The Poets' Niche

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A Passion for Pushkin (1799-1837)



This month's featured poet is Alexander Pushkin, Russia's most famous bard and a man for whom I have enormous respect and brotherly love. My passion for Pushkin began 17 years ago on a freezing February morning in Moscow when Tamara, my guide, showed me his statue, ghostly and mysterious through the refracting hoarfrost. And then I saw them—flowers placed reverently on the pedestal just as they have been placed every single day since the statue was unveiled June 6th

, 1880!

| Not all of me will die, for through my art, I know, |
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| My soul shall long outlive my mortal body's death, |
| And I shall be renowned while on this earth below |
| At least one poet still draws breath.* |
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| Pushkin's popularity and exalted status are accorded partly because he touches people's hearts through his graceful poetry and partly because subsequent great Russian writers—Gogol, Turgenyev, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy among many others—acknowledged their debt to another Russian genius. Pushkin changed the course of Russian literature forever by fashioning a literary language where before there was only High Church Slavonic and colloquial street talk. The upper crust of course spoke French. |

His most illustrious work is *Eugene Onegin*, a novel-in-verse made up of nearly 390 stanzas, each stanza containing 14 lines and of a very particular rhyming pattern throughout. It took Pushkin over eight years to compose it. For a taste of its drama, read aloud this Onegin stanza about a pistol dual over a beautiful woman where the poet loses.



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