



# **My Talisman: The Poetry & Life of Alexander Pushkin (English and Russian Edition)**

*Julian Henry Lowenfeld*

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As Shakespeare is the quintessential poet of the English language, Goethe is the national bard of Germany, and Dante is the national poet of Italy, so Pushkin is the quintessential expression of the famously unique Russian soul, universally beloved by Russians for over 200 years as the sunshine of Russian poetry. Pushkin is at the very heart of Russian culture. Gogol, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov, and Nabokov, (the Russian literary geniuses best known in the West) all have revered Pushkin and acknowledged themselves his literary heirs. To Gogol, Pushkin was an extraordinary phenomenon, perhaps the only true expression of the essential Russian spirit ; to Dostoyevsky, Pushkin was the height of artistic perfection. Tolstoy praised Chekhov by calling him Pushkin in prose and urged young writers: read and re-read Pushkin! For Russian poets, a deep devotion to Pushkin is something almost akin to religion. Pushkin is the Prophet of Russian literature; countless phrases of his have entered the Russian language as Shakespeare s phrases permeate English. Yet, while Russians revere Pushkin as English-speakers do Shakespeare, the West knows Pushkin far less well than it knows his literary heirs. The incomparable mastery of Pushkin s verse has eluded translation, because few English-speaking poets have mastered Russian well enough to convey him with proper feeling. Yet Pushkin (who was also indisputably the most colorful and romantic figure in Russian literary history) was also by far the most Western and European of all great Russian writers. His works resonate with universal significance, for they eschew nationalism, religious preaching, and doctrine, and instead stress universal values such as love, joy, freedom, honor, and the preciousness of life, values that are as timelessly relevant and potent in 21st century America as they were in 19th century Russia. My Talisman, The Life and Poetry of Alexander Pushkin brings the joy of Russia s national bard to English-speakers. In a dual-language edition, handy for academic use, as well as for bilingual households, it contains over 120 of the most beloved poems of Alexander Pushkin, illustrated by approximately 180 of the poet's own beautiful, extremely vivid drawings. The book also contains extensive excerpts from the universally acknowledged crown jewel of Russian literature, Eugene Onegin, Pushkin s magnificent novel in verse, and a complete biography of the poet, whose life is a thrilling tale in its own right. He was at once of ancient Russian aristocratic lineage and the son of six ethnic groups (most famously, on his mother s side he was the great-grandson of a black slave kidnapped from Cameroon). He withstood neglect and abuse in childhood, deliberate ostracism, poverty, debt, two exiles, house arrests, constant censorship, controls and spying to inspire an entire nation s yearnings for freedom. Many friends were executed or exiled to Siberia; he barely escaped the scaffold himself. He experienced droughts, plagues, locusts, wars, duels, passionate love affairs and scandals, sandstorms, blizzards, ocean hurricanes...and worse than any weather the enmity or troublesome amity throughout his life of the Tsars. And yet, he resolutely, defiantly dared to be free, to be happy, to laugh, to love and to create.

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