

Group essay contest

“Unity in Diversity: Russia and the English-Speaking World”

«British characters popular in Russia (Sherlock Holmes, Harry Potter, James Bond, Robin Hood, Peter Pen, Alice Through the Looking Glass, Mary Poppins, Miss Marple and others to choose from): cultural reflection and public love»

«Популярные в России британские персонажи (Шерлок Холмс, Гарри Поттер, Джеймс Бонд, Робин Гуд, Алиса в Зазеркалье, Питер Пэн, Мэри Поппинс, Мисс Марпл, другие – на выбор): отражение в культуре и любовь публики»



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Theses

- Anglo-Russian cultural contacts run through the entire history of the Russian state.
- English literature has influenced writers and readers creating a mentality that can understand and therefore love these books immensely.
- British authors have given us a lot of new genres and literary movements.
- The brightest examples of literature in the English language inspired many great interpreters.
- Sometimes the authors adopted the main idea and adapted it to the Russian (or Soviet) mentality.
- Popular franchises (like Bondiana) have been reflecting a changing reality for almost half a century.
- People in different countries avidly devour books which help them escape ... into imaginary realms like Middle-earth or Wonderland.
- Great authors of crime fiction give readers a chance to “play detectives” and learn to be more attentive to details, build a chain of logical reasoning to solve most mysterious cases.
- The gift of storytelling would not be a source of success if it were not for the great intelligence and erudition of British writers.
- Being the capital of Russia, Moscow best indicates public adoration for Carol’s characters.
- Franchises create different combinations of plots, characters and aesthetics to attract the widest possible audience of all categories.
- This approach forms a circle.
- The guests will only ask for another serving if they like the food.

“The proof of the pudding is in the eating.”

(English proverb)

Anglo-Russian cultural contacts run through the entire history of Russia. However, of all the rulers it was probably Catherine the Great, who made the most significant contribution to the development of the spiritual sphere of Russian society. She fostered the publication of periodicals and favoured the production of Shakespeare’s plays. At the end of the 18th century Russia sought to know the English lifestyle and culture. Even the term “anglomania” was coined.

Alexander Pushkin softly laughed at Eugene Onegin for his glorification of the ideas of the English Enlightenment whereas he himself, as well as Lermontov and many others, was under the spell of Byron. The main character of Pushkin’s novel in verse (which was shot as a common production by British and American companies in English in 1999) is a bored “dressed like a London dandy” St. Petersburg socialite, with whom Tatiana Larina – an intelligent, but inexperienced and sincere young lady – falls in love. These characters of the Russian classics are very similar to the ones of the English literary treasury: Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy. Both men are proud, reserved and difficult to please, but they are noble and save the main heroines from dishonor. Eugene rejects Tatiana, while not exposing her feelings to ridicule, although writing a love letter to a man then was shameful. In his turn, Darcy finds Elizabeth’s runaway sister and settles the whole matter. Tatiana Larina, Elizabeth Bennet, Jane Eyre (from Charlotte Bronte’s remarkable novel) are always true to their inner principles. Russian readers empathize with the decisions and actions of the characters whose moral values are actually shared by both nations. English literature has influenced writers and readers for many centuries, creating a mentality that can understand and therefore love these books immensely.

British authors have given us a lot of new genres and literary movements. Who came up with Christmas stories? Charles Dickens! Wilkie Collins created

the famous British detective. Limericks were given to children by Edward Lear. There is nothing to say about the magic sagas, whose most renowned authors are C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien and J. K. Rowling. And then there are historical novels, gothic horrors and ghost stories, unique English humor, a treasure trove of British poetry...

The brightest examples of literature in the English language inspired many great interpreters. Such outstanding poets as Samuil Marshak and Boris Zakhoder introduced their own talent into English poems and novels to make characters like Alice popular with Russian children (who do not actually draw a line separating the original Russian books from the translated ones). During the pandemics, the studio Soyuzmultfilm entrusted Matroskin the Cat, Winnie-the-Pooh and other cartoon characters, who are all equally loved, to encourage children to wash their hands and wear masks. (Pic. 1)

Sometimes the authors adopted the main idea and adapted it to the Russian (or Soviet) mentality. For example, *The Brass Bottle* (a 1900 comedy novel by the British writer Thomas Anstey Guthrie, under the pen name of F. Anstey) has already been remade twice: by Lazar Lagin and later Sergey Oblomov. The story about Old Man Khottabych evolved together with the development of the society. (Pic. 2, 3)

Popular franchises (like *bondiana*) have been reflecting a changing reality for almost half a century. Probably, James Bond became popular because of the cinema rather than Fleming's books as in their 50-year-old narrative, the films tend to be more objective in their outlook on the world than the original novels. This franchise finds its heroes and enemies on both sides of the iron curtain as in Bond's universe the main evil is the sociopathic millionaires and terrorists who want to dictate their will to the world. *Bondiana* introduces the idea of loyalty (to the country, oath and friends) as the highest prowess. The unpleasant image of Russia of the 90s appears on the screen as a result of the loss of this virtue in the pursuit of material values. Russian readers, fed on English books, know how

to face the truth. The franchise sold an eye-catching image of a “superman”, along with a package of perks such as cars, gadgets, money, women, and feats. Cinema goers feel free to travel around the world with Bond and save the civilization on the way. The brand guarantees its fans a fabulous entertainment.

Hunger is the best sauce, so people in different countries avidly devour books which help them escape from oppressive regimes or monotonous daily routine into imaginary realms like Middle-earth or Wonderland. Tastefully written stories evoke the desire for more treat and search for sequels and prequels. The story of the boy “who survived” enchanted the Russian public with its unusual world, careful study of mythology (in this, Rowling is the real successor to Tolkien and Lewis), as well as the opportunity for readers to grow up with the wizards. This series even helps students to learn English as a foreign language. The novels are getting more and more complex and challenging to read. Those who are tired of studying and boring duties can ask for advice from Mary Poppins – a great master to introduce magic into reality – who teaches, “In every job that must be done there is an element of fun. You find the fun, and... SNAP! The job’s a game.”

Great authors of crime fiction like Dame Agatha Christy and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle give readers a chance to “play detectives” and learn to be more attentive to details, build a chain of logical reasoning to solve most mysterious cases. People of different backgrounds love the heroes of English detectives for their sharp wit, reliability, courage and... weaknesses: Miss Marple is a provincial old lady, Holmes is a sociopath, Poirot is a foreigner. These traits make them human and bring humor to a tense narrative. We see the same literary device in Russian detective stories. For instance, one of the main characters in the novels by Akunin is perceived by others as an oddball because he wears a fashionable *Lord Byron* corset, slightly stutters and has a Japanese servant. (Pic. 4) It is worth mentioning, though, that an angloman Fandorin is as interesting to the reader of our days as Onegin was to the people of the 19th

century. And it is not for nothing Agatha Christie was nicknamed the Queen of detectives. Not only did her novels fascinate with mystery, sense of humour and true-to-life details, “The Pale Horse” even saved the life of a 19-month-old girl dying of a condition that baffled London doctors. Fortunately, Marsha Maitland, a nurse, noticed that the baby’s symptoms were remarkably similar to those of a thallium case described in the book. In the same year 1977, a similar poisoning occurred in the USSR. Yampolsky, the investigator who was looking into that case, was also a fan of Agatha Christie’s books, which helped him to find the criminal.

The gift of storytelling would not be a source of success if it were not for the great intelligence and erudition of British writers. Both Tolkien and Lewis were Professors of Literature, but it was a lecturer in mathematics at the University of Oxford (Charles Lutwidge Dodgson) who created the chaotic, unsettled world of fairy tale, full of madness and devoid of the basics of logic. It penetrates modern globe culture because love to games, adventures and wonders knows no borders.

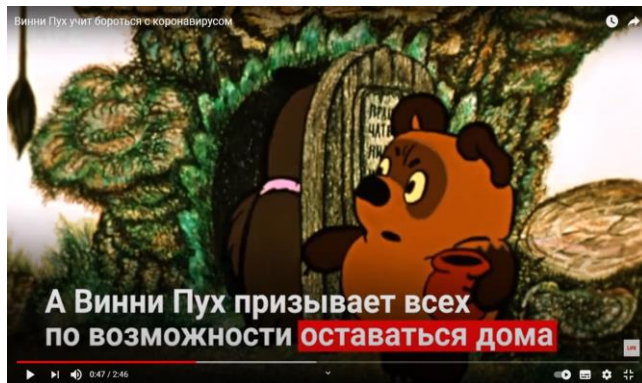
Being the capital of Russia, Moscow best indicates public adoration for Carol’s characters. There is a shopping mall with a multimedia amusement park dedicated to Alice in Wonderland; lots of linguistic centres (Pic. 5), hairdressing salons and night clubs inviting guests (often cosplaying famous characters) to go through the looking glass. Fans may dress up like the characters from either the original novel or the ones from movies (Pic. 6) and games. Wonderland is the land of questions. Why does the sun rise and set again every day? What will happen if you fly through the whole Earth?... From such questions, science was born. The characters of Carol’s books have inspired generations of scientists, who have sent Alice on different trips and even reduced her so much that the girl found herself in the microcosm of elementary particles! They also invite us to visit an interactive exposition in the Polytechnic Museum *Alice in the Land of Science*, which is more incredible than the most “strange” fairy tale. (Pic. 7)

Armed with a great number of formats (from fiction to comics, motion pictures, TV series, radio shows and merchandising) franchises create different combinations of plots, characters and aesthetics to attract the widest possible audience of all categories. Their income consists of billion dollars. For example, a story about James Bond includes 24 full-length films produced by EON company making a canon. Also, there are 14 books written by Ian Fleming and over 30 books created by other authors after Fleming's death, some computer games, graphic novels, soundtracks for Bond's films, hundreds of books and TV shows that were specially made in honor of creating the franchise and its different aspects, the mouthwatering assortment of special products which could be associated with James Bond (from men's clothing to cars with number plates 007). (Pic. 8)

This approach forms a circle. Companies make products related to iconic characters, fans buy them, and those who want to keep up with the Joneses read books, watch new movies, etc. Other novelists notice such great popularity and pick up on the trends. Consequently, students all over the world can repeat vowels with Eliza Doolittle to speak proper English, do their best to become "practically perfect in every way" and sometimes quote Shakespeare's plays. However, jokes about Holmes and Watson, parodies of Mary Poppins and graffiti with images of favourite characters (Pic. 9) which can be found virtually everywhere in Russia prove true love like nothing else, since they are not ordered or paid for. You can include "Doctor Zhivago" (in English, of course) into the UK school curriculum just as a host can put a dish on the table, but the guests will only ask for another serving if they like the food.

Illustrations:

Picture 1:



A screens cap

Picture 2:



A screen cap of the “Starik Khottabych” movie, 1956

Picture 3:



“}{ОТТ@БЬЧ” movie, 2006

Picture 4:



<https://yandex.ru/images/search?text=%D0%A4%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BD%20%D0%B8%20%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%B0&source=related>

duck&lr=10740&p=1&pos=47&rpt=simage&img_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.pereulo4ki.ru%2Fimages%2Fexcur%2FFandorin_OSN_393.jpg

Picture 5:



a language centre (Mytishchi)

Picture 6:



Cosplayer Olkaaklo with the photographer Kira Mitenkova

Picture 7:



<https://polymus.ru/ru/events/exhibitions/alisa-v-strane-nauki/>

Picture 8:



Funko POP! Vinyl figure of James Bond

Picture 9:



Mytishchi (the yard in front of classical school № 33)

Resources:

- Alice in the Land of Science
<https://polymus.ru/ru/events/exhibitions/alisa-v-strane-nauki/> (date of reference 30.01.2021)
- Cosplay – “Alice in Wonderland” and “Alice through the Looking Glass”
<https://babiki.ru/blog/raznoe-interesting/38915.html> (date of reference 30.01.2021)
- Marushkina N. With., Samatova Yu. Yu., Travin, S. J., English culture and Russian society
<https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/angliyskaya-kultura-i-rossiyskoe-obschestvo-xviii-veka/viewer> (date of reference 14.01.2021)
- The New York Times Archives *Agatha Christie Book Saves an Infant's Life*
<https://www.nytimes.com/1977/06/24/archives/agatha-christie-book-saves-an-infants-life.html> (date of reference 30.01.2021)
- Vyunitskaya Eugenia, 7 facts about British literature
https://zen.yandex.ru/media/eksmo_kids/7-faktov-o-britanskoi-literature-5f58e06edeed59545a8b0fb1 (date of reference 14.01.2021)
- Анна Бок for IsraLove Вся правда о Старике Хоттабыче
<https://isralove.org/load/5-1-0-1471> (date of reference 31.01.2021)
- Осипов С.В. — Меняющаяся Россия и меняющаяся бондиана: страна и люди в зеркале медийной франшизы (1962-2015 гг.) // Культура и искусство. — 2018.
https://nbpublish.com/library_read_article.php?id=26463 (date of reference 19.01.2021)