

Title: Mapping Petersburg's Androgynous Zones: Sophia Petrovna's Gender Ambiguity and Its Implications

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Andrei Bely's *Petersburg* is a novel populated by androgynes of various degrees; its characters do not fit neatly into the gender binary. Its three most significant characters – Apollon Apollonovich, his son, Nikolai, and the radical Aleksandr Ivanovich – possess feminine physical or mental features. Though the androgyny of the aforementioned male characters has been analyzed, the revelatory androgyny of the novel's heroine, Sophia Petrovna, has gone largely unexplored. Sophia Petrovna represents both the unity and contrast of the two genders. Depending on which of her two names is being used to describe her, – Sophia Petrovna, which is grammatically feminine, or Angel Peri, which is grammatically masculine – she is referred to by either masculine or the feminine verbs, adjectives, and pronouns. Many of her features give her an appearance of boyishness and link her to other famous androgynes, particularly Sasha from Fedor Sologub's *Petty Demon* and the Greek figure of Dionysus.

In the introduction to their 1978 translation of *Petersburg*, Robert Maguire and John Malmstad claim that the notion of “unity in duality” (Maguire and Malmstad xiv) pervades the novel; Sophia Petrovna illustrates this union in the realm of gender. Though the novel portrays Sofia Petrovna as a vain, simple-minded young woman, her role is more complex than this description suggests; more than just a catalyst for the explosive reaction between opposed elements that occurs in Nikolai, her gender undergoes the same highly unstable reaction. She is an experiment in androgyny, testing the theories engendered by and circulating among Bely's coevals.

Maguire, Robert A., and John E. Malmstad. Introduction. *Petersburg*. By Andrei Bely. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1978. viii–xxii. Print.