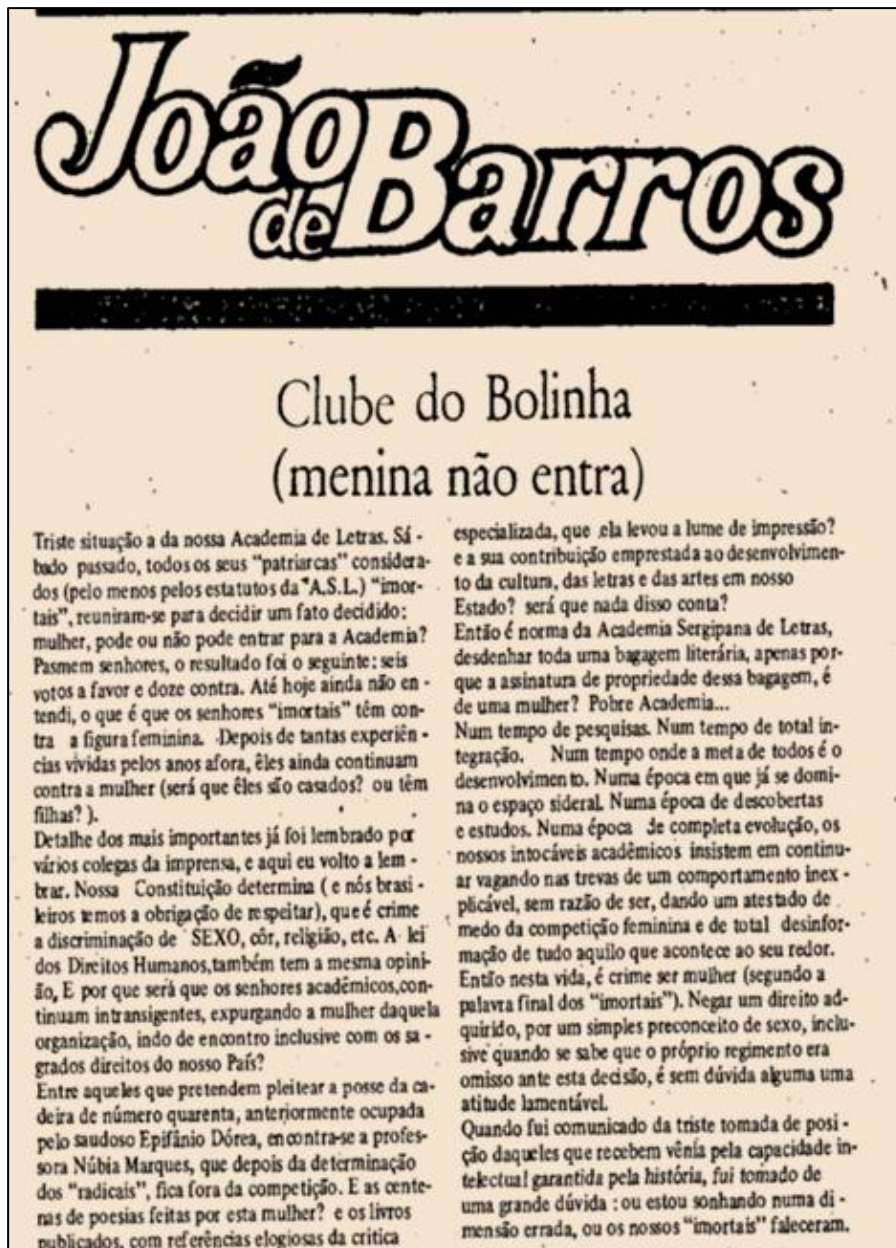
In this report, it is possible to infer the game of competition in the field of intellectuals from Sergipe, as well as the networks that were formed for the election of a new academic. For the vacancy of chair number 40th, there was speculation about three names: lawyer Ariosvaldo de Figueiredo, professor Núbia Marques and professor Nunes Mendonça. According to the author of the news article, Ariosvaldo Figueiredo had a good portion of the academics' votes – of the three names indicated in the article, he was the only one to formally register in the ASL electoral process.

The decision about the electoral process in the ASL to fill Epiphânio Dória's vacancy took place at the meeting of the association on August 7, 1976. In this section, it was decided to maintain the tradition, that is, to interpret the statute in the sense of preventing women from accessing it. For the majority of academics, the entry of women would only be possible with the reform of the statute. This decision led to a series of protests directed at the ASL by Professor Núbia Marques, as can be seen in the article entitled “*Núbia Marques protesta contra a ASL*”: “Núbia stated that what upset her most was the fact that the members of the Academy had resorted to tradition as an explanation for their absurd and unrealistic attitudes [...]” (JORNAL DA CIDADE, August 10, 1976, p. 7). In addition to protesting against the argument of tradition and following the dictates of the ABL, in the same article, Núbia stated that the ban on women being candidates was unconstitutional and disrespectful of human rights. She also expressed her willingness to run for office whenever there was a vacancy in the ASL.

The academic Jorge Neto, who was the main articulator of Núbia Marques' candidacy, established a group of intellectuals who intended, through the entry of women into the ASL, to create a renewed environment, with new members and new thoughts. This group of intellectuals can be characterized as younger immortals, not in terms of chronological age, but rather in terms of sharing a favorable view of women's entry into the ASL, in addition to being more in favor of accepting innovative measures for academia. The majority group at the time was made up of old colleagues, who were tied to an androcentric conception of the sodality and, therefore, opposed to women's entry into Academy.

The members of this new wing of the ASL – the new immortals – were part of cultural movements in Sergipe between the 1960s and 1970s, such as the *Clube Sergipano da Poesia* (CESPO), created by Antônio Garcia Filho (1960), characterized as “[...] a civil society of a literary nature that aimed to promote the dissemination, study and debate of poetry” (SILVA, 2012, p. 68). Professor Núbia Marques was part of this movement and of the government agencies – the *Departamento de Cultura e Patrimônio Histórico* (DCPH) and the *Conselho Esdual de Cultura*. These were spaces for the social interaction of Sergipe's intellectuals that guaranteed visibility and the strengthening of cultural capital for accreditation with ASL academics. In addition to Professor Núbia Marques, her fellow professors Carmelita Pinto Fontes and Gizelda Santana Morais, who would also succeed and become academics, participated in this network.

Other repercussions of Professor Núbia Marques's impediment on participating as an ASL academic candidate were published in the *Jornal da Cidade*. In the August 10, 1976 edition, journalist João de Barros, a well-known “social columnist” for the newspaper and a prominent figure in Sergipe's high society at the time, published an article with the suggestive title “*Clube do Bolinha* (girls don't get in)”. In this article, the journalist expressed his disapproval of the ban on women entering the academy and emphasized the qualifications of Professor Núbia Marques as a suitable candidate to join the association.

**Figure 1** - *Clube do Bolinha* (girls are not allowed) – column by João de Barros in *Jornal da Cidade*

Source: BARROS, João. *Jornal da Cidade*, August 10, 1976, p. 9.

In the article, the columnist reports about the meeting of August 7, 1976 and criticizes the discrimination against women due to the ban on their membership in the Academy. For him, the interpretation of the Brazilian Constitution and human rights – even though Brazil was living in a state of exception and disrespect for these rights – prevented discriminatory behavior towards women. In addition, João de Barros saw a mismatch between the ban and the social and cultural transformations that led to gender equality. And, above all, he highlighted the immortals' disregard for Núbia Marques' literary production and her contribution to studies and participation in cultural organizations in Sergipe (JORNAL DA CIDADE, August 10, 1976). In other words, the candidate had significant cultural capital to participate in this space of literary consecration in Sergipe. For all these reasons, the journalist was clearly disapproving of Professor Núbia Marques simply because she was a woman.

On October 14, 1976, *Jornal da Cidade* published the headline “*Mulher vai tentar entrar novamente na Academia*” (Jornal da Cidade, October 14th, 1976, p. 1), which reported on Núbia Marques’ application for the position of chair number 11, which had belonged to academic José da Silva Ribeiro Filho. This was Professor Núbia Marques’ second attempt to enter the Academy. The result would come in the October 19th, 1976 edition, in the column by journalist João de Barros, with the title “*Até que ponto o poeta é imortal*”, which reported the challenge to Núbia Marques’ candidacy, indicating some reasons. (JORNAL DA CIDADE, October 19th, 1976). According to the journalist, Núbia Marques’ second attempt to become an immortal member of the ASL was rejected because she was a woman, despite the fact that the *Academia Brasileira de Letras*, whose standard was followed by the ASL, had already elected the writer Rachel de Queirós on August 4th, 1976. Thus, contrary to the debates at the national level, the candidacy of a woman was rejected by the ASL. Another aspect highlighted in the column was the issue of votes sent by academics who did not attend the meeting, which evidenced an articulation by the president of the ASL, Severino Uchoa. This suggests that his social network prevailed in this vote, resulting in the election of Wagner da Silva Ribeiro to seat No. 11, previously occupied by his father. Still about the subject of the *Jornal da Cidade* of October 19, 1976, columnist João de Barros cited the names of female intellectuals who were also eligible to join the ASL, such as professors Núbia Marques, Beatriz Góis Dantas, Carmelita Pinto Fontes, Maria da Glória Monteiro, Gizelda Moraes, and Maria Thetis Nunes (JORNAL DA CIDADE, October 19th, 1976).

It can be seen in the selection of women eligible to join the ASL that they were all professors, anticipating a list of intellectuals who were later elected to the ASL, such as professors Carmelita Pinto Fontes, Gizelda Moraes, and Maria Thétis Nunes. These women held cultural capital and held positions in secondary and/or university teaching and participated in institutions or instances of literary life in Sergipe, instances of consecration or self-legitimization. In this way, they achieved recognition from their intellectual peers and overcame the androcentric barriers of academia.

### **Professor Núbia Marques, the pioneer of the ASL**

Núbia Marques’ third attempt to join the ASL occurred in 1977 with the vacancy resulting from the death of the poet Clodoaldo de Alencar, who occupied chair number 34. The change in attitude of the ASL members regarding the entry of women into the association was the result of the impact caused by the pressure from a group of academics led by Jorge Neto and the election of Rachel de Queirós, in 1977, to the *Academia Brasileira de Letras*. The justification that it followed the ABL model served as a new interpretation of the association’s statute, allowing women to apply, as had occurred in the ABL. The election took place on December 5th, 1977, and the inauguration took place on March 17th, 1978.

Núbia Marques had a rich literary and scientific production, one of the criteria for competing for a place in academia. With eight published books, covering both literary and scientific works, her poems were recognized with awards and she established significant collaborations with other authors. Her writing encompassed diverse literary genres, such as short stories, poetry, prose and novels, and reflected her activities as a professor at the Federal University of Sergipe, where she explored research in the areas of folklore, education and issues related to women. This multifaceted profile not only demonstrated her mastery in the literary and academic spheres, but also highlighted her network of collaborations with local writers, such as Carmelita Pinto Fontes and Gizelda Moraes. These partnerships strengthened their social connections and helped challenge the predominantly male nature of the *Academia Sergipana de Letras* (ASL).

The inauguration ceremony of Professor Núbia Marques was more than a symbolic event. In addition to the usual rituals, the personal significance stood out. The choice of the date, March 17th, 1978, was not only because it was the historic date of the change of the capital from São Cristóvão to Aracaju. For Núbia, this date carried a deep emotional weight, as it marked the death of her firstborn son, Valério. That day marked exactly 24 years since his loss. It was from this painful episode that Núbia began her journey in literature. Her first book, “*Um ponto de duas divergências*”, is a testimony to this absence, a touching expression of the pain of losing her son.

Regarding the attire for the inauguration ceremony, the *Academia Sergipana de Letras* did not adopt a women's uniform, leading Núbia Marques to wear a formal dress with a low neckline. Eneida Déda, Núbia's daughter, highlighted the meaning or intention behind her mother's choice of attire: “The dress she wore was a surprise, since my mother did not usually wear low-cut clothes. It was even funny to see that outfit at the academy. It was something out of the ordinary for her, but my mother was like that, unpredictable!” (DÉDA, 2019). It is possible to infer that the objectives behind this choice were multiple: to demonstrate her femininity, to question the androcentric standards of the *Academia Sergipana de Letras* and, mainly, to highlight the strength and determination of women in that context. The issue of clothing worn by pioneering women in academies of letters was also observed in other memorable inaugurations, such as that of Rachel de Queirós at the *Academia Brasileira de Letras* in 1977 and that of Marguerite Yourcenar at the French Academy of Letters in 1980.

Before her inauguration ceremony, Rachel de Queirós was frequently asked about the clothes she would wear, given that the existing model was the men's uniform. Heloisa Buarque de Hollanda (2019) reports that the writer, when answering an interview for a newspaper about the clothes she would wear, replied “[...] my dresses are all *chemisier*, all the same style: I don't dress, I cover myself” (HOLLANDA, 2019, p. 88). In this way, Rachel de Queirós demonstrated that women's clothing for the *ABL* would have a characteristic of seriousness and simplicity. It was a model created by the stylist Silvia Souza Dantas, which had the following description: “[...] a simple dress like Rachel, in academic green, long, straight, V-neck and flared sleeves” (HOLLANDA, 2019, p. 88). The sword that is part of the men's attire was rejected by the immortal.

In France, Marguerite Yourcenar, the first woman in four hundred years to be elected to the French Academy, also rejected the traditional dress and the sword – the regalia of this association – which symbolizes the submission of the immortals to the sodality. In an interview she gave in 1988 to the magazine *Paris Review* Interview, she recalls: “I refused to wear the Academy uniform – my long velvet skirt and cape were designed by St. Laurent. Yourcemar” (YOURCENAR, 2012, p. 286) also said that she refused to wear a sword because it was a symbol of submission to male power (YOURCENAR, 2012).

As for the speeches given at Núbia Marques' inauguration, the first to be given to welcome the new immortal was by fellow member Abelardo Romero, an academic who joined the *ASL* in 1976 and defended the modification of the association's bylaws in order to allow women to join. The tone of his welcoming speech was a historical overview of women's struggle to gain space, especially in the literary world, in Western society. Initially, he referred to the election process of Núbia and then cited two men from Sergipe who fought for women: Tobias Barreto and Martinho Garcez. The first one defended the request for subsidies to study medicine made by two young women, exposing the idea that women had the same predispositions for academic knowledge as men; the second one defended divorce, at the end of the 19th century (Romero, 1980).

However, the most emblematic thing about this prelude to the speech of academic Abelardo Monteiro was attributing to the male figure the defense of women's rights, thus seeking an origin for the trajectory of women's struggles in Brazil and in Sergipe. In this sense, he corroborated Bourdieu's (2002a) thinking about male domination, in which the values constructed throughout the process dictate the explanations of social reality. In the last part of the speech, Abelardo praised the cookbook, highlighting her writing, through poetry, novels and prose based on social problems, justifying Núbia Marques' entry into the ASL. Another aspect highlighted by the speaker was the fight for women's rights, evidenced in her works, such as "*O passo de Estefânia*" and countless poems with social themes. Finally, he highlighted the teaching activity carried out by Núbia Marques at the Federal University of Sergipe.

Núbia Marques (1980) began her speech by presenting an overview of the transformations that have occurred in the condition of women, relating them to the market perspective, that is, to the need to incorporate the female productive force. According to her:

We live in a predominantly male world. And when we say this, we do not do so with resentment or useless protests; we are simply placing discourse on objectively concrete facts. Women, the second sex or the weaker sex, prone to tears and the subtle and discreet exercise of submission, are subsidiary. This submission is not mythical; it is evident. We do not make these statements without support. Everything leads us to believe, given the increasingly visible participation of women today, that they are free and fight shoulder to shoulder with men, and that 'all are equal before the law' (MARQUES, 1980, p. 1).

In this sense, throughout her speech, Núbia Marques demonstrates how women began to occupy positions that were once exclusively male. According to her, such changes were associated with the interests of the capitalist system. Using statistical data, the author highlighted the growth of the female workforce, even though it was marked by lower wages. Furthermore, she highlighted the distorted views of women, whether as the "weaker sex" or due to the association of their image with sensuality, thus combating the idealized view of the female gender. Núbia Marques defended the independent woman, arguing that statements about women "[...] are common sense, without scientific support, and therefore stereotypical, especially if the woman is an intellectual" (MARQUES, 1980, p. 34). In other words, she questioned the common sense view of women's subservience to men and, in contrast, highlighted Simone de Beauvoir's writings on the conditions of women in the fight against male domination.

The pioneer Núbia Marques also made a point of acknowledging in her inauguration speech the names of Sergipe intellectuals who supported her name as an academic. These ASL academics were intellectuals who were part of its social network, worked as teachers, lawyers and journalists and became part of the Academy during the 1960s and 1970s, leading changes in the stance of the literary association of Sergipe. Something similar can be established with what happened with the writer Rachel de Queirós, in the ABL, when the immortals of her network established the strategies for changing the rules and sought the votes necessary for her victory in the election. According to Michelle Asmar Fanini (2009),

although announced as a victory for feminism, as the breaking of an 80-year-old taboo and, ultimately, as symptomatic of a change in the conservative and traditionalist profile of the ABL, the election of Rachel de Queirós was not exactly a result of an initiative/campaign in favor of female eligibility (FANINI, 2009, p. 216)



In the context of Sergipe, Núbia Marques not only had the support of a social network formed by academic intellectuals from the *ASL*, who supported her and led the campaign in her favor, but also made a point of highlighting in her inauguration speech (Marques, 1980) her purpose of promoting the visibility and participation of women in all social spheres. This view of Núbia Marques was in line with the feminist concepts that gained strength in the 1960s, encompassing women's struggle against oppression, in the search for the development of quality of life and in the battle against inequality.

## Final Considerations

In the academies of letters, the restriction on female participation was not uniform among the different similar institutions in the country. As seen, the *Academia Paulista de Letras* had been admitting women since 1919. Throughout its history, the *Academia Brasileira de Letras* has had episodes that rejected the entry of women, such as the cases of poets Júlia Lopes, Carolina Michaëllis, Amélia Belváqua and Dinah Queiroz. It was only in 1977 that Rachel de Queirós broke this barrier when she was elected immortal of the *ABL*.

In Sergipe, the *Academia Sergipana de Letras* maintained this ineligibility until 1977, when Núbia Marques won a seat. Her rise was the result of her intellectual competence, but also of her insertion in an influential local social network, especially linked to the Federal University of Sergipe, where her teaching activities were fundamental to her legitimacy in the *ASL*. With a degree in Social Work, her academic journey and active participation in cultural movements and government agencies in Sergipe linked to culture in the 1960s and 1970s demonstrate her cultural capital. And, by demonstrating the need to expand the spaces for women to act, Núbia Marques expressed the importance of a more active and representative participation of women in all sectors of society.

Teaching provided women not only with intellectual exercise, but also access to literary production and cultural networks. This connection with the educational field may have been a facilitating factor in overcoming barriers that could hinder the recognition and admission of female writers in letters academy. In this sense, the trajectory and literary paths of the teachers show that the exercise of the professional activity of teaching contributed to their insertion in networks of sociability and to the aggregation of capital that guaranteed their legitimacy and insertion in the androcentric space of the academies of letters. In the case of the *Academia Sergipana de Letras*, this occurred with the pioneering entry of professor Núbia Marques and, throughout the second half of the 20th century, with five other secondary and/or higher education teachers who were elected immortals of the *ASL*.

Finally, the female struggle for recognition and entry into spaces of literary consecration, such as the academies of letters, reflects the determination to overcome challenges in environments historically dominated by a male perspective. Pioneering women, such as writers Rachel de Queirós and Núbia Marques, not only broke barriers, but also left a fundamental legacy for the inclusion and recognition of women in literary and cultural spheres, demonstrating that competence, talent and female contribution are essential and indelible for the development of these institutions and the literary field.

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