

# **Father Complex and Parricide in Andrei Bely's *Petersburg***

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## **Abstract**

The vast Russian lands, seemingly boundless and anarchic, have long been governed by the iron hand of the Tsar and other more modern figures of absolute authority. The Russian ruler has been both feared and revered by his people, who have bestowed the epithet of «Батюшка» “little father” on him. The little father provides them with a sense of security against life’s uncertainties and protection against Russia’s numerous enemies. Peter the Great in particular set his imprint on Russian society and culture as founder of the modern Russian bureaucratic state and implacable agent who transformed Russia from a backward Asiatic hinterland into a powerful European state.

The year 1905 marked a year of crisis for the Russian bureaucratic state and the authority of the Russian father figure. In his novel *Petersburg* (1916), Andrei Bely (1880-1934) presents a complex relationship between father, Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov, and son, Nikolai Apollonovich, in the context of the chaos, violence and terrorist acts that afflicted the Russian capital in those revolutionary times. The father, a high-ranking official in the Russian government, finds himself at odds with his would-be assassin son. The present study proposes to examine the father-son relationship from several perspectives: the Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy as outlined in Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy* (1872) provides a framework to focus on the rigid rationalistic behavior of the father, and the dreams and obsessive patricidal thoughts that govern the son’s unconscious and subconscious mind. Reference will also be made to Freud’s essay entitled *Dostoevsky and Parricide* (1928) and the third essay from *Totem and Taboo* (1913) which examines the narcissistic phase associated

with a primitive, child's understanding of the universe and early libidinal development in analyzing Nikolai's growing fascination with his own childhood and childhood memories that are manifested by a deep ambivalence: one of increasing hostility and a search for love and acceptance. According to Freud, an overvaluation of the self and individual fantasies leads to an "omnipotence of thoughts" and a projection of inner mental life onto the external world. Nikolai's imaginary construction of reality is manifested by his obsessive thinking, delusional disorders and his father complex. The paper also addresses the character and role of Alexander Dudkin, in his capacity as revolutionist, alter-ego of Nikolai and as the Nietzschean agent of will who murders his spiritual father.

**Key words:** father complex, father figure, omnipotence of thoughts, obsession, Apollonian-Dionysian dichotomy, 1905 Revolution

# 安德烈·貝里《彼得堡》中的父親情結與弑父

## 摘要

廣大的俄羅斯土地，長期處於沙皇的鐵腕及其他威權統治者的政策之下，看似毫無約束，但俄羅斯境內的無政府主義正在醞釀。

俄國人民敬畏當局統治者的威權，稱呼其中的一位統治者為「小父親」（little father），這位「小父親」提供這些人民安全感，保護人民不受敵人威脅，並對抗生活中的不確定性。現代俄羅斯官僚政府體制的建立者，彼得一世的形象特別深植於俄國人的社會文化之中，彼得一世更是推動俄羅斯由落後退縮的亞洲內陸國家，轉變為歐洲國家背後強而有力的推手。

1905 年，俄羅斯政治的官僚生態與父親的形象面臨危機。在 *Petersburg*（1916）中，作者 Andrei Bely（1880 – 1934）用小說中的父親 Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov 與兒子 Nikolai Apollonovich 間的父子情結，呈現蘇俄首府受到戰爭時混亂、暴力及恐怖份子行動的折磨下，政府與人民的對立關係。父子間的對立，就在這位身為俄羅斯政府高級官員的父親，發現他兒子即將成為刺客時，焉然展開。

本論文從幾個面向探討父子間的關係：以《悲劇的誕生》（1872）中，尼采用阿波羅－酒神的對立作為架構，聚焦於父親嚴格刻板的理性行為，以及主宰著兒子無意識與潛意識中夢想與著迷的弑父想法；文中也以佛洛伊德的文章〈杜思妥也夫斯基與弑父母〉（*Dostoevsky and Parricide*）（1928）以及《圖騰與禁忌》（1913）一書中的第三篇文章，來檢視自戀階段和原始的、兒童對宇宙及早期慾望形成的關聯，以分析兒子 Nikolai 對父親日漸增長的敵意、同時尋求愛和認同的矛盾心理。根據佛洛伊德，過度重視自我和個人幻想將導致「思想的全能」，而將個人內在心靈投射到外在世界。Nikolai 的困擾與固執證實了他對現實的虛構、失序與迷惑以及父親情結。本論文同時著墨於 Alexander Dudkin 在小說中的性格與扮演的角色：他革命家的身分、Nikolai 的第二個自我、以及尼采式的意志代理人－那個謀殺他精神中的父親的人。

**關鍵字：**父親情結、父親形象、思想的全能、困擾、阿波羅－酒神對立、俄國 1905 年革命

Russian existence at the turn of the nineteenth century was marked by waves of turbulence, a restive population, social protests and disorder. The tsarist government under Nicholas II was both unable and unwilling to redress grievances of an economic and political nature. Its quasi-military nature--authoritarian, highly bureaucratic, out of touch—served to spawn a large number of increasingly virulent political groups the members of which did not hesitate to use violent means directed at heads of state who all too often became the victims of terrorist attacks. The terrorist bomb became a symbol of the times serving in that capacity in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) set in London as well as in his later novel *Under Western Eyes* (1911). It plays a similar role in Andrei Bely's novel entitled *Petersburg* (1916). In the latter novel, Bely (1880-1934) presents a complex relationship between father, Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov, and son, Nikolai Apollonovich, in the chaotic context of the 1905 Revolution. The political and familial intermix as the father, a high-ranking official in the Russian government, finds himself simultaneously at political odds and at home with his would-be assassin son.

Petersburg in 1905, the setting for the novel, was in its death throes as the capital of a vast and sprawling empire that extended from Warsaw to Vladivostok. Bely, the son of a mathematician, in his Prologue to the novel introduces the motif of geometrical points and circles while inviting the reader to contemplate the vastness of the Russian Empire and its unreality:

Petersburg not only seems to appear to us, but actually manifests itself—on maps: in the form of two small circles, one set inside the other, with a black dot in the center; and from this very mathematical point, which has no dimension, it proclaims forcefully that it exists: from here, from this very point surges and swarms the printed book; from this invisible point speeds the official circular. (xxii)

Bely's symbolism and verbal playfulness can be viewed as an ecstatic vision blending creative art with life, derived from among other sources, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). His reading of Nietzsche's first published work, which itself emerged from the upheavals of the Franco-Prussian War, influenced his view of music as a primordial basis of existence and of art as a way of mastering the world. For Nietzsche, culture arises from the creative force of music; the spirit of music (part of the extended title of the work) replaces stagnant cultural forms, thereby creating a forceful and unrelenting rhythm of life which Bely effectively conveys in his novel. Art allows for a new and creative experiencing of life, a consciousness of its irrational and mysterious depths.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Viacheslav Ivanov's theory of the Dionysian nature of art in which he develops his idea that rationality destroys culture and morality in his essay "Nietzsche and Dionysus". (1906)

Nietzsche served the Russian symbolists as the patron of revolutionary thinking. The German philosopher points to the dream as “the first day of creation, the magic of a new culture, a song of songs: We are living through a crisis. Never have the basic contradictions of the human consciousness collided in the soul with such sharpness; never yet has the dualism between cognition and feeling, contemplation and will, the personality and society, science and religion, and morality and beauty been so precisely expressed.” (Lane, 177) Nietzsche invites the artist to look beyond external phenomena in order to gaze into the horror of individual existence and primal being, and in joyfully taking part in the destruction of appearances, induces feelings of pity and terror but even more an identity with the procreative life forces of nature.<sup>2</sup>

The fantastic chaos and phantasmagoric atmosphere of the city characterizing the numerous nocturnal scenes presented in the novel echoes that of Pushkin’s *Bronze Horseman* (1833) and Gogol’s *Petersburg Tales* (1836). The city’s denizens, including the novel’s main protagonists, appear as spectral metonymic features that alienate rather than endear; they are deprived of any distinctive humanity and are rather reduced to noses, bowler hats, moustaches and arms in constant motion. The grotesque names, the ironic repetition of sounds of individual words and phrases--e.g., the over-insistent rationalism captured in the name Apollon Apollonovich—and the overly rich and stylized alliteration betray the city’s decadent state, ripe for revolution in the ongoing struggle against authority and authority-figures. Even if, on occasion, the sun happens to be shining and colors fill the cityscape with a sense of well-being, the situation soon turns ominous. For the setting takes place on the day of the General Strike, “on this nice October day” (123) which suddenly turns into a day when the eerily penetrating sounds of the siren constantly wail and everything turns topsy-turvy: “The gloomy building with the crimson summit; and outside the gloomy building that was crimson with sunset...it was impossible to see anything except bodies, bodies and bodies: bent, half-bent, barely bent and not bent at all: ooo-oooo-ooo the hooting in space punctuated by Revolution...Evolution...Proletariat...Strike...Strike...Strike.” (123-124) The apocalyptic element in the culture of the 1900s, characterized by a revolutionary denial of present and past values, features a strong concern with the future; death and ruin create a sense of foreboding, of the imminent disintegration and demise of one of the patriarchal European empires on the eve of World War I. The

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<sup>2</sup> *The Birth of Tragedy* anticipates the insights of psychoanalysis in its references to dreams, form and intuition, the conscious and the unconscious, manifest and latent content as presented in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) as well as drives (*Triebe*) as Dionysian impulses, Eros and Thanatos, the sexual impulse and the desire for death. See, Smith, Introduction (xxxv)

mythic narrative of cultural and spiritual change inspired by Wagner and Nietzsche<sup>3</sup> can be seen as a purposive cure for the prevailing angst and anxiety by drawing upon the mythical past. Bely displays a literary sensibility that is brilliant in its poetic expression and childlike, impulsive, direct, and naïve. Ironically, Bely, the would-be futurist, with increasing focus reverts to the personal past of childhood and beyond to understand the current decadent state of civilization and existence itself. Amidst the social and personal anarchy of the times Bely sees the child as the symbol of transfigured consciousness. “The very failure of Bely to secure the myth of resurrection,” we are informed by a contemporary critic, “induces him to revert to a primitivist image of the child in which he searches the mind to its prenatal and preconscious levels of being to recover a wholeness of spirit.” (Clowes, 228) Such a reversion to primitivist technique continues more completely in the novel that followed *Petersburg*, *Kotik Letaev* (1922), yet it is clearly present in the earlier novel as well.

Revolutionary politics exacerbated the generational conflict that first found novelistic expression in Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons* (1862). Bazarov, the representative of the new man, is a natural scientist and physician, a hard-headed materialist and utilitarian who rejects the conventions and romantic idealism of the fathers’ generation to the point of taking aim at one ‘father’ in a duel. In 1905, the social critic P. N. Miliukov wrote: “There exist two Russias... one of Leo Tolstoy...the other of Plehve, the late minister of the interior.” The latter serves as a model for the father-figure of *Petersburg*, Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov, not least by being the intended victim of a revolutionist’s bomb. Tolstoy was a spokesman for the intellectuals and the people and liberty; Plehve and Apollon embody the deeply-rooted anachronism of the bureaucracy and despotism of the Russian state. This unstable state of affairs with the ruling class increasingly out of touch with the ruled created a nation-wide ferment in Russian society that came to a head in 1905, when “a general explosion [was] capable of eruption at any moment.” (Ascher, Vol. 1, 11)

The novel *Petersburg* embodies the spirit of destruction, disturbing and fascinating, drunken visions and spiritual frenzy leading to the abyss. Hermann Hesse’s observation that the post-World-War I psychology derived from Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, “with Freud serving as the first architect,” is already vividly

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<sup>3</sup>Bely was one of many Russian writers and artists captivated by the cult of Nietzsche. He writes in *Arabesques* (161): “...in his aphorism I see the ultimate symbolizing ability: the surprising musicality enslaved me, a musician in spirit, completely...The philosopher-musician seemed to me the very type of a symbolist.” He goes on to define “symbol” as “an aphorism charged to the limit.” (Lane, 230)

demonstrated in *Petersburg*.<sup>4</sup> (Smith, 261) The conception of parricide, deliberations on it, the plotting of it and the actual crime of parricide give form and content to *Petersburg*. Nikolai Apollonovich and his alter ego and spiritual brother, Alexander Dudkin, share characteristics of the Brothers Karamazov: the spiritual mysticism of Alyosha, the spirit of philosophical revolt and the hallucinatory visions and spectral encounters of Ivan, and the Dionysian drunkenness of Dmitri, symbolic of the collectively willed parricide directed against government leaders in the revolutionary turmoil, are all present.

In his essay of 1928, “Dostoevsky and Parricide,” Freud observed that it was no coincidence that several of the greatest works of literature featured parricide. Compromise with morality is a characteristic Russian trait that allows crime to be committed. He viewed Ivan the Terrible (1530-1583), who murdered his son and heir in a fit of rage, as being overly attached to the symbolism of authority: Tsar, God, Nation—and was condemned to this veneration of paternalistic authority by his own neurosis while indulging himself in his own murderous revolutionary agenda.

Freud identified the criminal type as distinguished by a boundless egoism and destructive tendencies, and a loveless, unloving nature, marked by a lack of empathy. In Freud’s view, Dostoevsky singled out violent, murderous, egoistic characters for his heroes, those with destructive instincts directed against their own person, making them masochistic and guilt-ridden, even suicidal; intolerance, love of tormenting those he loves, a sadistic attitude towards potential victims, a perverse, innate instinctual disposition characteristic of a criminal and sado-masochist are all present. He commented on the inability of neurotic characters to form meaningful relationships, depriving them of the unity and harmony of family life. Dostoevsky’s novels feature long passages in which a disturbed individual is under the control of his unconscious with instinctual urges of the mind stemming from sexual experience/frustration.

The event experienced as the severest trauma is a turning point of one’s neurosis, i.e., an identification with a person whom the subject wishes dead. An attack on such a person, Freud points out, has the value of a punishment. One wishes another person dead, and now one is the other person and is dead oneself. For a boy the other person is usually his father; the attack (hysteria) is a self-punishment for a death-wish against a hated father. (240)

In the essay on Dostoevsky, Freud makes reference to an earlier work. In *Totem and Taboo* (1913), drawing upon anthropologically-oriented studies of myth as Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1906-1915), Freud characterized parricide as the

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<sup>4</sup> See Hesse’s essay “Recent German Poetry” published in *The Criterion*, I, 1 (1922) 90-1, referred to in Smith’s article.

principal and primal crime of humanity as well as of the individual and the main source of the feeling of guilt. A boy's relationship to his father is necessarily ambivalent: it is characterized by hatred for a rival and at the same time by tenderness which creates a strong and lasting identification with the father. Any attempt to usurp the father's (or father figure's) power would be met with by castration. This wish/fear on the unconscious level is expressed in the form of guilt. (241)

Trying to gain the father's tender love is also met negatively through the threat of castration; pathogenic intensification, i.e., neurosis, sets in when both masculine and feminine factors display themselves; latent homosexuality emerges in viable forms through male friendships, and as rivals in love. Identification with the father, moreover, takes a permanent place in the ego. The inheritor of the father's influence embeds itself in what is referred to as super-ego. The hardness and cruelty of the father are manifested in a sadistic super-ego and a passive masochistic ego; a great need for punishment develops in the ego. (*Totem and Taboo*, in Gay, 503ff)

Bely draws upon aspects of his own biography to characterize the conflicts and rivalry of father and son, allowing the informed reader to experience the novel as parody, which extends to the prototypes for the characters of Sergei Sergeich and Sophia Petrovna (cf. Blok's poetic drama, *Balaganshchik*, 1906) as the Russian poet and colleague of Bely, Alexander Blok and his wife Liubov. The Russian poet and essayist Khodasevich refers to Bely as "an eternally playing child" («На вечность дитя играющее») yearning for spiritual transformation through passive meditation, a healing process as he saw it for the spiritual illness of the times. Khodasevich also described the parents of Bely, poles apart in their temperaments and sensibilities, in the following manner:

Его мать была очень хороша собой: безобразный, неряшливый, погруженный в абстракции муж и красивая, кокетливая жена, обуреваемая самыми земными желаниями...Отсюда—столь же обыкновенный в таких случаях разлад, изо дня в день проявлявшийся в бурных ссорах по всякому поводу. Боря при них присутствовал.

("His mother was very attractive: her husband was ugly, sloppy, ever lost in abstractions, with the beautiful, flirtatious wife, given over to the earthiest of desires...From these circumstances derived such a lack of harmony, from one day to the next manifesting itself in turbulent quarrels for hardly any reason at all. Boria was affected by all of them." Khodasevich, 52)



The theme of family, family conflicts and the conscious and unconscious life of the child first appears in *Petersburg* and continues in later novels: *Kotik Letaev*, (1922) *The Crimes of Nikolai Letaev*, *The Baptized Chinaman*, (1927) in *Moscow Eccentric* (1926) and *Moscow under Fire* (1926).

In the course of his writing career Bely became increasingly fascinated with childhood memories and assigns various levels of meaning to them. In *Petersburg*, the political, philosophical and social issues are interwoven with the autobiographical as the writer, through the consciousness of Nikolai, interjects scenes that appear to arise spontaneously from the depths of memory: strong childhood impressions involving his father and his search for clues of parental affection. “The very imagination of Andrei Bely was once and for all struck and—I daresay—shaken by the constant threats of his home life. These threats exerted the most profound influence on his character and on his entire life.” (Khodasevich, 53)

The dichotomy referred to by Freud is played out in the character of Nikolai through his ambivalent feelings toward his father, Apollon Apollonovich Ableukhov, and the exploration of his conscious and unconscious impulses as presented by the narrator. The father is a personification of a rigidly bureaucratic and overly rationalistic senator, the son a student of philosophy and esoteric religions. Apollon is characterized by the line, the square, self-imposed outlines, his bulging skull, and a compartmentalized view of his personal and official affairs. This latter trait allows him to feel protected, however insecurely, from the swirling chaotic forces let loose in revolutionary Petersburg. “The Russian bureaucracy, centered in Petersburg, with its decadent, ephemeral aspects, its lines, cubes, mathematical forms are embodied in Apollon’s detached, ritualized behavior—an automaton.” (Maguire, 67) The compartmentalization extends to his home—“a filthy sewer”—where he isolates himself in his study, the door to his wife’s room locked. “He had the key to it, but he had penetrated into this part of the house only twice, and he had caught a head cold there.” (264) The pathos of Apollon’s loneliness and sad fate is undercut by the narrator’s jibing asides, here and elsewhere in the text.

Whereas Apollon’s room makes a prisoner of him, Nikolai’s study is an inner sanctum. His highly developed philosophical and religious consciousness gives rise to a powerful unconscious life accessed through his dreams. He is possessed of a strong spiritual dimension that allows him entrance to an expansive spatio-temporal cosmos: “all spectral forces are concentrated in him, directed at him, philosophical, revolutionary and the inherited bureaucratism of his father—the apocalyptic end of Petersburg.” (Berdiaev, 553) The Turanian eastern element in Nikolai’s heritage is combined with his intuitive predisposition for the irrational and incantatory—one

could say poetic--element to endow him with an atavistic identification with the Mongols. The father and son's surname of Ableukhov is a Russianized version of Ab-Lai-Ukhov, the name of their ancient Kirghiz ancestors, supporting the statement made by the narrator that in every Russian Mongol blood flows.

The father and son share certain features: a pitiful physical and social awkwardness bordering on absurdity; a sense of isolation, and a habit of speaking to themselves. They share a common interest in philosophy, though the rigid, formalistic father is drawn to legal philosophy, his bible being the Russian Code of Laws, while the son is drawn to the idealistic philosophy of Neo-Kantianism, his study adorned by the bust of Kant, 'of course'. One of the son's attempts to propitiate his alien and alienating father is by adhering to his parent's request to read Mill's *Logic*. Moreover, the son appears perpetually stuck in a childish/adolescent stage of development prevented from his very nature from becoming a man, a victim of the sterility of modern philosophy, of modern life. "Nikolai is scrawny, hairless, a failure with women, suspended between childhood and adulthood" (Alexandrov, 123), yet redeemed by his expansive spirit, as if a god were speaking through him. His ultimate reversion to the childhood mythologem provides a source of pathetic solace while his identification with his ancestral parentage transforms him, at least on the unconscious level, into a distinguished hero that traces its heritage down to the Titans themselves.

The rift in the relations and communication between father and son is exacerbated by the absence of the mother, who two and a half years earlier, abandoned her husband and son in running off with her Italian lover (she reappears at a critical point in the novel). This results in Nikolai's proposal to members of a revolutionary terrorist group of his willingness to kill their target, his father. A precipitating factor in the apparently apolitical son's decision is linked with his unsuccessful love life that makes up the novel's subplot. This parodic dimension is based on Bely's real-life relationship with the poet Alexander Blok and his wife Liubov, with whom he falls in love.<sup>5</sup> Nikolai attempts to break another taboo by making love to a young and attractive married woman, Sofya Petrovna, but his attempts are comically inept; the reader finds him with one leg over a bridge as he is about to plunge into the cold waters of the Neva. Nikolai nevertheless manages at the last moment to transfer his frustrations to his father. This is met with bemusement by the revolutionists, but embroils him in the cold, calculating, authoritarian world of Russian underground politics.

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<sup>5</sup> For development of the idea of Blok and Bely reinforcing each other's vision of the fatefulness of the times, see Maguire and Malmstad, 100ff.

The role played by a third character, Alexander Ivanovich Dudkin, a dedicated revolutionist and principled idealist, whose democratic convictions have been hardened by exile in Siberia, is essential for the development of the novel's plot and the theme of the double. According to the critic Alexandrov, Alexander can be viewed as a Promethean character with a Titanic love for mankind aroused by the Dionysian spirit of his existence. This in turn is based on "a hidden substratum of suffering and knowledge revealed to him in a Dionysian vision, forcing him to be torn apart by vultures, or in Alexander's case, madness. He can be seen as an embodiment of how the whole excess of nature in pleasure, pain and knowledge resounds to the point of a piercing scream of his demonic song of the people identified with the encroaching flood of the Dionysian ready to swallow up the Apollonian." (32) Alexander self-consciously embodies the revolutionary spirit of Nietzsche in attempting to transform values: "I was a Nietzschean. We're all Nietzscheans. You [Nikolai], too, are a Nietzschean. You may not acknowledge this. All the same, for us Nietzscheans, the masses when moved by social instincts...become transformed into an executive apparatus in which all people—even people like you are a keyboard upon which the nimble fingers of the pianist... play, as they overcome all difficulties. Such are we all!" (63) This passage is excerpted from the extensive conversation between Alexander and Nikolai as the former delivers the "sardine tin" housing the bomb intended to destroy Apollon Apollonovich to Nikolai for "safekeeping."<sup>6</sup> Dudkin is morbidly fascinated by the spirit of death; the developing fog that envelops his mind eventually produces hallucinations. He appears as a decidedly Dostoevskian figure: part Svidrigailov (*Crime and Punishment*) in the dark nightmarish quality of his mind, part Ivan Karamazov in his incipient madness and grotesque hallucinations, and part Kirillov (*The Devils*) in his giving himself over to his fate. He is a true revolutionist in the name of the abstract people, leading him mysteriously on to "a general thirst for death; and I grow intoxicated by it with ecstasy, with bliss, with horror." (115)

Alexander serves as an alter ego for Nikolai. He himself is a committed terrorist, the bomb maker providing Nikolai with the bomb that would destroy his father. For Alexander, as for Conrad's Professor in *The Secret Agent*, the bomb functions as agent of his will. He assists Nikolai in various ways, conscious and unconscious, in facilitating the planned assassination, most conspicuously by

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<sup>6</sup> Alexander's speech echoes a line from the Underground Man who states that man "wants to hold onto those most fantastic dreams, his own indecent stupidity solely for the purpose of assuring himself...that men are still men and not piano keys, and that even if the laws of nature play upon them with their own hands, they're still threatened by being overplayed until they won't desire anything more than a schedule. But that's not all; even if man really turned out to be a piano key, even if this could be demonstrated to him by natural science and pure mathematics, even then he still won't become reasonable..." (*Notes from Underground*, 22)

delivering the bomb intended for his father to Nikolai's home "for safekeeping"; he is also seen as a dark and threatening shadow for Apollon, a child-destroyer to whom Apollon has symbolically given birth—Zeus-like--through his conscious fears.<sup>7</sup> Alexander first appears early in the novel on Nevsky Prospect, where he, bomb in hand, encounters Apollon making his daily way to the government institution by carriage. Their eyes meet:

"Apollon Apollonovich resembles Zeus in this: goddesses and genii issued from his head. One of these genii, the stranger with the tiny mustache, sprang into existence, like an image, and ran amok in the yellowish spaces...Apollon Apollonovich was indeed like Zeus: hardly had his brain given birth to the Stranger, another Pallas Athene, than the goddess of wisdom assumed yet another form." (22)

The comparison to Zeus is linked to the theme of parricide as the god, youngest of six children by Kronos and Rhea, would overcome his father by force. This motif recurs in Nikolai's unconscious meditations and cosmic dream "set off" by the bomb, referred to below. At the same time, Alexander, as shadow and stranger, enters Apollon's consciousness, which in turn plants seeds of fear and anxiety that mark the beginning of the old man's demise. His presence thus serves as a catalyst for father and son to come to grips with repressed feelings and fears.<sup>8</sup>

The theme of parricide and the relationship between father and son appear to be symbolized by the family coat of arms—a knight being gored by a unicorn. Nikolai's motivation for his murderous thoughts appears to be confused. Only near the end of the novel does he allow himself to consciously contemplate his feelings toward his father and play out his fantasy of doing his father in. He plots out all the details of the phantom homicide, from stealthily planting the bomb under his father's pillow, ironically wishing him a good night, then waiting, "quivering in his soft bed" until "something would burst...the never to be repeated, the unique, prolonged sound...---the explosion!" (250) He amazes himself at his own hard-heartedness, mimicking his father's bitter sentiment that he is but a scoundrel.

Apollon harbors a dismissive disregard for his son, a being he barely tolerates. He views him unfeelingly as "a young man of small stature, penetrating glance, and a

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<sup>7</sup> See, Thomas for a discussion of the myth of Parthenogenesis, 204ff.

<sup>8</sup> In the expanded version of the novel published in 1916, the reader is given Alexander's description of Petersburg: "The city lies on a swamp, a characteristic little dot, adorned with monuments: It belongs to the land of the world beyond the grave." (404) "The biology of shadows has not yet been studied; and so I tell you this—never come to terms with a shadow: you will not understand its demands; in Petersburg it will enter into you through the bacilli of all kinds of diseases that are swallowed in the very water that comes through the taps" (405)--the physical source of his gloominess, depression and hallucinations.

tangle of various intellectual interests.” The father is unloving and disgusted by the sexual act; in examining his own past, he sees the conception of his son as the culmination of “a series of violations” inflicted upon Nikolai’s mother: “Was it so astonishing that Nikolai Apollonovich had turned out to be a complex of repulsion, fear and lust. He had been obliged to educate this horror, this offspring of theirs, to humanize this horror.” This verdict appears as a combination of his own self-hate and an apollonian attempt to distance himself from his own emotional burden by embroidering it in rationalistic form. (264)

Nikolai in turn is ashamed of the word “offspring”, the careless, hurting manner in which the father refers to his existence. That he is his father’s offspring induces him to blame his father for the humiliation of his biological form and his disgust at the physical nature of life, of the flesh and its mortality: its “way of sweating and spoiling in the heat.” “He loathed his own flesh, but had desired another’s. From childhood he had carried the larvae of monstrosities; on maturing they had crawled forth.” (253) His father has planted within him the seeds of his own self-disgust which he discovers in the roots of his childhood and his unconscious will determines to extirpate them.

Yet on the surface, the father-son relationship is ostensibly marked by “apollonian” decorum and stiff formality, and strongly negative mutual feelings—each thinks of the other as a “scoundrel”. A rare expression of tender feeling by Nikolai is parried by the father’s cold and hostile rebuff. The interlacing circles the two inhabit appear bent on mutual destruction. Only in the novel’s final pages does the ticking of the bomb reach its climax; the bomb finally explodes, claiming no victims, but creating a physical breach in the Ableukhov home; in fact, the explosion is an anti-climax, as the father by this time is unmanned, having lost both his political power and his imposing stature within the family. Rather, the father is left in a state of bewilderment, empty thoughts whirling through the breach in his consciousness as he peers into the void.

Nikolai, in turn, is forced to come to grips with the political end of the fatal deed. He is handed a letter “of terrible contents”—written by Lippanchenko, the Party leader and patron and ersatz father figure for Dudkin-- informing him that the Party has indeed given him the assignment of assassinating his father. In perusing the terrifying letter, Nikolai shows how squeamish and guilt-ridden he is, as he skips the line with his Father’s name, suddenly bereft of any will to power in perpetrating parricide. The crushing news, however, disengages him from his surroundings, leaving him desolate.

In this critical state of mind he reverts to his better self, his contemplative spirit. He feels his heart as a red sphere, a shell expanding, bursting. (144) When he is

subsequently taken to task for his failure to abide by the Party's dictates, he appears resolute: "I shall not do it... I refuse irrevocably." Later forced to acknowledge to Alexander that "the act of violence which you proposed to us... The intention came from you" forces him into an admission. While both Nikolai and the Revolutionist of high moral principle agree on the vileness of the act, Nikolai comes to the realization that the mind sometimes unwittingly expresses itself in gesture, intonation, glances... "I did not love my father...and more than once I expressed my..." (194-196) The incommunicable, forbidden thought of killing his father Nikolai is not yet able to put into words.

The symbol and shape of the sphere, so prevalent in the novel, is bound up with Nikolai, his childhood and its fate. It is associated with the shape of the bomb (kept in a sardine tin and delivered to his home by Dudkin); the nature of its detonating capacity with the rapid release of spherical waves of expanding gases finds a parallel in the guilty feelings bursting in his beating heart. The feelings in turn become associated with childhood fears and images from the past such as a rubber ball personified as "Pepp" (also appearing in the novel as the name of a secret agent). The circular nature of time is linked with the monstrous depression caused by horror. The interlude of verses recalled from his childhood when his father used to sing to him: "Little Kolenko, little fool" have come full circle: "In the evil design patricide and falsehood joined hands." (250-251)

As Freud mentions, a boy's relationship with his father arouses ambivalent feelings. This antagonistic duality is aroused in Nikolai's feelings for his father when he sees him in his fallen state. A fateful meeting of eyes takes place on a street, as if they were strangers. Nikolai appears in a carriage, in the early hours of the morning before sunrise, from which he obtains a new perspective of his father: a thin little human figure. Now it is the father's turn to look up and into the cab, and Nikolai instinctively avoids his glance; yet he cannot help seeing his father as a victim of his own ill-plotted doings; his own eyes reflect the terror welling within him: this absurd figure in a greatcoat is juxtaposed with the family coat of arms, a knight being gored by a unicorn. Nikolai feels, however, that both are being gored. (168)

As father and son meet, walking together into their home, Apollon appears as the figure of death; incongruously, Nikolai imagines his father in the act of sexual intercourse, filling him with a familiar nausea. (168) Nikolai retains a characteristically diffident appearance, yet his father has already seen through him and regards him as the scoundrel he has shown himself to be—the self-consciousness that characterizes their meetings once again leading to mutual embarrassment. It is at this point when the father shows an uncharacteristic vulnerability in a gesture meant to be helpful that an unconscious impulse overtakes Nikolai. Apollon's feeling of

ignominy fills Nikolai with a murderous bloody vision—that the scissors he is holding in his hand will penetrate a pulsating artery in the exposed neck of his father. (172)

Retreating from this fearful vision into his “inner sanctum,” Nikolai is forced to confront the bomb awaiting him there. This combination leads to a powerful dream sequence, a playing out in Nikolai’s unconscious of the parricide complex in mythic terms.<sup>9</sup> The sardine tin with its deadly contents ticks away while the sensation of a distended stomach, as if he had actually swallowed the bomb, induces nausea and weakness, compelling him to lose himself in drowsiness. His unconscious is colored by his spirituality, a dimension so lacking in the father, as he proceeds to enter into a world of Buddhist idealism: Standing before a door opening up to the cosmos, he makes his astral leap into the spheres.

On the spiritual plane, Nikolai’s attraction to Buddhism is embodied in its teaching of love for all beings and its system of logic as developed by Tibetan lamas serves as a doorway to the infinite cosmos. Nikolai’s unconscious meditations on the sardine tin elicit an atavistic dream, a reversion to the ancestral past and the Central Asian steppes of his Kirghiz ancestors, which appears to explain his bent for eastern spiritual beliefs and his revolutionary sentiments.

Eastern and western mythic elements merge in the dream. The open doorway permits the entrance of Kronos, one of the original Titans, in the guise of a Mongolian ancestor. Traditionally, Kronos as one of the offspring of Uranos, inspired his father with revulsion as soon as he and his siblings were born. After the father imprisoned them, Kronos rose up in revolt against the unspeakable father and his shameful act set in motion the cycle of enmity between fathers and sons.

Nikolai’s concept of a higher Kantian good takes the form of Nirvana and not Paradise characterized by a harmonious patriarchal sense of well being. His cosmic memory rather takes on an apocalyptic aspect as it reveals to him his previous identity as the Ancient Dragon nourishing itself on corrupt blood, consuming everything in flames. In his dream, Nikolai sees himself as an ancient Turanian bomb, disguised in a frock coat in his visitation of the West. His dream instills a vision of an immense sapphire crevice in his robe, the firmament, distilled with sparkling stars. Nikolai merges with his alter ego, his cosmic ancestor, to usher in a new world: This turns into a Mongolian affair, in which he identifies Apollon both as his mentor in the ways

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<sup>9</sup> Bely displays here a divided sense of reality, the real and the mystical dimensions as he does in his poem *Gold in Azure* (1904) with its numerous references to Nietzsche and V. Solovyov; dawn’s azure sky and golden sun are associated with Solovyov just as Nietzsche refers to “the dawn, the new man and new culture” as all the highest that enters the soul as horror and ecstasy.

of wisdom and as Saturn who is to be overthrown by the younger generation. The Father as Saturn, the deity of time, means the end of time with his death; the destruction of the father in turn means the destruction of the cosmos. The dream ends with the French phrase "*Cela tourne*" (184) "Everything turns": the unfolding vision turns into a portent of apocalyptic revolution: "Chronology is zero." Nikolai sees himself as both the agent of destruction and as the bomb itself.

To highlight the richness of Nikolai's imaginative powers is a scene showing his determination to revert to the images and sounds of childhood shared with his father. The dream vision can be juxtaposed with a childhood memory involving his father and not his mother, but the boy's German nanny who substitutes for the mother in taking care of little Kolenko. She conveniently retreats into the background save for the German verses she sings to the boy as his father teaches him a rhythmic dance to the strong measured beat of the verses:

Who rides, so late, through night and wind?  
It is the father with his child.  
He has the boy well in his arm  
He holds him safely, he keeps him warm.

"My son, why do you hide your face so anxiously?"  
"Father, do you not see the Erlking?  
The Erlking with crown and tail?"  
"My son, it's a wisp of fog."

My father, my father, and don't you hear  
What Erlking quietly promises me?"  
"Be calm, stay calm, my child;  
The wind is rustling through withered leaves.

"I love you, your beautiful form entices me;  
And if you're not willing, then I will use force."  
"My father, my father, he's grabbing me now!  
Erlking has done me some harm!"

The lines come from Goethe's ballad, "Der Erlkonig" ("The Erlking", 1782) recounting the death of a child in his father's arms, assailed by a supernatural spirit as he is being carried by his father on horseback back home. The increasingly frenzied beating of the horse's hooves—linked as a motif in the novel with both the Bronze Horseman and the Mongolian Horsemen—captures the urgency and concern of the father to get his son home safe and sound; at the same time it reveals the boy's



visionary capacity, a spiritual dimension lacking in the father that allows him to see the spirit of Erlking, his delightful daughters and his world, both enchanting and threatening. The father, meanwhile, is limited in his vision to the natural phenomena surrounding them and in interpreting the son's affliction in non-imaginative terms. The poem also seems to serve as a fantasy of the son, who imposes a dread punishment on the father for his inability to enter his son's world, understand his superior sensibility and protect him. Thus, the father is condemned to find his child dead in his arms, a striking inversion of the parricide conflict.

Nietzsche attributes a Dionysiac force to the folksong and its dual artistic drive of nature that is captured by its introduction into literature, which represents a unification of the Apollonian with the Dionysian creative impulses. He sees the repetition of the melody as a reversion to a primary and universal principal in its creative outburst of images in which music appears as will, conveying the impulses of passion "from a whispering inclination to a rumbling address," while employing Apollonian allegories to underlying nature and oneself in nature "as that which eternally wills, desires, longs." What becomes evident through the music is captured "in the throes of urgent and forceful movement." (*Birth of Tragedy* 38-40) In his willing and longing, Nikolai conjures up the memory and implicitly interprets it in terms of himself and his relationship with his father.

The pervasive sense of doom throughout the novel leads to an unexpected Gogolian ending. The bomb goes off, but the lives of father and son go on, an ending with a whimper; the paroxysm passes, yet the madness remains, the morbid thoughts continue to fill the brain with their leaden weight; the characters lose whatever status, whatever substantiality, they may have had and become phantoms, ghosts, madmen, or, in Nikolai's case, a zero.

Bely chooses a Freudian theme of parricide and develops it within a Nietzschean setting of revolution and anarchy. In so doing he creates a split and ambivalence between the private and the political, the impractical intellectual attuned to his spiritual dimension and obsessed with his personal relationship with his father, on the one hand, and the devoted revolutionary, principled and capable of acting on his principles without regard for his own welfare. Nikolai though harboring violent thoughts is himself incapable of violence. The father, in all his impotence, is relegated harmlessly to the countryside while the son is free to dispose himself of the destructive aspect of his father-complex. As the reader leaves him, Nikolai appears evermore engrossed on the spiritual plane, meditating on the religious and abstract philosophical intricacies of fathers and sons, even as the revolutionary spirit personified by Dudkin undermines the rationalistic figureheads which continue to feed on themselves.

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