

ГБОУ ГИМНАЗИЯ № 248 САНКТ-ПЕТЕРБУРГА

Индивидуальный конкурс эссе

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

Исследовательская работа (эссе)

**«МИР ТЕАТРА В РАБОТАХ РУССКИХ И
БРИТАНСКИХ ПИСАТЕЛЕЙ»**



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2022

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 WORLD OF THEATRE IN THE WORKS OF
RUSSIAN AND BRITISH WRITERS”**



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2022

Theses

1. Theatre as a form of art. The role of theatre in the life of a person and society.
2. British and Russian writers who wrote about theatre. Their novels, devoted to the world of theatre.
3. Two different images of theatre in the works of British and Russian authors.
4. The theme of theatre will always be in demand in literature.

THE WORLD OF THEATRE IN THE WORKS OF RUSSIAN AND BRITISH WRITERS

Being an exciting and fascinating art form that combines various types of art: literature, music, choreography, fine art, etc., while having its own and unique image and message to convey: a reflection of reality, conflicts, characters, as well as their interpretation and evaluation, theatre has always been a place of attraction of people's minds. The affirmation of certain ideas here takes place through a dramatic action, the main carrier of which is the actor, and the main perceiver is the viewer. In one form or another, theatre has managed to take its place in the cultural tradition of every nation in the world, regardless of race, religion or ethnicity.

The role of theatre in a life of a person and society varies depending on the time and the goal pursued by theatrical performance. The theatre stage serves as a place of entertainment, a center of social life and communication, a place of formation of political beliefs and public opinion and many more to name. Theatre is shown in the works of British and Russian authors as the main place of creative activity. Writers do their best to depict the world of theatre both from inside and outside.

The most outstanding representatives of novelists who wrote about the world of theatre are J.K.Jerome, W.S.Maugham, C.Graham and M.A.Bulgakov.



Jerome K. Jerome, 1859-1927

Jerome Klapka Jerome is one of the greatest English humorists best known for “Three Men in a Boat” and “Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow”. He wrote many novels, stories, essays and plays; the latter grew from his youthful dreams to be an actor. The

writer himself fell victim to scam of the theatrical world having served in a poor repertory company in England. Fortunately for his readers, he was able to turn his experience into a book which was called “On the Stage - and Off”, a very funny memoir of these miserable years. The book became his first successful one. Several years later, Jerome K. Jerome followed it with “Stage-Land”, a humorous and ironic guide to the late-Victorian theatre stereotypes.

Another classic British author, W. Somerset Maugham, wrote a lot about the problems of creativity and creators. In his novel “Theatre”, W.S.Maugham introduces us to Julia Lambert, a woman of breathtaking poise and talent, who is in her late forties. She is an English star stage actress. She is extremely talented, in fact. She cannot imagine her life without theatre and perhaps she never stops acting. In “Theatre” W.S.Maugham subtly exposes the tensions and triumphs that occur when acting turns into reality, and for Julia – ultimately reverse.



William Somerset Maugham
1874-1965

One more English playwright, screenwriter and novelist is Caroline Graham. Unfortunately, her books are little known in Russia. In her book “Death of a Hollow Man” Inspector Barnaby, the main character, goes to the premiere of the play based on another world-famous play, but instead of enjoying the stage performance, he gets a new case. An actor on stage is killed and Barnaby has to find out who of the theatre-goers or actors committed the crime.



Caroline Graham

So, we can also see how acting merges into reality.

Regarding Russian writers, Mikhail Bulgakov is the best one who tried to explore the world of theatre as the source of inspiration and creativity. He devoted

two novels to this theme. One of them is "Theatrical Novel" ("A Dead Man's Memoir"), written on behalf of a writer Maksudov. This novel is not easy to read, however, it is full of sparkling humor and sarcasm of the theatrical backstage. It also shows the writer's world of the thirties in the renovated post-revolutionary Russia. The fact that the novel is unfinished just adds it an enigma and gives us one more occasion to continue discussions.



Mikhail Afanasyevich Bulgakov

1891-1940

Another book by M.Bulgakov, concerning the world of theatre, is dedicated to the figure of great Moliere, the creator of classical comedy and a brilliant actor who apparently occupied a special place in the heart of M. A. Bulgakov. who wrote a play about Moliere "The Cabal of the Holy", a play based on Moliere's work "The Half-witted Jourdain", made a translation of "Miserly" and, finally, created a biographical novel "Moliere", later called "The Life of Mr. de Moliere". Having given this work a lot of effort and time, M.Bulgakov, unfortunately, died before the book was published. In these books M.A.Bulgakov tried to understand and to explain to readers the nature of talent and the role of an artist in society.

Theatre in fiction novels of British and Russian authors is presented in two different images. On the one hand, this is actually a drama for the theatre, a play or a performance, as well as the actors' performance on stage and reviews from the public and critics. On the other hand, the theatre is a plot-forming image that reveals the behavior of the characters.

Theatre occupies a special place both in English and Russian prose. Firstly, the theatre is a kind of special cultural place that influences and shapes the formation of character, the feelings the main characters are experiencing and it becomes an

example of how people cope with hardships in difficult circumstances, as it is brilliantly depicted in Jerome Klapka Jerome's "On the Stage - and Off". Secondly, the theatre is an important part of human society and a significant part of the structure of an English and Russian novel being one of its key images. Thirdly, theatre reflects an image of the time in which the authors were writing, absorbing all its political, historical and social aspects. As a perfect example of this concept, we can name "Theatrical Novel" ("A Dead Man's Memoir") by Mikhail Bulgakov. What is more, theatrical themes are the center of plot construction and disclosure of conflicts as, for instance, we may see it in Caroline Graham's detective novels.

In my opinion, most of these concepts are vividly presented in W. Somerset Maugham's "Theatre". Being originally written as a novel, this work serves as the plot basis for many plays. This novel is based on a metaphor - the world is the theatre which consequently implies that everything we may face in life is in the theatre. Although social and historical obstacles of the time period cannot be omitted, it is not them that are the most important for the author. The author distinguishes two worlds - the world of actors and the world of audience, real life people. For the first, the theatre is their real world, for the latter, it is a performance. However, with the course of events, the borders between those two worlds fade away. The contradiction, based on the difference in perception of the world, runs through the entire work. For the main character, the theater is the main content of her life. Real life and stage life are intertwined.

To sum up, though Maugham thought that "it is dangerous to let the public behind the scenes. They are easily disillusioned and then they are angry with you, for it was the illusion they loved"¹, we, the readers, are glad that writers themselves break this rule. Thus, we can better understand the nature of creativity and

1 www.gutenberg.ca/ebooks/maughamws-summingup/maughamws-summingup-00-h.html, ch.23

inspiration. I firmly believe that both theatrical art itself and theatre as the main place of plot in literature pieces will always remain in demand.

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Appendixes



Illustration to W.S. Maugham's "Theatre"



Illustration to M.A. Bugakov's "Theatrical Novel"

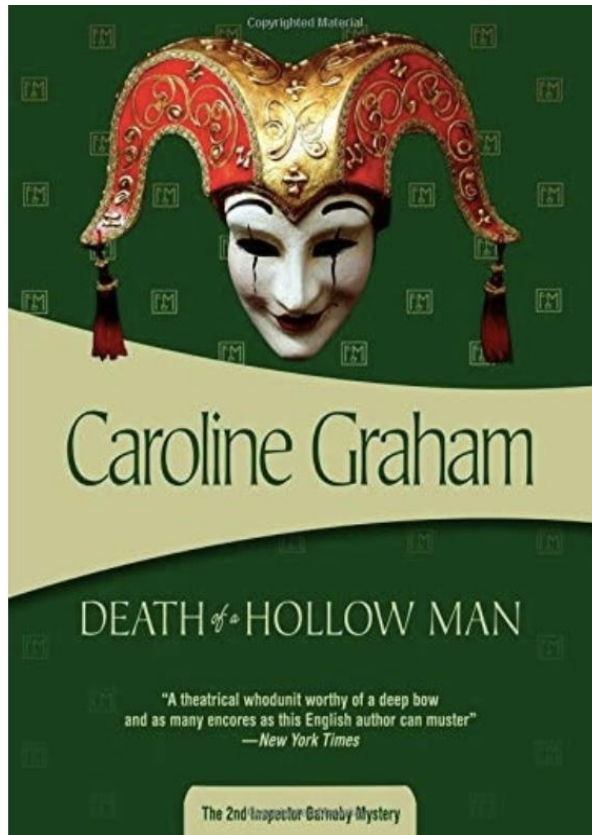


Illustration to C.Graham's "Death of a Hollow Man"

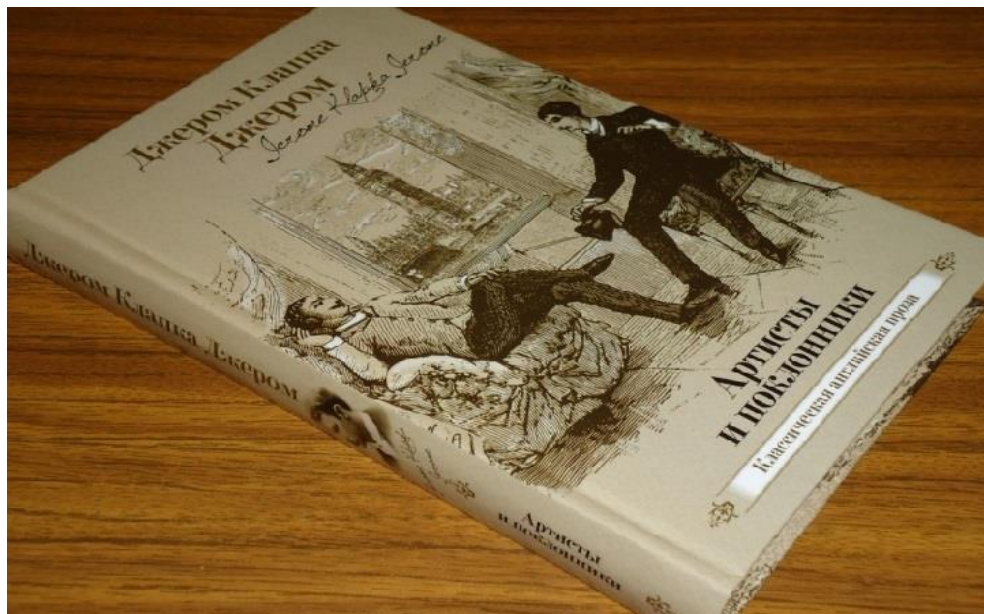


Illustration to J.K.Jerome's "On the Stage – and Off"