

Title: The Burned Letter and the Broken Urn: Pushkin on Loss and Recovery
Author: Leslie O'Bell, University of Texas, Austin

This paper treats Pushkin's "Sozhzhennoe pis'mo" and "Tsarskosel'skaia statuia" as concentrated reflections on the destruction of two emblematic objects, the letter consigned to the flames by the desperate lover and the urn accidentally broken by the girl of the statue. Each poem presents its own victory over loss. Though the letter must be burned, the fire that consumes it captures the essence of passion, in a "love-death." The lyrical gaze focuses on the letter to set it ablaze, yet the poem is cast in long, Alexandrine couplets which retard the action and elevate the letter to the status of a solemn sacrifice. The "love-death" is also a holocaust, and the poem closes by eternalizing its memory. In the statue poem, written in classical meter, the object of contemplation becomes the broken urn. The miracle of the fountain flowing from it may serve as a symbol of the continuity of culture despite all dislocations, part of the general affirmation that life springs eternal. Each poem is a paradox. Had the letter not been burned, its passion would not have been liberated. Had the urn not been broken, its waters would never have been released.

Selected Bibliography:

- Jakobson, Roman. "Stikhi Pushkina o deve statue, vakkhanke i smirennitse." In Andrej Kodjak and Kiril Taranovsky, eds. *Alexander Pushkin, A Symposium on the 175th Anniversary of his Death*. New York: NYU Press, 1976. 3-26 (3-14 on the statue poem).
- Kibal'nik, S. A. "Antologicheskie epigrammy Pushkina." *Pushkin: Issledovaniia i materially*. XII (1986): 152-175.
- Loseff, Lev . "The Toy Town Ruined." In *A Sense of Place: Tsarskoe Selo and its Poets*. Bloomington, IN: Slavica, 1993. Esp. pp. 40-41.
- Tsiavlovskaja, T. G. "Khrani menia moi talisman." *Prometei*. X (1974): 12-84. Esp. 53-55.