

## Mikhail Bakhtin: path and life in teaching<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

For the first time in the history of Russian pedagogy, the authors present a reconstruction of the path and professional life of the eminent Russian thinker M. M. Bakhtin (1895-1975) in the pedagogical field. Based on archival materials and biographical research, the main stages of Bakhtin's teaching activity are presented — from his early tutoring during his school years to his work as a lecturer at the Mordovian Pedagogical Institute and later at Mordovia University in the post-war period. The authors argue that the pedagogical component of Bakhtin's scholarly biography occupies a place no less significant than his research work. Moreover, for most of those who knew Bakhtin in everyday life — his students, alumni, and people who met him in various life circumstances — Bakhtin the teacher was no less important than Bakhtin the scholar. This is confirmed by the memories and letters of his students, as well as by the inscriptions in books presented to him. Throughout his teaching career, Bakhtin developed his own understanding of the tasks of creation and education — his own philosophy of education — which can be called “pedagogy of responsibility”. The article presents an analysis of a draft of M. M. Bakhtin's speech to the graduates of the Faculty of History and Philology at Mordovia University, which contains the fundamental principles of his “pedagogy of responsibility”. These principles clearly correspond to the foundations of Bakhtin's early philosophical and ethical program. Responsibility for one's own work and for one's students is the most important principle that Bakhtin emphasizes in this text. According to him, what transforms teachers into true educators is the continuity of tradition, fidelity to one's choice, and opposition to indifference.

*Keywords: M. M. Bakhtin. Teaching profession. “Pedagogy of responsibility”. Dialogical pedagogy.*

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### Mikhail Bakhtin: caminho e vida na docência

#### Resumo

Pela primeira vez na história da pedagogia russa, os autores apresentam uma reconstrução do percurso e da vida profissional do eminente pensador russo M. M. Bakhtin (1895-1975) no campo pedagógico. Com base em materiais de arquivo e em pesquisa biográfica, são apresentadas as principais etapas da atividade docente de Bakhtin — desde a tutoria durante seus anos de ensino fundamental até o magistério no Instituto Pedagógico e na Universidade da Mordóvia, no período pós-guerra. Os autores argumentam que o componente pedagógico da biografia científica de Bakhtin ocupa um lugar não menos significativo do que seu trabalho de pesquisa. Além disso, para a maioria daqueles que o conheceram na vida cotidiana — seus alunos, graduados e pessoas que conviveram com ele em diversas circunstâncias — Bakhtin, o professor, não foi menos importante do que Bakhtin, o cientista. Isso é confirmado pelas memórias e cartas de alunos e alunas de Bakhtin, bem como por dedicatórias em livros presenteados. Ao longo dos anos de sua carreira docente, Bakhtin desenvolveu sua própria compreensão das tarefas de criação e educação, sua própria filosofia de educação, que pode ser chamada de “pedagogia da responsabilidade”. O artigo apresenta uma análise do rascunho do discurso de M. M. Bakhtin aos formandos da Faculdade de História e Filologia da Universidade da Mordóvia, o qual contém os princípios fundamentais de sua

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“pedagogia da responsabilidade”. Esses princípios correspondem claramente aos fundamentos do programa filosófico e ético inicial de Bakhtin. A responsabilidade pelo próprio trabalho e pelos próprios alunos é o princípio mais importante que Bakhtin destaca nesse texto. Segundo ele, o que transforma professores em verdadeiros educadores é a continuidade da tradição, a fidelidade à escolha e a oposição à indiferença.

*Palavras-chave: M. M. Bakhtin. Profissão docente. “Pedagogia da responsabilidade”. Pedagogia dialógica.*

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## Introdução

The name of the prominent Russian thinker, philosopher, and literary theorist M. M. Bakhtin is known to anyone interested in the history of 20th-century Russian science and culture. In the international academic sphere, Bakhtin has been seen for many decades as one of the symbols of Russian culture and, in this sense, stands alongside A. S. Pushkin, F. M. Dostoevsky, L. N. Tolstoy, and A. P. Chekhov. For humanity science, the principle of dialogical thought, formulated by Bakhtin in his works from the late 1920s and consistently developed in his works from the 1940s to the 1960s, proves fundamental today. It is on this principle that dialogical pedagogy is built, which has been developing since the 1970s, and whose ideas are becoming increasingly sought after in the theory and practice of education in the modern world (Dubrovskaya; Osovsky, 2021; Matusov; Marjanovic-Shane; Gradovski, 2019; Osovsky et al., 2020).

So, up to this point, hundreds of monographs and collections, as well as thousands of articles, have been dedicated to various aspects of Bakhtin’s scientific legacy (Osovsky, 2013; Osovsky; Dubrovskaya, 2021; Osovsky et al., 2022). At the same time, the cultural-educational and properly pedagogical component of Bakhtin’s biography remains insufficiently explored.

When discussing Bakhtin as a philosopher, literary theorist, linguist, and cultural scholar, many authors sometimes forget what constituted the essence of his professional vocation: his pedagogical activity in schools and universities. Of course, this issue has not been completely ignored, having been addressed in works by V. I. Laptun, N. L. Vasiliev, and others (Brandist et al., 2020; Laptun, 2001; Osovsky; Dubrovskaya, 2024; Tikhanov; Laptun, 2017; Vasiliev, 2013). Bakhtin’s teaching activity is partially present in his biographies written by Clark and Holquist (1984), Konkin and Konkina (1993), and Pankov (2010).

However, until recently, this aspect of M. Bakhtin’s life has received little attention from researchers. The importance of the pedagogical component only became clear with the opening

of Bakhtin's archive to broad access. Throughout his life, in addition to his own manuscripts and correspondence, he kept numerous documents related to his work at the school and university (drafts of methodological articles, departmental plans, exams, and even notes with student questions from lectures and seminars).

The recent publication, in the journal *Voprosy Filosofii*, of an article on the phenomenon of grateful learning in Bakhtin's life, accompanied by archival materials (Osovsky; Dubrovskaya, 2024), made it possible to formulate a definition of the nature of his pedagogical views as a "pedagogy of responsibility", by analogy to the "architecture of responsibility", considered an underlying formula in Bakhtin's philosophical research in the early 1920s.

The aim of our article is to analyze Bakhtin's path towards the teaching profession and, at the same time, to show that the vocation of teacher was precisely one of the most essential aspects of the researcher's activity. Today we can safely say that Bakhtin had an inner sense of his vocation as a teacher: it is no coincidence that, in a draft of a speech to the graduating class of the Faculty of History and Philology at the University of Mordovia, he declared: "Today I address you [...] as a teacher for teachers" (Osovsky; Dubrovskaya, 2024, p. 132).

### **Bakhtin's path to a teaching career**

Bakhtin's path to a teaching career unfolded amidst difficult life circumstances and in an environment of radical change in social and political life, during times of war and revolution. It is noteworthy that Bakhtin's younger sisters also pursued teaching careers. Another example is the fate of his older brother, N. M. Bakhtin. From student, he went to the battlefronts of the First World War, after the Civil War, served in the French Foreign Legion during his years in exile, returned to Paris after being seriously wounded, and became one of the leading literary critics of the emigration. In the early 1930s, he moved to England, where he ended his life as a professor of classical literature at the University of Birmingham.

Did Bakhtin have the opportunity to do something other than teach? The question is not rhetorical. His father, Mikhail Nikolayevich Bakhtin, was for many years an employee and then manager of a branch of a large bank in Orel, then in Vilnius and Odessa. M. M. Bakhtin mastered the fundamentals of accounting and, according to some information, even worked in one of the bank branches in Petrograd. Later, these skills would help him earn a living in exile in Kustanai,

where he got a job as an accountant at the local District Consumer Union, occasionally teaching various courses, including accounting (Clark; Holquist, 1984; Konkin; Konkina, 1993).

Mikhail Bakhtin was involved in teaching activities from a very young age. Here we must recall a well-known tradition: high school students with outstanding performance often acted as tutors for their peers or those who needed intensive preparation to enter universities or higher education courses. In particular, this concerned teenagers from wealthy families who planned to enter prestigious educational institutions in the capital or who, due to certain restrictions (we are mainly talking about Jewish families), needed additional preparation to pass exams at Russian or Western European universities.

It is the story that underlies the well-known narrative about Bakhtin's first experience as a teacher, when, at the age of 18, he became the tutor of a young woman from a wealthy Jewish family in Odessa. Many years later, the widow of Matvei Kagan, a close friend of Bakhtin, recalled the episode in an interview given to N. A. Pankov. What is noteworthy here is not so much the tutoring, but the assessment of the young Bakhtin made in conversation by his older colleague with vast teaching experience:

"I had heard of Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin even before I met him. In my youth, I had a friend, Lelya Sochevanova, the daughter of a very rich and important businessman. In their family, education was provided by a tutor, a teacher—I don't know the correct way to say it—named Kleber. [...]. And so, Kleber often remembered Mikhail Mikhailovich and said, with delight: 'This is a genius! This is a genius!' He was impressed by Mikhail Mikhailovich's independence of judgment and breadth of knowledge. He often repeated: 'This is a genius! This is a genius!'" (Kagan; Kagan, 1995, p. 166).

Perhaps it is precisely this assessment that can be considered the starting point in the more than one-hundred-year history of the reception of M. M. Bakhtin's personal life and personality.

There is no doubt that the origins of pedagogical mastery lie in Bakhtin's own school experience. It is not just that the young Bakhtin studied at the best gymnasiums in Vilnius and Odessa, from which many famous figures of Russian culture emerged. The very intellectual and academic atmosphere of these educational institutions certainly influenced his formative process and stimulated the wide range of interests in the humanities of the future author of books on Dostoevsky and Rabelais. It is no coincidence that, in his conversations with Vadim

Duvakin in 1973 (published a few years later), Bakhtin recalled this time with great emotion: “The Odessa gymnasium was good. I can’t complain, I can’t. All the teachers were good [...] in general, it was wonderful. They were all excellent, wonderful, noble young men” (Duvakin, 2002, p. 30).

Unfortunately, frequent illnesses and bouts of osteomyelitis prevented him from attending school regularly and led him to become self-taught, which contributed greatly to the young high school student’s deep immersion in European philosophy. We see evidence of these years of study in letters from Nikolai M. Bakhtin (Mikhail Bakhtin’s older brother), sent to A. A. Vrubel of Odessa during school holidays: “My brother and I read poets and unpublished Kant” (Dvinyatina, 2005, p. 116). It is noteworthy that, in the summer of 1914, Nikolai M. Bakhtin, a student at the Faculty of History and Philology at the University of St. Petersburg, and his younger brother, Mikhail Bakhtin, shared the same literary and academic interests. This fact is confirmed by other letters, in which Nikolai tells the sister of a famous artist and the landlady of the apartment where he lives about how he is preparing for the university philosophy exam with the help of his brother.

Although there is no documented record of Bakhtin’s stay at the universities of Novorossiysk (Odessa) and Petrograd, today we can safely say that he had some university experience. In addition, Bakhtin mentions several names of his mentors in official documents from the mid-1940s. Thus, in one version of his autobiography, he wrote:

After graduating from a classical gymnasium in Odessa in 1913, he entered the University of Novorossiysk, where he studied with professors Lange, Varnicke, Mandes, Mochulsky, and others. In 1916, he transferred to the University of Petrograd, where he graduated in 1918 (he studied with A. I. Vvedensky, F. F. Zelinsky, S. S. Srebrny and others) [...]. He studied [the principles of] classical philosophy and philology (Osovsky; Dubrovskaya, 2024, p. 133).

Among the professors mentioned, the figure of one of the founders of Russian experimental psychology, a student of W. Wundt, Professor N. N. Lange, stands out. Bakhtin recounted details of his contact, as a student, with the famous scientist, in a conversation with Duvakin:

B: Lange, I told you, is Nikolai Nikolaevich. He was an excellent professor, an excellent professor, but, for example, when I remember asking him – I started

reading philosophical books in the original German very early on – I asked about Hermann Cohen – the director of the Marburg School...

D: Where is Pasternak?

B: Pasternak, yes, yes. Here. His first work of this kind, and a very important one, is “Kants Theorie der Erfahrung”, that is, “Kant’s Theory of Experience”. I asked him if it was a solid book (Duvakin, 2002, p. 40).

The presence, in Bakhtin’s early philosophical texts, of critiques of European psychologism and modern psychological theories, as well as his later immersion in the problems of vitalism, could not have occurred without knowledge of certain ideas of his teacher from Odessa. With no less reverence, Bakhtin recalled his mentors from Petrograd: “The most important figures among those I know, with whom I studied, were: Faddey Frantsevich Zelinsky... Well, he was a remarkable connoisseur of Antiquity, translator of ancient works and so on. He had an enormous influence on all the classics of the time” (Duvakin, 2002, p. 63).

The contact with celebrated teachers was not limited to the discussion of scientific problems; an extremely friendly, almost familial atmosphere developed between the mentor and the students, which, it seems, predetermined the nature of Bakhtin’s future relationships with his own students: “Zelinsky’s famous seminars were held at his house and, moreover, his wife offered us delicious cakes” (Duvakin, 2002, p. 72).

No less noteworthy is the figure of another classical scholar, S. S. Srebrny, representative of that generation of university professors who were only a few years older than their students:

"Whom was I especially close to?... Srebrny, Stepan Samuilovich Srebrny. He was Polish, yes. He was also, of course, a student of Zelinsky and devoted himself to the study of classical comedy, mainly classical comedy, early classical comedy and middle classical comedy. Well, of course, he also touched on late classical comedy, Greek comedy [...]. He gave seminars, like many professors and associate professors, at his home. That was fashionable at the time! [...]. Well, Srebrny had a seminar, we sat there, then some of us, the more distant ones, left, and our circle, those closest to him... stayed after these classes, drank tea and then performed charades" (Duvakin, 2002, pp. 65, 72).

Bakhtin’s mention of Srebrny is of great importance for clarifying the details of his biography. Many of the so-called skeptics, doubting the factual basis of Bakhtin’s recollections of his time at the universities of Novorossiysk and Petrograd, claim that he probably borrowed details of university life from his older brother's stories (Korovachko, 2017). However, judging by

the available data, Srebrny took up the professorship in 1916, that is, when N. M. Bakhtin left the university. Consequently, most of young Bakhtin's time with him occurred in his brother's absence.

In 1918, Bakhtin began his teaching career in the schools of the city of Nevel. During these years, he not only taught but also performed various administrative functions. In M. M. Bakhtin's archive, there is a certificate of appointment to the position of president of the school board of the Nevel school, issued on August 9, 1920. Together with the students, the faculty actively discussed issues related to improving teaching and including new subjects, in particular, Latin and English, boxing and sword-paly (Pankov, 1998).

With his friend L. V. Pumpyansky, Bakhtin participated in the production of Sophocles' Oedipus at Colonus. According to the district newspaper, about 500 students participated in the crowd scenes at this performance. However, Bakhtin discovered his talent as a teacher not only within the school walls; Nevel became the place where he had the opportunity to present his own philosophical ideas, largely formed during his work with the works of Immanuel Kant and the main representatives of German and Russian neo-Kantianism.

Bakhtin's presentation at one of Nevel's "family circles", which was named the Kantian Seminar, became a landmark event in the intellectual life of this small town. Bakhtin's longtime friend, the renowned pianist Maria Yudina, wrote about it more than once in her memoirs. It is noteworthy that Bakhtin also gave lectures outdoors: a limited number of listeners was enough for him to present the ideas of his "first philosophy" against the backdrop of Nevel's picturesque landscapes, where one of the lakes was named "Lake of Moral Reality".

Bakhtin's speeches were also extremely popular with the public in various Nevel clubs, which was reflected in the pages of the local press (Maksimovskaya, 1996). From this same period dates the short article "Art and Responsibility", published in Nevel's newspaper "Art Day", in which Bakhtin first outlined the principles of his ethical and aesthetic vision of real life and art (Bakhtin, 2003 [1919]).

In the autumn of 1920, Bakhtin moved to the city of Vitebsk, exchanging his position as a school teacher for that of a university professor. Several years of school practice, intensive studies in philosophy, and intense teaching activity allowed him to become one of the most prominent figures not only in the school sphere but also in the intellectual life of the city. Teaching work at the local Public Education Institute, the People's Conservatory, and technical

schools alternated with presentations at clubs and numerous debates, which were reported in detail in Vitebsk newspapers and magazines (Shatskikh, 2001).

Proof of the attention Bakhtin received from his students and listeners at various seminars are the notes of a member of the Bakhtin Circle, the future and famous art critic I. I. Sollertinsky. In 1921, in Vitebsk, he recorded in his diary the titles of all the Bakhtin lectures he attended. The most striking evidence is the recollection of R. M. Mirkina, who, while still a student, attended the Bakhtin Circle on Russian literature in Vitebsk and, later, as a student at the Leningrad Institute, along with her sister, met Bakhtin again to continue her studies. Much later, Mirkina recalled:

Mikhail Mikhailovich lectured beautifully. He was a natural orator, with a very expressive voice and a beautiful timbre. His speech flowed freely and uninhibitedly. He never used notes, plans, or prepared quotations. Some of the deliberation inherent in his printed works disappeared in his oral presentations. It seemed as if one were dealing with a brilliant, passionate, and emotional improviser. When reciting poems, it seemed as if he were not a lecturer or a reader, but their author. Bakhtin, of course, took the composition of the audience into account, but he never simplified anything. This ability to combine simplicity of presentation with profound analysis was also characteristic of Mikhail Mikhailovich. He once called himself a neo-Kantian [...]. He was a genius not only as a scientist, but also as a person. What I learned from Bakhtin has remained with me forever. His lectures propelled me toward broader reflections not only on literary issues, but also on various aspects of social reality (Mirkina, 1993, pp. 67, 69).

Bakhtin lectured not only to residents of Vitebsk: his archive contains a “Certificate of work as a lecturer in the divisional club of the political department of the 5th Rifle Division”, indicating that he also lectured to Red Army soldiers from military units around Vitebsk (Bakhtin, 1922).

Having returned to Leningrad in the spring of 1924, Bakhtin was able to continue working only with unofficial teaching activities, limited to lectures in family circles and seminars. Many of Bakhtin’s contemporaries, including the academician D. S. Likhachev, the historian and literary scholar N. P. Antsiferov, and others, recalled his participation in these circles. No less noteworthy was Bakhtin’s presence in numerous literary and musical salons in Leningrad, in the homes of the historian E. V. Tarle, the aforementioned Maria Yudina, and the literary scholar and critic, a member of the "Bakhtin Circle," Pavel Medvedev (Osovsky; Dubrovskaya, 2022).

According to several indirect, yet undocumented, accounts, Bakhtin had the opportunity to occasionally teach at educational institutions in Leningrad. However, his failing health and intense scientific work – in particular the preparation of the book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Work* (Bakhtin, 2022 [1929]) – made it impossible for him to dedicate himself to teaching full-time.

In December 1928, Bakhtin was arrested for attending a religious organization considered anti-Soviet and, after trial, was sentenced to five years in the Solovetsky camp. However, due to the convict's state of health and numerous petitions, including from A. M. Gorky, the Political Red Cross, and others, his sentence was commuted to exile in Kustanai (Konkin; Konkina, 1993).

In several biographical documents, Bakhtin indicated that, in Kustanai, he had the opportunity to teach at specialized educational institutions; however, no archival evidence of this has been found to date.

Bakhtin remained in Kustanai until the beginning of autumn 1936. In October, he moved with his wife to Saransk, where he resumed his activities in higher education. Bakhtin's arrival in Saransk was the result of a favorable confluence of circumstances: on the one hand, the Mordovia Pedagogical Institute, established in 1931, urgently needed qualified teachers; on the other hand, the aforementioned Pavel Medvedev and his former student, the head of the Literary Department of the Moscow State Pedagogical Institute, G. S. Petrov, maintained close ties with that university. More than three decades later, Bakhtin told Duvakin:

[...] in my last year, I received a letter from Pavel Nikolaevich Medvedev. Medvedev visited Saransk. He went there simply for small jobs. There was a large pedagogical institute there, in Saransk, and then... his student was the head of it. And then he went for small jobs. He liked it there; I liked it in the sense that it was so calm, peaceful, everything was good. At that time... And he advised me to go to Saransk (Duvakin, 2002, p. 237).

Nazarova and Svischeva (1990, p. 3) present the following account:

Mikhailovich Bakhtin is still clear and visible before us. In the second year, Mikhail Mikhailovich taught ancient literature to us. We waited impatiently and listened to his lectures with pleasure. He was short, slightly stooped, bald, with a pale face and dark, intelligent eyes that shone with a special gleam. He wore a light suit. During classes, he usually kept his right hand in his jacket pocket and his left hand on his chest, over his lapel. He never had papers, books, or scraps of paper in his hands. I remember when he spoke about Homer and analyzed his epic poems, reciting large

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chapters from memory. It seemed to us that before us was not the master Bakhtin, but an ancient Greek thinker and a living witness to those distant events. We listened to him as if we were bewitched, afraid even to cough.

A remarkable document from this period, discovered in the archive of M. A. Beban, are the lecture notes on foreign literature that the poet and correspondence student gave in the spring semester of 1937 (Klyueva, 2019). Despite all the imperfections of the notes, it is remarkable how the scientific depth of these lectures combines with the pedagogical skill of presenting quite complex material to provincial students.

The worsening political situation in the country and the internal conflict in the leadership of the Pedagogical Institute forced Bakhtin and his wife to leave Saransk in early July 1937. Mikhail Bakhtin would spend the next eight years at Savelovo Station, just over a hundred kilometers from Moscow, where, in the years before the war, he devoted himself mainly to scientific work, preparing a monograph about a coming-of-age novel, a study about Rabelais, and a series of works on the theory of the novel. Based on the latter, two reports would be prepared in the Literary Theory section of the A. M. Gorky Institute of World Literature, of the USSR Academy of Sciences (Pankov, 2010).

With the start of the Great Patriotic War<sup>4</sup>, Bakhtin returned to teaching at a secondary school. For several months, he worked as a German teacher in the village of Ilyinskoye and then taught Russian language and literature, German language and history in secondary schools in the city of Kimry and at a school at Savelovo Station.

In the late 1980s, Tver literary scholars E. N. Ponomareva and M. V. Stroganov (1992), and, a little later, local historian V. Korkunov (2013), attempted to collect memories of Professor Bakhtin. Remembering their teacher with immense gratitude, former students noted Bakhtin's ability to engage with them as equals, discuss serious topics, reject stereotypes found in textbooks, and defend his own vision of literature. Thus, in a classroom discussion revolving around one of Bakhtin's favorite plots – an example of detached discourse in *Eugene Onegin* – the following occurred:

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<sup>4</sup> This corresponds to the period of the Second World War (1941-1945), when Russia was invaded by the Nazis and had to fight for its territory.

“When we studied *Eugene Onegin*, he let us discover the poem and the characters for ourselves. We liked Lensky best because, unlike the aggressive Onegin, he seemed more romantic. And then Bakhtin recounted how Pushkin regarded Lensky; ...” he showed that Púç Bakhtin did not recognize Lensky as a writer [...].

I remember a classroom discussion and debate about *Eugene Onegin*. The image of Lensky.

– What do you think of Lensky’s poems?

– “Excellent”, we said.

– Bad!

– But what do you reject (disapprove of, or something like that) in Pushkin?

– It wasn’t Pushkin who wrote badly, but Lensky... (Korkunov, 2013, p. 116).

The methodological device that Bakhtin used in the dialogue was taken from the dialogic arsenal already mentioned in the book on Dostoevsky: the example with Lensky’s poetry is an obvious word that Bakhtin used to illustrate to the students the hetero discourse of Pushkin's novel.

School teaching prompted Bakhtin to turn to methodological questions, in particular to the problems of teaching Russian in the final years of high school. It was in Savelovo that he prepared the article “Questions of Stylistics in Language Teaching” (Bakhtin, 2013 [194-], which to this day remains one of the most important methodological texts for dialogic pedagogy (Matusov; Marjanovic-Shane; Gradovski, 2019). No less noteworthy are the drafts and notes of lecture texts preserved in Bakhtin’s archive, in particular on the poetry of Mayakovsky, which he taught in the schools of Savelovo.

After the end of the Great Patriotic War, Bakhtin decided to resume his teaching activities at the university. Following the advice of G. S. Petrov, then a responsible official of the Ministry of Education of the Soviet Union, he returned to Saransk, where, in the autumn of 1945, he took up the post of head of the Department of General Literature. From then on, Bakhtin’s teaching activities became linked to the Mordovia Pedagogical Institute (since 1957, Mordovia State University) (Bakhtin, 2002).

In the autumn of 1946, at the Institute of World Literature, Bakhtin defended his thesis on the topic “François Rabelais in the History of Realism”, the text of which would later form the basis of his famous book *The Work of François Rabelais and the Popular Culture of the Middle*

*Ages and the Renaissance*.<sup>5</sup> Due to circumstances that had nothing to do with the quality of the research, Bakhtin received the title of Doctor of Philological Sciences only six years later (Pankov, 2010). However, for most of his colleagues and students, Bakhtin's status as an academic, his personality, the depth of his knowledge, and his evident pedagogical talent were undeniable.

An analysis of the documents of the Department of General Literature (and later of Russian and Foreign Literature) allows us to affirm that, for Bakhtin and his colleagues, not only research but also teaching activity was quite important (Bakhtin, 2002). The head and professors of the department led student circles, gave lectures on problems of aesthetics and modern culture to students from various faculties. The department carried out methodological work, collaborating with the Department of Pedagogy and Psychology, as well as with individual representatives of research institutes of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of the Soviet Union. The presence of a well-known poet and literary theorist, L. I. Timofeev – a close friend of Bakhtin – at the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences made it possible to send young professors from the department, Yu. F. Basikhin and A. G. Serdtseva, to postgraduate studies.

Bakhtin maintained special relations with his Literature students, many of whom carried the fond memory of their mentor throughout their lives. For the vast majority of students, contact with Bakhtin was not only focused on the world of literature, but also a way of understanding life itself and its laws.

Thus, V. A. Mirskaya – who maintained a relation with Bakhtin and his wife for many years after graduating from university, became a graduate student and later a teacher at the Mordovia Pedagogical Institute – wrote in the preface to the publication of her notes from Bakhtin's lectures:

I kept my old notebook as a relic. And today I am happy because it is becoming the property of all who cherish the name of our unforgettable teacher. And I am also proud that I – that diligent girl with braids – was able to thank my beloved teacher in some way, transmitting his words to others... (Mirskaya, 1999, p. 10).

The fact that almost all the students who passed through the "Bakhtin School" felt sincere gratitude is evidenced by the dedications in the books they gave to their mentor. This sentiment fills the dedication of one of the student groups:

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<sup>5</sup> Translator's note: This text has a slightly different title in the current Brazilian translation: *A cultura popular na Idade Média e no Renascimento*. The context of François Rabelais (Bakhtin, 1999 [1940-1965]).

Dear Mikhail Mikhailovich! You gave us profound knowledge, you taught us to love literature and art. You ignited in us a love for knowledge. You taught us to understand life, to love it, you taught us to live. A big THANK YOU for that. Grateful students of the fourth year of the Literature Department of the Mordovia State Pedagogical Institute. 3/1-50 (Klyueva; Zemkova, 2020, p. 119).

Bakhtin's dialogue with his students continued throughout his years of study and work. Naturally, these relations were built differently with each student: Bakhtin's archive contains letters that graduates sent to their teachers in distant villages of Mordovia, where they taught in schools. Former students congratulated Bakhtin on holidays, sharing their lives and difficulties. The power of the thinker's words resonated in the souls and hearts of the students, as evidenced by the messages they left in books. Thus, Bakhtin's former student, the poet A. S. Malkin, wrote: "To Mikh. Mikh. Bakhtin. A connoisseur of literature and a man with a soul [Signature of A. S. Malkin]. 11/26/1955" (Klyueva; Zemkova, 2020, p. 143).

Even more expressive is the message from the writer G. V. Balabaev: "To dear Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin – from a student. You taught me to feel and understand the living soul of literature and, with your example, taught me a unique lesson in behavior in life. This book is a timid tribute of my respect for you. 12/24/73 [signature of G. V. Balabaev]" (Klyueva; Zemkova, 2020, p. 30).

Few students were fortunate enough to continue collaborating with Bakhtin as his graduate students. It is worth noting that the scientist took over the supervision of graduate students after his retirement from university. For Yu. F. Basikhin, A. V. Dialektova, V. A. Gobov, E. V. Konyukhova and T. M. Nefedova, postgraduate studies have become a true school of scientific research (Klyueva; Lisunova, 2020; Vasiliev, 1998).

Attempts to enter Bakhtin's graduate program were also made by "outsiders". For example, the scholar and literary critic V. N. Turbin, who greatly contributed to facilitating Bakhtin's life and daily routine in Saransk and Moscow, tried to persuade him to accept several graduates from his seminar into the graduate program (Pankov, 2010). Sometimes, the very opportunity to meet Bakhtin was as important to the graduate student as discussing scientific issues. Ponomareva (1995) speaks about this in her memoirs. She was a long-time employee and later director of the Dostoevsky Museum in Moscow:

“I went there as if I had a purpose, obviously not fully believing in it – to write a dissertation under his supervision [...]. For me, in the end, it turned out to be a very long story, as I left the dissertation for many years and defended it very late – for me, it was never an end in itself, but the contact with M. M. Bakhtin was a gift; The dissertation topic itself was sidelined and ended up in such a vague perspective that we almost never addressed it in subsequent years – we kind of forgot about that objective and that subject” (Ponomareva, 1995, p. 60).

The young generation of literary scholars and philosophers of the early 1960s found in Bakhtin a mentor and a producer of knowledge who transformed their ideas about literary science. In a letter from V. V. Kozhinov, written on behalf of his friends and associates (S. G. Bocharov, G. D. Gachev, P. V. Palyevsky, and V. D. Skvoznikov), it was stated:

Mikhail Mikhailovich, deeply respected and dear to us! I am writing to you on behalf of a group of young literary scholars, united by collaborative work and friendship, who were born in the year your book was published or one or two years later. <sup>6</sup> In practice, we have done almost nothing yet. However, we strive to continue the work of your generation of researchers of Russian literature. [...] for us, perhaps the greatest value of your work lies in your methodology, which provides the only true path to understanding the art of words – a methodology that, when analyzing a work, does not make a priori abstractions of any kind, but strives to reveal all its multifaceted artistic content, deeply exploring the objective and concrete reality of the work's form [...]. We learned this from you. And, if we manage to express something useful and essential, we will be largely grateful to you for it (Pankov, 2010, p. 486).

In letters exchanged with Bakhtin, the theme of gratitude to the mentor constantly resonates in the memoirs of Bocharov, Kozhinov, and Gachev. Although primarily focused on scientific topics, the dialogue frequently turned to the discussion of everyday issues, and each of Bakhtin's interlocutors sought his advice or instructions. Everyone believed that the “Bakhtin School”, through which they had passed, had provided them with the opportunity to reach a special level of scientific understanding of Russian literature – which made each of the participants in the “younger Bakhtin circle” prominent researchers in the Russian humanities and rendered their works an invaluable contribution to literary studies.

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<sup>6</sup> Translator's note: Reference to the year 1929, when M. Bakhtin's first book, "Problems of Dostoevsky's Work," was published.

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## Conclusions

Bakhtin formulated his conception of the teacher at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, in the aforementioned draft of a speech to the graduating class of the Faculty of History and Philology at Mordovia University. We have not yet been able to establish the exact date of writing of this text; Bakhtin most likely prepared it in 1961, before his retirement. There is no evidence that this speech was ever delivered, but the very course of the scientist's thoughts, the emphasis and the main theses of the text allow us to affirm that we have before us the formulation of Bakhtin's "pedagogy of responsibility". One of the most important thoughts in this draft is the idea of a mentor's responsibility to their students, passed down from generation to generation:

You are on the threshold. A celebration on the threshold: behind you is the university; ahead of you, a vast life still unknown to you. On the threshold is the time to think.

Take with you all the good things you have received, do not lose them, do not forget them. Remember that we are responsible for everything we will do (Osovsky; Dubrovskaya, 2024, p. 132).

Here, the idea of responsibility becomes the most important principle of training and education, which should form the basis of every teacher's activity: "Our products are living people. We are responsible for all their future actions, for their work, and you will be responsible for the entire subsequent life of your students" (Osovsky; Dubrovskaya, 2024, p. 132).

At the same time, as Bakhtin emphasizes, pedagogical work does not tolerate indifference: "Fear indifference, aridity, insensitivity. Indifferent hands create nothing. Love the people that life brings close to you" (Osovsky; Dubrovskaya, 2024, p. 132).

This type of discourse, by definition, is a monologue; however, in Bakhtin's case, there is an internal dialogism, the response to which will be the corresponding actions of his listeners in their future lives. The moral and pedagogical emphasis of the late Bakhtin clearly aligns with the philosophical and ethical orientation of his early texts, in which the ideas of responsibility and human action form the core of the young philosopher's reflections.

The pedagogical side of Bakhtin's life may seem less expressive than his scientific achievements, but, in the human dimension, it occupies a no less important place in the thinker's

“living biography”. In this sense, Bakhtin the teacher is rightly placed on the same level as Bakhtin the philosopher and scholar of literature, and his pedagogical activity is no less significant than his scientific discoveries.

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