

Title: Vagaries of Masculinity in Venedikt Erofeev's *Moscow to the End of the Line*
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Masculinity of “tempered steel,” characterized by devotion to the Soviet cause, robust military power, and faith in science, was a popular ideal during the first decades of the Soviet era. In the 1960s and 1970s, as liberal intelligentsia became increasingly wary of the Soviet project, this ideal began to wane. Alternative archetypes of masculinity took shape, including hikers who braved natural dangers, men who aspired to act according to the ideals of Russian nobility, and rebels who dressed and acted in a Western manner.

Although distinct from the older ideal, all of these archetypes underscore typically masculine traits: activity, strength and the freedom to realize oneself. However, without considering Venedikt Erofeev's novel *Moscow to the End of the Line*, a classic of late Soviet nonconformist literature, it is difficult to appreciate the extreme range of responses to the gender crisis. The protagonist Venichka, an alcoholic and spiritual seeker, rejects the masculinity of “tempered steel”—yet instead of embracing alternative masculinity, he cherishes delicacy and vulnerability, which are traditionally associated with the feminine. This paper analyzes the reasons for which this happens.

Preliminary findings indicate that Venichka “feminizes” himself to enact an ultimate submission to fate, a notion contrary to the Soviet identity (especially male) of a historical actor who takes part in building Communism. Traditional femininity serves Erofeev as an existing and highly lyrical model for submission to a radical philosophical and spiritual experiment on himself. Venichka submits to the movement of the commuter train (the titles of the novel's chapters are based on the villages that he passes, not on his actions). Both in his experimental drinking and in the erotic paradise that Petushki represents for him, his body is a highly individualized entity to be mutilated or submitted to profane pleasure. Finally, the language that he uses to describe his frailty – frequently archaic and poetic – allows him to revive Silver-Age models for the spiritual experiment involving the body.