

## FOLKLORE AND LITERATURE

The studies of the British culture and therefore understanding of the national character of the English cannot stand apart from the research of its important product – folklore. The folklore and folk customs of England developed over a long chain of centuries. Some ancient customs were passed from Celtic to Germanic generations and further. Invaders and settlers brought with them their own beliefs, which mixed with older traditions.

The main reason to uniqueness of British culture lies on the surface: Great Britain is an island populated by the nations that had to develop and go the long way of its history being separated from the rest of the world by water. These very characteristics turned them into very interesting and special people, whose history and culture are one of the richest in the world.

British folklore includes traditions, customs, beliefs and systems of values of the mythology of the Anglo-Saxons, Welsh, Scottish and later Normans influence.

The main system of values, beliefs and traditions of British nations is mostly reflected in **the ballads and fairy tales**.

**Ballads** are a fascinating subject of study. These poems are among a group of anonymous songs that were probably created between 1100 and 1700 in Northern England and Scotland, although their origins are still controversial.


The anonymous folk ballads were passed along orally from a singer to a singer, from generation to generation, and from one region to another. The medieval or Elizabethan ballads that appear in print later are probably only versions of many oral forms. It uses simple language, an economy of words, dramatic contrasts, epithets, set phrases, and frequently a refrain. Although the subject matter varies considerably, some major classes of the ballad can be distinguished— among them the historical and heroic such as **Beowulf, King Arthur songs and Robin Hood cycle**.

**Beowulf** is an [Old English heroic epic poem](#) of anonymous authorship. Its creation dates to between the 8th and the 11th century. It is long, as there 3183 lines and devoted to brave and strong hero who fought for the good of his people, killing two monsters. The **ballad** has been adapted a number of times in cinema, on the stage, and in books.

Another oldest recorded ballads in the English language are **Judas (the 13<sup>th</sup> century)** and **Arthurian legends**. **King Arthur** is a legendary [British](#) leader of the late 5th and early 6th centuries, who, according to medieval histories and [romances](#), led the defence of Britain against [Saxon](#) invaders in the early 6th century. The details of Arthur's story are

mainly composed of [folklore](#) and literary invention, and his historical existence is debated and disputed by modern historians.

There is also the notion of Round Table associated with King Arthur.



In [Arthurian legend](#), King Arthur had a round table so that none of his barons, when seated at it, could claim precedence over the others. The literary importance of the Round Table, especially in romances of the 13th century and afterward, lies in the fact that it served to provide the knights of Arthur's court with a name and a collective personality. The fellowship of the Round Table, in fact, became comparable to, and in many respects the prototype of, the many great orders of [chivalry](#) that were founded in Europe during the later Middle Ages.

Another ballad printed in the late 15th or early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries is devoted to "Robyn Hood".

**Robin Hood** (spelled **Robyn Hode** in older sources) is a [heroic outlaw](#) in [English folklore](#), and, according to legend, was also a highly skilled [archer](#), assisted by a group of fellow outlaws known as his "Merry Men". Traditionally, Robin Hood and his men are depicted wearing [Lincoln green](#) clothes and lived in Sherwood forest.

Robin Hood became a popular folk figure in the [medieval](#) period as the one who was fighting with the unscrupulous sheriff. Robbing the rich he gave everything to the poor. He continues to be widely represented in modern literature, films and television.

There is one example of Robin Hood ballad translated into modern English:

Robin Hood, Robin Hood, riding through the glen  
Robin Hood, Robin Hood, with his band of men  
Feared by the bad, loved by the good  
Robin Hood, Robin Hood, Robin Hood

He called the greatest archers to a tavern on the green  
They vowed to help the people of the King  
They handled all the trouble on the English country scene  
And still found plenty of time to sing

He came to Sherwood Forest with a feather in his cap  
A fighter never looking for a fight  
His bow was always ready and he kept his arrows sharp  
He used them to fight for what was right

Satirical ballads and Royalist ballads contributed to the 17th century political discourse. In a sense, these ballads were antecedents of the modern newspaper. **Thomas Percy, Robert Harley, Francis James Child, Walter Scott and James Hogg** were among early collectors and publishers of ballads from the oral tradition of broadsheets and previous anthologies. Professor **Francis Child's and Cecil**

**Sharp' Ballads** are a collection of 305 ballads from England and Scotland, and their American variants, collected in the 19th century. **The collection of English and Scottish Popular Ballads** was published by Houghton Mifflin between 1882 and 1898 in 10 volumes.

The old ballads are a very valuable part of poetical literature. Their themes touch on almost all the subjects of human experience. Ballads are a rich source of data connected with history, social life, feelings and values of the people living on the British Isle.

### **English Fairy Tales.**

The term '**fairy tale**' appeared in the 18th century, as a translation from French. It is universally understood, but not in fact accurate, since many of the best-loved stories have no fairies in them. So some scholars prefer the terms 'Wonder Tales' or 'Magic Tales'. Fairy tales with very similar plots, characters are found in many different cultures and countries. Sometimes the influence of different tales on one another is quite obvious. Two theories have attempted to explain **the common** elements in fairy tales. One is that fairy tales are the remains of ancient myths which lived over the centuries and spread over continents. The other is that such fairy tales stem from common human experience and therefore can appear separately in many different countries.

The fairy tales circulated in England in oral form and like ballads many of them unfortunately have been lost to history. One of the oldest printed fairy tales in England was **Tom Thumb** which appeared in 1621 in a chapbook. Tom Thumb is born in answer to the wish of a childless poor couple, who desire a son even if he were no bigger than his father's thumb. Magician Merlin answers their wish and the Fairy Queen names him and gives him a hat made of oak leaf and a shirt of spider's web. Tom then encounters many adventures. The last of them is being eaten by a fish which is then caught for King Arthur's table; Tom becomes a knight and when he dies is mourned by the whole Arthur's court.

In 1711 there appeared the first printed version of **Jack the Giant Killer**, a popular English folk tale. The English fairytales were mostly humorous ones, except for the more magical **Three Heads in the Well**. Later Victorian collectors found some other oral examples, including **Tom Tit Tot** and **Cap o' Rushes from Suffolk**, **the Small-Tooth Dog from Derbyshire**, and **the Rose Tree** from Devon.

In the 18th century English fairy tales were published mainly by French Perrault. Selections from these were quickly translated and cheaply printed. Such fairy tales as **Cinderella**, **Bluebeard**, **Sleeping Beauty**, **Beauty and the Beast**, **Frog Prince**, **Red Riding Hood**, **Snow White**, and **The Little Mermaid** were totally absorbed into English culture, together with a few items from the Arabian Nights, notably Aladdin.

### **Theater**

Britain has a long tradition of theater. It was introduced from Europe to England by the Romans. By the medieval period theatre had developed a form of early street theatre, concentrating on themes such as Saint George and the Dragon and Robin

Hood. These were folk tales re-telling old stories, and the actors travelled from town to town performing those for their audiences.

The reign of Elizabeth I in the late 16th and early 17th century saw a flowering of the drama and all the arts. Perhaps the most famous playwright in the world, **William Shakespeare**, wrote around **40** plays that are still performed in theatres across the world to this day. They include tragedies, such as **Hamlet (1603)**, **Othello (1604)**, and **King Lear (1605)** **Romeo and Juliet**; comedies, such as **A Midsummer Night's Dream (1594—96)** and **Twelfth Night (1602)**; and history plays, such as **Henry IV**.

The Elizabethan age is sometimes nicknamed "the age of Shakespeare" for the amount of influence he held over the era. Other important Elizabethan and 17th-century playwrights include **Ben Jonson**, **Christopher Marlowe**, and **John Webster**.

During the Revolution of 1642—1660, English theatres were kept closed by the Puritans for religious and ideological reasons. When the London theatres were opened again with the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, they flourished under the personal interest and support of Charles II. Wide and socially mixed audiences were attracted by topical writing and by the introduction of the first professional actresses (in Shakespeare's time, all female roles had been played by boys). New genres of the Restoration were heroic drama, pathetic drama, and Restoration comedy. The Restoration plays that have best retained the interest of producers and audiences were the comedies, such as William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1676), *The Rover* (1677) by the first professional woman playwright, **Aphra Behn**, John Vanbrugh's *The Relapse* (1696), and William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700).

In the 18th century, the highbrow and provocative Restoration comedy was replaced by sentimental comedy, domestic tragedy such as George Lillo's *The London Merchant* (1731), and by an overwhelming interest in Italian opera. Popular entertainment became more important in this period than ever before. These forms flourished at the expense of English drama, which went into a long period of decline. A change came in the late 19th century with the plays on the London stage by the **Irishmen George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde and Norwegian Henrik Ibsen**, all of whom influenced domestic English drama and vitalised it again.

Today there are over 200 theaters in Britain: 40 of which are situated in London's West End. The most famous British theaters are **The Royal Opera and Royal Ballet**, both based at Covent Garden, **the National Theatre** and **the Barbican Theatre**. **The National** is a part of the **South Bank Arts Centre**, located near the River Thames. The Centre contains three theatres, cinemas, an art gallery, lecture and concert halls. The diamond of the National is the 1.160-seat **Oliver Theatre**, named after famous actor and director **Laurence Olivier**. The Royal Shakespeare Company performs at the Barbican in London and in Shakespeare's birthplace Stratford-upon-Avon. The most popular British theatres receive support from the Arts Council of Great Britain.

Important modern playwrights include **Alan Ayckbourn, John Osborne, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, and Arnold Wesker**.

A prolific composer of the 20th century **Andrew Lloyd Webber** has dominated the West End for a number of years and his musicals have travelled to Broadway in New York and around the world, as well as being turned into films.

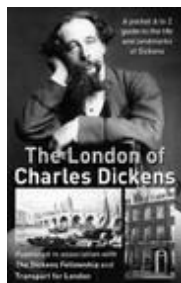
Pop music in Britain influenced by music from all over the world is also an important part of British culture, not just an expression of **Englishness**, but an indicator of the multi-cultural nature of Britain today. It is mainly a mixture of styles. "Ragga" brings together "rap" and "reggae», for example. Pop music is influencing traditional music. It is difficult to find people who don't listen to music at least for pleasure so it is not surprising, that music can be an instrument of social influence and change. The need and appreciation for music is evident in the everyday lives of people as well as it is heard at concerts, in movies, on television and throughout all forms of audio media.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century American influences became most dominant in popular music, with young performers producing their own versions of American music, including rock n' roll from the late 1950s and developing a parallel music scene. This led to the explosion of the 'British Invasion' of America of the early 1960s, headed by **The Beatles**, from which point rock music and popular music in general became something of an **Anglo-American collaboration**, with movements on one side of the ocean being exported to the other. As a result of these factors the United Kingdom remained a major source of musical innovation and participation in the modern era.

## Literature

British literature is so rich that it is absolutely impossible to describe its history and its main writers, poets and dramatists in any detail.

Like many other world literatures English literature grew up from the rich and diverse folklore heritage of the nations constituting this country. Rich narrative traditions of ballads, songs and tales come to us through literature, writings of



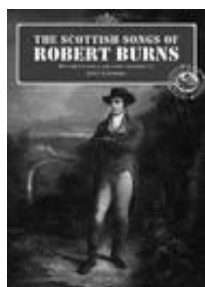
English authors ranging from Chaucer, Shakespeare and Ben Johnson, to William Yeats, Burns and Bernard Shaw and **John Milton**. The collector of Scottish folklore **Walter Scott** used many folklore elements in his wonderful historical novels. Scottish poet Robert Burns whom we know via wonderful translations by Marshak grew up on the folklore traditions of his land.

Everyone in the childhood read **Robinson Crusoe** by **Daniel Defoe** (1660-1731), **Gulliver's Travels** by **Jonathan Swift** (1667-1745), **Oliver Twist** and **David Copperfield** by one of the greatest English writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century **Charles Dickens** (1812-1870).

The Bronte sisters were exceptional writers of poetry as well as fiction.

**Wuthering Heights** by **Emily Bronte** and **Jane Eyre** by **Charlotte Bronte** are read and enjoyed even now. **Thomas Hardy**'s and **Jane Austen**'s novels reflected different sides of English life of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was not easy for 19 century women writers to sell their books under their real names. Many of them used male pseudonyms: **George Eliot** (1819-1880) never used her real name which was Mary Ann Evans. Her books show a detailed picture of provincial Victorian society with humour and feeling. A Scottish writer **Robert Stevenson** (180-94) wrote famous adventure novels, and an English novelist **William Thackeray** (1811-63) in his brilliant satire **Vanity Fair** became the master of great individuality. **Jerome, K. Jerome** (1859-1927) wrote two humorous books, one of which **Three Men in a Boat** is favourite with the Russian students. **Rudyard Kipling** (1865-1936) wrote a lot of poems, stories and tales, which children of all the countries still enjoy today. His stories about Mowgli and finest animal stories inspired Walt Disney to create a wonderful cartoon film. He was the first English writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize in 1907. An Irish-born author **Oscar Wilde** (1854 - 1900) created novels, stories and plays, still staged in Russian theatres. The War of the World by

**H. Wells** (1866-1946) became the first great works of science fiction.



There were many wonderful poets in Britain. Romantic poets **Baron and Shelly** influenced the poetry of Alezander.Pushkin. Many great writers and poets are commemorated by statues at their birth-places or in big cities like London. **Robert Burns** (1759-1796) is regarded by the Scottish people as their national poet.

Burns's poems and songs, known to us through translations of Samuel Marshak, were written in a very expressive Northern dialect. R.Burns grew up in a farm and managed to combine in his simple poems all tenderness, rich humour, lyric and love for freedom of the Scottish folklore heroes. His birthday is

celebrated in Scotland in cities, towns and villages as the national holiday and his statue and tiny house in Dumfries are the places, visited by his numerous admirers. The 20<sup>th</sup> century gave a great number of talented British writers, poets and dramatists: poet **Thomas Eliot (1888-1965)**, novelist and dramatist **John Galsworthy (1867-1933)**, **David Lawrence**, satirist **Aldous Huxley (1894-1963)**, **Sean O'Keisi**, **Richard Oldington**, novelist, dramatist and essayist **John Priestly (1894-1984)**, **Evelyn Waugh (1903-66)**, **Graham Green (1904-91)**, Irish novelist **James Joyce (1882-1941)** and many others. Joyce's novel **Ulysses** started the development of modernist literature in Britain. In this novel and later in **Einnegan's Wake** Joyce revolutionized the techniques of fiction – writing, introducing the “stream of consciousness,” inventing words, and experimenting with syntax. **Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)** in her novels also experimented with the stream-of-consciousness narrative technique.

An Irish playwright **Sean O'Casey** wrote a number of tragicomedies, blending realism with symbolism and poetry with vernacular speech. The writings of Irish poet **William Yeats (1865-1939)**, marked with the Nobel Prize in 1923, had a great influence on the development of the British poetry of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All his books of verses were full of the Celtic spirit, brilliant vigorous technique, the combination of western viewpoint with national philosophy and traditions. The Irish people are also proud of their countryman – playwright **Bernard Shaw, (1856-190)** whose satirical, witty and psychological plays became well known not only in Britain, but also all over the world, including Russia. Among Shaw's best-known plays are **Heartbreak House**, **Saint Joan** and **Pygmalion**, based on a Greek myth about a sculptor who carved a statue of a woman and fell in love with her. The adaptation of **Pygmalion** is a very popular musical “My fair lady”, successfully staged in Broadway and many European theaters.

**William Somerset Maugham (1874-1965)** is considered to be the best short-story writers in English. Many of his stories, together with novels and plays have been dramatized and became very fashionable and successful. **Agatha Christie**, the world's most successful and best-known detective writer, occupies a special place in British literature. During her long writing career she wrote over 83 books. Her detective novels were translated into every major language and tens of millions of her books were sold. Her little Belgian detective became as popular as Sherlock Homes by **Arthur Conan Doyle**. Poirot and her other detectives have also appeared in many of the popular films, radio programmes and stage plays, based on her books. Her play **The Mousetrap** has been running continuously in London since 1952.



In the late 1950s **John Osborne**, one of a group of so-called **Angry Young Men**, achieved fame as an author of tough realistic drama about working class life. **Iris Murdoch** gained an international reputation for her “psychological detective stories”. **Sir Arthur Clarke** created a number of science fiction books but probably became best known for his book. **A Space Odyssey** which was made into an extremely popular and



English literature influenced the literatures of America, Europe, Russia and many other world countries. It also gave rise to the young literatures of former British colonies. For example, Paul Scott's novels show the last years of the British presence in India, Alan Paton, Jack Cope, Alex La Guma wrote about the racial relationships in South Africa. Chinua Achebe described the tribal life in Nigeria. Nadine Gordimer, a white author from South Africa, was rewarded the Nobel Prize in 1991 as the greatest English writer of her time.

**1. Answer the following question:**

1. When was the term ballad was used in its present sense?
2. What is one of the oldest printed fairy tales in England?
3. What important information does the British folklore contain?
4. What English fairy tales and legends do you know?
5. Which English writers do you know?
6. Which English writers have you read in English?

**2. Translate the following words into Russian:** refrain, outlaw, unscrupulous, a chapbook, notorious, highbrow and provocative glen.

**3. Translate the following sentences into English:**

1. Главная причина уникальности культуры Великобритании, очевидно, лежит на поверхности. 2. Большинство английских сказок существовали только в устной форме. 3. Сказки с одинаковыми сюжетами и героями можно обнаружить практически во всех европейских культурах. 4. Баллады можно считать богатым источником информации об истории, общественной жизни, чувствах и ценностях англичан. 5. Легенды о короле Артуре начали появляться в 12 веке и, возможно, в их основе лежат предания о предводителе кельтов 5 или 6 веков, защищавшего страну от саксонского нашествия. 6. Самые древние баллады о Робин Гуде относятся к 15 веку. Его имя впервые упоминается в английской литературе в поэме Вильяма Лэнгленда, написанной в 1377 году, и позже в 18 веке в правительственных документах. 7. Можно с уверенностью сказать, что Робин Гуд действительно был похож на человека, описанного в старинных балладах. 8. Великий шотландский поэт Роберт Бернс любил свою родину, своих соотечественников и писал, в основном, о них. 9. В 1718 году, когда английскому писателю Даниэлю Дэфо было уже около 60 лет, он встретил моряка, который пробыл много лет один на необитаемом острове около Чили. 10. Необычные приключения моряка Селкирка захватили его воображение, и Дэфо написал историю человека, потерпевшего кораблекрушение. Он выбрал остров в другой части мира и создал вымышленный образ своего героя, Робинзона Крузо. 11. Мастерство журналиста позволило Дэфо создать очень правдивую и увлекательную историю. Книга имела грандиозный успех

**3. Tell about your most favourite English writers.**