

Literary Figures Who Live On



Don Quixote and Sancho Panza

by Armando Simón

There are certain characters from literature that are so unique and so appealing that they are recognized even by those who have not read the book from where they originated. It is almost as if they had a life of their own.

Some fictional characters are known all over the world: Dracula, Don Quixote, Sherlock Holmes, the three musketeers, Tom Sawyer, Don Juan, Harry Potter (actually, several of the other characters as well within the Harry Potter series, such as Voldemort, etc.), and robots (the latter originating from the stage play *R.U.R.*). Go to Argentina, Australia, Lebanon, Morocco, or Japan, and most everyone will recognize the names if you mention them.

Some characters are memorable and well known, but mostly in their respective countries. They include Raskolnikov, Martín Fierro, Oblamov, Sancho Panza, Reynard the Fox, the good soldier Švejk, and the characters in *Eugene Onegin*. Along the same lines are the characters that are recognizable not just in the country where the literary works were written but also principally in countries having a shared language, specifically English and specifically Pollyanna, Peter Cottontail, Winnie the Pooh, Alice in Wonderland, Oscar and Felix (from *The Odd Couple*) and the personalities found in Shakespeare's plays (though in the case of Shakespeare one would also include Germany due to an early superb translation of the plays; in fact, Shakespeare's plays have been staged in Germany more often than in Britain).

Then, there is Zorro and James Bond. Their characters became famous worldwide not for the literary quality of the books but rather because the films adopted and adapted them and made them more memorable with better plots.

Considering the output of literature, it is interesting that there are not more iconic characters, even from famous works of literature. It is also interesting that the best known are primarily from the English speaking countries. Perhaps someone someday will figure out why this is so.

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