

# What Makes English Limericks And Russian Chastushki Compatible?

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**Abstract**— *This article is about comparing English limericks with Russian chastushki which have some similarities in social and moral features in literature. In this article both aspects of literature reveal their literary characters that can help readers to distinguish them in practice. Also, by reading this article readers can be aware of the historical background of the limericks and chastushki as well as their usage in practical way. This article consists of several examples of English and Russian poems so that it is clear to the readers and users.*

**Keywords**— limericks, Jabberwocky, Lewis Carroll, balalaika, rhyme, genre of limerick, nonsense poem, classic verse, folklore, ditty.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

As we know each period had its well-known writers and literature. In fact, literatures and written works are usually based on the events people underwent or the case the history witnessed. Every genres of literature has its own special features and phenomena that might have a great influence on humankind. Limericks can be called one of the genres which occupy an important place in English literature and social life. Nowadays the limericks could can be used to teach English to learners in a funny and fast way. While analyzing English limericks, it came to our mind to compare them to similar genres in other languages, which took us to the Russian language where one genre of folklore seemed to be close to limericks, although their functions and environment are not very similar.

## 2. MAIN PART

“Chastushka” is the Russian language folklore version of limericks. The term was derived from an adverb “часто” meaning “frequently”, related to the verb “частить”, meaning “do something incessantly”. They are a traditional type of short Russian or Ukrainian humorous folk songs with high beat frequency, which consist of one four-lined couplet, full of humor, satire or irony.

Term “chastushki” was first used by [Gleb Uspensky](#) (1971). It was a Russian late XIX century musical folk genre and it was newly coined term of Russian folk. Usually chastushki are sung one after another. Chastushki make use of a simple rhyming scheme to convey humorous or ironic content. The singing and recitation of such rhymes were an important part of peasant popular culture both before and after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

Scientific researchers believe that chastushkas came into existence in the 60s and 70s of the 19th century. The name emphasized the connection between the new literature genre and dance songs, which were called “frequent” in many cases. Chastushki and dancers had similar melodies and intonations. The birth of a new genre is closely connected with the entry into the Russian culture of the accordion. This Russian musical instrument came from Germany - also around the 60s of the XIX century - and very quickly gained popularity among the people. Classic ditties have certain features. First, they are sung by the accordion or balalaika. Sometimes ditties are performed to the so-called “language” - a musical tune imitated by a voice. Secondly, the genre implies some kind of competition. Most often - a singer and accordion player, and sometimes - two singers.

In contrast with English limericks, Russian ditties (chastushki) can be sung by a group of people but Limericks are only poems that can be performed by an individuals. Thirdly, the performance is accompanied by dancing. Therefore, the ditty is an interesting synthetic genre that combines instrumental playing, singing and dance. And finally, ditties are based on improvisation. Why are they so popular and loved? Because the texts are created literally in front of the listeners and are often devoted to topical events.

Usually many chastushki are sung one after another. Chastushki (Rus. plural form of “chastushka”) make use of a simple rhyming scheme to convey humorous or ironic content. The singing and recitation of such rhymes were an important part of peasant popular culture both before and after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The basic form is a simple four-line verse making use of an ABAB, ABCB, or AABB rhyme scheme. Usually humorous, satirical, or ironic in nature, chastushki are often put to music as well, usually with balalaika or accordion accompaniment. Originally chastushki were a form of folk entertainment, not intended to be performed on stage. Often they are sung by a group of people. To compare, limericks are also a type of funny verses. Poets use limericks as literary or poetic forms to convey and create funny and humorous images. The

purpose of using this form is to replace everyday expressions with unusual alternatives to express emotions and a particular mood by adding eccentricity and weirdness.

**A fellow jumped off a high wall,  
And had a most terrible fall.  
He went back to bed,  
With a bump on his head,  
That's why you don't jump off a wall.**

Here, the example of Russian chastushki:

**In the morning our mother Mila  
Gave us two sweets.  
Barely had time to give  
She ate them herself.**

It is clear that the genres are not the same but chastushki and limericks have similarities in the meaning of social, cultural and moral features.

Usually, limericks were written for criticizing upper level members of society and laughing at them. Here, the meaning of the poem is that during the years of 1649 to 1658, Britain was ruled by Oliver Cromwell as the Lord Protector of the republic. Before he died, he encouraged Parliament to appoint his son, Richard to the post. Richard was not suited for being Lord Protector. In contrast to his father Oliver's nature, Richard was mouse-like and timid. He earned a number of nicknames such as Tumbledown Dick because of his abrupt fall from power when the monarchy was restored under King Charles II in 1660. The silly, trivial nature of limerick lyrics makes them a natural fit for children's poetry. That said, adults also enjoy bursts of levity. The existence of these two audiences—adults and children—has helped cement the limerick's place in popular culture for well over a century. The limerick is a classic verse form in English. The earliest known example comes from the 11th century! In that time, there has been more than enough opportunity to pen a few classics. Here, we can observe one of the best modern limerick authors of English.

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, better known by his pen name Lewis Carroll, was an English writer of children's fiction, notably 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland' and its sequel 'Through the Looking-Glass'. He was noted for his facility with word play, logic, and fantasy. The poems Jabberwocky [Lewis Carroll [2:1871] is classified in the genre of literary nonsense. "Jabberwocky" is a nonsensical ballad written by Lewis Carroll in 1871. In "Jabberwocky," Carroll uses nonsensical words throughout a typical ballad form to tell a tale of good versus evil, which culminates in the killing of the fearsome Jabberwocky. Jabberwocky, fictional character, a ferocious monster described in the nonsense poem "Jabberwocky," which appears in the novel Through the Looking-Glass by Lewis Carroll. Alice, the heroine of the story, discovers this mock-epic poem in a book that she can read only when it is reflected in a mirror.

**'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves**

**Did gyre and gimble in the wabe.**

**All mimesy were the borogroves**

**And the momerathsoutgrabe.**

The Hunting of the Snark (An Agony in 8 Fits) is a poem written by Lewis Carroll. It is typically categorised as a nonsense poem. Written from 1874 to 1876, the poem borrows the setting, some creatures, and eight portmanteau words from Carroll's earlier poem "Jabberwocky" in his children's novel Through the Looking-Glass.

One of the famous works is "Alice in Wonderland". The author of the classic Alice in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll [2:1865:45], also made great use of limerick poetry, as seen in "There was a Young Lady of Station:"

**There was a young lady of station  
"I love man" was her sole exclamation  
But when men cried, "You flatter"  
She replied, "Oh! no matter!  
Isle of Man is the true explanation.**

### 3. CONCLUSION

Sometimes a limerick poet starts a limerick by thinking what he wants to say by choosing a topic (school, friend) and then thinking what rhymes are available for that word and then creating some sort of story out of them. The first line of a limerick traditionally introduces a person and a place, with the place appearing at the end of the first line and therefore establishing the rhyme scheme for the second and fifth lines. In early limericks, the last line was often essentially a repeat of the first line, although this is no longer customary. It is the fact that the genre of limerick has stronger power to influence people than other types of poems.

It can be inferred that every culture and cultural background has its valuable features. Perhaps, these kind of aspects could not effect or impact reasonably on humankind in its period but they are still alive. As long as life continues, people endeavor to enrich their life with well-worthy literary works. In this article English limericks and Russian chastushki are tried to be compared with several works of the authors. Actually, genres of the limericks and chastushki could not be the same but their characteristic features and roles for people are the same because of the social life of the people who involved actively in society.

### 4. REFERENCES

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