

Государственное Образовательное Учреждение Высшего Образования  
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**«Unity in Diversity: Russia and the English-Speaking World.  
Time for Equal Opportunities»**

Исследовательская работа (эссе)

**«Мир театра в работах русских и британских писателей»**



**Выполнила: Шишкова Анастасия Петровна**

**Студент 2 курса**

**Руководитель: Ковалева Татьяна Анатольевна**

Individual 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”**



Written by: **Shishkova Anastasia Petrovna**

Supervisor: **Kovaleva Tatiana Anatolievna**

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## **The plan**

### **1. Introduction**

**Why the theme of theatres became popular at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century.**

### **2. «The people of the theater» by V. Gilyarovsky**

Close look to the collection of stories of the not very famous Russian writer.

### **3. “On the stage – and off” by Jerome K. Jerome.**

Close look to the deep novel about the truth of acting in British theatre written by our favourite writer.

### **4. Comparison**

Comparison lines between two books telling us the basis of British and Russian theatre from the close sight.

## **Intermission: the backstage of acting. Russian and English writers speak about daily routine of the theatre.**

### 1. The introduction.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the theatre was becoming not only the heritage of little domestic performances but the point of a growing interest from the public and the life of actors was the hidden world as well as the backstage. And one day it became clear that it was vitally to reveal the mystery of the wings, dressing rooms and other areas that had not seen the presence of ordinary people. And writers started their work. Practically simultaneously two books of not very famous writers in England and in Russia were published: "People of the theater" by V. Gilyarovsky and "On the stage – and off" by Jerome K. Jerome.

### 2. «The people of the theater» by V. Gilyarovsky<sup>1</sup>

The people of the theater are the author's own memories of the time when he himself was part of the theater and participated in its life. This is a collection of short stories: memoirs and stories told to him by his actor friends.

The collection begins with the story "Vasya". A small, but filled with the loving kindness work, in which the sincere love of all theater actors for the main character is traced, which is not a very frequent phenomenon in the acting environment, but for small theaters of Russia at the end of the 19th century– it is a fairly common phenomenon of friendship between members of the troupe, where attention was paid not to status, but to personal qualities, and if a person was kind, sincere, then everyone loved him. Ie, the emphasis of this work is based on the humanity and personality of the actor and his fate.

In the following story "Dokuchaev" Gilyarovsky introduces us to the famous actor Mikhail - a handsome, strong man, the main character of life, who was lucky and became a star. Also the things which are casually mentioned in this story are the everyday life of the "cream of society", festivities and a rather riotous lifestyle characteristic of Bohemia. However, the actor appears before us in the image of a

man who is grieving for a friend who died in an accident in the dressing room where the conversation is taking place. The story ends with the fact that Gilyarovsky encounters Mikhail on the street and sees not a wealthy and famous actor, but only an old man who has lost everything and spends the rest of his days in poverty and loneliness. Here the author, Gilyarovsky, reveals to us the whole essence of acting: while the star is burning, everyone admires it, and when a person can no longer delight the audience, he becomes unnecessary. This is the law of bohemia, the law of the theater, which was born together with the art of hypocrisy on the stage and will die together with its last sounds. Gilyarovsky helps a friend, and we see from the outside that despite the fact that the author of the memoirs is a member of this bohemia, he has preserved kindness and the concept of "honor" in his heart, has preserved the image of true friendship, which is not afraid of the trials of fame and celebrity.

Another interesting story in the collection is the story "friends", which continues the theme of friendship in the acting environment. The author notes that in his time, actors lived in the theater and were proud of their profession, even if they were poor provincial actresses, poor and recognizable only in their city, but they proudly bore the title of "actor". And everyone who was involved in this profession was something like a brotherhood, which supported each of its members and helped him both physically and mentally. Such a phenomenon as "salvation" is very common between actors, whether it is salvation in a drunken brawl and then advice to start a solid acting profession on the recommendation, as, for example, in the already mentioned story "Vasya", or ransom from the master and help with finding a career in the theater, as in the story "friendship". Also an interesting aspect is that all the characters in Gilyarovsky's novel are large, heroic men, who, according to the description, resemble Poddubny<sup>1</sup>, which is also a characteristic feature of the provincial theater of the late 19th – early 20th century.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ivan Maximovich Poddubny (Russian: Ива́н Макси́мович Подду́бный) was a professional wrestler from the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union.

Russian theater, based on these three works, it can be concluded that in the works of Gilyarovsky, a Russian writer, the Russian theater is first of all, people, real people, their experiences, from fate and care, their feelings and emotions, this is real friendship, not envy and bullying. However, the author also notes that the life of an actor is difficult because poverty, moving and a small number of roles left their mark on the fate of talents.

### 3. **“On the stage – and off” by Jerome K. Jerome.**

Firstly, I would like to note that the work of Jerome K. Jerome<sup>3</sup> is written with inimitable humor in the form of a single novel, where each chapter is devoted to a separate stage in the life of the main character's acting: from the very basics to the first success. At first, it seems that the main character is joking when faced with such misunderstanding and insincerity of people associated with the theater, agents and directors of provincial theaters. Jerome K. Jerome describes people with a small amount of sarcasm, drawing our attention rather to the emotional background, some little things in the situation, individual phrases. In the middle of the novel, it seems that the world of provincial theater is so mired in insincerity and ordinariness that the main character has no chance of finding success.

Secondly, we see that the friends addressed by the main character do not play a special role in the ego of life, and he describes his colleagues in the troupe only in a couple of lines, while he puts more emphasis on his own contemplation of what is happening. Jerome K Jerome gives a deeper look at the essence of provincial acting, with all the strife, quarrels over roles, ill-conceived scripts and a poor existence due to low earnings. Rare friends help to find a way out of difficult situations, but the actor carries most of the problems on his shoulders. Perhaps this is the British mentality, in which it is not customary to shift your burden of problems onto someone else's shoulders, but there is a feeling that the main character immerses us in the real, not so pink world of provincial British theater<sup>4</sup>, where the problem of a little person is revealed much more scrupulously.

In general, the world of British theater shown in this work really corresponded to reality, because the trend of "survival" of the provincial theater persisted until the middle of the 20th century. Poverty, lack of work and earnings, empty, ridiculous roles - here it is rural and urban theater in all its glory.

#### **4. Comparison**

I would like to compare these two works, two different authors from different countries, but united by the same theme of theater at the end of the 19th century.

The first line of comparison is the main characters. In Gilyarovsky, the main character of the memoirs looks at what is happening from the side of a transient person who understands and participates in all the subtleties of provincial theater, but is not in the thick of events, like Jerome To Jerome, the main character is in the center of events and feels all the hardships and all the successes. Gilyarovsky describes the experiences of other people, Jerome describes his own, but the common position is that the theater is people, these are lives that are filled with hard work and constant searches. The theme of the little man is present in both works, which leads us to believe that both Russian and British theater faced the same problems and themes at the end of the 19th century.

The second line of comparison is, of course, the surrounding people. Because of that, British culture is individualistic, and Russian is collectivist, then Gilyarovsky's main characters are surrounded by friends, and Jerome K Jerome's main character is simply surrounded by people from the corpse. Gilyarovsky suggests to us that the Russian theater was based on the institute of friendship, and the British theater was based on the aspirations of each individual, but in the end it gave an equally good result in the form of a slowly but steadily developing provincial theater living its own life

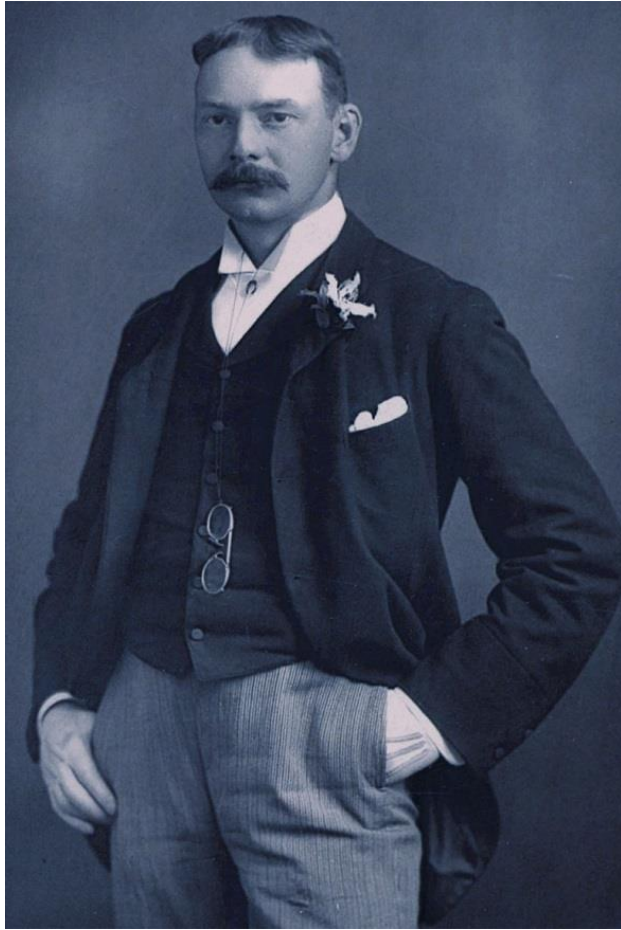
1. V. Gialyarovskiy



2.

Russian provincial theater of the late 19th – early 20th century.





3.

Jerome K. Jerome



4.

British theater in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century

**List of Literature used:**

1. *"People of the theater"* by V. Gilyarovsky
2. *"On the stage – and off"* by Jerome K. Jerome.
3. *"The Cambridge history of British theatre"*
4. *"The history of Russian theatre"* by R. Leach