**L1S1 2018 \_ LITTERATURE BRITANNIQUE \_ FICHE DE LECTURE**

**NAME: DEUMIÉ Nolwenn, group C**

Choose one book among the following list:

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|  | Emilie Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* |
|  | Lewis Carroll*, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* edition “Collins Classics” |
|  | Bram Stoker, *Dracula* |
|  | DH Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* |
|  | Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* |
|  | George Orwell*, 1984* |
|  | Alan Sillitoe, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* |
|  | Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange* |

The quality of your English will be taken into account: /5

**I Find information about the writer and his or her contribution to English literature. You should cite your sources (website, reference of the anthology…) and use your own words. /5**

Charles Lewis Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll, was born in 1832 and died in 1898. Homeschooled, he had struggles with socialization and stuttered a lot even if he referred to it as “hesitations”. It didn’t prevent him to become a great mathematician and he worked as an Anglican deacon at Christ Church, Oxford. As he always wrote short stories and drew illustrations, he decided to publish his own magazine called “Mischmasch” which was a real hodgepodge of funny ideas to entertain his family. He had then the opportunity to officially publish in *The Train: First Class Magazine*, which triggered him to create his pseudo. It was also at that time that he met the Liddell family, he quickly became close to the four children but especially to Alice Liddell, who is actually the heroine of the two major books of Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Alice through the Looking Glass.* Those two works had a huge success and became known worldwide. Even Queen Victoria was a fan of Dodgson’s works, but this fame doesn’t come from nowhere. Lewis Carroll had indeed a unique way to create stories, which seem to be complete nonsense if we don’t know how to read them properly.  
  
 To introduce this part, let’s take an anecdote about our writer. Charles Lewis Dodgson decided to use a pseudo in order to avoid criticism about his works and his prose. What is interesting is that his pen name comes from a play on words: he translated his first two names into Latin (“Carolus Lodovicus”) and then anglicized them to “Lewis Carroll”. It actually gives a pretty good example of what we can possibly find in his writings, of the peculiar way he had to shape language and play with it. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is full of puns and plays on words that are hard to decipher but are in reality very logical.   
The point is that, as Lewis Carroll is a Victorian writer, we expect his works to be serious or even austere, as it was more or less the standards of that time. By publishing those books full of colors and extravagance, he ran counter to the rules. This was not common at all to write something about such a fantasy world with talking animals, weird characters with exaggerated personalities and magical cakes. He was moreover the first to do so. He opened a path for future writers and literary nonsense became a genre in its own. That may be one of the reasons of the timeless fame of Charles Dodgson.  
Also, Lewis Carroll books, and especially *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland,* are particularly psychological. This is a journey into subconscious, as it shows how children feel in an adult world. There are some important elements we have to know in order to understand why it is such a revolution for children and their place in society: during the Victorian era, children were considered the same way as grown-ups, so they worked and were not allowed to be as innocent as kids nowadays. Books such as Lewis Carroll’s one or even *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie had a huge impact on this aspect of society because they showed genuine children full of innocence that were completely lost in the adult world they had to live in. Alice for instance doesn’t understand the animals and people she meets in Wonderland and vice versa, the animals don’t understand her; we can interpret it as the constant misunderstanding between children, represented by Alice, and adults, represented by animals. In *Peter Pan*, Wendy is forced to have a room of her own while she just wanted to stay with her brother, so she preferred flying to Neverland where she would never grow old. Kids and grown-ups don’t have the same needs and those books point out the lack of consideration for children. This other point is a major one. Not everyone can write about psychology in such a subtle way. But we may here be over-interpreting things, because there is no proof that Dodgson wanted to make a criticism about Victorian society. *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* might as well be a simple exploration of all the possibilities of imagination. However, the fact that people could be searching for a hidden message that doesn’t exist makes Lewis Carroll’s book even more interesting, because people saw in his writings the capacity he could have had to expose his society’s issues with complete nonsense, which could have been marvelous.   
 To put it in a nutshell, Charles Lewis Dodgson is a fascinating writer that managed to create a whimsical universe that is still studied nowadays. Everybody knows *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, by reading the book or watching the Disney movie, or they at least heard of it. It became an inescapable of general culture, thanks to Charles Dodgson’s incredible and paramount imagination, his love of plays on words and puns, and finally thanks to his desire to share the stories he made.   
 **II Your personal reading: select two passages (page/ line) you found particularly interesting in this book and analyse why those two passages have struck you. /10**

The first excerpt I chose is from page 19 to page 20, which is the very beginning of chapter three. To sum it up quickly; in chapter two, Alice cried so much that she created a pool and tried to get out of it, she met a mouse and after a little argument about cats and dogs, the mouse helped her to join the shore. Once they were on the shore with various other animals –especially an Eaglet, a Duck, a Lory and a Dodo-, the mouse made them all sit in circle and told them he would “make [them] dry enough.” In order to do so, the mouse begins to tell the story of William the Conqueror.   
The extract stroke me because this is a perfect example of the nonsense we find in the book. How could you make someone dry by teaching them history? Those two things are totally different and have absolutely no connection. But the Mouse goes on and refuses any interruption during his lecture, which is actually quite funny; even a shiver is too much to handle for the Mouse.   
There is a part of the dialogue that is especially interesting:  
  
“ ‘ Edwin and Morcar, the earls of Mercia and Northumbria, declared for him ; and even Stigand, the patriotic archbishop of Canterbury, found it advisable—”

“Found what?” said the Duck.

“Found it,” the Mouse replied rather crossly: “of course you know what ‘it’ means.”

“I know what ‘it’ means well enough, when I find a thing,” said the Duck : “it’s generally

a frog or a worm. The question is, what did the archbishop find?”

The Mouse did not notice this question, but hurriedly went on-”   
  
There is a huge play on words here, with “it”. The Duck is literally understanding that the archbishop found something -the famous “it”- and he wants to know what the something the archbishop found is, whereas the Mouse is talking about the thing the archbishop found **advisable**. That’s actually why the Mouse doesn’t take the time to answer to the Duck’s question. The misunderstanding here is obvious and well written, it makes the original situation even more absurd, because not only the characters are drying while learning history, but they don’t even understand the lecture they are given. This is a real pleasure to read as we don’t expect that at all.

The second excerpt I chose is the first encounter between Alice and the Cheshire cat during chapter six, on pages 57 to 59. Alice just get out of the Duchess’ house with what she thought was a baby. Alice finally realized she was holding a pig and let it go. Just after that, she sees the Cheshire cat in a tree next to her.   
We have a strange feeling while reading this extract. The cat seems omnipotent, as if he knew everything about Wonderland. He is able to tell where each direction leads without hesitation, which is quite uncommon. Furthermore, the Cheshire cat appears in a way as the only sane character in a crazy world. He indeed tells Alice that everybody is mad and even her, otherwise she would have never come there, which is quite an accurate thing to believe when we discover Wonderland and everything that can happen there. Also he is very logical when Alice is asking for a direction and says that she doesn’t care where she goes “[as] long as [she] get[s] somewhere.”, as the Cheshire cat tells her: “Oh, you’re sure to do that […] if you only walk long enough”. It seems quite obvious at first, but it isn’t in a world where everything is nonsense and topsy-turvy.   
However, we can’t deny that the Cheshire cat is a weird character anyway, always grinning and appearing or vanishing in the blink of an eye.  
There is a real contrast here, as if the Cheshire cat was a complete paradox, and it makes it hard to define such a complex character. We could say that he is a bit frightening, which is true in a way, but there is this feeling that he is reliable unlike all the other characters that for instance refuse to listen to Alice. The way he was written by Lewis Carroll makes him trustworthy or at least ready to help or answer questions.  
On top of that, the Cheshire cat seems like the only character really at ease in Wonderland, as if he knew exactly what was going on in this place and was not worried about anything, which can be considered as a rather seldom feature.   
To summarize it all, the Cheshire cat is a particularly fascinating character, hard to define or classify, who offers a really interesting way to put into perspective the world Lewis Carroll created.