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Tsvetaeva's "Don Juan" Cycle: Dialogue with Pushkin and Blok

Several recent scholars (Diana Burgin, Alyssa Dinega, Stephanie Sandler) have noted the crucial roles Pushkin and Blok play in Tsvetaeva's quest to overcome the perceived artistic limitations of her gender, and develop a poetic identity that transcends the feminine. In her 1917 "Don Juan" cycle, allusions to works of both poets on the same subject allow Tsvetaeva to rewrite the legend and reshape her poetic identity by exploring her predecessors' treatment of gender. *The Stone Guest* demonstrates Pushkin's awareness of shifting female roles in society, marriage, and artistic creation. Laura represents a female version of Don Juan, paralleling his sexual behavior and acting as artistic co-creator, as she performs songs based on his lyrics. Pushkin also demonstrates Donna Anna's agency in her own seduction, as she initiates the first conversation with Don Juan, invites him to her house, and grants him another rendezvous before the Commander appears. Tsvetaeva, in her poems, builds on Pushkin's rethinking of gender roles by depicting an encounter between Don Juan and Carmen, the *femme fatale* who exhibits the same freedom toward men that Don Juan does in relation to women. In doing so, she also challenges Blok's portrayal of the poetic hero's relationship with the female personae in both his 1912 Don Juan poem "Shagi komandora" and his 1914 "Karmen" poems. Tsvetaeva's cycle transforms Blok's Donna Anna and Carmen from relatively passive objects of worship, potential saviors, or victims of male violence into equal rivals with their would-be seducers. This equality between the sexes represents not so much a liberation of feminine sexuality as a general voiding of erotic energy. Paradoxically, Tsvetaeva elevates the legendary seducer Don Juan into a state that transcends sexuality, releases him from suffering, and assures him immortality in the same eternal pantheon of poetic figures to which she herself aspired.