

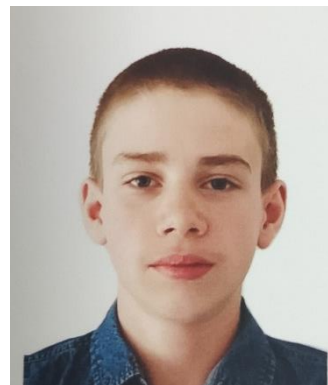
ГБОУ ЛИЦЕЙ № 369 г. Санкт-Петербурга

Индивидуальный конкурс эссе

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

Исследовательская работа (эссе)

**«Мир иллюзий Самуила Маршака и Льюиса Кэрролла»**



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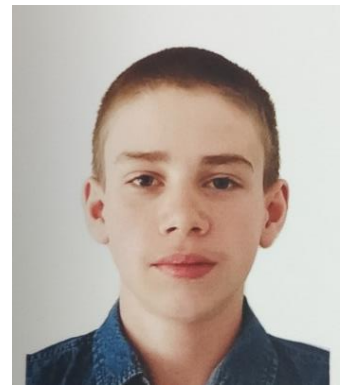
State-budget educational institution Lyceum 369 of Saint Petersburg

Individual essay contest

**“Unity in Diversity: Russia and the English-Speaking World.  
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Research work (essay)

**“World of illusions: Samuel Marshak and Lewis Carroll”**



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Form 9 G

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## Theses

Definition of an illusion.

Literary worlds are the worlds of illusions. Words have the power to create them and make them seem true.

New children's literature arrives with Lewis Carroll.

Russian children's literature owes a lot to Marshak.

The English language is an important character of Lewis Carroll's books. Both Marshak and Carroll use grammatical nonsense which delights children and adults. Literature gives us games and visual deceptions which add to the pleasure we get from imaginary plot or unusual characters.

Dream worlds of both writers make us believe there are few impossible things in the world.

Illusion is the first of all pleasures.

Voltaire

What is an illusion? Cambridge English dictionary defines it as an idea or belief that is not true; as something that is not really what it seems to be. [12] Many philosophers believe our world is an illusion. According to the theory of linguistic relativity we are limited in our perception of the world not only by our senses but by our language. [7] When we name an object it becomes what is implied by the meaning. The importance of the word is tremendous: from lines in the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," [8] to much more playful: "Must a name mean something?" Alice asked doubtfully. «Of course it must," Humpty Dumpty said with a short laugh: "my name means the shape I am - and a good handsome shape it is, too. With a name like yours, you might be any shape, almost." [9] So creating nature of the word is made clear.

The way we see the world can be just an illusion. Besides, there can be billions of worlds seen from different perspective - the worlds created by talent and ink. Literary worlds which sometimes seem more real than the one we live in. We open a book like we open the door to get into another place. Falling into a hole can also become a way into another world. This eccentric way of travelling is described in one of the most peculiar and weird book of all times 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland'. Its author, Lewis Carroll, was a mathematician, a poet, a deacon and a photographer, this combination lets us assume that he could understand the elusive nature of the world well enough, moreover, he could create his own worlds full of illusions.

Even the name of this writer is illusory. His real name is Charles Lutwidge Dodgson. After translating it into Latin he got Carolus Ludovicus and then translating it to English in a reverse order he got Lewis Carroll. He gave humanity an entire world full of fantastic riddles and logical puzzles which can

never be fully solved as it is an illusion to believe that a human is able to solve the riddle of the Creator. Probably, “the riddle, as originally invented, had no answer at all”. [10]

There were not many books written specially for children before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Children’s literature was not even a stepdaughter of real literature. Children were read to and read themselves folktales or fairy tales and religious books teaching them to behave themselves and not to anger god. The purpose of a children’s book was to educate not to entertain.



Fig.1 Lewis Carroll

When in 1865, Lewis Carroll wrote “Alice's Adventures in Wonderland”, it became epoch-making. Even at the time of its publication, the novel was considered a masterpiece. The book is so imaginative and strange that it cannot leave you indifferent. The dream world where you can meet a grinning cat, a rabbit with a watch or the moralizing duchess seemed capturing and recognizable like a dream you saw last night. The book gives food for thought while it lets the reader dwell in the realm of fantasy. What seems ridiculous to an adult is full of meaning for a child. At last children were not just taught to behave but amused and played with. Lewis Carroll showed that things can change and stay the same, that a lot depends on the point of view, that a thing can be real and still be an illusion. Alice grows and shrinks, runs while staying at the same place. You remember “if you wish to go anywhere you must run twice as fast as that”. [9]

What makes books about Alice’s adventures even more fascinating is the play on words used by Carroll so exquisitely. The English language is definitely one of the main characters of Carroll’s books. This also makes his books difficult to be translated into any other language. To keep the puns, transfer allusions clear to people of Victorian England into another culture is a titanic work.

Tw'as brillig, and the slithy toves

Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:

All mimsy were the borogoves,

And the mome raths outgrabe. [9]

These lines delight children and adults. Though no one completely understands what the slithy toves exactly do in the wabe, isn't it an illusion to think that when we talk about never-never land with usual words we visualize it properly?

Wonderful play on words and stylish grammatical nonsense will be used by quite a different writer in a very different country.

'Driver, stake me to the drain! / Striver, brake me to the strain! '[3]- These are immortal lines from one of the most loved by Russian children poem 'The Absentminded Fellow' by Samuel Marshak. Its character, like Alice, manages to stay in the same place but this time due to his absentmindedness. Sitting in a detached train carriage he is surprised finding out he has not gone anywhere:

"I was going to Birmingham, /But I came back instead!" he concludes. [3]

Love for puns, jokes and logical games makes two writers, English and Soviet Russian, close in spite of all seeming differences. One might ask: "Indeed, what can people divided by time, language, culture have in common?" These differences are only an illusion. Why can't true passion for language and literature wipe off the borders of time and distances? Why can't people creating wonderful dream worlds for adults and children possess similar traits?



Samuel Marshak was well familiar with English literature. He studied in England from 1912-1914. He was a brilliant translator. Russian readers know and love Robert Burns, William Shakespeare, Kipling and many other poets due to Marshak's talent. Marshak translated Carrol's poems in "Alice in Wonderland". Russian

Fig.2 Marshak in England [4]

children are read Mother Goose nursery rhymes in pure Russian and many people don't have the slightest idea that they are reading translations by Marshak and not Russian folklore poems. English humour was transferred by Marshak into his own poems for children. For example, "Baggage" which tells a funny story of a lady who loses her dog during a trip is actually an anecdote. It is told in a witty way in a form of a song with repetitions and refrains so often used in English and Russian folklore. These repetitions make the poem more pleasing to the ear and at the same time more solid:

A Lady has checked in to ship

A couch, /A pouch, /A grip, /A hamper, /A paper, /A hat.

And also a pint-sized mutt.

At the station she was handed out

Four baggage receipts of green color

Which listed without a skip

The couch, /The pouch, /The grip, /The hamper, /The paper, /The hat

And also the pint-sized mutt. [11]

Maxim Gorky called Marshak the founder of Russian children's literature. Marshak made Russian children's literature grand. He thought that profession of a children's writer was important and noble. One must know a lot to write simply about serious things. He used to say that it is an illusion that writing for kids is easy. Marshak wrote dozens of hilarious poems like "Old Woman, Close the door!", "Hail to Mail", "The Two Lazybones and the Cat", "Babies of the Zoo", "Poodle" and many more. "Poodle" with its ironical absurdity is very close to Carroll's eccentricity. It also



Fig. 3  
Baggage, [5]

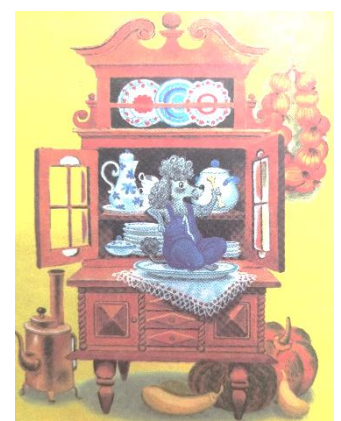


Fig. 4  
Poodle, [5]

reminds of limericks and Edward Lear. Indeed, isn't it funny to find your dog sitting on a dish in your buffet when you are going to feed it?

We, Russian speakers, can't imagine our childhood without Marshak's poems and tales. His gift of fancy has evoked love of many generations of children who were brought up by his poems. Marshak could wonderfully combine a moral like in folklore tales with pleasure of perfect style. People, who knew him well, remembered how happy Marshak was finding a perfect rhyme, a proper word which made his imaginary worlds vivid and real. Anyway, who can express the ideas of a writer better than he, himself? Let him speak:

So let our Time be filled with merry song,

With toil and dance and flights o'er space and sea;

Though brief her span, or though it last for long,

Let her, with us, create — and in creation, BE. [12]

Imaginary worlds of two different writers, Carroll and Marshak, share one common feature: love for Word. They let their readers travel far and wide in the worlds full of illusions on the wings of fantasy. On the way they amuse us, make us think, make us more creative and quicker to learn new ideas just by making us believe “as many as six impossible things before breakfast.” [9] They make us stronger saying very few things are impossible. This is why their worlds are and will always be loved by people truly and deeply.



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