

# Myths and Heroes

## Introduction :

In order to study the notion of Myths and Heroes in class, we've focused on British characters. Most British characters relate to Britishness in a certain way and, since they've become popular figures, these characters reflect the characteristics of Britishness. The most famous British characters can be seen as Heroes since they do, in fact, have become part of the popular British folklore.

## Link :

Since most of the British Heroes relate to Britishness, in some way or another, they give outsiders a glance at what defines Britishness. Let's look closer at how Britishness is defined:

## Plan:

### 1. Characteristics of Britishness

Britishness defines the British characters as much as the British characters themselves define Britishness: that is to say that culture pretty much defines itself based on the British way of life. From an outsider point of view, Britishness relates to bad food, rain, the double-decker buses and the queen, amongst other clichés that have been spread out by television and films. The British indeed have their own specific way of life, that includes such clichés, like the fact that they drink tea very often, but it's more than that. Its specific history, including the many wars they didn't lose, the industrial revolution and the British colonial Empire as well as its specific insular geographical position makes it a unique country. I believe that one of the shiniest aspects of Britishness comes with their particular sense of humor, that is kind of absurd as it is shown in the many Monty Python's movies as well as in the Flying Circus, that was the Python's TV series broadcasted on BBC in the 70's.

### 2. Some British characters

Let's take a look at the British characters we've studied in class and deduce some aspects of Britishness from them. So we talked about Alice in Wonderland, which is a novel that was written by Lewis Carroll in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The main character is Alice, a child who fell down the rabbit hole, thus entering Wonderland. Wonderland is actually a metaphor of the British society, made of several characters reflecting certain aspects of that society. At first, there is the white rabbit, who's always running out of time since he's constantly looking at his clock, afraid of being late: he doesn't look very healthy: rather, he appears as a very stressed character. He represents the day to day worker, full of anxiety and worries. Then comes the striped cat and his awkward smile: he represents sneakiness and a bit corruption (he seeks his own benefit first). The opponent to the good side of Wonderland is the Queen of hearts, who has a gigantic head: her uneasiness, caused by her difference makes her a tyrannic leader, cutting people's head off as soon as they don't do as she says. She represents the unfair and arbitrary power as it can be encountered in society (our boss for instance) or through totalitarianism. Other characters are very relevant when it comes to link them with Britishness: the Mad Hatter appears as the typical Englishman: he's very welcoming to Alice, he drinks tea all day, has a weird fashion sense and seems totally crazy.

Even though Wonderland seems, at first glance, not to make any sense, it turns out to be a very accurate view of the adult's world, including a share of criticism.

Many other British characters are widely known all around the world: Sherlock Holmes, who is the hero of the famous Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novels and a very clever detective, James Bond, the heroic British Spy who was created by writer Ian Fleming and pictured in many movies (that are still being produced): he keeps saving the world from the UK's enemies. But not all British Characters are Heroes though: Mr Bean reflects Britishness through a very special character, that Rowan Atkinson, his creator and portrayer on screen describes as a "a child in a grown man's body".

### **Conclusion:**

Most British characters can tell us long about Britishness: from Sherlock Holmes to James Bond and including Mr Bean, all these popular names reflect the British way of being: their sense of humor, their beloved tea, their way of dressing and particular style – all that is part of Britishness, along with more general cultural aspects like the Queen, the double-deck bus, their food and last but not least, the rain.

Personally, I didn't ever watch Alice in Wonderland before this occasion, so I did catch up to both the Disney and the Tim Burton's pictures. It was very interesting to look at it from a more grown-up perspective, given that most people get to watch these as they are kids. Moreover, I think that the Disney version comes closer to representing the non-sense that occurs in wonderland while still making the cartoon a coherent whole, seen as a metaphor of society and its vices. The Tim Burton movie seemed weakest on that particular point: even though I appreciated the performance of Johnny Depp, the multiple changes that were made to the scenario seem to have weakened the implicit part of it, replaced by a more coherent story, bringing the whole thing back to Good versus Evil, especially with the introduction of the White Queen and the whole subplot with the Vorpals sword.