

Title: The Swan and the Chicken: The Emblematics of Cognition in Andrei Bely's *Kotik Letaev*
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According to Andrei Bely's own confession, *Kotik Letaev* (1915 – 1916) was conceived as the "itog, resul'tiruiushchii opyt antroposofa" (roughly translated: "the final result of an anthroposophist's experience," Belyi 1994). As an artistic product, however, the novel far exceeds the framework of anthroposophy, as it calls forth "a whole gamut of referential possibilities" (Janecek 1974). In my presentation I will argue that the novel's thematic backbone – "the memory of memory" – originates in Plato's idea of cognition as remembering. Like Plato, Bely develops this idea through the myth of the winged soul, but he gives it a unique twist. While Plato's anamnesis is the awakening of an adult's soul, Bely's "memory of memory" is a twofold process: in order to remember what the soul saw in the other world, an adult should remember his / her childhood when the memories of that world were still alive. At the same time, these memories gradually evanesce as the child's acquaintance with the material world progresses. Thus the cognitive process affects the soul in two opposite ways and implies both remembering and forgetting. As I will demonstrate, the two sides of cognition appear embodied in two particular birds – the swan and the chicken. Directly associated with the soul, the swan represents the soul's wingedness whereas the chicken – an illustration of the cognitive process of *sensibilia* – emblemizes the loss of the soul's wings.

Bibliography

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