

Building cultural understanding

By EKATERINA GENIEVA

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Margarita Rudomino All-Russia State Library for Foreign Literature (LFL for short), named after its founder and Director for the first 50 years of its existence has traditionally functioned as one of the institutions for cultural relations with foreign countries with a special focus on Great Britain. A number of eminent figures of British literature and art visited the Library and met with its readers at various times – Richard Aldington, C.P. Snow, Graham Greene, John Le Carré, Alan Sillitoe and Ruth Fainlight, Jon Stallworthy and others.

Since the British Council accepted the LFL invitation to move under its roof in 1991, friendly cultural ties and cooperation between the Library and GB have acquired added momentum.

The LFL's contribution to promoting British culture in Russia (and vice versa) are numerous and various. The most stable and long-standing form of cultural cooperation is a book exchange with British libraries which have Slavonic and/or Russian collections, such as the British Library, the Bodleian Library, Cambridge University Library, or collections of books on arts, including the Victoria & Albert Museum Library. The LFL works hand in hand with the English Speaking Union, acting as a venue for its numerous activities in Moscow. Margarita Rudomino Library regularly takes part in the London Book Fair, in the International Russian poetry festival *Pushkin in Britain* and in the activities of Pushkin House in London held there as well as in the Russian Embassy.

Being among the most active members of Pushkin House, LFL is represented on its board and tries to make full use of its potential as a centre for introducing Russian cultural figures to a British audience. In cooperation with the British Council it organises study visits for Russian professionals to British cultural institutions.

The LFL is also involved in major events on the Anglo-Russian cultural scene, such as the large-scale exhibition *William Blake and the British Visionary Artists* to be opened at the Moscow Pushkin Arts Museum in November of 2011. On this great occasion the LFL, *Inostrannaya Literatura* (Foreign Literature) magazine and the British Council have jointly organised a competition among translators to translate the gems of Blake's poetry and to bring out the bilingual edition of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* in new translations

and – for the first time in Russia – with facsimile reproductions of original engravings by the author.

Outstanding figures of British culture, mostly literature, for example, John Ruskin, Beatrix Potter, Lewis Carroll and D.H. Lawrence are celebrated by the Library in connection with memorable anniversaries of their biographies and creative work or with their assimilation in Russia. Celebrations include exhibitions, conferences, readings, discussions, lectures and performances. In this regard the LFL seeks help from appropriate British bodies such as the Lewis Carroll Society. Other activities include exhibitions of the Pre-Raphaelite Artistic Photographs and of illustrations to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Salvador Dali, a one-day seminar on Carroll, a lecture on the Pre-Raphaelites, a master-class on the art of photography, a meeting with the Russian translator, Nina Demurova, a morning performance for children and a reconstruction of the Mad Hatter's tea-party for adults.

The "Big Read" all-country programme organised by the LFL is an effective method of promoting works of literature in Russian regions. In each case it is actually an event or presentation of one book, and when the book is by a British author, it is a promotion of British literature and provides a deeper understanding of British culture and traditions as a whole. At the moment the programme is unfolding in the Saratov region – one of the largest in Russia. The books for the programme are selected by the Library and printed under its auspices; the latest British additions are translations into Russian of Virginia Woolf's *A Writer's Diary* and of selected prose and poetry of D.H. Lawrence, the bilingual edition of poems by Rowan Williams *Headwaters* and the textbook, *English Tolerance through Languages*, in two parts. The Rudomino Book Centre has launched a new series *Masters of Literary Translation* by publishing two anthologies of English language prose: *A Smaller Sky* (translations by Alla Nikolaevskaya) and *Foreign Affairs* (translations by Vladimir Kharitonov).

Building bridges between nations is a complex and rewarding process. There are a good number of bridges between the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation – in politics, in education, in science, in trade, in business and so on. The Library is more than happy to join this common effort, looking after its own – the Word which is the backbone of all communication and every culture. F