

Title: Frustrated Love in Dostoevsky: A Bakhtinian Perspective

Author: Alina Wyman, University of Illinois, Chicago

One of the rarely discussed questions of Bakhtin's philosophical development is the changing content of his concept of aesthetic and ethical closure, *zavershenie* (*consummation*). In his early, pre-dialogical work Bakhtin discusses productive uses of closure in both literary creation and the challenging art of human relationships.

Bakhtin contemplates the 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 challenging undertaking becomes known as *active empathy* or *vzhivanie* and the empathizer's productive outsideness following the incomplete "entry" into the other's inner world is secured precisely through the act of consummation or *zavershenie*, as Bakhtin terms it.

Bakhtin structures his concept of live-entering in such a way that "pure empathizing," the moment of coinciding with the other, becomes merely one of the components in the complex process of understanding. Having "returned" into himself and resumed his individual position in being, the subject concerns himself with "shaping and objectifying the blind matter obtained through empathizing" ("Toward a Philosophy of the Act" 15). The "shaping" and "objectifying" of the other's emotional content is accomplished through my intentional and consistent utilization of the "surplus of vision," a visual advantage I possess in relation to the other by virtue of my external position in the process of empathizing ("Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity"). This results in the act of *consummation*, my loving completion of the other's inwardly incoherent and fragmented spiritual image. In early Bakhtin, an ideal act of consummation is a profoundly *creative* undertaking, modeled on Christ's Incarnation. It elicits an actualization of the other's better self, without exhausting his potential in the process.

I propose to examine the "creative" acts of frustrated love in Dostoevsky as an example of *negative consummation*. In Ivan Karamazov's love-hatred toward humanity, in Kirillov's self-annihilating love toward the humiliated and ultimately helpless Christ and in Ivan Karamazov's laughter at the freezing peasant we encounter the same embittered love whose creative energy had been turned inwards, *against* love itself and ultimately against the beloved. With the help of Bakhtin's theory, I interpret the various philosophical programs of Dostoevsky's rebels as a desperate attempt to retain a sense of agency in a world of radically limited choices, which, ironically, leads them to a rejection of an *active* existential position.

If I assume a priori that the beloved cannot be helped, the productive, actively oriented "surplus" of my love immediately falls away, making any creative consummation of the beloved impossible. The logic of the either-or mentality then dictates a *ressentiment* solution: I will embrace the existing status quo, finalizing the hopeless image of my beloved and even exacerbate her pain in a desperate effort to take an active stance in relation to the suffering other.

In the course of this discussion, I consider Dostoevsky's statements that love is made possible 1) by my ability to help the beloved and 2) by a belief in the immortality of the soul, that is, by faith that the beloved will be ultimately "helped," otherwise love turns into hatred (*Diary of a Writer*). In this context, I discuss the important theme of Myshkin's helpfulness in *Notebooks for The Idiot* and the alleged impossibility of "loving for the sake of one moment" in *Notebooks for The Idiot* and *Notebooks for The Adolescent*. In conclusion, I use the Bakhtinian theory of consummation to establish an important continuity in Ivan's essentially *passive* existential position in the chapters "Pro and Contra" and "The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor," unnoticed by the critics.