

Title: Patronymics and Poverty in Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk*
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Dostoevsky's literary struggle with Gogol has been well-documented, and Gogol's tale "The Overcoat" has long been viewed as the key to understanding *Poor Folk*. Donald Fanger, for example, has demonstrated how the young Dostoevsky's epistolary novel "humanizes all that is mechanical and lifeless" in Gogol's story of a poor clerk (152). As Bem and Passage have pointed out, part of this "humanization" occurs through name symbolism. And while many other scholars have pointed out the significance of first and last names in *Poor Folk*, few have offered an explanation or literary source for the shared patronymic of Makar Alekseevich Devushkin and Varvara Alekseevna Dobroselova.

This paper will explore how Dostoevsky used the patronymics from the name "Aleksei" both as a part of his literary polemics and also to introduce two archetypes of poverty. First, the patronymics, shared by non-siblings, establish the subtext of Gogol's "Old-World Landowners;" reading *Poor Folk* through the prism of this short story connects both authors' polemics with Sentimentalism, while also raising the question of spiritual poverty. Secondly, by choosing the name "Aleksei," Dostoevsky expands the field of literary battle to include a hagiographical form of poverty, specifically that found in *The Life of Alexis, Man of God*. In examining these subtexts, it will be shown that the genius of *Poor Folk* lies not only in the remaking of Gogol's "The Overcoat," but in its complex web of inter-textual polemics.

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Fanger, Donald. *Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1965.

Passage, Charles E. *Character Names in Dostoevsky's Fiction*. Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1982.