

FROM THE BOOK TO BAKHTIN'S THESIS ON RABELAIS (1930-1952): PROJECT, CONTEXT, RESULT

Sheila Vieira de Camargo GRILLO*

- **ABSTRACT:** Recovering part of the context in which, *Popular culture in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance. The context of François Rabelais* (1965), understood as being from between the years of 1930 to 1952, is the task we propose to undertake in this article. This endeavor is justified in that it offers the Brazilian public knowledge about the direct relationship between the theory of the novel and Bakhtin's work on Rabelais, as well as the circumstances in which the text was written. The research, characterized as historiographic, is based on primary and secondary sources, and recognizes that it is inconclusive and provisory in nature. Results reveal: the direct connection between the theory of the novel, developed in the 1930s, and the book on Rabelais; the fact that *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (BAKHTIN, 1984 [1929]) entered the history of Soviet literary theory soon after its publication; Mikhail Bakhtin's scientific personality; and the revolutionary dimension of François Rabelais' work.
- **KEYWORDS:** M. Bakhtin; book on Rabelais; context.

Introduction

M. Bakhtin's book on François Rabelais, currently in the Portuguese version, translated from the French and published in 1987 under the title: *A cultura popular na Idade Média e no Renascimento. O contexto de François Rabelais* (BAKHTIN, 2010[1965]),¹ has a long trajectory that begins in the 1930s and "closes" in 1965 with its publication in the Soviet Union. Considering that, in Russia, this path is well known among specialists of M. Bakhtin's work, however, in Brazil, this information is sparse and still little known. The objective of this article is to recover a part of the circumstances in which the text was developed – from the 1930s to the decision of the

* Universidade de São Paulo (USP). Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas (FFLCH). São Paulo - SP - Brazil. sheilagrillo@usp.br. ORCID: 000-0003-0480

¹ TN: Following the norms of Scielo, we rely on the previously published English versions of works cited here, where they exist and are available to us, the primary one being: BAKHTIN, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Hélène Iswolsky. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984. All other citations that do not appear in previously published English versions or are not available to us are translated from Portuguese, with the Portuguese versions appearing in footnotes.

VAK (Higher Attestation Commission)² – based on, above all, two types of sources: 1) documents of the period, regarding the writing, and thesis defense, and the awarding of a doctoral degree through VAK, the scientific commission’s meeting minutes from the defense, letters, reports from official members, and specialist editors, shorthand records from the stenographer’s transcripts of the defense appearing in *M. M. Bakhtin. Obras reunidas* [M.M. Bakhtin. Collected Works] (1997-2012); 2), articles, and books by Russian specialists who wrote and interpreted these sources: Popova (2008, 2009, 2010), Pankov (2010) and Alpatov (1997, 1999). The collected documents will be treated as historical sources, endowed with information and social evaluations,³ some converging with, and others diverging from, one another. The relevance of this historiographic research is to provide Brazilian Bakhtinian scholars with data about the historical and intellectual context that will aid in understanding the long process of developing the text, the interferences M. Bakhtin endured during its evaluation by VAK and his scientific personality, with implications about the book published in 1965. This historiographic approach shapes the following organization of the article. First, we carry out a brief synthesis of M. Bakhtin’s two presentations at the Gorky Institute of World Literature (IMLI), as they reveal the relationship between the theory of the novel and the study on Rabelais. Next, we treat M. Bakhtin’s initial proposal and his effort to turn the work on Rabelais into a book. Afterward, we relate to and comment on the evaluation by the official opponents of M. Bakhtin’s thesis, defended in 1946 at the IMLI. Lastly, the two final and most extensive sections are dedicated, respectively, to the approach of the doctoral thesis defense based on the stenographer’s notes and the process of awarding the title at the Higher Attestation Commission (VAK).

The 1940s: presentations at the Gorky Institute of World Literature (IMLI)

In the defense of the thesis about Rabelais, whose stenographer’s transcripts are analyzed further on in the text, in his initial presentation, Bakhtin declares: “Rabelais, in principle, when I began this work, was not my main objective. I was working for many years on the theory of the novel”⁴ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1018).⁵ In other words,

² In the Soviet Union, it is the Commission linked to the Ministry of Higher Education, responsible for the final verification of the documentation of the defense and for the awarding of advanced academic degrees.

³ “Social evaluation organizes both view itself and the understanding of the event transmitted, and the forms of its transmission.” (MEDVEDEV, 2012[1928], p. 191) For the English version, see: BAKHTIN, M.M.; Medvedev, P.N. *The formal Method in Literary Scholarship: a critical introduction to sociological poetics*. Translated by Albert J. Wehrle. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985.

⁴ In Russian: *Рабле первоначально, когда я приступил к этой работе, не был для меня самоцелью. Я работаю в течение очень многих лет над, теорией, историей романа.*

⁵ This and all other translations from Russian are the responsibility of the author of the article. TN: As previously stated, where previously published English versions exist, these are used for citations, otherwise citations are translated from Portuguese with the Portuguese version appearing in a footnote. In Portuguese: *“Rabelais, em princípio, quando eu comecei com esse trabalho, não foi para mim o objetivo principal. Eu trabalhava durante muitos anos na teoria e na história do romance”* (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1018).

Bakhtin had declared the connection between the theory of the novel and the research on Rabelais. Along this line, the theory of the novel was the subject of two of his presentations in the theory of literature group, led by the academic Leonid Timofeev, at the Gorky Institute of World Literature (IMLI- Moscow), at the beginning of the 1940s, the institution in which he defended his thesis on Rabelais in 1946.

On October 14th, 1940, M. Bakhtin presented “Discourse in the novel”⁶ [Слово в романе] at the Gorky Institute of World Literature (IMLI- Moscow), a text that was published in 1975 in the collection *Questions of Literature and Aesthetics*⁷ [Вопросы литературы и эстетики] (BAKHTIN, 1975), organized by S. Botcharov and V. Kojinov. On March 24th, 1941, M. Bakhtin presented to the IMLI for a second time, this time on the theme of “The novel as a literary genre” [Роман как литературный жанр], later published under the title “Epic and Novel”⁸ [Эпос и роман] (PANKOV, 2010), about which Pankov (2010) highlights, among other things, the role of laughter in renovating the genre, suggesting the relationship between the theory of the novel and the book on Rabelais. Of this second presentation, Pankov (2010) also highlights, among other things, two aspects of Bakhtinian theory that are of interest to us: firstly, the historical approach, understood as the comprehension of the orientation of the genres; secondly, the establishment of the difference between epic, as poetry of the past and having already occurred, and the novel, as a zone of contact with contemporaneity in the progress.

Without denying the originality of the Bakhtinian theses, Pankov, through his consultation of the stenographer’s transcripts of the meeting in which Bakhtin participated and the works of theory integral to these same meetings, establishes relationships between Bakhtin’s thesis and the ideas developed by the group. In the transcripts, reproduced in Pankov (2010), a question posed during a discussion of Bakhtin’s second presentation is noteworthy: Leonid Timofeev (1904-1984), the then head of the Soviet Literature section of the IMLI, asked for a clearer definition of genre. Answering, Bakhtin responds that he sees “genre as the literary norm of the construction of everything”⁹ (PANKOV, 2010, p.73), which, in our view, will result in the clear and precise definition given at the beginning of the text *Speech Genres* (BAKHTIN, 1986 [1953-54], p. 60-102), as “*relatively stable types of these utterances,*” that “reflect the specific conditions and goals of each such area not only through their content (thematic) and linguistic style... but above all through their compositional structure.” (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.60), as well as its evaluation of the “compositional construction” and the “author’s project”, aspects linked to the entire utterance.

⁶ BAKHTIN M. M. Discourse in the Novel. In: *The Dialogic Imagination: four essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 259-422.

⁷ TN: The English version of the collection of essays entitled, *Voprosy literatury i estetiki – Questions of Literature and Aesthetics*, was translated into English as *The Dialogic Imagination: four essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. For reference, see footnote 7.

⁸ For reference, see footnote 7, p.3-40.

⁹ In Russian: “я имею в виду под жанром не ту или иную литературную норму построения целого». Translated from Portuguese: “*visa o gênero como norma literária de construção do todo*”.

It is at this same institute that Bakhtin will defend his thesis on Rabelais, which shall be discussed shortly.

The book that became a thesis

Bakhtin's defense of his doctoral thesis "F. Rabelais in the history of realism"¹⁰ [*Ф. Рабле в истории реализма*] before the scientific committee¹¹ of the IMLI occurred on November 15th, 1946. However, the genesis of this text goes back to the beginning of the 1930s., when M. Bakhtin lived in Kostanay. We know this when Bakhtin responded, on being interviewed by Duvakin (2002[1996], p. 238-239)¹² about pinning down when he started the work on Rabelais: "I began 'Rabelais' while still in Kostanay (...) But most of the work, of course, took place much later. I mean, in Moscow¹³, where I lived unregistered and later (...) in the Savyolovsky district"¹⁴ But how did Bakhtin consult books while living so far away in Kostanay? His friend, the biologist Ivan Kanaev, sent Bakhtin books with the help of "a relative who was the director of the Saltykov-Shchedrin State Public Library"¹⁵ and of the Academy of Sciences, both in Leningrad (DUVAKIN, 2002 [1996], p. 239). The work was finished in the summer of 1940.

Initially, Bakhtin did not conceive the text about Rabelais as a thesis, but as a book addressed to a broad audience. His first try at publishing occurred between the end of the 1940s and the beginning of 1941. In correspondence with Bakhtin, dated December 12th, 1940 (BAKHTIN, 2008), Aleksandr Smirnov (1883-1962), literary theorist and specialist in Shakespeare¹⁶ wrote that "he is happy to help in his endeavors", and

¹⁰ In Portuguese: "F. Rabelais na história do realismo"

¹¹ Comprised of official opponents (members), who read the entire thesis and emitted written reports, and non-officials, who could read the work in its entirety or at least his arguments (written synthesis). Equivalent of a defense panel in Brazil.

¹² TN: A partial version published in English as: GRATCHEV, Slav N. "Bakhtin in His Own Voice: Interview by Victor Duvakin: Translation and Notes by Slav N. Gratchev." *College Literature*, vol. 43, no. 3, Summer 2016, pp. 592-602. Doi: 10.1353/lit.2016.0028.

¹³ According to Pankov (2010, p. 95), in Moscow Bakhtin lived "in the house of his younger sister, Natalya Mikhailovna, and her husband, N.P. Perfiliev". In Portuguese: "na casa de sua irmã mais nova, Natália Mikhailovna, e seu marido, N. P. Perfiliev" [у своей младшей сестры, Натальи Михайловны, и её мужа, Н. П. Перфильева] or at the homes of I. I. Iúdina and B. V. Zaliévski, and in St. Petersburg at I. I. Kanaev's house.

¹⁴ In Portuguese: "Comecei 'Rabelais' ainda em Kustanai (...) Mas o trabalho maior, é claro, aconteceu já mais tarde. Quer dizer, em Moscou onde vivi sem registro e depois (...) em Saviólovo", In Russian: "Рабле начал я ещё в Кустанае. (...) Но основная работа, конечно, произошла уже позже. Значит, в Москве я жил непрописанный и так далее, а потом (...) в Савёлово."

¹⁵ In Portuguese: "um parente que era diretor da biblioteca Saltikova-Schedrina." In Russian: «директор Библиотеки имени Салтыкова-Щедрина в Ленинграде» .

¹⁶ On tracing the profile of Aleksandr Smirnov, official member of the scientific committee of the defense, Pankov (2010) does not mention his interest in Shakespeare. This information is found in the letters exchanged between Smirnov and Bakhtin and published in *M. M. Bakhtin. Obras Reunidas, Vol. 4(1)* (2008): letter from Smirnov to Bakhtin – "I don't lose the excitement and occupy myself with my Shakespeare." In Portuguese: "não perco a animação e me ocupo um pouco com meu Shakespeare" [Не теряю бодрости и понемногу занимаюсь своим Шекспиром] (p. 946); letter from Bakhtin to Smirnov – "yesterday I read in the newspaper about your presentation on Shakespeare in the anniversary session of the Academy." In Portuguese: "ontem li no jornal sobre sua apresentação de Shakespeare na sessão de

that, “he already spoke with Jirmunsky about Rabelais”¹⁷ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p.929). Based on written statements, Pankov (2010) informs that Smirnov met Bakhtin at the beginning of the 1920s at the piano concerts of Maria Iudina¹⁸ which took place at her apartment in Leningrad.

The Attempt to publish the book was a long process. Reproduced in *M. M. Bakhtin. Collected Works* (2008), the two reports to the editor Goslitizdat were developed by: the well-known literary scholar and some time intimate of OPOIAZ,¹⁹ Boris Tomachevsky, who evaluated Bakhtin’s text as a solid work of science, original and courageous, ending with a recommendation for its publication; and by the aforementioned, A. Smirnov, who considers Bakhtin as having discovered and opened a productive path to studying and interpreting Rabelais and also recommended it for publication. Both of the reports are dated December 1944, in other words, four years after the first finalizing of the text and the initial efforts by Bakhtin to publish it. According to Popova (2008), until summer of 1945, Bakhtin fed the hope of, with the publication of his book about Rabelais, leaving the little city of Savylovo, where he works as a Russian teacher in Elementary School. However, this proposition does not come to fruition as Goslitizdat publishing, according to a letter from Smirnov to Bakhtin (BAKHTIN, 2008), refused the publication on the basis of two justifications: the recent publication of another work on François Rabelais and the specificities of some parts of M. Bakhtin’s text.

Despite the fact that the book was not published, the contacts made during this endeavor helped in the proposal to transform it into a thesis, which was presented to M. Bakhtin at the session of Western Literature of the Gorky Institute of World Literature (IMLI), on June 28, 1946. As previously mentioned in Grillo (2019) and Grillo, Guedes-Pinto and Campos (2020), although Bakhtin did not have a diploma from the College of Letters of Petrograd (despite having affirmed that he had it in his deposition), his process was accepted based on a minimal doctorate certificate [*кандидатский минимум*] emitted by the Department of General Literature of the Lenin State Pedagogical Institute of Moscow, on June 24, 1946, in which he obtained an “excellent” evaluation in the following courses: Ancient Literature, Medieval and Renaissance Literature of the 18th, 19th and 20th century, German, French, and History of Philosophy and dialectical and historical materialism. According to Popova (2008), this is the only official document

aniversário da Academia”. In Russian: [вчера я прочёл в газете о Вашем шекспировском докладе на юбилейной сессии Академии] (p. 954); letter from Smirnov to Bakhtin – “in my rare free time, I work with Shakespeare, rather I detail, synthesize and delight in (aesthetically and spiritually) more than in fact research anything.” In Portuguese: “nas raras horas livres trabalho com Shakespeare, mais detalho, sintetizo e deleito-me (estética e espiritualmente) do que de fato pesquisei algo”. In Russian: [Работаю в редкие свободные часы над Шекспиром, но больше детализирую, суммирую и наслаждаюсь (эстетически и духовно), чем действительно что-нибудь исследую] (p. 964).

¹⁷ In Portuguese: “ficará feliz em ajudar com seus negócios” [...] “já falou com Jirminski sobre o seu Rabelais. In Russian: « Буду счастлив содействовать Вашим делам» (...) « Я уже рассказал В. М. Жирмунскому о Вашем Рабле».

¹⁸ Maria Veniamnova Iudina (1899-1970), celebrated Soviet pianist, who knew M. Bakhtin in her hometown, Nievel, where Bakhtin resided between 1918 and 1919, and both gathered with other thinkers of the “Kantian Seminar”.

¹⁹ Society for the Study of Poetic Language [Общество Изучения Поэтического Языка], a group of literary theorists headquartered in Petrograd and later in Leningrad in the 1920s, who became known as the Russian Formalists.

about his education, constant in his particular process. Despite soliciting the IMLI, the sending of the University diploma, the Higher Attestation Commission (VAK) also ended up accepting this certificate.

Until June of 1945, Kanaev²⁰ (BAKHTIN, 2008) writes to Bakhtin about the procedures for submitting his thesis aiming to obtain the title of Doctor. Already at the end of June, 1945, in a letter to Smirnov (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 957-958), Bakhtin writes he intends, based on the “counsel of the influential workers of the Gorky Institute”²¹ not nominated by him, to obtain the title equivalent to the Brazilian *livre-docente*²² (докторская степень). From the summer of 1945 to the spring of 1946, the only advance in the process of defense is the definition of the two official members: Aleksander Smirnov and Aleksei Dkiveliégov.²³ According to Popova (2008), this slowness was due, in part, Bakhtin’s move to Saransk and the difficulty of gathering the necessary documents for the defense.

Soon after he submitted the thesis and the documents, he immediately began the discussion, particularly between the aforementioned Aleksandr Smirnov and Vladimir Chichmariov²⁴ with relation to the title being sought. According to a letter to Bakhtin from July 31st, 1946 (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 968-969), Smirnov writes that “I will insist on awarding the title of Associate Professor!”²⁵ and that he has the support of two official members²⁶ of the scientific committee: Isaak Nucinov²⁷ and the previously mentioned Aleksei Djiveliégov. Despite showing great sympathy for Bakhtin’s candidacy, V. Chichmariov soon manifested his concern about the proposed obtaining of the title of Associate Professor and suggests the presentation of a double candidacy – Doctor and Associate Professor – judged in two sessions of subsequent defenses, to avoid the risk of a complete rejection of the work. According to Popova (2008, p. 909), “For the defense of M.M.B., nothing in the Rabelais text of 1940 was changed except for the addition of the bibliography.”²⁸ Next, we examine the reports from the official members.

²⁰ Ivan Ivanovitch Kanaev (1893-1994), eminent biologist, specialist in genetics and historian of science of Western Europe, met Bakhtin when he moved, in 1924, from Leningrad, where he formed, once again, a circle of scholars of philosophy, religion, psychoanalysis and literature.

²¹ In Russian: «по совету некоторых влиятельных работников Института им. Горького».

²² TN: Roughly equivalent to an Associate Professor in the American University system or Senior Lecturer in the British System.

²³ According to Pankov (2010), he lived between 1875 and 1952, is a historian, Associate professor in Art Theory, and during the time of Bakhtin’s defense, coordinator of the area of Western Literature at the IMLI.

²⁴ According to Pankov (2010), Vladimir Chichmariov lived between 1874 and 1957, is the director of IMLI between 1944 and 1947, and a specialist in stories in Romanian languages and literatures.

²⁵ In Portuguese: “*insistirá na outorga do título de livre-docente.*” In Russian: «буду настаивать на присуждения докторской степени!»

²⁶ To the present, the scientific committees of defenses are comprised of many members (Bakhtin’s had 13 [BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1017-1018]), among whom some are named official members who must read the thesis and present a detailed report on it.

²⁷ According to Pankov (2010), Isaak Nucinov lived between 1889 and 1950, was a theorist on Western literature.

²⁸ In Portuguese: “*Para a defesa, M.M.B. não muda nada no texto de Rabelais-1940, apenas acrescenta a bibliografia.*” «Перед защитой М.М.Б. ничего не меняет в тексте Р-1940, только добавляет библиографические списки.»

Reports from the official members

In the *Collected Works* (vol. 4(1), 2008), the reports from the three official members are published, plus the report by Ievgueny Tarle about Bakhtin's theses. The first and longest of them (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 999-1007, 8 pages), dated 09/15/1946, was authored by the aforementioned, Aleksandr Smirnov, and begins with the finding of the rarity of works on Rabelais in Russia and the Soviet Union, and even any extensive theoretical works in Western Europe. Next, Smirnov evaluates that the work of Bakhtin "researches (...) some particularly essential features, especially those that help clarify the type of realism represented in Rabelais' work, and the place this creation occupies in the history of European thought and literature." (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1000).²⁹ Following this, Smirnov argues that, contrary to the works produced until then that related to Rabelais' work exclusively to the Renaissance, Bakhtin reveals the world view and medieval art, polarized in an official view and another non-official and popular. The popular and festive images of the non-official view are distinguished by their unfinished character, in a moment of passing from the old to the new or the past to the future and by the use of laughter to subvert the official view. Taking up the terms of the thesis again, Smirnov talks about the popular world view, images, style, form, and language, and almost never uses the word "culture", which is more present in the book published in 1965. All of these resources are at the service of the struggle against medieval oppression and obscurantism. On ending the synthesis of the thesis, Smirnov declares that his content is profoundly original and that there are valuable observations, to, then to return to the influence of this world view in the work of the Russian writer Nikolai Gogol (1809-1852). Smirnov raises the general objection to Bakhtin's thesis – the grotesque and popular images in the work of Rabelais are not formed only by renovating and living aspects, but also by petrified and automatized elements – and mentions a dozen passages to which he disagrees, proposing alternative interpretations. Smirnov finalizes his report with the following evaluation:

For its global character, for its volume, for the immense erudition of the author, for the personal methodology of the research, for the importance, originality and exceptional fertility of the ideas and scientific concepts contained in the work, the research corresponds not to a doctoral thesis, but to an Associate Professorship. For this reason, I request the concession of M. M. Bakhtin the scientific degree of Associate Professor in Philological sciences. (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1006-1007).³⁰

²⁹ In Portuguese: "*pesquisa (...) alguns traços particularmente essenciais, em especial aqueles que ajudam a esclarecer o tipo de realismo representado na obra de Rabelais e o lugar ocupado por essa criação na história do pensamento e da literatura europeus.*" «исследует лишь некоторые черты его, но черты особенно существенные, именно те, которые помогают выяснить тип реализма, представляемый творчеством Рабле, и место, занимаемое этим творчеством в истории европейской мысли и литературы.»

³⁰ In Portuguese: "*pesquisa (...) alguns traços particularmente essenciais, em especial aqueles que ajudam a esclarecer o tipo de realismo representado na obra de Rabelais e o lugar ocupado por essa criação na história do pensamento*

The second report (much shorter, with almost 3 and a half pages) is by the aforementioned, Isaak Nucinov and dated 10/12/1946. The first phrase illustrates the general tone of the text: “Russian Rabelaisian studies are enriched by a great work” (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1008).³¹ Nucinov highlights the Bakhtinian approach of the “gothic realism” and its importance to Renaissance literature and especially Rabelais, as well as valorizing the analysis of the imagetic-verbal system of Rabelais and the character of the laughter in this system, whose roots are found in medieval life. However, Nucinov disagrees with Bakhtin on three points: first, the absence of or little attention given to the stand off between Rabelais with scholastics and with medieval science; secondly, the similarity, without sufficient basis, of Rabelais’ novel with phenomena that appears after the Renaissance, in particular with Shakespeare and the Modern Age; thirdly, the claim that sources for the literature of Nicolai Gogol originate in gothic realism, on the contrary, Nucinov states: “Gogol’s laughter is nourished on this last point, as we shall see, is one of the most criticized aspects of Bakhtin’s work is Ukrainian life itself and not on Western literary influences”. (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1010).³² This last point, as we shall see, is one of the most criticized in the work by Bakhtin at the Higher Attestation Certificate Commission) VAK. Nucinov ends his report lauding the erudition, autonomy, seriousness of the scientist and states that the work deserves much more than the granting of a Dr.

The third report (3 pages) is by Aleksei Djiveliogov and there is no date information. The evaluator highlights that, although Bakhtin shows the necessary knowledge of the voluminous literature on Rabelais in the West, he does not repeat what was already done and proposes an approach never before carried out in Russia, the Soviet Union and even Western Europe. For Djiveliogov, Bakhtin revealed great freedom in the managing of his material, on showing the relation of Rabelais with his world view and the medieval artistic problems, and with this opened a path for new aspects of the work of the French writer. The panel member states that a research of such breadth and with such originality could not fail to raise discordances and that considered Bakhtin’s valorization of the role attributed to the lower range and the body excessive. To close, Aleksei, on recommending the thesis for publication, emphasizes the author’s erudition, his dominion of the research method and that, considering the qualities attributed, considers the title of doctor to be beneath the research developed, recommending that the work receive the title equivalent to the Brazilian *livre-docente* [Full Professor in the United States].

e da literatura europeus.” In Russian: « По всему своему характеру – по объему (35 печ. листов), по огромной проявленной автором эрудиции, по личной методике исследования, по чрезвычайной значительности, оригинальности и плодотворности заключенных в работе научных мыслей и концепций – работа эта более подходит к типу не кандидатской, а докторской диссертации. По этой причине я возбуждаю ходатайство о присуждении М. М. Бахтину учёной степени доктора филологических наук».

³¹ In Portuguese: “*Os estudos rabelaisianos russos enriqueceram-se com um grande trabalho.*” In Russian: «Русская раблеана обогатилась крупным трудом».

³² In Portuguese: “*O riso de Gógol nutriu-se da própria realidade ucraniana e não das influências literárias do Ocidente.*” In Russian: «Смех Гоголя питался самой украинской действительностью, а не этими вынесенными с Запада литературными влияниями».

The fourth and final report, of one and a half pages, and also missing a date, is by Ievgueny Tarle,³³ who spotlights the innovative and erudite character of the work, on seeking sources of Rabelais' work, as well as pointing out on top of that the original character of the research that never limits itself to a formalist approach and is always articulated to the analysis of content and of the revolutionary sense of the poetry in Rabelais. As the others, the panel member ends up reinforcing the erudition, the independence of thought and method, and recommends it for publication.

In addition to these reports, we present, next, the interventions of the official members and non-official members based on the stenographer's transcripts of the defense of the thesis.

Analytical Synthesis of the stenographer's transcripts of the defense

Bakhtin's defense took place on the 15th of November, 1946 and was registered in a stenographer's transcript, reproduced in *M. M. Bakhtin. Obras reunidas vol. 4(1)* [M.M. Bakhtin. Collected works], vol. 4(1) (2008). The analysis of these documents raises disagreements between two important scholars of Bakhtin's works in Russia: Nikolai Pankov (2010) and Vladimir Alpatov (1997, 1999). Pankov characterizes the political, social, and academic atmosphere from the beginning of the second half of the 1940s when a veritable campaign against the IMILI and even against Bakhtin's defense ensued. On analyzing the IMILI's meeting minutes, Pankov relates to having his leaders defended from the following accusations from the party: "lack of a sense of historicism, servile to the West, absence of substance and relevance to everyday life."³⁴ (PANKOV, 2010, p. 114). Pankov qualifies the defense of a drama,³⁵ noticeable both in the text and the subtext of the transcripts.

Alpatov (1997), on the other hand interprets Bakhtin's defense transcripts differently and criticizes Pankov's approach as follows:

- 1) A dichotomous split (black or white) between the scientific committee members in their relationship with the Marxist "establishment", or rather, they would have chosen only anti-marxists and "anti-establishment". Alpatov thinks that the relations with official Marxism were more nuanced, having Marxist literary theorists with a broader perspective, including not rejecting everything Western. Also he argues that prisoners, the condemned and exiled in the 1930s and

³³ Ievgueni Tarle (1875 – 1955), was a historian, among others, of the Russian Empire and relations between Western Europe and Russia, and member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

³⁴ In Portuguese: *falta de sentimento de historicismo, servilismo ao Ocidente, ausência de temas substanciais e relevantes ao cotidiano.* In Russian: *«отсутствие чувства историзма, низкопоклонство перед Западом, на отход от насыщенных, жизненно-необходимых тем».*

³⁵ Pankov relates some dramatic episodes of the defense that were not in the transcript, but that, to avoid undocumented oral testimonies we do not address here.

1940s such as the celebrated linguist and literary theorist Viktor Vinogradov (1895-1969) and the aforementioned Ievgueny Tarle, were rehabilitated and occupied command posts in Soviet academic institutions;

- 2) An excessive dramatization of the defense based on an unfavorable political context. Instead of this, Alpatov highlights that any defense is a tense situation and that the concession of Associate Professor to a candidate who does not have the title of doctor was extraordinary and, therefore, naturally generating tense arguments.
- 3) The occurrences are narrated without considering the dynamic of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, which were marked by quick and constant transformations. In the first half of the 1940s, the period of time in which Bakhtin prepared and submitted his thesis to the IMLI, WWII eased the anti-Western atmosphere, as there was a coalition with Western countries aiming to achieve victory over fascism, making it Stalin's "most liberal" period. While in the second half of the 1940s, precisely during the time of the defense and after the evaluation of it in VAK, there was a change in orientation: it went from internationalism and an approach to class for the imperialism [*великодержавность*], Russian patriotism and the struggle against cosmopolitanism.
- 4) Finally, Alpatov had compared Bakhtin's destiny to other prisoners and condemned, as the aforementioned, Viktor Vinogradov and Ievgueny Tarle, to conclude that M.M. Bakhtin's marginal destiny was due, in large part, to the oddness of his character, his "constant inability to ask about and care about other's interests"³⁶ (ALPATOV, 1997, p. 95), and to his disregard for publishing his work.

Regarding this last aspect, the reading of the letters written by Bakhtin to Yudina, Kanaev, Smirnov, Boris Zaliesski³⁷ etc. – present in *M. M. Bakhtin. Obras reunidas vol. 4(1)* (2008), to which Alpatov (1997) most likely didn't have access – contradict him, as the interest Bakhtin shows in and efforts in publishing his work on Rabelais is glaring, along with his constant requests for his friends to intercede together with the publishers and the IMLI. As an example of this, I present two letters by M. Bakhtin: one to Aleksandr Smirnov, dated December 1944 (BAKHTIN, 2008) and the other to Maria Iudina de 28/10/1946 (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 973):

³⁶ In Portuguese: "constante inabilidade para pedir e cuidar dos seus interesses". In Russian: "постоянное его неумение просить и хлопотать".

³⁷ Segundo Pankov (2010), Boris Zaliesski lived between 1887 and 1966, was a close friend of Bakhtin and geologist by education. No vol. 4(1) of *M. M. Bakhtin. Obras reunidas*, there are a dozen letters exchanged between Zaliesski and Bakhtin.

Dear Aleksandr Al

I received the information with joy, knowing that you were so generous to agree in review my Rabelais. I am deeply thankful to be the beneficiary of your generosity. I know how busy you are and how ungratifying it is to work with this type of review. I summoned all my courage to send you this telegram with a request for your haste in sending the review. The question was very late in coming, and I fear that the favorable climate for my book may change. For me this question has primordial importance, it depends on the possibility of Saviolovo's leaving, where the scientific work subsequently became impossible. Have you met in person with P. I. Tchaguin?³⁸ What did he say about the work prospects? How are you making a living? What are you working on at the moment (in Yaroslavl!) Things here are not so good for me. I had a difficult winter; I recovered a little in the summer. Now I am working on the (incomprehensible) problem.

Send my warm regards to your wife.

With love, M. Bakhtin

Dear Maria Veniaminovna,

We are very concerned about your silence. We sent you a post card and *two* telegrams and no response! Are you in good health, is everything alright?

About the defense of the thesis, I don't know a thing, except that it has been scheduled for November 15th. Therefore, it is necessary to travel at the latest on the 8th or the 9th of November. But how can I go without any news from you, nor about the situation of my thesis? I implore you to set us at ease with a letter and telegram above all about your well being and then about the thesis (the *three* members, character of the reports, what Nucinov says, etc.). It is necessary that all this become clear up to November 8th, so the defense is not annulled. I anxiously await your reply. Send regards to all the friends.

A kiss from us, Yours Bakhtin.³⁹

³⁸ Piotr Ivanovitch Tchaguin [*Пётр Иванович Чагин*] (1898-1967), was the editor in chief of Goslitizdat [*Гослитиздат*] of Moscow – State Editor of Literary Fiction.

³⁹ In Portuguese: *Caro Aleksandr Al{eksandrovitch}, Eu [recebi a informação] com alegria soube, que você [foi tão bondoso] concordou em resenhar meu Rabelais. Sou profundamente [agradecido] reconhecido por sua bondade. Eu sei como você é ocupado e como é ingrato o trabalho com esse tipo de resenha. Eu tomei a coragem de enviar-lhe um telegrama com o pedido para apressar o envio da resenha. A questão demorou muito e receio que o clima favorável para meu livro possa mudar. Para mim, essa questão tem um importância primordial, dela depende a possibilidade de sair de Saviólovo, onde o trabalho científico subsequente torna-se impossível. Você encontrou-se pessoalmente*

In the two letters, we perceive M. Bakhtin's endeavoring to mobilize people he knows to intercede in favor of his work on Rabelais. Having presented Pankov and Alpatov's interpretations of the defense transcripts, reproduced in the *Collected works* vol. 4 (1) (2008, p. 1017-1068), we move on to our synthesis of the points in the transcripts that seem most relevant to us.

Chichmariov (BAKHTIN, 2008) opens the session with the definition to be judged for the granting of the title Doctor [степени кандидата] in philological sciences to M.M. Bakhtin on the theme of "Rabelais in the history of realism" and informs that the three official members are the Associate Professors in philological sciences Smirnov, Nucinov and Djivielievov.

Next, Bakhtin gets the floor, and begins with referencing a synthesis of 20 pages of his work⁴⁰ presented to the Scientific Committee, deserving of some clarification. Firstly, Bakhtin declares that his dissertation is uncommon and that he worked on it for over 10 years. He clarifies that came to Rabelais while researching the theory and history of the novel, whose forms are characterized by its evolution, unfinished and inconclusive character. Following that, he affirms that Dostoyevsky is the one who knew how to resume and conclude this tradition of the novel genre. Afterward, he returns to Rabelais, whose novel speaks the language of the medieval town square and employs unfinished and inconclusive forms of existence. On mentioning the critical fortune, Bakhtin affirms that it just clarifies superficial aspects of Rabelais' work and after that he returns again to Russian literature to state that Gogol represents the continuance of the medieval laughter. In the last moments, he apologizes for not having had access to all the material necessary, he admits to having knowledge of the novelty (reinforced here and at various moments at VAK) of his work and being the conception of the paradoxical grotesque body and reinforces that Rabelais' wordings and style reveal an unfinished world, and one being developed. Thus, he ends: "I did very little, but

com P. I. Tcháguin? O que ele falou sobre as perspectivas de trabalho? Como você vive? Sobre o que trabalha no momento (em Iarosláve!). Minhas coisas não estão muito bem. Eu passei o inverno com muita dificuldade, no verão recuperei-me um pouco. Agora trabalho sobre o problema {incompreensível}. Mande lembranças ternas a sua esposa. Com amor, M. Bakhtin. Cara Maria Veniaminovna, Estamos muito inquietos com o seu silêncio. Enviamos a você um cartão postal e dois telegramas e nenhuma resposta! Você está bem de saúde, está tudo bem? Sobre a defesa da tese, eu nada sei, além de ela ter sido marcada para 15 de novembro. Portanto, é preciso viajar o mais tardar em 8 ou 9 de novembro. Mas como eu posso ir, sem nada saber sobre você, nem sobre a situação da tese? Peço com insistência acalmar-nos com carta e telegrama sobretudo relativo ao seu bem-estar e depois sobre a tese (são três os oponentes, o caráter dos pareceres, o que fala Nucinov etc.). É necessário que tudo isso se esclareça até 8 de novembro, para não anular a defesa. Mou esperar sua resposta com impaciência. Mande lembranças para todos os amigos. Um beijo nosso, Seu M. Bakhtin In Russian: Дорогая Мария Вениаминовна, Мы очень обеспокоены Вашим молчанием. Мы послали Вам открытку и две телеграммы – и никакого ответа! Здоровы ли Вы, всё ли у Вас благополучно? О защите диссерт[аци]и я ничего не знаю, кроме того, что она назначена на 15 ноября. Но как я могу выехать, не зная ничего о Вас, ни о положении с диссертацией? Очень прошу Вас успокоить нас письмом и телеграфно прежде всего относительно Вашего благополучия, а затем и о диссерт[аци]и (три ли официальных оппонента, характер отзывов, что говорит Нусинов и т. п.). Необходимо, чтобы всё это выяснилось до 8 ноября, чтобы не нарушить защиты. С нетерпением будем ждать Вашего ответа. Привет всем друзьям. Целую. Ваш М. Бахтин.

⁴⁰ According to personal experience attending a defense of a thesis at the State University of St. Petersburg in June, 2018, the members of the Scientific Committee receive, before the defense, a summary of thesis (called theses) so that they can familiarize themselves with the work, since only the official members are required to read the thesis in its entirety.

if I managed to spark interest in this world and show its importance, I consider my objective achieved” (BAKHTIN, 2008, p.1023)⁴¹.

When Bakhtin finishes his discourse, the president of the Scientific Committee gives Smirnov the floor, and he then proposes that the committee evaluate the work as a thesis for Associate Professorship. Next the president concedes the floor to Nucinov, who agrees with the change of title to Associate Professor and argues:

I know an entire series of very valuable works and scientists who do not have the least certificate for a doctorate, of whom we granted the title Associate Professor. Just as this series of works, the work of M.M. Bakhtin is an enormous contribution to the history of science.⁴² (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1024).

We highlight that this speech by Nucinov contradicts Alpatov’s (1997) aforementioned speech that the concession of the degree of Associate Professor to a candidate who does not have the title of doctor was an exception at those times.

The next to speak is Djiveliogov. He began by acknowledging Bakhtin’s erudition and obsession for the theme, to then affirm that his colleagues’ reproaches, with which he agrees, were due to this obsession. Djiveliogov adds his disagreement with the sharp ambivalence of the theme of the lower stratum and the sanctions; his evaluation is that Bakhtin managed to show the process of the incarnation of the popular characteristics in the renaissance ideology. He criticizes the fact that Bakhtin did not managed to include the atmosphere of condemnation of heretics burnt at the stake in the 16th century; and ends with the recommendation for the publication of the work and his agreement with the decision that the thesis deserves the title of Associate Professor. I would like to call attention to an aspect of this speech: the mention of criticism of Bakhtin’s works made by previous examiners – probably Smirnov and Nucinov – who are not figured in the transcript. An explanation would be that Djiveliogov had access to the written reports of the two official members and he is referring to the texts and not the speech.

In the following argumentation, Maria Teriaeva⁴³ presents many criticisms of M. Bakhtin’s work. Firstly, she points out the lack of a characterization of realism and the place of Rabelais in the history of realism. In the second place, she criticizes

⁴¹ In Portuguese: “*eu fiz muito pouco, mas se eu consegui despertar o interesse por esse mundo e mostrar sua importância, considero que meu objetivo foi atingido.*” In Russian: *Я сделал очень немного, но если я сумел заинтересовать этим миром и показать его значение, то я считаю свою задачу выполненной.*

⁴² In Portuguese: *Conheço uma série inteira de trabalhos, muito valorosos e de cientistas que não possuíam nem o atestado de mínimo para doutorado, aos quais outorgamos o título de livre-docente. Assim como essa série de trabalhos, o trabalho de M. M. Bakhtin é uma enorme contribuição à história da ciência.* In Russian: *Я помню целый ряд работ, очень ценных работ учёных, которые не имели кандидатского минимума, и мы присуждали им степень доктора. Но и в ряду таких работ работа М. М. Бахтина представляет наиболее крупный вклад в историю науки.*

⁴³ We did not find reliable bibliographic information about Maria Teriaeva. Pankov (2010) states he was not able to find out her age at the time of the defense. From the ideological viewpoint, Pankov defines her as a sincere defender of Marxist ideas. She was a specialist in Stendhal and wrote children’s literature.

the absence, in the thesis, of the approach to realism made by the great Russian and Soviet literary theorists – Guerstsen, Belinski, Dobroliubov, Chernichevski, Lenin and Salin. Next, she points out the absence of a Soviet political approach to the theory of literature and again cites Belinsky, Dobroliubov, Chernichevsky, Lenin and Stalin. Following up, she criticizes the lack of a definition of gothic realism. Afterward, she dedicates a large part of her presentation disagreeing with the approach to Gogol made by Bakhtin, seen as continuer of popular culture, festivals, and laughter – to which Teriaeva considers a formal simplification of the phenomenon studied by Bakhtin –, as, for her, Gogol perceived the essence and struggle of the classes. Still criticizing the lack of an approach to class issues, Teriaeva evaluates that the work must be redone entirely, as it errs from a lack of methodology in which the biology plays an enormous role, as well as presenting an idealistic understanding of dialectical materialism. Finally, citing Nucinov’s argumentation, Teriaeva states that the proposal for granting the title of Associate Professor, contradicts all the criticisms of the thesis.

During her evaluation, Teriaeva attacks not only Bakhtin’s thesis, but also the reports of the official member of the scientific committee, which is why Kirpotin follows in the transcript, to propose that the members of the scientific committee mentioned also be able to participate.

Nikolai Piksano⁴⁴ begins his speech expressing his “awkwardness” [*смущён*] about the unforeseen proposal to change the granting of the title to Associate Professor. He states that “A doctoral thesis is not a question of great responsibility, to which one would be too concerned, above all, to be dealing with Bakhtin, who we know for quite some time through his publication”⁴⁵ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1035). Piksano⁴⁴ had declared that, although he had not had time to read the thesis, Bakhtin’s oral exposition provided many elements for discussion. Primarily, he suggests changing the title of the thesis to “Rabelais looking backward, Middle Ages and Antiquity”, as the title suggests that Rabelais looks not only to the past, but also to the future. Next, he points out that Bakhtin cited Gogol and Dostoevsky in his exposition, but the thesis does not have enough elements to affirm Rabelais’ influence on Russian literature and realism of the 18th century. Finally, he considers that there the Middle Ages are given a disproportionately greater representation in the analysis of the medieval festival laughter in Rabelais’ work and closes with the consideration that “Humanism of the 15th and 16th century was in some measure hostile and even opposed the source of the Renaissance which was definitely from popular culture”⁴⁶ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1038).

⁴⁴ Pankov (2010) informs that Nikolai Piksano⁴⁴ lived between 1878 and 1969, is the author of over 700 scientific works and cites testimonies that characterize him as a pedantic conservative.

⁴⁵ In Portuguese: *Uma tese de doutorado já não é uma questão de tanta responsabilidade, para a qual deve-se preocupar-se muito, sobretudo, por se tratar de Bakhtin, que conhecemos há muito tempo por sua publicações.* In Russian: *«Кандидатская диссертация – дело не такое уже ответственное, чтобы очень беспокоиться о ней, а особенно, когда дело касается Бахтина, которого мы давно знаем в печати»*

⁴⁶ In Portuguese: *“o Humanismo dos séculos XV e XVI era em certa medida hostil e até oposto a certa fonte popular do Renascimento.”* In Russian: *«гуманизм XV-XVI вв. В известной мере враждебен и даже противоположен отдельными народными истоками возрождения».*

Next, Nikolai Brodsky⁴⁷ states that: “before me is a person, who I have known for a long time through his work on Dostoevsky”⁴⁸ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 103). After declaring not having read the work, he poses two questions based on the oral presentation and in the summary of the thesis presented to the scientific committee: 1) Gothic realism represents a debasing of the method, as it is classical realism, of which he is an expert, which reflects the contradictions and movements of the objective world; 2) He does not agree with the thesis that the works “Dream of a ridiculous man” and “Bobok” of Dostoevsky reflect gothic realism.

The next to speak is Dmitry Mikhaltchi⁴⁹ and, in his brief intervention, claims to have read the work, which he considers a “Soviet literary theory milestone”⁵⁰ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1040). Next, he enumerates diverse qualities of the thesis and of the candidate: great analytical capacity, enormous erudition, broad horizon and more knowledgeable than the examiners. He ends by stating that Bakhtin deserves the titles of doctor and Associate Professor.

Iosif Finkelstein⁵¹ also admits to not having read the thesis and based on the oral presentation, declares that the most important work is the revelation of the unknown paths by which realism was developed and from which the 16th century novel was formed. He considers that the criticisms made about Bakhtin’s thesis are unfounded and that Bakhtin’s Rabelais does not look back but pushes forward.

Eugenia Dombrovskaya⁵² to not having read the entire work and her speech is a series of criticisms of the thesis: she accuses Bakhtin of failing to consider the satirical aspect in Rabelais, she asserts that Rabelais is not a legacy of the Middle Ages, citing Engels to defend that the Renaissance is a surpassing of the Middle Ages, rejecting that the works of Gogol *Taras Bulba* and *Dead Souls* are saturnalian and, finally, states that these works are not an imitation of Western literature.

Next, the three official members take the floor again to defend the granting of the title of Associate Professor. In the first place, Djiveliogov states, in a controversial opening, that it is necessary to read the thesis to criticize it; he considers unfounded the accusation that there is no class struggle in the work, as popular laughter is the struggle

⁴⁷ According to Pankov (2010), Nikolai Brodski lived between 1881 and 1951, obtained the title of Associate Professor without defending a thesis. His most important works were publications of the biographies of Pushkin and Leirimontov. He headed the Russian Literature section of the IMLI in 1946.

⁴⁸ In Portuguese: “*diante de mim está uma pessoa, que conheço há muito tempo pelos trabalhos sobre Dostoiévski.*” In Russian: «*перед мной человек, давно мне знакомый по работам о Достоевскомю.*»

⁴⁹ According to Pankov (2010), Dmitri Mikhaltchi lived between 1900 and 1973, defended his doctoral thesis about Cavalry poetry in 15th century Italy, obtaining the title of Associate Professor, and was a professor at various Muscovite Universities.

⁵⁰ In Portuguese: “*acontecimento da teoria literária soviética.*” In Russian: «*мы имеем дело с явлением в советском литературоведении очень крупным.*»

⁵¹ According to Pankov (2010), Iosif Finkelstein lived between 1920 and 1980, defended his thesis about Jean Racine and was just 26 years old at the time of the defense. Considering the sphere of interests of this researcher, Pankov comments on not understanding his participation on the scientific committee.

⁵² Eugenia Dombrovskaya lived between 1903 and 1973, she was a doctor in English literature and professor from 1946 to 1973, at the Department of Foreign Literature at the Krupskoi Regional Institute Pedagogic of Moscow.

against feudal power. Following up, Smirnov, in a more diplomatic tone, accentuates the original and innovative character of the thesis, to end, tactfully, that he agrees with everything his fellow members have stated, but that these statements do not apply to Bakhtin's work. Afterward, Nucinov takes the floor for a second time to defend that there is class struggle in Bakhtin's thesis, and that this struggle consists in opposing feudalism, concluding that: "Before me is a work that cannot be compared to any other, to which the granting of the degree of Associate Professor here, in this auditorium. I do not retract my proposal to grant comrade Bakhtin, for his work, the title of Associate Professor."⁵³ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1048).

A group of interventions ensues, by non-official members who admit to not having read the thesis and who make observations based on Bakhtin's presentation and the prior discussions of the examiners. The first of these interventions is by Valery Kirpotin⁵⁴, who recognizes Bakhtin's indisputable erudition and declares he knows Bakhtin's book on Dostoevsky. He considers the division between popular and official culture artificial; and judges having, on the one hand, an overvaluation of Carnival and the popular laughter of the Middle Ages and, on the other hand, the disregard for the ideology of the Renaissance: "It seems to me that the approach for me has been a serious recrimination"⁵⁵ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1050), and he does not position himself one way or another with regard to the title of Associate Professor. Following him, in his brief speech, Boris Zaliesski⁵⁶ expresses his impression of the defense: "Having listened attentively to the discussion, I conclude that these who know the work well have spoken positively, and those who have expressed negatively have openly admitted to not having read it"⁵⁷ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1051). The last to present an argument is Boris Gornung,⁵⁸ who, on highlighting the conception of the unity of the development of the culture according to the Marxist-leninist philosophy of history, valorizes diverse aspects of the work: the existence of two Middle Ages, the medieval sources of Rabelais' humanism and realism, the originality of the work, its methodological value.

⁵³ In Portuguese: "*Diante de mim está um trabalho que não pode ser comparado a outros, aos quais outorgaram o grau de livre-docente aqui, neste auditório. Não retiro minha proposta de outorgar ao camarada Bakhtin, por seu trabalho, o título de livre-docente*". In Russian: *Перед мной такой труд, который не может сравниться с другими трудами, за которые мы присуждали докторскую степень здесь, в этом зале. Я не отказываюсь от своего предложения присудить тов. Бахтину за его работу докторское звание.*

⁵⁴ According to Pankov (2010), Valery Kirpotin lived between 1898 and 1997, was a specialist in Russian literature and vice-director of the IMLI from 1945 to 1947.

⁵⁵ In Portuguese: "*Parece-me que o abordado por mim é uma recriminação muito séria*". In Russian: *Мне кажется, в том, что я говорю, - это очень серьезный упрек.*

⁵⁶ See note 29.

⁵⁷ In Portuguese: "*Ao ouvir atentamente a discussão, concluí que aqueles que conhecem bem o trabalho manifestaram-se de modo positivo, já aqueles que se expressaram de modo negativo reconheceram abertamente não tê-lo lido*". In Russian: *Слушая внимательно прения, я вывел заключение, что те кто хорошо ознакомился с работой, высказывались положительно, а те, кто высказывался отрицательно, все признавались откровенно, что работу не читали*

⁵⁸ According to Pankov (2010), Boris Gornung lived between 1899 and 1976, defended his doctoral thesis on Ancient Greek language and literature at the IMLI, held various secretarial posts at research institutions and state libraries, public works about the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, citing the ideas of Bakhtin.

Next, M. Bakhtin ends the session responding to the official examiners' questions. We will highlight those that touch on the main points in which to understand Bakhtin's personality, thought and methodology:

- 1) Returning to Djiveliogov's adjective, Bakhtin recognizing himself as an "obsessive innovator" [одержимый новатор] (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1054);
- 2) Emphasizing that the gothic tradition can be observed in Russian revolutionaries, as "The essence of any thought, and above all revolutionary thought, is not in isolation, in the separation of the rest of the world, but in deep organic relation with everything that is progressive in the world."⁵⁹ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1059);
- 3) This consciousness that: "I show Rabelais in the history of realism. Maybe I'm wrong, but I have introduced a new page in the history of realism."⁶⁰ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1060), and he refuses to recount the history of realism – requested by Maria Teriaeva – as he deemed it would a repeat of common knowledge;
- 4) Laughter was not the only means of resistance in the Middle Ages: "It was never my intention to consider laughter as something joyous, disinterested and happy. It was one of the most powerful weapons of the struggle. The people fought both with laughter and with firearms, fists, and clubs."⁶¹ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1061);
- 5) Rabelais is a new consciousness and at the same time allows for the discovery of tradition. "Would it be possible to separate the question [revolutionary, S.G.] of the conscience, of discourse and of thought? Would revolutionary questions be possible without discourse?"⁶² (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1062);
- 6) Medieval laughter paved the way for the Renaissance: "Laughter free of fear, and this work of laughter of liberation from fear is the necessary presupposition for the renaissance consciousness in general."⁶³ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1062);

⁵⁹ In Portuguese: "A essência de qualquer pensamento, e sobretudo do pensamento revolucionário, não está no isolamento, na separação do restante do mundo, mas na sua relação orgânica profunda com tudo o que há de progressista no mundo". In russian: Суть всякой мысли, а тем более революционной мысли, не в её изоляции, не в отрыве от остального мира, а в её органической глубокой связи со всем передовым, что есть в мире.

⁶⁰ In Portuguese: "Eu mostro Rabelais na história do realismo. Talvez eu esteja enganado, mas eu introduzi uma nova página na história do realismo. In russian: Я показываю Рабле в истории реализма. Может быть, я ошибаюсь, но мне кажется, что в историю реализма я внес новую страницу.

⁶¹ In Portuguese: "Não era em absoluto minha intenção considerar o riso como algo alegre, desinteressado e feliz. Ele foi uma das armas mais poderosas de luta. O povo lutou tanto com o riso quanto com armas de fogo, punhos e bastões.". In russian: Я вовсе не имею в виду, что средневековый смех – весёлый, беззаботный и радостный смех. Он был один из мощнейших средств орудия борьбы. Народ боролся и смехом, боролся и прямым оружием, - кулаками, палками.

⁶² In Portuguese: "Seria possível separar a questão [revolucionária, S. G.] da consciência, da palavra e do pensamento? Questões revolucionárias seriam possíveis sem a palavra?". In russian: Да разве можно отрывать дело от сознания, от слова, от мысли? Да разве революционные дела возможны в отрыве от слова?

⁶³ In Portuguese: "O riso liberta do medo, e esse trabalho do riso de libertação do medo é o pressuposto necessário para a consciência renascentista em geral.". In russian: Смех освобождает от страха, и эта работа смеха по освобождению от страха – это необходимая предпосылка вообще ренессансного сознания.

- 7) Carnival is not joyous: “I never held Carnival to be something joyous. In no such terms. All throughout Carnival the image of death is present. Speaking in your terms, it deals with a tragedy. But the tragedy does not have the last word.”⁶⁴ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1063);
- 8) Affirmation of the revolutionary: “my work is profoundly revolutionary; it’s forward thinking and presents something new. My entire work speaks of the most revolutionary writer – Rabelais.”⁶⁵ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1064) “I consider the people, in whose traditions Rabelais created, profoundly progressive. (...) I think that I knew how to show the profoundly progressive and revolutionary character of the Carnival consciousness, the consciousness of unity, temporal physical unity.”⁶⁶ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1065).

After M. Bakhtin finishes his speech, the scientific committee of 13 members gather to vote primarily on the granting of the title of doctor – resulting in: 13 in favor and none against. Next, they vote on the title of Associate Professor – resulting in: 7 in favor and 6 against. Kirpotin presents the final synthesis:

Thus, the Scientific Counsel awards the title of doctor in philological sciences to comrade Bakhtin M.M. and addresses the Ministry of Higher Education with the certification for the title of Associate Professor in Philological Sciences. Therefore, I consider this session of the Scientific Council closed.⁶⁷ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1066).

With this, the Scientific Council unanimously approves awarding him the title of doctor, but despite the majority vote in favor of his being awarded the title of Associate Professor (7 to 6), the Committee leaves the final decision to a higher power, in the Ministry of Higher Education, a step that will be analyzed next.

⁶⁴ In Portuguese: “*Eu não concebi o carnaval como algo alegre. De modo algum. Em toda imagem do carnaval está presente a morte. Falando nos termos de vocês, trata-se de uma tragédia. Mas a tragédia não é a última palavra.*”. In Russian: *Я не имел в виду карнавал как что-то весёлое. Вовсе нет. В каждом карнавальном образе присутствует смерть. Говоря вашим термином – это трагедия. Но только не трагедия является последним словом.*

⁶⁵ In Portuguese: “*meu trabalho é profundamente revolucionário, segue adiante e apresenta algo novo. Todo o meu trabalho fala do mais revolucionário escritor – Rabelais*”. In Russian: “*Моя работа глубоко революционна, что моя работа идёт вперёд и даёт что-то новое. Вся моя работа говорит об революционнейшем писателе – Рабле.*”

⁶⁶ In Portuguese: “*Considero que o povo, em cujas tradições Rabelais cria, é profundamente progressista. (...) Penso que eu soube mostrar o caráter profundamente progressista e revolucionário da consciência do carnaval, da consciência da unidade, da unidade temporal física.*” (...). In Russian: *Мне кажется, я там сумел показать глубоко прогрессивный, революционизирующий характер сознания карнавала, сознания единства, физического временного единства.*

⁶⁷ In Portuguese: *Desse modo, o Conselho Científico outorga o título de doutor em ciências filológicas ao camarada Bakhtin M. M. e dirige-se ao Ministério da Escola Superior com o requerimento de outorga do título de livre-docente em ciências filológicas. Portanto, considero encerrada a sessão do Conselho Científico.* In Russian: *Таким образом, Учёный совет присуждает степень кандидата филологических наук тов. Бахтину М. М. И обращается в Министерство высшей школы с ходатайством о присуждении ему степени доктора филологических наук. На этом заседании Учёного совета считаю закрытым.*

The process of awarding the title in the Higher Attestation Commission (VAK)

Bakhtin's examination process at VAK is long: it goes from November/December of 1946, just after his defense at the IMLI, until May 31st of 1952, the date when the final decision to reject the concession of Associate Professor to him is given, on the one hand, and grant, on the other, the title of doctor. Thus, as in the analysis of the stenographer's transcript of the defense, the examination of Bakhtin's reactions to the reports emitted about his work allow us to understand, on the one hand, aspects of the project and Bakhtin's scientific personality, and, on the other, as Pankov (2010) so clearly points out, the changes that occurred in the work in due to the criticisms contained in the reports. This last aspect demystifies the false idea of absolute freedom in scientific creation, which suffers coercions, at times just and others conservative and unjust, from members of the scientific sphere.

In a letter sent to the VAK, the director of the IMLI, Vladimir Chichmariov, expounds that: the three official members defended granting him the title of Associate Professor, a series of non-official members gave very positive evaluations for his work, and there were presentations of criticisms. This letter is followed by a certificate, with the title "Certificate to VAK of the No. 2 Form regarding the scientific title of doctor in philological sciences"⁶⁸ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1073) signed by the scientific secretary of the IMLI and the non-official member of the Scientific Council, Boris Gornung. In this certificate, Gornung firstly, makes a synthesis of Bakhtin's academic education and teaching experience, in which he highlights the information that M. Bakhtin finished the College of History and Philology at the University of Petrograd in 1918, a fact that was never proven (KONKIN, KONKINA, 1993; KOROVACHKO, 2017). Next, the secretary carries out a descriptive appraisal of Bakhtin's scientific works, spotlighting the book on Dostoevsky. Following that, he appraises the great originality of the thesis defended that can be summed up with the phrase: "In no manner does his work repeat what specialists in the West have done."⁶⁹ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1074). Finally, he presents the results of the two votes and demands the VAK award M. Bakhtin the title of Associate Professor.

In the next document, entitled "Response to the VAK request for complementary documentation in the M. M. Bakhtin process"⁷⁰ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1076), dated May 10th, 1947, the scientific secretary of the IMLI, Boris Gornung responds: "Comrade Bakhtin was requested by telegram to provide a copy of the diploma for the completion of the course at the University of Petrograd in 1918. The Institute did not require it from Bakhtin before the defense, as he presented the document of completion of the minimum

⁶⁸ In Portuguese: "Atestado à VAK do Formulário No. 2 sobre a outorga do título científico de doutor em ciências filológicas." In Russian: *2 о присвоении учёной степени доктора филологических наук.*

⁶⁹ In Portuguese: "Seu trabalho em nada repete o que fizeram especialistas ocidentais" In Russian: *Его работа ни в чем не повторяет того, что сделали западные специалисты.*

⁷⁰ In Portuguese: "Resposta ao pedido VAK de documentação complementar do processo de M. M. Bakhtin." In Russian: *Ответ на запрос ВАК о дополнительной документации по делу М. М. Бахтина.*

requirements for the doctorate.”⁷¹ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1076). As far as we know, M. Bakhtin never sent the diploma requested, as, according to his biographers Konkin/Konkina (1993) and Korovachko (2017), there are no records that Bakhtin attended the University of Petrograd. Probably, the VAK, just as the IMLI, were content with the document of completion of the minimum requirements for the doctorate.

In the minute of a VAK meeting on June 20th, 1947 (BAKHTIN, 2008), the commission of philological sciences send Bakhtin’s thesis to two members to emit reports on whether they indicate the work as meriting the title of doctor of Associate Professor – they are: Mikhail Alekseev (1896-1981), professor of foreign languages and head of the Department of Foreign Literature at the State University of Leningrad and at the Guersten State Pedagogical of Leningrad, and Stefan Mokulsk (1896-1960), critic, book publisher, and professor of theater at the University of Leningrad and Moscow.

Pankov (2010) contextualizes the time period when these reports were written. Firstly, in November of 1947, in the official newspaper *Culture and life* [Культура и жизнь]⁷², the article “Overcoming backwardness in the development of the current problems in literary theory” [Преодолеть отставание в разработке актуальных проблем литературоведения], was published. In it, V. Nikolaiev (1947) accused Chichmariov and Kirpotin, director and vice-director of the IMLI, of poor management – having been let go right after the publication – and mentioning Bakhtin’s thesis as an example of an unsuccessful activity, as M. Bakhtin used a Freudian methodology in which grotesque images and lower stratum and the body played a fundamental role in Rabelais. Another element of the context, highlighted by Pankov, was the destruction, by Soviet science, of the “Vesselovsky School”, which is mentioned positively in Bakhtin’s thesis, and the affirmation of the influence of Babelais, a Western author, on the work of Nikolai Gogol.

Mikhail Alekseev’s report, dated March 2nd, 1948, is reproduced in its entirety in vol. 4 (1) of *M. M. Bakhtin. Collected Works* (2008). The evaluation is extremely laudatory and ends with the proposition that it would be shameful to Soviet science not to award Bakhtin with the Associate Professor title. To give a more concrete impression of the tone of the report, we present the beginning:

In my view, M.M Bakhtin’s work, under the title above, is an uncommon phenomenon and exceptional in our scientific literature. For the courage, the freshness, and the originality of his ideas, for the fruitful results, for the finesse of his analysis and for many other aspects, in fact, for its

⁷¹ In Portuguese: “Foi solicitada por telegrama ao Camarada Bakhtin uma cópia do diploma de conclusão da Universidade de Petrogrado em 1918. O Instituto não a exigiu de Bakhtin antes da defesa, pois apresentou-se o documento de obtenção do mínimo para doutorado.” In Russian: Копия диплома об окончании Петроградского университета в 1918 году запрошена у т. Бахтина телеграфно. Институт не требовал её у т. Бахтина при защите, поскольку имелся документ о сдаче кандидатского минимума.

⁷² Propaganda newspaper of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, published between 1946 - 1951.

magnificent quality, this research is distinguished, clearly, from all of the theses of Associate Professorship in the last ten years, with which I have had contact through manuscripts or public reports. I cannot call M. M. Bakhtin's thesis any other way except a notable work that, in the case of its publication, could not be left to become a true event in the history of the study of literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1079-1080).

Besides two indications of bibliographic inclusion, the only reservation is the choice of the term, "gothic realism" [*готический реализм*] which does not reveal the nature of the phenomenon studied. As an alternative, the writer of the report suggests the expression "medieval folkloric realism" [*фольклорно-средневековый реализм*] (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1082).

There are no works cited in Stefan Mokulsk's report. According to Pankov (2010, p. 265), "The report by S. S. Mokulsk is entirely lacking archival material, however, from what he presented about the thesis in the specialists' commission of February 24th, 1949, it is clear that his opinion over all was also positive."⁷³.

Apparently, the Higher Attestation Commission (VAK) was not satisfied with the reports, and, according to two meeting minutes dated respectively April 12th, 1948 and November 25th, 1948 (BAKHTIN, 2008), M. Bakhtin's thesis was sent to another two specialists: Viktor Jirmunsky (1891-1971) – specialist in Germanic languages, sociolinguistics and German, Russian and Turkish literatures; and Iakov Metallov (1900-1976) – member of the Bolshevik party from 1919, editor of Goslitizdat, specialist in German literature, university professor, director of Research Institutes and president of the VAK Commission meetings between April 12th, 1948 and December 20th, 1948 (BAKHTIN, 2008). Jirmunsky and Mettalov's reports do not contain any works cited, as far as we are concerned, and according to Pankov (2010), it is not clear if the report of the former was in fact emitted, and the contents of the latter's report are unknown. In the meeting minutes of December 30th, 1948 (BAKHTIN, 2008), Mettalov decides, considering the qualities and the defects of the work, to invite M. Bakhtin to participate in the commission meeting, to take place on November 19th, 1949, so that he become aware of the criticisms against his work. In seven telegrams exchanged between them, on one side, Bakhtin, and on the other Yudina and the Ministry of Higher Education (BAKHTIN, 2008), Bakhtin tries to discover the motive for the invitation and declares that, due to health problems, he cannot attend the meeting.

In meeting minutes from February 24th, 1949 (BAKHTIN, 2008), there is a report about Bakhtin's process which, on the one hand, highlights the originality and great quantity of material researched, but, on the other, that

⁷³ In Portuguese: "*O parecer de S. S. Mokulsk está ausente nos arquivos, porém, a partir do que ele apresentou sobre a tese na comissão de especialistas de 24 de fevereiro de 1949, é visível que sua opinião no todo também foi positiva.*" In russian: *Отзыв С. С. Мокульского в деле отсутствует, однако из того, как он докладывал о диссертации на экспертном совете 24 февраля 1949 г., видно, что его мнение в целом тоже было положительным.*

[...] in M. M. Bakhtin's work there are errors and gross defects, such as the reference to the "great" authority of Vesselovsky, the affirmation of Rabelais' influence on N.V. Gogol's work, the term "gothic realism", etc. The content of the work does not correspond to its title "Françoise Rabelais in the history of realism", since Bakhtin elucidates only one of the aspects of this issue.⁷⁴ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1090).

The final decision is to return the work to M. Bakhtin so that he may redevelop it and present it again to the commission of specialists. The following document is the stenographer's transcripts of a VAK meeting from March 15th, 1949 (BAKHTIN, 2008), led by Aleksander Toptchiev⁷⁵, in which the specialist Valentina Kinnik-Sokolova⁷⁶ is consulted about the merit of awarding M. Bakhtin with the title of Associate Professor. Kinnik-Sokolova begins her speech referring to the laudatory reports by the official members Nucinov, Djiveliégov and Smirnov and is interrupted by Aleksandr Samarin⁷⁷: "In relation to their evaluations it is completely possible to attribute a minus sign, they should not be cited."⁷⁸ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1091). Then, the specialist mentions the laudatory report by Alekseev, the problems indicated by non-official members during the defense in 1946 and points out that the work presents a very one-sided understanding of Rabelais, linking it to street fair buffoons and traveling theatres, and calling attention to the similarities between Rabelais and Gogol. On this last aspect, Samarin then reacts: "if there had never been Rabelais, there never would have been Gogol either?"⁷⁹ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1092). Kinnik-Sokolova responds that the issue is Rabelais' influence on Gogol. After the specialist finishes her speech, Totchiev states the work clearly has a cosmopolitan nature and posits Gogol to be an imitator of Rabelais. Another VAK member, Anatoli Blagonravov⁸⁰ opines that the commission of specialists itself doubts whether the thesis merits the degree of Associate Professor and

⁷⁴ In Portuguese: "no trabalho de M. M. Bakhtin existem erros e defeitos grosseiros, como a referência à "grande" autoridade de Vesselóvski, a afirmação da influência de Rabelais sobre a obra de Gógol N. V., o termo "realismo gótico" etc. O conteúdo do trabalho não corresponde ao seu título "Françoise Rabelais na história do realismo", uma vez que Bakhtin elucidou apenas um dos aspectos dessa questão. In Russian: В работе тов. Бахтина М. М. Имеются грубые ошибки и искажения, как то ссылка на «высокий» авторитет Веселовского, утверждение влияния Рабле на творчество Гоголя Н. В., термин «готический реализм» и т. д. Содержание Работы не соответствует её заглавию «Франсуа Рабле в истории реализма», так как тов. Бахтин осветил лишь одну из сторон этого вопроса.

⁷⁵ Aleksandr Toptchiev (1907 – 1962), was the vice-minister of Higher Education, vice president of VAK, chemist with many studies published in that field.

⁷⁶ Valentina Kinnik-Sokolova (1898 – 1979), literary theorist and translator (of Baudelaire, Verlaine etc.), especially in French and Russian literatures.

⁷⁷ Aleksandr Samarin (1902 – 1970), was vice president of VAK, vice-minister of Higher Education, metallurgical engineer.

⁷⁸ In Portuguese: "Em relação às avaliações deles é completamente possível atribuir um sinal menos, não convém citá-los". In Russian: К оценке их можно вполне поставить знак минус, ссылаться на них не следует.

⁷⁹ In Portuguese: "se não houvesse Rabelais, também não haveria Gógol?" In Russian: Если бы не было Рабле, не было бы и Гоголя?

⁸⁰ Anatoli Blagonravov (1874-1975), was a mechanical engineer, who served in WWI, and participated in the Soviet revolution, becoming a specialist in artillery.

proposes to close the question with awarding the title of doctor, but Samarin responds that it is necessary to verify if the thesis even corresponds to the title of doctor. Thus, closes the transcript of the meeting.

The subsequent document is a letter from the sector of the universities at VAK, dated May 9th, 1949 (BAKHTIN, 2008), in which Bakhtin is invited to attend the VAK meeting on May 21st or 28th of that same year, so that he may answer to the following criticisms: the analysis of Rabelais' disassociation from the French and European Humanism of the time; the approach to the novel "Gargantua and Pantagruel" according to a formalist method that ignores its semantic aspect; the concentration on folkloric aspects, comic images and scenes grossly physiological in nature; the lack of distinction between the realism of popular street diversions and the realism in Rabelais. The synthesis of the final letter consists in affirming that the thesis presents methodological vices. According to the stenographer's transcripts (BAKHTIN, 2008), the meeting proposed in this letter occurred on May 21st, 1949, and was presided by previously mentioned, Aleksander Toptchiev, who solicited Bakhtin to answer to the criticisms of his thesis. Bakhtin begins stating the criticisms have nothing to do with his work and responds to them one by one:

- 1) He declares that "The entire objective and the whole aim of my work is to reveal the era of the Renaissance!"⁸¹ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1096);
- 2) In relation to popular culture and the Renaissance, "I approached [them] from the point of view of the popular and non-official culture, since only from there is it possible to understand the democratic writers of the Renaissance, such as Rabelais"⁸² (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1096); "It does not deal with "physiological crudeness", but a powerful weapon of the people, of popular criticism."⁸³ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1097); "We often make declarations and cite from passages by Lenin about the non-official culture present in all peoples; however, it's necessary to get beyond this; it's necessary to reveal this non-official culture."⁸⁴ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1097);

⁸¹ In Portuguese: "*Todo o objetivo e toda a finalidade do meu trabalho é revelar a época do Renascimento!*" In Russian: *Вся цель, задача моей работы – раскрыть эпоху Возрождения!*

⁸² In Portuguese: "*Eu [os] abordei do ponto de vista da cultura não oficial e popular, pois só a partir dela é possível compreender escritores democráticos do Renascimento, tais como Rabelais.*" In Russian: *Я подошёл со стороны неофициальной, народной культуры, потому что только с этой стороны можно понять демократических писателей Возрождения, - таких, как Рабле.*

⁸³ In Portuguese: "*Não se trata de imagens "fisiológicas grosseiras", mas de uma arma poderosa do povo, de criticismo popular.*" In Russian: *Но это не «грубо-физиологические» образы: это могучее орудие народного смеха, народного критицизма.*

⁸⁴ In Portuguese: "*Muitas vezes declaramos e citamos passagens de Lênin sobre a cultura não oficial presente em todos os povos; porém é preciso ir adiante: é necessário revelar essa cultura não oficial.*" In Russian: *Мы очень часто декларируем, приводим цитаты из Ленина о неофициальной культуре, которая есть у каждого народа; но надо же пойти дальше: надо эту неофициальную культуру раскрыть.*

- 3) Regarding Gogol: “I recognize that it was inconvenient to approach Gogol in a secondary way, and I will take out these three pages. However, is it possible to define my entire work based on three pages!”⁸⁵ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1098) and he adds, “I did not deduce Gogol from Rabelais or Western sources. I state that it is necessary to study Gogol, to study this laughter that has not been studied, which is connected with the spiritual academy, with the Bursas⁸⁶, to whom Gogol was linked.”⁸⁷ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1098).
- 4) Just like all the studies at the beginning of the 1940s, Bakhtin declares that his work needs reformulating after the passing of 9 years, but that he is convinced that his proposal continues to be extremely current.

With Bakhtin’s speech finished, Aleksander Toptchiev cites the criticism that Bakhtin’s method leads to wrong conclusions, to which he responds, “I deduced Gogol from national Ukrainian folklore, and only point out that my method of revealing non-official culture must be applied also to the study of Gogol”⁸⁸ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1099). The heated discussion continues between various members of the commission. It is important to highlight the role of Viktor Vinogradov (1895-1969) – illustrious linguist and theorist of Russian literature, previously mentioned, and cited by Bakhtin in many of his works – who states: “Bakhtin was almost my colleague at the University of Leningrad, a person of great culture and knowledge, exceptional talent, but, as you’ve seen, very mad.”⁸⁹ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1100). Vinogradov’s statement about them having been colleagues at the university is very odd considering the absence of Bakhtin’s diplomas. In addition to lauding Bakhtin’s talent, Vinogradov defends the issue of Rabelais’ influence on Gogol, declaring that Bakhtin only recognizes the influence of popular literature on Gogol, and proposes that Bakhtin deserves an

⁸⁵ In Portuguese: “*Reconheço que foi inconveniente abordar Gógol de modo secundário e retirarei essas três páginas. Contudo, é possível definir a avaliação de todo o meu trabalho por essas três páginas!*”. In Russian: *Я признаю, что делать Гоголя побочной темой было неудобно, и эти страницы я снимаю. Но разве из суждения об этих трёх страницах можно определить суждение о моей работе в целом!*

⁸⁶ In the pre-revolutionary system, seminarists in the boarding school system, where they studied theology, rhetoric, and philosophy. The *bursas* were poor establishments, in which seminarists, to survive, taught private classes or made presentations at schools and street fair theaters during religious festivals.

⁸⁷ In Portuguese: “*Não deduzi Gógol de Rabelais ou de fontes ocidentais. Afirimo que é preciso estudar Gógol, estudar esse riso não estudado, que se conecta com a academia espiritual, com os bursacos, aos quais Gógol estava ligado.*” In Russian: *Я Гоголя на выхожу из Рабле или западных источников. Я утверждаю, что Гоголя нужно изучать, изучить этот неизученный смех, который связан с духовной академией, бурсаством, с которым Гоголь был связан.*

⁸⁸ In Portuguese: “*Deduzi Gógol do folclore nacional ucraniano, e só aponto que meu método de revelação da cultura não oficial deve ser aplicado também ao estudo de Gógol!*”. In Russian: *Я Гоголя вывожу из национального украинского фольклора, я только указываю, что мой метод раскрытия неофициальной культуры должен быть применен и к изучению Гоголя.*

⁸⁹ In Portuguese: “*Bakhtin foi quase meu camarada na Universidade de Leningrado, pessoa de grande cultura e grandes conhecimentos, de talento excepcional, mas, como viram, muito doente.*” In Russian: *Бахтин – почти мой товарищ по Ленинградскому университету, человек очень большой культуры, очень больших знаний, ну, необыкновенно талантливый, но, как видите, очень больной.*

incentive for his work. The commission's final decision is that Bakhtin rewrite the work and, without having to defend it again, present it for analysis by a commission of specialists from VAK.

Eleven months after this meeting with Bakhtin, a letter from Bakhtin to the scientific secretary of VAK dated April 15th, 1950 (BAKHTIN, 2008), relates, in detail, the alterations carried out on the thesis for the Associate Professorship and informs that it is annexed. The following are the main points Bakhtin relates:

- 1) The writing of an introduction to the book (the previous version did not include one) that reveals the fundamental limitation of my work in the light of the doctrine of V.I. Lenin about the two national cultures in each national culture and presents a preliminary definition of popular non-official culture of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.
- 2) A critique is carried out based on the general views of A.N. Vesselovsky about Rabelais' work (p. 34-37), as well as specific critiques on particular issues (p. 137-139, 206-207 and 215).
- 3) Introduced a most fundamental and combative criticism of Bourgeois Rabelaisian studies.
- 4) Writing of approximately 90 pages (in different parts of the work) with the objective of making the methodological effort clearer to reveal the revolutionary content regarding the classes found in popular culture of the past and its distinction from the official culture (that is, the culture of the dominant classes).
(...)
- 5) Removal of the pages in the book dedicated to N. V. Gogol's writing, due to imprecise formulations and the secondary and superficial treatment of N. V. Gogol's work, which, in a book about Rabelais, is out of place.
- 6) In accordance with the indication by specialists from the Commission, the inadequate term "gothic realism" was substituted with the term "grotesque realism" (this term has, clearly, a conventional character); the title of the work was also slightly modified (also as per indication by the specialists of the Commission): in place of "Rabelais in the history of realism", the work is now entitled "Rabelais and the problem of popular culture in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance" (...) ⁹⁰(BAKHTIN, 2008, p.1104-1105).

⁹⁰ In Portuguese: *1. Escrita de uma introdução ao livro (ela não existia antes) que revela o problema fundamental do meu trabalho à luz da doutrina de V. I. Lênin sobre as duas culturas nacionais em cada cultura nacional e apresenta uma definição preliminar da cultura popular não oficial na Idade Média e no Renascimento. 2. Realizadas uma crítica de base das visões gerais de A. N. Vesselóvski sobre a obra de Rabelais (p. 34-37), bem como críticas pontuais a questões particulares (p. 137-139, 206-207 e 215). 3. Introduzida uma crítica de caráter mais fundamental e combativa dos estudos rabelaisianos burgueses. 4. Escrita de aproximadamente 90 páginas (em diversas partes do trabalho), com o objetivo de dar mais nitidez e força metodológica à revelação do conteúdo de classe e revolucionário presente no conteúdo da cultura popular do passado e sua distinção da cultura oficial (isto é, da*

In the fragment cited, we highlight Bakhtin having carried out extensive alterations to his thesis, which increased, according to what he himself mentions later on in this letter, by 120 pages. These alterations responded to all the criticisms addressed to the work, with an emphasis on the introduction of “class and revolutionary” aspects, in consonance with the Marxist hegemonic ideology of the Soviet Union of the time.

In other meeting minutes dated May 11th, 1950 (BAKHTIN, 2008), the commission designates the previously mentioned professor Roman Samarin⁹¹ to emit a report, which was presented at the February 22nd meeting in 1951 (BAKHTIN, 2008), or rather, nine months after its designation. In this report, Samarin judges the work as not suitable for consideration as research that fulfills the requirements of a doctoral thesis and catalogs the following problems:

- 1) Bakhtin treats realism in Rabelais’ work as a manifestation of naturalism, which would be precocious for the European Middle Ages and Renaissance;
- 2) Bakhtin does not understand popular art of the 15th and 16th centuries, but approaches them from the point of view of naturalist tendencies, or rather, from their crude and exterior means of representations;
- 3) Bakhtin uses indelicate, obscure, confusing, inadmissible terminology and style, referring to the lower material and body;
- 4) From the methodological point of view, Bakhtin does not carry out a historical approach to Rabelais’ work nor a Marxist-Leninist analysis of the popular liberating movement in France of the 16th century. With respect to this, the following excerpt is worth noting: “There is no concrete historical basis in the

cultura das classes dominantes); (...) 5. Retiradas do livro as páginas dedicadas à criação de N. V. Gógol, em razão de conterem formulações imprecisas e em razão de o tratamento secundário e superficial da obra de N. V. Gógol no livro sobre Rabelais estar fora de lugar; 6. De acordo com a indicação da Comissão de especialistas, o termo inadequado “realismo gótico” foi substituído pelo termo “realismo grotesco” (esse termo tem, é claro, um caráter convencional); foi um pouco mudado (também por indicação da Comissão de especialistas) o título do trabalho: no lugar de “Rabelais na história do realismo” o trabalho agora intitula-se “Rabelais e o problema da cultura popular na Idade Média e no Renascimento (...)”. In Russian: 1. Написано введение к книге (его раньше не было), раскрывающее основную проблему моего исследования в свете учения В. И. Ленина о двух национальных культурах в каждой национальной культуре и дающее предварительное определение неофициальной народной культуры средневековья и Ренессанса. 2. Дана принципиальная критика общих взглядов А. Н. Веселовского на творчество Рабле (на стр. 34-37) и сделаны отдельные критические замечание по частным вопросам (стр. 137-139б 206-207 т 215). 3. Критике буржуазной раблеистики придан более принципиальный и боевой характер. 4. Заново написано около 90 страниц (в разных частях работы), имеющих целью внести больше чёткости и методологической строгости в раскрытие классового и революционного содержания народной культуры прошлого и её отличий от официальной культуры (т. е. от культуры господствующих классов). 5. Страницы, посвященные творчеству Н. В. Гоголя, вовсе устранены из книги, так как они содержали в себе нечёткие формулировки и так как полупная и беглая трактовка творчества Н. В. Гоголя в книге о Рабле вообще неуместна. 6. В соответствии с указаниями Экспертной комиссии неудачный термин «готический реализм» замечен термином «гротескный реализм» (и этот термин носит, конечно, условный характер); несколько изменено (также по указанию Экспертной комиссии) заглавие работы: вместо «Рабле в истории реализма» работа озаглавлена теперь «Рабле и проблема народной культуры средневековья и Ренессанса» (...)

⁹¹ Roman Samarin, (1911-1974), literary theorist, specialist in English Literature, professor and coordinator of the Foreign Literatures Department at the State University of Moscow.

work, for this its formalist abstraction takes place, stained by an unpleasant physiological tendency, which unfortunately forces one to be reminded of the conjectures of the reactionary Freudians of “literary theory”.⁹² (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1111).

- 5) “in M. M. Bakhtin’s thesis, Rabelais is studied outside of the literary struggle of his time. M. M. Bakhtin almost never cites in his book other notable French writers of the Rabelais’ time, an entire Pleiades of writers and satirical-poets, headed by Rabelais”⁹³ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1111-1112).
- 6) The important problem of popular culture in the Middle Ages is only proposed and not really worked through as a thesis would require, due to the lack of a Marxist-Leninist analysis of the emergence and development of the French nation.

Following this report, the minutes from VAK’s May 10th, 1951, Commission of Literary Theory meeting (BAKHTIN, 2008), which highlights: Bakhtin’s methodological disregard for concrete historical conditions in Rabelais’ work; the impossibility of the thesis being added to the holdings of the Lenin Public Library; the sending of the thesis to Bakhtin so that he incorporate Samarin’s observations, and rejects the application for the awarding of the title of Associate Professor, presented by the Scientific Committee of the IMLI.

Finally, in the minutes of the meeting on May 31st, 1952, from the Presidency of VAK (BAKHTIN, 2008), Bakhtin’s academic and professional trajectory are related (once again Bakhtin is said to have graduated from the College of History and Philology of Petrograd), citing, and synthesizing all the reports emitted and concludes that:

In comrade Bakhtin’s work, there is insufficiencies and serious methodological errors, essentially linked to the fact that the author of the thesis adopts a formalist approach to the issue of Rabelais creative method and neglects the concrete historical conditions of its development: the conditions of the popular liberating movement in France of the 16th century, the conditions of the formation of the French nation, the political

⁹² In Portuguese: “*No trabalho não há base histórica concreta, disso decorre a sua abstração formalista, colorida por uma tendência fisiológica desagradável, o que infelizmente obriga a lembrar das conjecturas reacionárias freudianas da “teoria literária”.*” In Russian: *В работе нет исторической конкретной почвы – отсюда её формалистическая абстрагированность, окрашенная неприятной физиологической тенденцией, к сожалению, заставляющей вспомнить о реакционных омыслах фрейдистского «литературоведения».*

⁹³ In Portuguese: “*na tese de M. M. Bakhtin Rabelais é estudado fora da luta literária de sua época. M. M. Bakhtin quase não cita em seu livro outros notáveis escritores franceses da época de Rabelais, uma plêiade inteira de escritores e poetas-satíricos, que Rabelais encabeçou.*” In Russian: *Рабле в диссертации М. М. Бахтина исследуется вне литературной борьбы его эпохи. М. М. Бахтин почти не упоминает в своей книге других замечательных французских писателей эпохи Рабле. О целой плеяде писателей и поэтов-сатириков, которую Рабле возглавил.*

conditions, including even the literary struggle, in which Rabelais participated.⁹⁴ (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1118).

The final decision, for which Bakhtin had waited from November 15th, 1946, to May 31st, 1952 (5 years, 5 months and 20 days), was: “Awarded to Bakhtin M. M. the diploma of doctor of sciences” (BAKHTIN, 2008, p. 1118).⁹⁵

Final Remarks

The book that drew from M. Bakhtin’s thesis on Rabelais had a very turbulent trajectory in the period between 1930 and 1952, revealing diverse essential aspects for a better understanding of this work. I underscore, primarily, M. Bakhtin’s statement about a straight connection between the theory of the novel developed in the 1930s and the book on Rabelais. From this statement, I take the liberty of pointing out two aspects that, despite the fact that they are not in the documents analyzed in this article, they point to, I think, productive ways of analyzing Bakhtin’s work by Brazilian readers: on the one hand, both respond to the golden age of the European literary tradition; and, on the other hand, the two are found in a zone of contact with the contemporaneity in progress, signaling future and inconclusive tendencies of the literary genre and popular culture. Subsequently, I reinforce the mention, by the official and non-official members of the scientific committee of the IMLI during the defense of the thesis on Rabelais, that they knew Bakhtin for a long time through his book on Dostoevsky, which is once again, evidence of the fact that “Problems of Dostoevsky’s Art” (BAKHTIN, 1984[1929]) entered Soviet literary history soon after its publication and never fell into oblivion. Next, Mikhail Bakhtin’s scientific personality is impressive, even before harsh criticisms and in an unfavorable political-ideological context, he repeatedly reaffirms his conviction with respect to the originality of his research about Rabelais and refuses to bow down to the demands that oblige him to recount and repeat already established knowledge. Furthermore, without bowing down to the Soviet Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy, Mikhail Bakhtin knew how to reveal in the images, the language, the symbols, and the popular genres present in Rabelais, a revolutionary dimension. The

⁹⁴ In Portuguese: “*No trabalho do camarada Bakhtin há insuficiências e erros metodológicos sérios, em essência ligados ao fato de que o autor da tese adota uma abordagem formalista da questão do método criativo de Rabelais e negligencia as condições históricas concretas de seu desenvolvimento: as condições do movimento popular libertador na França do século XVI, as condições da formação da nação francesa, as condições políticas, incluindo ainda a luta literária, da qual Rabelais participou.*” In Russian: *В работе тов. Бахтина имеются серьезные методологические недостатки и ошибки, в основном сводящиеся к тому, что автор диссертации формалистически подходит к вопросу о творчестве методе Рабле, пренебрегает конкретными историческими условиями его развития – условиями народно-освободительного движения во Франции XVI века, условиями формирования французской нации, условиями политической, в том числе и литературной борьбы, участником которой был Рабле.*

⁹⁵ In Portuguese: “*Outorgar a Bakhtin M.M. o diploma de doutor em ciências.*” In Russian: *Выдать Бахтину М. М. Диплом кандидата наук.*

accusations by the VAK members who wrote reports, deserves taking note, that Bakhtin adopted a formalist approach and employed an unpleasant physiological tendency that recalled conjectures of reactionary Freudians of “literary theory”, in other words, he is accused of adopting two perspectives – formalist and Freudian – which were the object of his, Pavel, Medvedev and Valentin Voloshinov criticisms in the 1920s. According to Pankov (2010), due to the VAK accusations, the name Bakhtin became “prohibited” and only returned to the scientific world after the publication of the book “Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics” in 1963.

I close with this brief reflection about the writing of the historiographic article in linguistics and literary theory: the reconstruction of facts, dates, historical personalities is anchored in primary sources (meeting minutes, letters, reports, stenographic transcripts, etc.) and secondary sources (Russian scholars who have already elaborated on all or part of the primary sources), indicators of consensual data and gaps in sources, as well as divergences in the interpretation and fixation of historical events, obliging it to recognize the inconclusive and relatively open character of the writing of this history.

GRILLO, S.V.C. Do livro à tese de Bakhtin sobre Rabelais (1930-1952): projeto, contexto, desfecho. *Alfa*, São Paulo, v.66, 2022.

- *ABSTRACT: recovering part of the context in which, Popular culture in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance. The context of François Rabelais (1965), understood as being from between the years of 1930 to 1952 is the task we propose in this article. This endeavor is justified in that it offers the Brazilian public knowledge about the direct relationship between the theory of the novel and Bakhtin’s work on Rabelais, as well as the circumstances in which the text was written. The research, characterized as historiographic, is based on primary and secondary sources, and recognizes that it is inconclusive and provisory in nature. Results reveal: the direct connection between the theory of the novel, developed in the 1930s, and the book on Rabelais; the fact that Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics (BAKHTIN, 1984 [1929]) entered the history of Soviet literary theory soon after its publication; Mikhail Bakhtin’s scientific personality; and the revolutionary dimension of François Rabelais’ work.*
- *KEYWORDS: M. Bakhtin; book on Rabelais; context.*

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