

Gymnasium (Grammar School) № 248 Saint Petersburg

Group essay contest

“Unity in Diversity: Russia and the English-Speaking World. Time for Equal Opportunities”

Research work (essay)

“The image of the “little man” in Russian and English Literature of the XIX century illustrated in the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky and Charles Dickens”

Contestants:



Urova Varvara
Урова Варвара



Tiukhlova Yulia
Тюхлова Юлия



Podgoretskii Alexander
Подгорецкий Александр

Supervisors: Kamitova A., Shliakhovskaya L.

Руководители группы: Камитова А.В., Шляховская Л.Н.

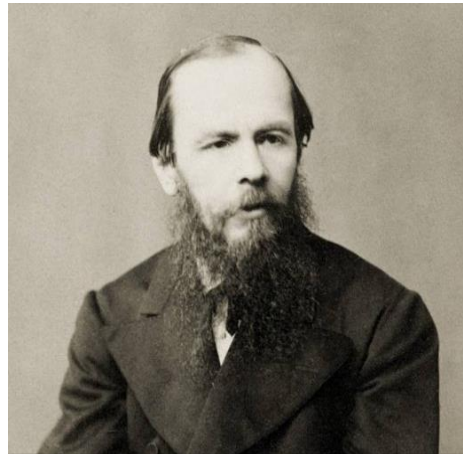
Theses

1. An appearance and development of the theme of the “little man” in Russian and English literature. Two outstanding writers.
2. The “little man” in the works of F. M. Dostoevsky. His famous books “The Double” and “Poor Folk”.
3. Dickens's childhood which predetermined the main theme of his books.
4. Inactivity as a quality of the “little man”.
5. The images of the “little man” in Dickens’ and Dostoevsky’s novels have something in common, but they also have differences.

The image of the “little man” in Russian and English Literature of the XIX century illustrated in the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky and Charles Dickens

The theme of an ordinary man has always concerned society, so many writers have turned to it. In the 19th century realism dominated in Russian and English literature. Many writers began to show the life of the “little man” in their works. Novels revealing this theme quickly became popular, as they vividly showed the lives of ordinary people with all their shortcomings. Books about the “little man” are still interesting even today though they are sometimes considered to be not easy to read. Some of the most famous writers who wrote in this genre are Charles Dickens and Fyodor Dostoevsky. The works of Dickens and Dostoevsky will be relevant at all times because they show the hard life of the “little man”, who is trying to overcome all the difficulties of their life.

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky is a Russian writer, thinker, and a philosopher of the 19th century, who was recognized as a classic of Russian literature after his death. Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote such novels as, “Poor People”, “Crime and Punishment”, “Idiot” and many others. F. M. Dostoevsky delved deeper



Fyodor Dostoevsky, 1821-1881

into the inner world of the “little man” than other writers had done before. In the novel “Poor Folk”, readers for the first time really understand the thoughts and life philosophy of the “little man”. Thanks to this, they can better see the character of the hero. For example, it is clear that the main character of this novel, Makar Devushkin, completely comprehends the reason of his low social status. “...and all because I was of a quiet, peaceful, good-natured disposition!”¹ writes Makar.

¹ Fyodor. Dostoevsky, Poor Folk, p.39

In general, the whole Makar`s life is connected with rewriting documents. He devoted 30 years of his life to his job. It plays an insanely important role for him. It helps him to overcome the insignificance of his existence and to make up for the lack of reality. It also makes it possible for Makar to “reincarnate” into another person. He cannot live without these reincarnations.

Besides his job, his ambitions help him to achieve his aim. They are secret and mysterious. The possession of them makes it possible for the “little man” to feel on the same level with other people. The vulnerability of these ambitions depends on whether there is someone around Makar. “ Of course, later I blamed myself, and my pride underwent a fall; but no extraneous person except yourself knows of the affair, and in any case it does not matter.”² We can conclude that Makar is highly dependent on people`s opinion.

His attitude to things is also confirmed by his words: “..... bitter cold without an overcoat or boots – I could bear it, I could well endure it, for I am a simple man in my requirements; but the point is—what would people say, what would every envious and hostile tongue exclaim, when I was seen without an overcoat? It is for OTHER folk that one wears an overcoat and boots.”³ Makar Alekseyevich suspects that a sharp eye is hidden behind everything. He hates it and wants to hide all the time.

In another novel, “The Double”, the main character, who is also the “little man”, tries to convince everyone, including himself, that he is independent. On the other hand, he is obsessed with the idea of being in the world of other people. He lives and surrounds himself with illusions. For example, he exchanges bills for smaller ones, so that it seems that he has more money than he actually has.

To sum up, Dostoevsky`s “little man” is the character who is very dependent on other, ordinary people. The “little men” try to be like everyone else, so that there are no complaints about them. They do not want to be

² Fyodor. Dostoevsky, Poor Folk, p.59

³ Fyodor. Dostoevsky, Poor Folk, p.66

themselves to the full, but live in dreams, illusions about the world of other people.



**Charles J.H. Dickens,
1812-1870**

Charles Dickens is known as one of the most important British writers, a classic of world literature, one of the greatest 19th-century Romanticists. He is the author of such novels as “A Christmas Carol”, “Great Expectations”, “The Adventures of Oliver Twist”, “The Cold House” and many others. He was able to portray the lower class and poverty in England most accurately.

A journalist, editor, illustrator, and a writer, he was born in 1812 in Portsmouth in the family of a naval clerk who dreamed of wealth. In 1822, the family moved to an impoverished area of London, where Charles's father was put in prison for debts. The young Dickens dropped out of school and went to work to cover his father's debts. He succeeded in going back to school but left it again to help his family with money. He became a correspondent and soon started writing articles. His first book, “Sketches by Boz”, was written in 1836.

It was his childhood that influenced his choice of the central theme of his books, living in poverty. Dickens himself had gone through all the hardships of life and thanks to his phenomenal memory was able to convey his experiences in his books.

In his story-tale “A Christmas Carol in Prose: Being a Ghost-Story of Christmas”, also known as “A Christmas Carol”, we see Bob Cratchit, a clerk. He works for the main character of the tale, curmudgeon Ebenezer Scrooge. Scrooge is greedy, so he pays Bob an incredibly small salary. Bob has a large family, they live extremely poor. One of his children, little Tiny Tim, is very ill and is about to die. Despite this situation, Cratchit is confident that there is something good in his boss and even offers a toast to his health at Christmas

dinner. However, if Scrooge had not become better, nothing would have changed in the life of the clerk. The family would have remained poor, and their son would have died. Only the kindness of the boss, caused by the appearance of the Christmas spirits, helped Cratchit and his family.

This is a feature of the “little man”. He does not make any attempts and even does not want to change his social status, his life and simply goes with the flow.

In “Hard Times” and “Bleak House”, Dickens shows us London, a huge, growing city. There is a wide gap between the rich and the poor in this city. Literally, a few streets away from the mansions there are blocks of flats of the poor. Beggars have no chance to change their situation. The most unfortunate are the children who live in appalling conditions, starving, and enduring punishment. They have to steal (Dickens' book “The Adventures of Oliver Twist” is about that) in order to survive. However, the author does not urge us to sympathize with the characters, as poverty is seen absolutely everywhere, sympathy is useless.

Although the main characters of Charles Dickens and Fyodor Dostoyevsky live in different countries, all of them have the same traits of character. The image of the “little man” is portrayed quite similarly by both writers. Poverty always chases them. They live in old little crumbling houses, struggling to find money for food and clothes. It is impossible for some of them to care for their families; their children starve and have to work or even to steal to make a living. The little man uses any source of income to survive.

Moreover, both writers show the dark side of life in the capital cities. “Outside there was a terrible heat, in addition the stuffiness, crowding, everywhere lime, woods, bricks, dust, and that peculiar summer stench, so familiar to every St. Petersburg who does not have a cottage - all at once

unpleasant shook the nerves of a young man already upset ... A sense of repugnance flashed for a moment in the delicate features of the young man.”⁴

The characters are dissatisfied with their lives and their social status. They dream of living a life of wealth and pleasure, but they do nothing to achieve their purpose, to change their fate.

However, despite the similarities, the novels of Dostoevsky and Dickens end differently. Charles Dickens hopes for the best. That is why his books usually have happier endings. In “A Christmas Carol”, for example, Cratchett gets a pay rise, which helps his family and his sick child to survive. Though in Dostoyevsky’s novels a lot of characters die.

What is more, in Dostoevsky's works, the “little man” is strongly dependent on other people's opinions. He tries to appear better than he really is. In Dickens’ books, however, the “little man” pays no attention to other people's opinions of him or his actions.

To sum up, “the little men” of Charles Dickens and Fyodor Dostoevsky have many similarities, but they also have many differences. These differences are due to different cultures and worldviews of two countries. Nevertheless, they do not lead to a misunderstanding of the authors’ artistic conceptions. This is proved by the long-lasting popularity of the novels by Charles Dickens and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Their literary heritage is still of world importance.











⁴ Fyodor Dostoyevsky «Crime and Punishment», part 1, p. 4

Bibliography:

1. Ch. Dickens. A Christmas Carol, 2008
2. F. Dostoyevsky. Crime and punishment, 2003
3. F. Dostoyevsky. Poor Folk, 1988
4. F. Dostoyevsky. The Double, 2009
5. С. В. Савинков, А. А. Фаустов. Аспекты русской литературной характерологии, 2010
6. <https://www.biography.com/writer/charles-dickens>
7. <https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/bleak-house/analysis/setting>

Appendixes

Characters' comparison summary

| Criteria | Fyodor Dostoyevsky | Charles Dickens |
|---|---|---|
| Poverty |  |  |
| The perception of the capital differs from other people's opinion |  |  |
| Unwillingness to take actions to change their lives |  |  |
| A good ending in the story |  |  |
| Dependence on other people's opinions |  |  |