Feminine Seduction in Pushkin’s *Stone Guest*

Pushkin’s innovative treatment of Don Juan in *The Stone Guest* has been well documented. In this paper, I will examine the role played by the women Don Juan seduces. I claim that Pushkin illustrates not just the process of “poetic seduction” described by Anna Akhmatova, David Herman, and others, but also a series of interactions in which men and women each play significant roles in the act of seduction. This can be seen most clearly in Laura, a female counterpart to Don Juan whom Pushkin interpolates into the legend. However, I would argue (extending observations by Nancy Anderson, Dmitry Blagoi, and L.S. Ospovat) that Donna Anna also plays an unusually active role in this process, initiating her first encounter with Don Juan, provoking him to reveal his true identity, and granting him a rendezvous. Pushkin thus establishes a pattern in which all of Don Juan’s named conquests (Inez, Laura, and Anna) attempt to free themselves from gloomy, controlling men, with the hero functioning as a conduit for these rebellions.

Pushkin’s interest in women as co-seducers derives in part from his personal anxieties: he encodes his fear of Natalia Goncharova’s betrayal after his death into Donna Anna. However, in light of his growing interest in the role of women as active agents in romance and creative art alike, his paralleling of male and female behavior, words, and gestures indicates an awareness of the instability of gender roles in Russian society. In this light, *The Stone Guest* can be read as an alternative scenario to Tatiana’s rejection of Onegin: women in the little tragedy actively encourage and participate in seduction. Pushkin therefore anticipates both later interest in the “woman question” and contemporary anthropological research that questions whether women are not drawn as much as men to serial relationships.