

Title: New Uses of Bakhtinian “Consummation” (*Zavershenie*): A Sample Analysis of *The Brothers Karamazov*

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Celebrated as the champion of *dialogue*, a dynamic interaction between selves characterized by fruitful “ne-zavershennost’ (incompleteness),” Bakhtin is usually noted for revealing artistic and spiritual means of *combating* the reifying effects of closure, not for depicting its successful realization. And yet, in his early, pre-dialogical work Bakhtin describes productive uses of closure in both literary creation and the challenging art of human relationships. In this paper, I will explore Bakhtin’s early notion of *zavershenie* (finalization / consummation) and suggest new applications for the concept, using a close reading of several key scenes in *The Brothers Karamazov* as a sample analysis.

In “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” and “Toward a Philosophy of the Act” Bakhtin discusses productive ways of “entering” other consciousnesses, the process which, he claims, could be ethically and aesthetically rewarding only if the empathizer does not coalesce with the other but manages to retain a responsible position *outside* of his psyche. This process is termed active empathy or *vzhivanie* and the empathizer’s productive outsideness following his “entry” into the other’s inner world is secured precisely through the act of consummation or *zavershenie*, a loving completion of the other’s inwardly fragmented self. Indeed, in the early works, *consummation* is the creative outcome of empathy in the sphere of interpersonal relationships and of aesthetically “shaping” the hero in the sphere of literary art.

For Bakhtin, one’s independent, external position in relation to another’s inner being (surplus of vision) enables one to “consummate” his spiritual image, calling the ideal person within to actualize itself. Symbolically alluding to Incarnation and Resurrection in early Bakhtin, consummation must respect both the inner and the outer boundaries of the consummated self. By affirming another’s palpable spiritual achievements, I may save him from the fate of empty potentiality, Bakhtin suggests; by resisting a finalizing definition, I ensure that this acknowledged realization does not exhaust his vital potential, rendering the act of consummation terminal.

The first part of my paper will demonstrate that, with some revision, the concepts of *consummation* and *surplus of vision*, largely abandoned by the later Bakhtin, are useful tools for tackling the problem of just *how* love is realized or practiced in Dostoevsky’s world. In the latter part of my presentation, I will apply the concept of *zavershenie* in my analysis of Alyosha’s conversations with Mitya in *The Brothers Karamazov*. For Alyosha, productive closure of his conversations with his brothers safeguards against circular, resentment-driven “dialogue,” against which Bakhtin warns us in his analysis of *Notes from Underground (Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics)*. In contrast to his predecessor Prince Myshkin, Alyosha retains his surplus of vision and thus remains active in response to the other’s suffering. Because he uses his privileged knowledge gently, Alyosha does not overwhelm his interlocutors and succeeds at granting forgiveness and absolution. As a result, the recipients of Alyosha’s empathy withstand the temptation to consummate themselves in a Promethean rebellion against God. Instead, they open themselves to spiritually enriching consummation by one of Dostoevsky’s most Christ-like heroes.

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