

Title: From “Rafaeleva Madona” to “Moia Madona”: Pushkin as Creator through the Lens of His Mary Poems

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Pushkin’s use of the Virgin Mary as a theme is limited to a handful of poems, ranging from “*Ty, bogomater’, net somnen’ia...*” (1826), a poem in the tradition of *Gavriliada*, to “*Zhil na svete rytsar’ bedny...*” (1829), in which a devoted knight meets his holy bride at death. Generally speaking, the inclusion of Mary in Pushkin’s poetry is usually accompanied by stylized verse or exoticized topics. Mary’s qualities as mother, virgin, or bride, are either cast aside and left open to new, often blasphemous interpretations, or raised to a pious extreme in imitation of a certain style, such as the *legenda*. Against this broader background, the present paper will concentrate on two of Pushkin’s “Mary” poems—the unfinished “*Kto znaet kray, gde nebo bleshchet..*” (1828) and the sonnet “Madona” (1830)—which collectively illustrate a shift in the poet’s conception of Mary and her image in art. The former playfully challenges the great Renaissance painter Raphael to capture the charm of a Russian beauty, instead of the “Jewess” (Mary) he paints with such regularity. The latter rewrites this idea in a most serious manner. In the sonnet, the claiming of a Madonna for himself is more an assertion of artistic authority over another master’s creation than the mere idealization of his young wife. This paper does not discount the role of biography (Mariia Aleksandrovna Musina-Pushkina and Natalia Goncharova are clearly invoked), but the emphasis is on Pushkin’s artistic decisions and posturing of himself as poet and ultimately, creator. Reading both of these poems together may offer new insight specifically into Pushkin’s love poetry, a neglected genre in criticism.