

Title: Andrei Bely's *Petersburg*: Tailoring Gogol's "Overcoat"

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In *Gogol's Craftsmanship*, Andrei Bely points to interesting parallels between his novel *Petersburg* and Gogol's story "The Overcoat." Noting the prominence of "the grandiloquence of departments" (Bely 1934: 302) as a theme in both works, he declares his character Apollon Apollonovich to be a mix of Gogol's Akakii Akakievich and the Person of Consequence (Ibid.: 305). As I will argue in this paper, the "title character" of Gogol's story, the overcoat itself, is related to Apollon Apollonovich's son, Nikolai Apollonovich, and his omnipresent *nikolaevka*. In fact, the two writers share a remarkably similar metaphysical approach to clothing. As I will show, Gogol and Bely sew their overcoats from the same material — Plato's dialogues. In his depiction of Akakii Akakievich, Gogol refers primarily to the allegory of the tailor's coat and the body from Plato's *Phaedo* (Soshkin), associating his protagonist and the protagonist's clothes respectively with the soul and the body. Meanwhile, though Bely cuts his overcoat from Gogol's templates, he also makes use of another Platonic motif: the myth of the winged soul from *Phaedrus*. If Akakii Akakievich's overcoat emphasizes the death of the soul in the earthly world, then Nikolai Apollonovich's coat becomes the manifestation of the soul's revival. In Bely's words, Akakii Akakievich "lives inside a universe that is unique to him; it is not sunny, but 'overcoated'; his 'overcoat' is to him the world soul" (Bely 1934: 45). On the other hand, Bely's own protagonist's always-winged *nikolaevka* signifies the transformation of the body, influenced by the soul's wingedness. Unlike Gogol, who reduces Akakii Akakievich's universe to the size of an overcoat, Bely liberates his hero, awakening his soul and making him one with the Universe.

Bibliography:

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Soshkin, Evgenii. "Pochemu Akakii Akakievich upal navznich'."

<http://www.ruthenia.ru/document/547313.html>