

CHAPTER FIVE

CLASSISM, ETHNOCENTRISM, XENOPHOBIA AND RACISM:

THE PORTRAYAL OF SOCIAL CONSTRUCTS IN THE WRITING OF BLYTON AND CHRISTIE

...as Alison Light has shown, the detective novels of Christie owe much of their appeal to the way they challenge rather than reinforce the assumptions of readers, both about the genre and about the society depicted.

Warren Chernaik *The Art of Detective Fiction*

1 INTRODUCTION

As McGillis notes, “[t]he culturally invisible or diminished have something in common with women and children in that they, too, have been powerless to take part in the conversations of cultural and other forms of political activity” (2000b:xxi). Like women in a society dominated by men, individuals who are of a different race, class, nationality, religion and ethnicity are regarded as ‘other’ in relation to the dominant group and are often marginalised and less valued by society. This leads to as well as reflects, of course, the manifestation of asymmetrical power relations between dominant and marginalised groups.

Widespread social changes in Britain in the early twentieth century included the introduction of social security benefits (prior to the First World War); the Public Libraries Act in 1919, which gave more people of all classes access to books; and the introduction of cheaper paperback editions in the 1930s which “helped to widen the social range of the reading public” (Thompson 1993:129) because books became more affordable. The spread of mass media communication, the introduction of national radio and television broadcasting also improved access to information for traditionally marginalised individuals and groups, thus narrowing the

divide between rich and poor, educated and uneducated, and upper and lower classes. Regardless of these emergent trends, the shared beliefs and practices of the white English-speaking middle class remained dominant and were reflected in the mass communication of the society. This discourse is also reflected in the cultural artefacts of that society, such as the popular literature which included detective fiction and children's literature.

Thompson remarks that popular culture "becomes the locus for the acceptance, rejection, resistance, incorporation, or hybridization of dominant values, beliefs, feelings and ways of seeing" (1993:76). As a result, much popular literature portrayed the prejudices of, as well as the ways of ensuring that one was valued by, the dominant group. Bargainnier observes that

[s]nobbery and narrow chauvinism, even xenophobia, have been called characteristic of the interwar English upper class, and the detective fiction of the period has been accused of fostering those attitudes. Certainly the lower classes are treated similarly to servants. Working people – small tradesmen, landladies, yeoman farmers etc. – often 'talk funny,' meaning ungrammatically. Education, or lack of it, was part of class distinction.

(1980:33)

Symons describes the writers of Golden Age detective fiction as "right-wing. This is not to say that they were openly anti-Semitic or anti-Radical, but that they were overwhelmingly conservative in feeling" (1992:108).

Like the detective fiction of this time, children's literature also depicts these prejudices. Fisher discusses how children's adventure stories,

like any other class of fiction, reflect in varying degrees the social attitudes of their time. In the development of children's books in England, the Establishment view has persisted more or less without challenge for more than a century. The landmark names in adventure story (Ballantyne, Rider Haggard, Buchan, Arthur Ransome) have not questioned the assumptions underlying their subject matter, offering to their young readers generally accepted social values.

(1985:279)

Mason remarks on “the prejudices of most of the early children’s series books, in which undesirable characters are automatically associated with minority groups” (1995:21). She goes on to comment on the Nancy Drew series in which “[c]riminals are dark-hued and poor” (Mason 1995:68) while Nancy and her friends are white, upper class and affluent. Druce comments on Blyton’s writing in which adversaries

range from comic and cowardly foreigners to thieves and kidnappers, ‘mad’ scientists, circus hands, gipsies, untrustworthy servants, and other members of the unregenerate criminal and working classes. They are bullies, cowards, their behaviour is stupid, their accents vulgar or ludicrously foreign.

(1992:222)

Blyton’s child protagonists are “anglocentric and *class/ist*” [italics in original] (Rudd 2000:108).

The discourses portrayed in popular fiction went some way towards defining the norm as well as reflecting it: as I have discussed in Chapter Four of this study, Christie’s Miss Marple helped to define the stereotypical elderly spinster detective in fiction. However, Rowland argues that “[l]ocating crime amongst the stereotypes serves to dethrone them as emblems of English complacency and functions as a critical commentary on Englishness in its mode of upper-middle-class cultural dominance” (2001:68). This “critical commentary on Englishness” is important to my consideration of the portrayal of prejudices in the writing of Blyton and Christie. Even though Blyton and Christie portray the intolerant attitudes of their time in their writing, they also offer alternatives to this widespread point of view.

In the context of asymmetrical power relations between dominant and marginalised groups classism refers to discrimination against individuals on the basis of their social class, in particular the enactment of prejudices that benefit the upper classes and are to the detriment of the lower classes; ethnocentrism is the belief that a particular ethnic or cultural group is superior to others, and the resultant tendency to evaluate the actions, behaviour, and

customs of other ethnic or cultural groups and to find them wanting in relation to one's own. Ethnocentrism can manifest in racism which refers to the belief that members of different racial groups (individuals who share common ancestry and distinguishing physical features such as skin colour) possess characteristics, abilities, attributes and features that determine their superiority or inferiority to other racial groups; or in xenophobia, the dislike and irrational fear of people from other countries and cultures.

In this chapter I consider the portrayal in the writing of Agatha Christie and Enid Blyton of the treatment of individuals who are of a different race, class, nationality, religion, and ethnicity from the dominant group, with particular emphasis on their paradoxically simultaneous portrayal of the dominant and alternative discourses widespread at their time of writing. The Anglo-Boer (1899-1902), the First World War (1914-1918) and the Second World War (1939-1945) had a great impact on the ways of thinking of this society and it encouraged the development of much discrimination. It is likely that Blyton and Christie's target audience would have been more receptive of books that reflected traditional ways of thinking, including dominant prejudice. However, even though Blyton and Christie lived in a time of clearly defined class relations and much political turmoil, they portray some alternative discourses in relation to the treatment of foreigners, racial equality and class relations in their writing.

2 CLASSISM

While discrimination against individuals of lower classes was widespread in the early twentieth century, it was also a period of increasing social awareness and reform; there was a marked rise in the popularity of socialism in Britain. In 1945 the British Labour Party, which advocated representation of the working class and socialist policies was elected to office.¹²

An example of the changing political climate and the emergent discourse of socialism is Christie's portrayal of the increased interest in the rights of the working class in *A Murder is Announced*. Here Christie portrays Edmund Swettenham reading a newspaper called the *Daily Worker*; Christie has Edmund's mother comment on his class in relation to work:

“And it isn't,” pursued Mrs Swettenham, “as though you *were* a worker. You don't do any work at all.”

(Christie [1950] 1979:9)

Christie portrays widespread opposition to the increase in socialism, common among members of the upper classes, in the short story *Death by Drowning*. Stanford, the primary suspect in the murder of Rose Emmott, is new in town – an outsider – and is accused of having had an affair with Rose which led to her falling pregnant. Stanford is described by Colonel Melchett as a “Bolshie, you know – no morals” (Christie [1931] 2008:514). Labour union leaders and other leftists were sometimes described in an offensive manner as ‘Bolshies’. In the above examples, both in the sarcastic comments by Mrs Swettenham and the description of Bolshies’ having no morals, Christie expresses the established social tendency to express opposition to emergent left wing political discourse.

¹² Social Democratic parties dominated the European governments following the Second World War including France, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Belgium, and Norway.

In *The Murder at the Vicarage* Christie reflects the segregation of classes and the widespread view that lower classes are regarded as ‘other’ when she has Inspector Slack comment: “I know how to manage them” (Christie [1930] 1972:74) when he is discussing the maid whom he is about to interview. His reference to domestic staff as “them” clearly separates the staff from the middle class group – us – in which Slack includes himself. Division between classes is also evident in *Death by Drowning* when Christie has Colonel Melchett comment about the relationship between Rose Emmott and Stanford: “Stick to your own class” (Christie [1931] 2008:515), he says.

Blyton also reflects the prevailing system of thought and echoes the ‘us-them’ segregation way of thinking in *Five Have a Wonderful Time* when she has the circus people remark that that they do not want to mix with the children: “Us-folk and you-folk don’t mix,” said the man obstinately. “We don’t want you here...” (Blyton [1952] 1980:50). Blyton even has the circus folk make the same comment again later in the same story: “Us-folk and you-folk don’t mix” (Blyton [1952] 1980:67). Here we see hegemony in action as the subordinate group adopts and internalises the segregation practices of the dominant group. However, in the same story, Blyton has Dick comment:

“...I say – what a pity these people resent us being in their field. It’s not going to be very pleasant to have them all banded against us. Not fair either. I should *like* to be friendly.”

“Well, perhaps it’s just a case of us-folk and you-folk,” said Julian. “There’s a lot of that kind of feeling about these days, and it’s so silly. We’re all the same under the skin. We’ve always got on well with anyone before.”

(Blyton [1952] 1980: 51)

In this way, Blyton presents an alternative to the dominant opinion that different groups in society should be segregated from each other. Thus, while Blyton does not challenge the status quo by having the circus people and the children openly disregard the segregation discourse, she does criticise this discourse in the comments made by Dick and Julian, in

particular Julian's remark that it is "silly" (Blyton [1952] 1980: 51). In addition, Julian's comment that "[t]here's a lot of that kind of feeling about these days" (Blyton [1952] 1980: 51) is indicative of the prevalence of tension between different groups in society at the time.

Bargainnier believes that "Christie, like most of her major characters, was of her class; she never escaped from it – she neither wanted nor tried to – and so the prejudices of that class occasionally appear in her fiction" (1980:34). This idea is reiterated by Laura Thompson who remarks that Christie "had grown up with social hierarchies and preferred to maintain them" (2007:385). The world of the English upper middle class provides the social setting in which Christie's fiction takes place. John Thompson also makes a similar point:

the setting of the Christie novel is inevitably upright, proper, dignified and English in an eternally Edwardian way.... Christie's characters are always middle-class or upper-middle-class persons who at the very least have a parlourmaid.

(1993:123)

Christie uses social conventions, norms and expectations "to make explicable the actions of her characters. They act as they do because of the social class to which they belong" (Bargainnier 1980:31), because of the expectations that society has of individuals based on their social position as a result of shared beliefs and expectations about behaviour and social interaction.

The portrayal of servants in Christie's writing is also realistically reflective of the time. Prior to the Second World War, the houses of the wealthy in England were staffed by many servants. The number of servants provided an indication of the "social position of their employers" (Bargainnier 1980:33) – the greater the number of servants the higher the social standing of their employees. Bargainnier observes that "one can trace the decline in the number of family servants in England" (1980:33) in Christie's writing. In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, first

published in 1920, regardless of Mrs Inglethorp's claim that they are a "war household" (Christie [1920] 1969:13) and thus less wasteful, the staff includes Dorcas the parlour-maid, Annie the housemaid, a cook, and three gardeners. In contrast, in *Nemesis*, first published in 1971, there is only one servant to look after the three women living at The Old Manor House, but at one time they had three servants: "a cook, a housemaid – a parlour-maid – kitchen maid too... and a groom" (Christie [1971] 1974:84).

Christie's portrayal of servants can be linked to an element of nostalgia that is often evident in her writing – her longing for the time in which she grew up in a large country house populated by several servants: "Dear old Dorcas. As she stood there, with her honest face upturned to mine, I thought what a fine specimen she was of the old-fashioned servant that is so fast dying out" (Christie [1920] 1969:114). This nostalgia might be seen as evidence of how the prevailing body of beliefs in society at the time of her growing up influenced Christie.

The value of a good reliable servant is emphasised throughout Christie's writing. In *A Murder is Announced* Christie has Mrs Swettenham emphasise the importance of having good reliable servants when she reprimands Edmund for upsetting Mrs Finch: "If she takes a dislike to us and won't come, who else could we get?" (Christie [1950] 1979:9). In *Murder at the Vicarage*, the vicar and Griselda's completely incompetent servant, Mary, resigns.

"Mary. She's given notice."

I really could not take the announcement in a tragic spirit.

"Well," I said, "we'll have to get another servant."

It seemed to me a perfectly reasonable thing to say. When one servant goes, you get another. I was at a loss to understand Griselda's look of reproach.

"Len – you are absolutely heartless. You don't care."

I didn't. In fact, I felt almost light-hearted at the prospect of no more burnt puddings and undercooked vegetables.

"I'll have to look for a girl, and find one, and train her," continued Griselda in a voice of acute self-pity.

(Christie [1930] 1972:120)

Griselda's hypocrisy is evident as she goes on to manipulate the situation and persuades the vicar to take pity on Mary and convince her not to resign, even though neither she nor the vicar appear to have any real pity for Mary. Griselda would rather have Mary stay because even an incompetent servant is better than the burden of having to hire and train another one. This example, and the mocking and satirical tone with which Christie portrays Griselda, clearly reflects "Christie's acceptance and amusement at her class and its social norms" (Bargainnier 1980:2).

In relation to the portrayal of servants in Christie's writing, it is useful to note that she was ignorant about the reality of life experienced by the lower and working classes. In her autobiography Christie's comment that it must have been nice to have been a servant, "the servants were, I think, actively happy" (Christie 1993:27), shows evidence of her ignorance, as well as her acceptance of the status quo of the society in which she lived. This is an example of cultural hegemony in action in which subtle forms of ideological control and manipulation perpetuate the status quo: servants begin to consent to their own domination.

In her fiction, servants do not play a significant role in the action. While Christie "can be accused of snobbery... it must be noted that she never makes such persons guilty of murder" (Bargainnier 1980:34). This could be because, as I mentioned earlier, Christie wrote about what she knew. She wrote about people of her own class – lower classes are peripheral and form part of the setting because she was not familiar with the reality of their lives. In addition, as Christie's audience was made up largely of middle class readers, she would have written about their lives rather than about the lives of their servants. These secondary characters help to populate the fiction and "are responsible for much of the works' flavour by fulfilling their roles of supplying information, causing misdirection, providing humor and social

commentary and creating a sense of familiarity” (Bargainnier 1980:143). Individuals of Blyton and Christie’s social standing accepted as normal the idea of having servants who cooked, cleaned and cared for them. Servants were expected to be silent, discreet and efficient beings who did not speak out of turn and who disappeared into the background – they were expected to be ‘invisible’ and Christie follows the rules.

Most of the working-class characters in Blyton’s writing, too, are usually background figures. Although Joanna, the cook, is a recurrent character in the *Famous Five* series, she remains in the background. In *Five Go Adventuring Again* readers are told that “Joanna the cook had made a lovely lot of buns and a great big cake” (Blyton [1943] 1980:23), but Joanna does not interact in a meaningful manner with the children. In *Five Run Away Together* Blyton has Joanna go away to look after her sick mother. This provides the opportunity for the introduction of the villainous Mrs Stick and her son Edgar. Even though the children have little interaction with Joanna, Blyton has Julian remark: “I hope Joanna comes back. I liked old fat Joanna” (Blyton [1944] 1981:12). In *Five on Kirrin Island Again* the children arrive at Kirrin Cottage for the holidays, and “to their great delight, found Joanna, the old cook there” (Blyton [1947] 1971:23). Joanna is “part of the social landscape” (Rudd 2000:93), the setting of the story, and is not essential to the plot itself. The role of servants in society is to care for their masters; there is no need for this to be reciprocated. The children think nothing of referring to her in unflattering terms such as “old” and “fat” (Blyton [1944] 1981:12). While they express happiness at seeing her, their pleasure is not at her company but at her reliability. Joanna offers stability and certainty because she conforms to expectations about what a good reliable servant should be: she has a pleasant demeanour, she provides the children with large quantities of well-cooked food, and she does not interfere in their activities.

In line with the expectations around acceptable social behaviour and relations of the time, members of different classes were expected to behave in a manner appropriate to their class. When Mrs Cavendish in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* interferes in Mrs Inglethorpe's marriage problems, Christie has Poirot emphasise that "[i]t was an astonishing thing for a woman of her breeding to do" (Christie [1920] 1969:77), thus implying that only an individual of a lower class, or of 'inferior' breeding, might be expected to behave in such an uncouth manner. In addition, it was an indication of appropriate decorum and good breeding then not to show emotion. After the murder of Mrs Inglethorpe in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, Hastings informs the reader that "[u]nder the circumstances, we were naturally not a cheerful party. The reaction after a shock is always trying, and I think we were all suffering from it. Decorum and good breeding naturally enjoined that our demeanour should be much as usual" (Christie [1920] 1969:57).

In *The Murder at the Vicarage* Miss Marple discusses the unacceptable behaviour of Major Hargraves "a churchwarden and a man highly respected in every way" (Christie [1930] 1972:65) who was discovered to have secretly married a second wife.

"And all the time he was keeping a separate second establishment – a former house-maid, just think of it! And five children – actually five children – a terrible shock to his wife and daughter."

(Christie [1930] 1972:65)

Is the "shock" to his wife and daughter caused by the fact that Major Hargraves had a second wife, or is it because the second wife was a former house-maid, and not of their social standing?

The expectations about how members of different classes ought to behave are also evident in the portrayal of stereotypical lower class characters. In *Murder at the Vicarage* the vicar

expresses the expectation that Mary, their servant, should address her betters appropriately: “[i]s it quite out of the question to induce Mary to say sir or ma’am?” (Christie [1930] 1972:61). Christie has Mary rebel against expectations of how she should behave and has her challenge the dominant ways of thinking. In contrast with Mary, in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* Christie has the character of Dorcas fill the role of the quintessential old-fashioned servant. Dorcas conforms to all the expectations of how a servant should behave:

Dorcas was standing in the boudoir, her hands folded in front of her, and her grey hair rose in stiff waves under her white cap. She was the very model and picture of a good old-fashioned servant.

(Christie [1920] 1969:44)

In addition, Dorcas is discreet and does not want to speak of her late mistress’s private affairs:

“Then I will begin by asking you about the events of yesterday afternoon. Your mistress had a quarrel?”

“Yes, sir. But I don’t know that I ought –” Dorcas hesitated.

Poirot looked at her keenly.

“My good Dorcas, it is necessary that I should know every detail of the quarrel as fully as possible. Do not think you are betraying your mistress’s secrets. Your mistress lies dead, and it is necessary that we should know all – if we are to avenge her....”

(Christie [1920] 1969:44)

In contrast with her presentation of alternative discourse in the character of Mary, Christie appears to promote the dominant expectations of the time by having Dorcas restrict her own behaviour and seek to fit into the mould of what society at large regards as a good servant. The depiction of contradictory discourses in Christie’s writing is easily recognisable and highlights the fluctuating discourses in the early twentieth century to which Christie would have been exposed.

The character of Dorcas, in her refusal to gossip, is in contrast to the housemaid in *Nemesis* who gossips with Miss Marple about her employers: “And such nice ladies as they all are, too

– Miss Anthea is the scatty one, but Miss Clotilde went to university and is very brainy – she talks three languages – and Mrs Glynne, she’s a very nice lady indeed” (Christie [1971] 1988:84). The expectation that servants will gossip is reflected in comments made by Mrs Ackroyd in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*.

Mrs Ackroyd went off at a tangent, after her usual fashion.

“Servants are so tiresome,” she said. “They gossip, and talk amongst themselves. And then it gets round – and all the time there’s probably nothing in it at all.”

(Christie [1926] 1974:126)

Christie also has Inspector Grange in *The Hollow* reinforce this expectation when he remarks to Poirot:

“What did I tell you? There’s always hope where there’s a kitchenmaid. Heaven help us when domestic staffs [*sic*] are so reduced that nobody keeps a kitchenmaid anymore. Kitchenmaids talk, kitchenmaids babble.”

(Christie 1979 [1946]:133)

The seemingly contradictory portrayal of servants in Christie’s writing is interesting to consider in relation to the dates of publication. *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* was first published in 1920, *The Murder at the Vicarage* in 1930, while *Nemesis* was published in 1971. This is significant because it reflects changes in discourses about the behaviour of servants over time. While Dorcas in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* conforms to social expectations and behaves in a formal and submissive manner, as I have shown above, Christie portrays Mary in *The Murder at the Vicarage* as overtly challenging and resisting expectations, and the behaviour of the housemaid in *Nemesis* is far more relaxed and informal. This is indicative of the way that discourses in general are in a constant state of change: there is often no clear cut differentiation between the dominant, oppositional or alternative, and emergent discourses operating in society and Christie’s portrayal of servants illustrates this.

Christie also emphasises the assimilation of socially acceptable behaviour by servants in the inferior and submissive demeanour of the staff when they are speaking to their ‘betters’. In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* she has Poirot interview the gardeners:

Manning came slowly and hesitatingly through the French window, and stood as near it as he could. He held his cap in his hands, twisting it very carefully round and round. His back was much bent, though he was probably not as old as he looked, but his eyes were sharp and intelligent, and belied his slow and rather cautious speech.

(Christie [1920] 1969:63)

It is interesting to note that even though her portrayal of Manning as submissive appears to reinforce dominant expectations of how he should behave; the fact that Christie highlights his “sharp and intelligent” eyes subverts the belief that servants and working classes are unintelligent. Christie also resists the dominant discourse when she has some lower class characters use these expectations that they are less intelligent to their advantage. In *The Murder at the Vicarage* she has the vicar point out that Mrs Archer, the cleaning lady, is not as stupid as she seems:

“That old crone? She’s practically a half-wit, as far as I can make out.”
“That’s merely the camouflage of the poor,” I explained. “They take refuge behind a mask of stupidity. You’ll probably find that the old lady has all her wits about her.”

(Christie [1930] 1972:115)

The portrayal of dichotomous dominant and alternative discourses in Christie’s writing is evident in her portrayal of lower class characters. Even though she offers an alternative discourse and allows servants to resist expectations about their behaviour and presents evidence of intelligence in these characters, she also reinforces the established belief that servants and lower classes are unintelligent and uneducated by having them use poor grammar. The manner in which foreigners and lower classes speak labels them as ‘other’ to the English white middle class. The standard of education is a yardstick often used to distinguish between individuals of different classes. In *A Murder is Announced* the gardener at

Dayas Hall explains to Inspector Craddock that he does not know where Mrs Haymes is: “It’s Mrs ’Aymes you want? I couldn’t say where you’d find ’er. ’As ’er own ideas, she ’as, about what she’ll do.” (Christie [1950] 1979:58). In *The Murder at the Vicarage*, when the vicar asks Mary if she heard the sound of the shot on the evening of the murder, Mary asks: “The shot what killed him?” (Christie [1930] 1972:60). Similarly, in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* Christie emphasises the poor grammar of the old woman who takes care of Dr Bauerstein’s apartment when she has Hastings stop by to visit Dr Bauerstein:

“Good afternoon,” I said pleasantly. “Is Dr Bauerstein in?”
She stared at me.
“Haven’t you heard?”
“Heard what?”
“About him.”
“What about him?”
“He’s took.”
“Took? Dead?”
“No, took by the police.”

(Christie [1920] 1969:133)

Like Christie, Blyton also reinforces the expectations that lower class characters use poor grammar. In Blyton’s *Famous Five* books she emphasises the poor grammar used by Edgar Stick in *Five Run Away Together* by having Dick, in a superior manner, point out the correct use:

“Edgar looked startled. “Smugglers?” he said. “I didn’t know that. Pa and Ma don’t tell me nothing. I don’t want nothing to do with smugglers.”
“Don’t you know *any*-thing?” said Dick. “Don’t you know why you’ve come to Kirrin Island?”
“I don’t know nothing,” said Edgar, in an injured tone.”

(Blyton [1944] 1967:150)

Another example of the superior attitude displayed by Blyton’s characters can be found in *Five Go down to the Sea*:

The boy wore a ragged pair of jeans and an old pullover. He was black-eyed and burnt dark-brown by the sun. He stood a few feet away and stared.

“Who are you?” said Dick. The boy went back a few steps in fright. He shook his head.

“I said, who are you?” said Dick again. “Or, if you prefer it another way, what’s your name?”

“Yan,” said the boy.

(Blyton [1953] 1969:30)

Poor grammar and lack of education creates the impression and reinforces the expectation that members of the lower classes are less intelligent. However, Blyton also points out that the lower classes lack the privilege of education afforded to the upper and middle classes:

“Haven’t you ever been to school?” he [Dick] asked Nobby.

The boy shook his head. “Never! I can’t write. And I can only read a bit. Most circus folk are like that, so nobody minds. Jumping Jiminy, I bet *you’re* all clever, though! I bet even little Anne can read a book!”

(Blyton [1946] 1967:79)

The ease with which Nobby accepts that most circus folk lack education reflects their consent to occupying their subordinate position. Education, as the privilege of the upper and middle classes, also functions as a tool of hegemony and ensures that the lower classes remain uneducated and oppressed.

Following the First World War, and possibly also as a result of social changes in Britain in the early twentieth century as well as the effect of the Great Depression with its severe economic downturn on the global economy in the decade before the Second World War, many formerly middle class individuals found that they had to work in order to support themselves financially. Christie draws attention to the change in circumstances faced by many of the middle classes in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* when she has Mrs Ackroyd express her disapproval of educated servants:

“[t]here’s something different about her from the others. Too well educated, that’s my opinion. You can’t tell who are ladies and who aren’t nowadays.”

(Christie [1926] 1974:129)

Mrs Ackroyd's comment reflects dominant thinking about servants. Thus, the changing social and economic conditions that led to many educated individuals becoming servants, led too, to emergent discourses about the education of servants as educated servant became more common.

Poor hygiene is another characteristic attributed to the lower classes. For Blyton, "indifference to dirt, grease, foul smells and untidiness is a defining characteristic of the working class" (Druce 1992:225). Edgar Stick in *Five Run Away Together* is referred to as "a stupid, yet sly looking youth" (Blyton [1944] 1967:16) – even his dog is unpleasant and dirty: "[a] dreadful animal, smaller than Tim, all sort of mangy and moth-eaten. Tim can't bear it" (Blyton [1944] 1967:13-14).

...a mangy-looking dog appeared out of the kitchen door. It had a dirty white coat, out of which patches seemed to have been bitten, and its tail was well between its legs.

(Blyton [1944] 1967:17)

The first description of Nobby, the circus boy who befriends the children in *Five Go off in a Caravan* (Blyton [1946] 1967:13) is of a boy with "an ugly, freckled face, with a shock of untidy hair". Similarly, Tiger Dan, the villain in the story, is also depicted as dirty:

The children stared at the chief clown, and thought that they had never seen anyone less like a clown. He was dressed in dirty grey flannel trousers and a dirty red shirt open at an equally dirty neck.

(Blyton [1946] 1967:14)

Not only are the lower classes physically dirty, they live in dirty places. Nobby's caravan "wasn't nearly so nice as theirs. It was much smaller, for one thing, and very untidy. It looked dirty, too, and had a nasty smell" (Blyton [1946] 1967:89). Similarly, Blyton describes Wooden-Leg Sam's hut in *Five Go off to Camp* as follows:

The candlelight flickered and shadows jumped about the tiny hut. It was a poor, ill furnished little place, dirty and untidy. A cup without a saucer or handle stood on the table, and a tin kettle boiled on a rusty stove.

(Blyton [1948] 1967:95)

In *Five are Together Again* a “bright-eyed” little girl from the circus with “tangled, untidy hair”

(Blyton [1963] 1971:69) directs Julian and the others to Grandpa Tapper:

“There’s old Grandpa Tapper on them steps,” said the little girl, smiling up at Julian, whose hand she still held. “I like you, mister. Your hand smells nice.”

“Well, that’s because I wash it with soap and water four or five times a day,” said Julian. “Yours would smell nice too, if you did the same.”

(Blyton [1963] 1971:69-70)

Here Blyton emphasises the benefits of cleanliness in her endorsement of nice-smelling hands. Druce highlights what he calls the “purification of the working class” (1992:226) in Blyton – they are regularly bathed and washed, scrubbed; these “ritual scrubblings necessary to make their presence acceptable to Us” (Druce 1992:239). In *Five Fall into Adventure* George comments on Ragamuffin Jo’s “layers of dirt” (Blyton [1950] 1991:33). Dick defends Jo: “She’d probably not got any soap or hair-brush or anything. She’d be all right cleaned up. Don’t be unkind George”. This raises a question around Dick’s reference to Jo as “all right” if she were cleaned up. Is being “all right” enough for the children to overlook and ignore her class, or does he merely mean that she would be more acceptable? However, in this example, Dick does show support for Jo over George, thus placing a lower class character above one of the ‘Five’. In addition, Jo goes on to make friends with George’s dog. “Timmy walked over to [Jo] and sat down, his head on one side, puzzled. Then he suddenly bent down and licked the girl’s half-hidden face. She sat up at once and put her arms around Timmy’s neck” (Blyton [1950] 1991:34). Timmy’s acceptance is significant because Timmy’s reaction to characters often provides readers with an indication of whether they are good or evil in the *Famous Five* stories. Blyton goes on to emphasise Timmy’s acceptance of Jo when she remarks that Dick “had never seen Timmy make friends before with anyone who was

disliked by George” (Blyton [1950] 1991:35). Therefore, Timmy’s acceptance of Jo further endorses the children’s acceptance of her. This highlights the paradoxical presentation of discourses in Blyton’s *Famous Five* series: it appears that Dick, in his defence of Jo, and Timmy, in his acceptance of Jo, (insofar as we can attribute such agency to a dog) disregards her class.

According to Shavit, in the *Famous Five* adventures Blyton portrays “middle class children whose values the text does not violate, but rather accepts and even reinforces” (1985:318). Blyton’s *Famous Five* series acts as an agent of hegemony by encouraging her readers to display “proper respect for the upper middle classes” (Greenfield 1998:73) and thus reinforces middle-class values prevalent in England in the early twentieth century – values that would have shaped the horizons of expectations of both Blyton and her readers. There is evidence of hegemony in action in the reception of Blyton’s books by readers: even poor and lower class readers accepted the middle class values and expectations portrayed in her writing as the norm. “Enid’s young readers were not confined to a well-to-do, middle-class circle. Poorer children from the ‘smoke stack’ towns and cities of the industrial midlands and North were also avid readers” (Greenfield 1998:20). Shavit claims that the “unflattering” descriptions of lower classes in the text emphasise their “inferior status” (1985:319). The character of Joe in *Five Fall into Adventure* is described as a “ragamuffin” (Blyton [1950] 1991:19). Yan, the shepherd’s grandson in *Five go down to the Sea* is referred to in “disgust” by Julian as an “idiot” (Blyton [1953] 1969:34).

The lower classes in Blyton’s *Famous Five* stories are depicted as having internalised the everyday practices and shared beliefs that regard them as subordinate. They show ‘proper

respect' to the upper and middle classes, they know their place and express admiration for their 'betters'. In *Five Go to Smuggler's Top* Julian is called "sir" by the adult driver:

The driver turned round after a while and spoke to Julian. "We're coming near to Castaway Hill, sir."

(Blyton [1945] 1967:31)

Nobby, the circus child, calls Anne "Miss":

"I was enjoying myself so much I forgot the time," he said awkwardly. "Bet I've stayed too long and you've been too polite to tell me to get out. Coo, that wasn't half a good tea. Thanks, Miss, awfully, for all the delicious sandwiches. 'Fraid my manners aren't like yours, kids, but thanks for a very good time."

(Blyton [1946] 1967:56)

In *Five Go off in a Caravan* lower class Nobby is proud to befriend the 'superior' children:

"I'm proud," said Nobby, going bright red. "'Tisn't often folks want to make friends with a circus fellow like me – not gentlefolk like you, I mean. I'll be proud to show you round – and you can make friends with every blessed monkey, dog and horse on the place!"

(Blyton [1946] 1967:50)

In these examples Blyton appears to reinforce the dominant sentiment that the lower classes are inferior to the dominant middle class.

Acts of kindness shown by the upper class can be perceived as being condescending and patronising towards the lower classes thus reinforcing their superior position. In *The Murder at the Vicarage* Christie has the Vicar highlight the patronising attitude of Miss Hartnell, who operates under the guise of offering help, while in fact seeking to interfere in the affairs of poor people:

On my way home, I ran into Miss Hartnell and she detained me at least ten minutes, declaiming in her deep bass voice against the improvidence and ungratefulness of the lower classes. The crux of the matter seemed to be that The Poor did not want Miss Hartnell in their houses. My sympathies were entirely on their side. I am debarred by my social standing from expressing my prejudices in the forceful manner they do.

(Christie [1930] 1972:82)

While Christie appears to satirise and ridicule Miss Hartnell, and seems to agree with the resistance by “The Poor” to her interference in their affairs, she highlights the expected behaviour of individuals of different social standing by pointing out that the Vicar does not do anything about it because there is a ‘correct’ way for him to behave. As Bargainnier contends, “Christie is not completely admiring of the social forms; there is much satire, albeit mild, of the pretension or excess of them” (1980:31).

Taking pity on the lower classes reinforces the power of the upper classes and maintains the status quo by reinforcing the hegemony which has the lower classes accept, adopt and internalise the values, norms and practices of the upper classes, and thereby legitimise and reinforce their power and superior position. In Nobby’s words Blyton presents a clear example of this:

“Coo – I don’t have tea as a rule,” said Nobby. “Yes, I’d like to. Sure you don’t mind me staying, though? I ain’t got your manners, I know, and I’m a bit dirty, and not your sort at all. But you’re real kind.”

(Blyton [1946] 1967:56)

Druce remarks that “Blyton’s middle-class children speak with an admired arrogance” (1992:224) to lower class characters. The children in the *Famous Five* books expect the lower classes to endorse their superior position, and the lower classes accept their subordinate position and admire their ‘betters’.

“Look – isn’t that Yan?”

It was! He came sidling up, looking as dirty as ever, and gave them a quick smile that once more entirely changed his sullen little face. He held out his hand, palm upwards, and said something.

“What’s he saying?” said Dick. “Oh, he’s asking for a sweet.”

“Don’t give him one,” said Julian, quickly. “Don’t turn him into a little beggar. Make him work for a sweet this time. Yan, if you want a sweet, you can help pod these peas.”

Mrs Penruthlan appeared at once. “But see he washes those filthy hands first,” she commanded, and disappeared again. Yan looked at his hands, then put them under his arm-pits.

“Go and wash them,” said Julian. But Yan shook his head, and sat down a little way away from them.

“All right. Don’t wash your hands. Don’t shell the peas. Don’t have a sweet,” said George.

(Blyton [1953] 1969:49-50)

The children not only behave in a superior manner towards lower class children, but also to those lower class adults who are revealed as villains in the books. In *Five Go To Smuggler’s Top* Julian is rude to Block, the manservant who is later revealed to be one of the villains: “Shut up,” said Julian. “Don’t you dare speak to my cousin like that. I believe you’re mixed up in this curious business. Clear out, Block” (Blyton [1945] 1967:139). Similarly, Sooty, the children’s friend in *Five Go to Smuggler’s Top* is also rude to Block:

“Dark, dire, dreadful threats!” he said. “You look out for yourself too, Block. Any more snooping about, and you’ll find yourself tied up again – yes, and I might bite you again too. You never know. My teeth feel quite ready for it this morning.”

(Blyton [1945] 1967:104)

In *Five Run Away Together* Julian speaks down to Mrs Stick, the cook, who is of a lower class than he is, and is also revealed as the villain:

“Mrs Stick dropped her eyes first. “I’ll get your tea,” she said, “but if I’ve any nonsense from you I shall get you no other meals.”

“And if I have any nonsense from you I shall go to the police,” said Julian, unexpectedly. He hadn’t meant to say that. It came out quite suddenly, but it had a surprising effect on Mrs Stick. She looked startled and alarmed.”

(Blyton [1944] 1967:35)

In the same story, George slaps Edgar, Mrs Stick’s son.

“How dare you!” yelled Mrs Stick. “First that girl slaps Edgar, and then you pull his nose! What’s the matter with you all?”

“Nothing,” said Julian, pleasantly; “but there’s an awful lot wrong with Edgar, Mrs Stick. We feel we just *must* put it right. It should be your job, of course, but you don’t seem to have done it.”

(Blyton [1944] 1967:37)

Julian is also rude to Tiger Dan, a member of the circus in *Five Go off in a Caravan* who is also revealed to be a villain:

“I don’t need to discuss my affairs with either you or your friend,” said Julian, sounding extremely grown-up.

(Blyton [1946] 1967:80)

While the children are polite to Mr and Mrs Sanders at Kirrin Farm in *Five Go Adventuring Again*, Mr Sanders’ reference to George as “Master George” is a clear indication of his inferior social station in relation to that of the children and Mr Sanders’ conformity to the dominant expectations about how an individual of his status should behave:

“Hallo, Mr Sanders! How are you?”

“Why, if it isn’t Master George!” said the old fellow with a grin.

(Blyton [1953] 1969:35)

Blyton also challenges expectations about how individuals of different classes should behave when she criticises the behaviour of some middle class characters, or reveals these characters to be villains: Mr Roland, the tutor in *Five Go Adventuring Again*, an educated man who is expected to behave in what the dominant ways of being describe as an honourable manner, is discovered to be the villain in the story. Meanwhile, in *Five Have a Wonderful Time* the fair folk capture the villain who is masquerading as a scientist:

... Bufflo cracked his whip and made everyone jump.

“We will rescue them!” he said. “This is not police job. It is our job.”

“I say, look – that scientist comes back,” said Skippy suddenly. And sure enough, there he was, coming hurriedly up the field to ask some more questions!

“We will get him,” muttered Bufflo. All the fair-folk waited in silence for the man to come up. Then they closed round him solidly and began to walk up the hill.

(Blyton [1952] 1980:147)

Later in the same book the people from the fair rescue the children, as well as the missing real scientist, who are all being held captive by the villain’s accomplice. In this way the fair folk are portrayed in a manner that challenges the widespread expectation that gypsies are deceitful and dishonest.

Blyton also offers an alternative to the dominant expectations about how members of different classes should behave when she has children in the *Famous Five* stories befriend lower class characters. In *Five Fall into Adventure* and again in *Five Have a Wonderful Time* the children make friends with ragamuffin Jo the gypsy girl; in *Five Go off in a Caravan* the children have an exciting adventure with Nobby, a circus boy; while in *Five Go To Mystery Moor* the befriend a gypsy boy called Sniffer. Not only do the children befriend these lower class characters, but they also act in a way that would be considered inappropriate for their class when they live as homeless wild children in a cave on Kirrin Island in *Five Run Away Together*. In this way, Blyton portrays the freedom afforded the lower class characters in a positive manner and therefore appears to endorse this alternative behaviour. Rudd argues that one of the main pleasures of Blyton's books "is the fact that the traditional framework of society is temporarily questioned: patriarchy can be challenged, and the Five can upset middle-class tenets" (2000:97). Lower class characters often assist the children in the *Famous Five* series in their adventures and mysteries: even though the children are nasty to Yan in *Five Go Down to the Sea*, he rescues them from a cave in which they are locked by the villains and proves his importance. These lower class characters behave in a manner that the mainstream ideas consider to be honourable behaviour when they assist the children in the *Famous Five* adventures. In this way Blyton challenges the stereotype by including lower class children in her stories who do not conform to the stereotypical expectations that they are dishonourable and untrustworthy.

Both Blyton and Christie appear to endorse the widespread opinion of the time that encouraged segregation of members of different classes. In their fiction they place members of the working class in the background, and reflect the prevailing 'us-them' sentiment of the time. In addition, there is evidence of the assimilation of behavioural expectations of

individuals of different classes in their characters. Thus, they often portray a realistic reflection of class divisions of the time in their writing. Even though they present alternative discourses and opportunities for these dominant expectations to be challenged, they do not overtly challenge the class structures of the society in which they lived and wrote. While some lower class characters are portrayed in a positive way and break the stereotype, they remain segregated from the upper classes. The involvement of the lower class characters in the lives of the children in the *Famous Five* series is temporary and as soon as the adventure is concluded the 'Five' return to their middle-class lives while the lower class characters return to the circus or fair.

3 ETHNOCENTRISM, XENOPHOBIA AND RACISM

Promotion of the ideology of the British Empire and the endorsement of discourses that advocated the dominance of the English upper and middle classes resulted in discrimination against individuals who were not English, and the treatment of such individuals with prejudice. Hence, English ethnocentrism often manifested in xenophobia and racism. This prejudice is also reflected in the cultural artefacts of the time: Hunt and Sands remark that “virtually all (English-language) histories of children’s literature agree that children’s books, always fundamentally involved in reflecting and transmitting culture, were the witting or unwitting agents of the empire-builders” (2000:40). In the same way, the writing of Blyton and Christie reflects the prejudices of their time. However, there is also evidence of the reflection of emergent and alternative discourses in their writing.

3.1 Ideology of England/Discourse of Englishness

The British Empire was a major force in the world in the early twentieth century and “reached its greatest territorial expansion in the 1920s” (Williams 2005:456), and at its greatest extent, the British Empire “nominally ruled 600,000,000 people, about 30 percent of the world’s population” (Hunt & Sands 2000:43). “Great Britain ruled the waves and much of the land” (Rudd 2000:1). Colonialism¹³ and the expansion of the British Empire contributed to the development of what John Thompson calls an “ideology of England” (1993:123), or what David Rudd refers to as a “discourse of Englishness” (2000:89). The creation of a seemingly ‘ideal’ society with control over its territories and a growing Empire helped to encourage

¹³ McGillis defines colonialism as “an activity among peoples that involves one group assuming priority and authority over another group” (2000b:xxii). He goes on to say that colonialism “affects cultures and it assumes a certain mind-set: a colonial mentality. The colonial mentality assumes that the colonizer represents a more advanced state of civilization than the colonized does, and therefore that the colonizer has a right to assume a position of dominance”.

consent among the masses for the perpetuation of the “ideology of England” (Thompson 1993:123) and the maintenance of the status quo. The hegemonic practices of England were promoted and encouraged in the territories.

The Anglo-Boer, the First World War and the Second World War all influenced British attitudes towards foreigners, and encouraged the strength and dominance of the British Empire. The political insecurity and turbulence had a significant impact on the proliferation of discriminatory attitudes and beliefs about, and behaviours towards foreigners in England in the early twentieth century. Few people from other ethnic groups lived in Britain and

‘[a]broad’ was viewed with suspicion: the scenery might be acceptable but the local people ate too much rich food, drank wine, and talked too fast in a strange language; worse, their standards of sanitation were deplorable.

(Greenfield 1998:21-22)

Adventure stories written for boys became increasingly popular in the nineteenth century and encouraged patriotism. The proliferation of patriotic ideas and practices is reflected in Blyton’s *Famous Five* series. In *Five Go to Billycock Hill* Blyton has Julian comment that “Jeff seems... well, so *very* British, and I can’t say anything finer than that” (Blyton [1957] 1982:125). The idea that describing someone as ‘British’ is a compliment reiterates the dominant sentiment that the British were superior to other nations. The sentiment of patriotism encouraged much prejudice and arrogance. This resulted in asymmetrical power relations in which foreigners were marginalised.

The war-time culture, secrets and suspicion permeated Blyton’s fiction. Throughout the *Famous Five* stories references are made to Uncle Quentin’s important secret work: “Uncle Quentin laughed. “I’m looking for a secret formula!” he said” (Blyton [1943] 1967:67). In *Five Go Adventuring Again* the children uncover a plot by Mr Roland to steal secret papers from

Uncle Quentin, and in *Five on Kirrin Island Again* Uncle Quentin sets up a laboratory on Kirrin Island to carry out some “hush-hush” and “mysterious” (Blyton [1947] 1971:26) experiments. The war-time atmosphere is also evident in *Five Go to Billycock Hill* where the children wander onto an RAF airfield and meet Flight-Lieutenant Jeffrey Thomas, Cousin Jeff, who is later accused of being a traitor (although the children discover the truth and he is vindicated). The influence of war-time culture and the dominant discourse of the time is clearly reflected in Blyton’s writing when we hear Dick comment that “traitors deserve to die” (Blyton [1957] 1892:125).

Plain contends that fictions such as those of Agatha Christie “have been regarded as archetypically British” (2001:4). However, Christie’s depiction of England is unrealistic, “constructed and theatrical” (Rowland 2001:68), “an England of bucolic country villages and country houses disturbed by nothing more vexing than the occasional ungentlemanly murder” (Thompson 1993:129). It is an idealisation of England, “an England that exists in the popular imagination as a conflict-free, rural Arcadia sustaining the values and traditions that define ‘Englishness’” (Thompson 1993:123). Similarly, Blyton uses a “stylised social setting, a romanticised country or village background... a world which does not really exist” (Ray 1982:116). In fact, the descriptions are so vague, general and limited that the stories could be set almost anywhere. Furthermore, few child readers actually notice the Englishness of Blyton’s settings – English readers probably take the setting for granted while “overseas readers often found that they had been imagining a romanticised country” (Rudd 2000:92). Thus, this “discourse of Englishness” (Rudd 2000:89) is in fact an unrealistic portrayal of England. This idealised image of England perpetuates the spread of the dominant discourse of Englishness by creating the impression that England is a Utopian world.

In contrast with Christie, who travelled overseas on a number of occasions, and even lived in the Middle East for a period of time while her husband worked on an archaeological dig, Blyton disliked the idea of leaving English soil and experiencing things foreign to her conservative English taste. The extent of her overseas travel included short trips to Madeira and New York. Blyton wrote about her trip to Madeira in her column, and, according to Stoney, while “she broadened the horizons of her readers with her travelogue... it seems a pity that her own rather insular attitude, by no means uncommon in England at the time, should have crept into so many of her dispatches” (1992:92). Blyton’s books are located in a utopian setting, an idealised English countryside in which the characters are never seriously injured and the villain is always captured. The children have fields to camp and picnic in, secret islands, farms and cottages where they can experience their adventures. Coetzee comments on the balance between stability and security, and danger and excitement; “the security and stability of the utopian and Arcadian setting... contrasts with the danger and excitement of tracking down villains, a dystopian element which needs to be explored to restore harmony to the utopian setting” (181:2003). Thus, by solving the mystery, the children in the *Famous Five* adventures act as agents of hegemony and encourage the “discourse of Englishness” (Rudd 2000:89) because they restore order and uphold the idea of a utopian England.

Christie’s fiction is peppered with stereotypical depictions of foreigners, which appear to endorse the mainstream way of thinking about foreigners at the time. The ‘Big Four’ criminal syndicate in *The Big Four* is composed of foreigners:

Li Change Yen may be regarded as representing the brains of the Big Four. He is the controlling and motive force. I have designated him, therefore, as Number One. Number Two is seldom mentioned by name. He is represented by and “S” with two lines through it – the sign for a dollar; also by two stripes and a star. It may be conjectured, therefore, that he is an American subject, and that he represents the

power and wealth. There seems no doubt that Number Three is a woman, and her nationality French. It is possible she may be one of the sirens of the *demi-monde*, but nothing is known definitely. Number Four –

(Christie [1927] 1994:13)

Number Four is initially described only as “[t]he *destroyer*” [italics in original] (Christie 1994 [1927]:13), although Christie later reveals that he is an “Englishman” (Christie 1994 [1927]:48). The stereotypical portrayal of the foreigners is obvious: Chinese man is the brains, American man is the money, and French woman is expected to be a beautiful siren.

As I have already pointed out, Christie’s first description of the foreign maid Mitzi in *A Murder is Announced* is of an emotional, irrational and temperamental woman. It is definitely not flattering, and clearly stereotypical. The clichéd portrayal of the emotional foreigner is again evident when Christie has Detective-Inspector Craddock describe Mitzi in a disparaging manner as “one of those Mittel Europas who go off the deep end at the mere sight of a policeman” (Christie [1950] 1979:34).

Derogatory terms to describe foreigners are evident in much fiction by Christie. In *The Big Four* Christie has Inspector Japp express the prejudices of the time by referring to the Chinese man in an offensive manner as “the Chink” (Christie 1994 [1927]:103), and Hastings admits that he had never “succeeded in being able to distinguish one Chinaman from another.” (Christie 1994 [1927]:191). Similarly, in the short story *The Adventure of the Cheap Flat* Poirot and Hastings mistake the suspect whom they are following for someone of Japanese origin and refer to him in a defamatory manner as a “Jap”:

“He’s not a Jap,” I ejaculated in a whisper to Poirot.

“Observations was always your strong point, Hastings! Nothing escapes you. No, the man is not a Jap. He is an Italian.”

(Christie 1958 [1924]:59)

Like the lower classes, foreigners often use poor grammar. For example, Mitzi's response when asked why anyone would want to murder her is: "Because they are bad peoples" (Christie [1950] 1979:22). This reinforces the expectation that foreigners are less intelligent than the English white middle class and reinforces their status as 'other'. Blyton also reinforces the expectation that foreigners use poor grammar. In *The Circus of Adventure*, a title in Blyton's *Adventure* series, the children meet Gustavus whose speech exaggerated by Blyton when Gustavus encounters Kiki the parrot:

"Plizzed to mit you" he said. "What iz zis bird? How you call it?"... "It spiks!" he announced in awe. "It spiks. It spiks words. It sees my blidding finger, and it spiks to fetch the doctor. I never haf seen a Kiki-bird before."

(Blyton [1952] 2000:16-17)

In addition to his unusual accent, Blyton exaggerates Gustavus's mannerisms by having him bow very low and kiss them on the hand when greeting people, something that the children find very unusual. Yet, after the children's initial discomfort with the unfamiliar, foreigners like Gustavus become friendly with them and share in the children's adventure regardless of their differences.

Christie is honest about her generation's prejudice and snobbery towards foreigners and different racial and ethnic groups. In her autobiography she comments about a little girl who would not show her body to a French nurse because the nurse was a "foreigner" (Christie 1993:86). In *Nemesis* Christie remarks: "Nobody appeared to Miss Marple likely to be a murderer except possibly Mr Caspar, and that was probably foreign prejudice" (Christie [1971] 1974:54), while in *A Murder is Announced* she has Inspector Craddock also admit his own prejudice: "I think the foreign girl knows more than she lets on. But that may be just prejudice on my part" (Christie [1950] 1979:72). Bargainnier argues that while "Christie allows her characters to express narrow prejudice... seldom does she as an author develop a character

from what might be called xenophobia” (1980:34). Nonetheless, prejudice perpetuates divisions between individuals of different nationalities, race and ethnic groups and promotes an ‘us-them’ segregation mentality.

Mrs Ackroyd took out a frilled handkerchief, and became tearful.

“I thought, doctor, that you might put it to M. Poirot – explain it, you know – because it’s so difficult for a foreigner to see our point of view.”

(Christie [1926] 1974:127)

Possibly as a result of the promotion of patriotism and the impact of the war years, foreigners in Christie’s fiction are treated with a great deal of suspicion and distrust. In *A Murder is Announced*, Christie has Myrna Harris, an employee at the hotel where Rudi Sherz (the man who died at the house and is suspected of having tried to kill Miss Blacklock) worked, express the distrust of foreigners dominant at the time when she remarks that “the hotel ought to be more careful when they employ people – especially foreigners. Because you never know where you are with these foreigners” (Christie [1950] 1979:39). Sherz and Mitzi, Miss Blacklock’s maid, are both treated with suspicion, even though there is no evidence to suggest that they even knew each other. This is because they are, according to Sergeant Fletcher, “[b]oth foreigners – and I wouldn’t trust her a yard – not a yard” (Christie [1950] 1979:42). Christie uses the established prejudice and distrust of foreigners to mislead and misdirect the reader into suspecting Mitzi:

“It’s no good listening to what Mitzi tells you. She tells lies all the time.”

... “Everyone seems to agree that this foreign girl tells whoppers,” said Fletcher. “It’s been my experience in dealing with aliens that lying comes more easy than truth telling. Seems to be clear she’s got a spite against this Mrs Haymes.”

(Christie [1950] 1979:97)

However, in a subversion of the dominant distrust of foreigners, Christie gives Mitzi an opportunity to comment on the unfounded popular perception that foreigners are not trustworthy:

“What is the use of what I say? You will not listen. You say I am a poor refugee girl who tells lies. You say that a fair-haired English lady, oh, no, *she* does not tell lies –

she is so British – so honest. So you believe her and not me. But I could tell you. Oh, yes, I could tell you!”

... “I shall not tell you anything at all. Why should I? You are all alike. You persecute and despise poor refugees. If I say to you that when, a week before, that young man come to ask Miss Blacklock for money and she sends him away, as you say, with a flea in the ear – if I tell you that after that I hear him talking with Mrs Haymes – yes, out there in the summerhouse – all you say is that I make it up!”

(Christie [1950] 1979:87-88)

This trustworthiness is later justified when Mitzi assists Miss Marple in revealing the murderer to be Miss Blacklock. In this way, Christie resists the stereotype and presents an alternative to the expectation about how foreigners should (and do) behave.

Servants and members of the lower classes often show a marked dislike of foreigners. This is evident in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* when Christie has Dorcas comment that Poirot is better than the Scotland Yard detectives:

“them two detectives from London, what goes prying about, and asking questions. I don’t hold with foreigners as a rule, but from what the newspapers says I make out as how these brave Belgies isn’t the ordinary run of foreigners and certainly he’s a most polite spoken gentleman.”

(Christie [1920] 1969:113-114)

Similarly, the gardener in *A Murder is Announced* expresses prejudice towards foreigners by blaming the ‘hold up’ at Little Paddocks on foreigners and changing times:

What’s us coming to? That’s what Ned Barker said. Comes of going to the pictures so much, he said. But Tom Riley he says it comes of letting these furriners run about loose. And depend on it, he says, that girl as cooks up there for Miss Blacklock and ‘as such a nasty temper – *she’s* in it, he said. She’s a communist or worse, he says, and we don’t like that sort ‘ere...

Christie [1950] 1979:59)

This discrimination against foreigners on the part of the lower classes is evidence of how the current truths are appropriated by individuals in society, even though they themselves are discriminated against. This illustrates hegemony in action; the dominant group projects its way of thinking and ‘others’ come to see it as acceptable.

3.2 Hercule Poirot

Agatha Christie's Belgian detective Hercule Poirot is one of the most famous fictional detectives ever created. In a tribute to his fame and popularity, on 4 August 1975 the *New York Times* published "the only obituary for such a character on the front page" (Bargainnier 1980:44) following the publication of *Curtain*. *Curtain*, the final Hercule Poirot novel in which the famous character dies, was actually written by Christie in the early 1940s, but only published in 1975. Poirot appears in 33 novels and 52 short stories (Bargainnier 1980:45). Poirot – the epitome of detective – became part of literary discourse.

As I have already mentioned in Chapter Two of this study, Christie conceived the character of detective Hercule Poirot as a result of the influx of Belgian refugees into Britain during the First World War. In her autobiography Christie relates her decision to create a Belgian detective:

Who could I have as a detective? I reviewed such detectives as I had met and admired in books.... Then I remembered our Belgian refugees. We had quite a colony of Belgian refugees living in the parish of Tor.... Why not make my detective a Belgian? I thought. There were all types of refugees. How about a refugee police officer? A retired police officer.

(Christie 1993:263)

In line with the dominant patriotic sentiment of the time, foreigners would have been regarded with suspicion and even some contempt and dislike. In having Poirot as the main character, the detective, Christie is able to give him a certain amount of power (he is able to do things that the British police cannot succeed at) and in so doing she refuses the discourse of xenophobia towards Belgian refugees at the time.

Susan Rowland remarks that "not only is [Poirot] not English, he is most determinedly foreign. An affront to English masculinity in his neatness, fussiness, demands for fine food and central

heating” (2001:63). As Hart observes, “[t]hough Poirot was very fond of the English upper classes, and happily ate at their tables and solved their crimes, he remained his own man” (1990:121). Christie reiterates Poirot’s foreignness in *Peril at End House* when she has Hastings describe Poirot’s preferences for breakfast:

Poirot clung firmly to the Continental breakfast. To see me consuming eggs and bacon upset and distressed him – so he always said. Consequently he breakfasted in bed upon coffee and rolls and I was free to start the day with the traditional Englishman’s breakfast of bacon and eggs and marmalade.

(Christie [1932] 1971:55)

Similarly, in *The Hollow* Christie highlights Poirot’s desire not to conform to English expectations about appropriate attire for a Sunday lunch:

He knew well enough the kind of clothes that were worn in the country on a Sunday in England, but did not choose to conform to English ideas. He preferred his own standards or urban smartness. He was not an English country gentleman. He was Hercule Poirot!

(Christie [1946] 1979:68)

Christie accentuates Poirot’s foreignness by portraying him in contrast with his “ultra-English companion” (Rowland 2001:63), Hastings. As a foreigner, Poirot would not be considered to have power or be influential in an English social setting – as a foreigner he is an outsider, a marginal figure. Nonetheless, by solving crimes in a domestic English setting, in which evil is revealed lurking behind the orderly hierarchical social setting, and in which members of the white English upper middle class are guilty of disrupting the status quo, Christie has Poirot subvert the power relations of the society in which he is operating.

Poirot is often described by the English in derogatory terms. In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* he is referred to as “[o]ne of them Belgies from the village” (Christie [1920] 1969:80). In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* Mrs Ackroyd describes Poirot as “[t]hat dreadful little Frenchman – or Belgian – or whatever he is. Bullying us all like he did” (Christie [1926] 1974:125-126).

“No one can say that I have failed in my duty,” continued Mrs Ackroyd. “I am sure Inspector Raglan is perfectly satisfied. Why should this little upstart of a foreigner make a fuss? A most ridiculous-looking creature he is too – just like a comic Frenchman in a revue. I can’t think why Flora insisted on bringing him into the case.”
(Christie [1926] 1974:126)

In addition, the English struggle to pronounce his surname as is evident in Dr Sheppard’s reference to him as “Mr Porrott” (Christie [1926] 1974:19). Similar disregard is evident in *A Murder is Announced* when Miss Blacklock comments on Mitzi: “I have a foreign refugee with a most unpronounceable surname as a kind of lady cook help” (Christie [1950] 1979:49). Like Poirot, where Mitzi is from and how to pronounce her surname is not important – she is foreign and that is all that matters. Christie also has other characters reveal the prejudices of the time. In *Cards on the Table* Dr Roberts expresses the expectation that French men are renowned for seducing women:

Poirot was between Mrs Lorrimer and Dr Roberts.
The latter murmured facetiously to him.
“You’re not going to be allowed to monopolise the only pretty girl all the evening. You French fellows, you don’t waste your time do you?”
“I happen to be Belgian,” murmured Poirot.
“Same thing where the ladies are concerned, I expect, my boy,” said the doctor cheerfully.
(Christie [1936] 1963:18)

Christie has Hastings comment on Nick Buckley’s discomfort about being confronted by Poirot in *Peril at End House*

“Mademoiselle, may I crave one little word with you.”
The girl frowned. I realised her feelings clearly enough. She was afraid that this queer little foreigner was going to be a nuisance. I could not but sympathise with her, knowing how it must appear to her eyes. Rather unwittingly, she moved a few steps aside.
(Christie [1932] 1971:19)

Like other foreign characters and lower classes, Christie draws attention to Poirot’s foreignness by highlighting his incorrect use of English:

“Is there anything else that I can tell you?” inquired Mr Hammond.

“I thank you, no,” said Poirot, rising. “All my excuses for having deranged you.”

“Not at all, not at all.” [Mr Hammond]

“The word derange,” I remarked, when we were outside again, “is applicable to mental disorder only.”

“Ah!” cried Poirot, “never will my English be quite perfect. A curious language. I should then have said disarranged, *n’est-ce pas?*”

“Disturbed is the word you had in mind.”

(Christie [1926] 1974:155-156)

This further reinforces the image of him as a stupid foreigner; after all poor grammar is regarded as a marker of lack of intellect.

An eccentric character, Poirot’s peculiarities isolate him from the common ordinary man. He is vain and has a fetish for symmetry. He is excessively concerned with his appearance,

Hercule Poirot flicked a last speck of dust from his shoes. He had dressed carefully for his luncheon party and he was satisfied with the result.

(Christie 1979 [1946]:68)

In addition, Christie exaggerates his mannerisms,

Hercule Poirot swung around.

He bowed.

He shook hands ceremoniously.

(Christie [1936] 1963:9)

His physical appearance is unusual: “[t]here is no doubt, however, that to English eyes Poirot looked odd” (Hart 1990:101). Christie’s first description of him in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* contributes to the development of him as an eccentric character:

Poirot was an extraordinary-looking little man. He was hardly more than five feet four inches, but carried himself with great dignity. His head was exactly the shape of an egg, and he always perched it a little on one side. His moustache was very stiff and military. The neatness of his attire was almost incredible; I believe a speck of dust would have caused him more pain than a bullet wound. Yet this quaint dandified little man who, I was sorry to see, now limped badly, had been in his time one of the most celebrated members of the Belgian police. As a detective, his *flair* had been extraordinary, and he had achieved triumphs by unravelling some of the most baffling cases of the day.

(Christie [1920] 1969:21-22)

His speech and physical characteristics “combine with his personality to form a comic exterior, which Poirot uses when necessary for his own purposes” (Bargainnier 1980:46-47) as a disguise or form of camouflage. Willing to appear more vain or foreign than he really is – people underestimate Poirot. Like Miss Marple, he plays on the expectations that people have of him as an eccentric foreigner, to mislead them. Poirot is “aware of the effect that he is creating” (Bargainnier 1980:48) and uses people’s preconceived ideas about foreigners to get what he wants. He plays the part of the submissive foreigner but he is actually in control of the situation. In *Murder in the Mews*, in the short story *Dead Man’s Mirror* Christie has Poirot play on the social expectations of the English that he, as a foreigner, is somehow less intelligent:

“Pardon, I do not quite comprehend.” [said Poirot]
Mr Satterthwaite unbent indulgently to the lower comprehension of a foreigner.
(Christie [1937] 1994b:118)

A similar sentiment is evident in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* when Christie has Poirot appear meek and modest:

“It is true that I have retired from the world,” he said. “I never intended to take up a case again. Above all things, I have a horror of publicity. I must beg, that in the case of my being able to contribute something to the solution of the mystery, my name may not be mentioned.”
Inspector Raglan’s face lightened a little.
“I’ve hear of some very remarkable successes of yours,” observed the colonel, thawing.
“I have much experience,” said Poirot quietly. “But most of my successes have been obtained by the aid of the police. I admire enormously your English police. If Inspector Raglan permits me to assist him, I shall be both honoured and flattered.”
The inspector’s countenance became still more gracious.
(Christie [1926] 1974:66)

In the short story *Murder in the Mews* Christie illustrates the disdain displayed by some other members of the English police force towards Poirot:

[Poirot] skipped nimbly out of the room. Japp looked after him with an air of disgust.
“Potty,” he said. “Absolutely potty.”

Inspector Jameson preserved a respectful silence. His face said with British superiority: “Foreigners!”

(Christie [1937] 1994a:28)

Rhoda in *Cards on the Table* shares Japp’s opinion and Poirot is a eccentric and describes him as “gaga”:

“He doesn’t look a Sherlock,” said Rhoda. “I expect he has been quite good in his day. He’s gaga now, of course. He must be at least sixty. Oh, come one, Anne, let’s go and see the old by. He may tell us dreadful things about the others.”

(Christie [1936] 1963:148)

This further reinforces the image of him as a stupid foreigner yet Poirot uses these opinions to have people underestimate him.

“You mock yourself at me,” said Poirot, smiling, “but never mind. The old ones they laugh last sometimes, when the young, clever ones do not laugh at all.”

(Christie [1926] 1974:165)

Poirot frequently behaves as if he is ‘above the law’. As Bargainnier (1980:63) observes, Poirot “has no scruples about eavesdropping, and the same is true of deliberately lying”. He lies freely to gain the confidences of people, and supplies false or misleading information about himself to assist him in obtaining information. Hart (1990:108) emphasises “the unashamed way he told falsehood and pried into other people’s business”. In *Peril at End House* Hastings explains to Nick Buckley’s friend:

“Miss Buckley very kindly helped my friend when he twisted his ankle this morning,” I explained, as I accepted her offer.

“So Nick said.” Her eyes considered me, still detachedly.

“Nothing wrong with his ankle now, is there?”

I felt myself blushing.

(Christie [1932] 1971:20)

That Christie has Hastings blush reveals that he feels guilt for his friend’s lie, and for going along with the ruse. His guilt is evidence of his seeking to conform to the expectation of how an English gentleman should behave.

Later in the same novel Poirot and Hastings search Miss Buckley's house. Christie has Hastings express disapproval at some of Poirot's searching of the drawers containing her underclothes:

He was now going through the contents of a chest of drawers.
"Surely, Poirot," I said, with some embarrassment, "those are underclothes."
He paused in surprise.
"Any why not, my friend?"
"Don't you think – I mean – we can hardly –"
He broke into a roar of laughter.
"Decidedly, my poor Hastings, you belong to the Victorian era..."
(Christie [1932] 1971:113)

However, Poirot is not concerned or deterred by Hastings' disapproval:

"... If she wished to hide anything from sight – where would she hide it? Underneath the stockings and the petticoats. Ah! What have we here?"
He held up a packet of letter tied with a faded pink ribbon.
"The love letters of M. Michael Seton, if I mistake not."
Quite calmly he untied the ribbon and began to open out the letters.
"Poirot," I cried, scandalised. "You really can't do that. It isn't playing the game."
"I'm not playing a game, *mon ami*." His voice rang out suddenly harsh and stern. "I am hunting down a murderer."
"Yes, but private letters –"
"May have nothing to tell me – on the other hand they may. I must take every chance, my friend. Come, you might as well read them with me. Two pairs of eyes are no worse than one pair. Console yourself with the thought that the staunch Ellen probably knows them by heart."
I did not like it. Still I realised that in Poirot's position he could not afford to be squeamish, and I consoled myself by the quibble that Nick's last word had been, "Look at anything you like".
(Christie [1932] 1971:114)

In the short story *The Adventure of the Cheap Flat* in *Poirot Investigates* Christie again has Hastings express his concern about Poirot's actions:

[Poirot] stepped into the rough wooden contrivance and I followed him gingerly.
"Are we going to break into the flat?" I asked dubiously.
Poirot's answer was not too reassuring:
"Not precisely to-day," he replied.
(Christie [1924] 1958b:55)

Hastings' reaction to the inappropriate nature of Poirot's activities is emphasised by Hart (1990:136): "His friend's habits of eavesdropping, prying and dissembling never failed to

horrify him”; “[e]qually distressing to Hastings was Poirot’s addiction to listening at doors, peering through keyholes, and reading other people’s letters” (Hart 1990:109).

However, as a foreigner Poirot is outside the expectations of English society’s values and is not judged by the same standards. In *Peril at End House* Christie has Poirot argue that he is free from the social expectations and prejudices of the English: “[h]appily, being a foreigner, I am free from these prejudices, and can make investigations unhampered by them” (Christie [1932] 1971:42). His eccentric behaviour and lack of conformity to English social expectations is often overlooked because he is a marginal figure. Smith also observes that the eccentricities and foreignness of male detectives like Hercule Poirot allow them to fill the role of “the male-as-outsider” (Smith 2002:30), “since the outsider is often at an advantage over the insider when it comes to a question of having the distance necessary to solve the crime” (Smith 2002:31). As an outsider he is in a position to restore the social order and status quo because he is not governed by its social conventions. He is able to stand outside the situation, make observations and draw conclusions without feeling the need to adhere to social norms, and without being misled by English expectations and prejudices.

3.3 Racism

Christie and Blyton lived and wrote in a society in which asymmetrical race relations were common. In a reflection of the dominant racist discourse of the time, there are a number of examples of casual and unchallenged racist comments, and use of defamatory terms by Blyton and Christie.

In her autobiography Christie refers to comments made by the nurse who came to look after her daughter Rosalind, who had previously worked in Nigeria. The nurse remarked to Christie

that she “could do with a nigger or two. That’s the best about Nigeria – plenty of niggers” (Christie 1993:281). Christie also relates her memories of Cape Town, Table Mountain and “The Kaffirs” (Christie 1993:300). When her brother Monty returns to England with his African servant after serving in Africa during the Anglo-Boer War, she remarks:

Mother had a little difficulty in reconciling her two elderly maids to the idea of having Monty’s African servant in the house also.

“I don’t think so, Madam – I really don’t think that we could sleep in the same house with a *black* man.”

(Christie 1993:334-335)

This casual use of racist terms and reflection of racist attitudes in her autobiography is evidence of her assimilation of these discourses and the widespread opinion that individuals of a different skin colour or nationality should be regarded as ‘other’. It is therefore perhaps inevitable that these social prejudices are reflected in her fiction. Even though it is difficult to conclusively state whether Christie supported or opposed racist discourses prevalent in society at the time of writing, her use of such terms is in effect racist, regardless of how she portrayed these characters in her writing, or the fact that she is commenting on other people’s racist attitudes in her autobiography.

As can be expected, racist discourses of the time manifest in the writing of the time. The most obvious use of racist jargon by Christie in her writing is her book titled *10 Little Niggers* (1939). This title is completely unacceptable in contemporary society and has since been published as *And Then There Were None*. It is important to bear in mind that *Ten Little Niggers* was the name of a contemporary nursery rhyme popular among parents and children

when Christie used it.¹⁴ In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* Christie has Dorcas refer to a fancy dress party where “Miss Cynthia was a nigger once” (Christie [1920] 1969:115).

Christie reflects the growing anti-Semitism in Europe in the early twentieth century in the character of Dr Bauerstein, a Polish Jew, in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. Christie has John Cavendish express anti-Semitism when he reprimands Mary for spending time with Dr Bauerstein:

“I tell you Mary, I won’t have it.” [said John]
Mary’s voice came cool and liquid:
“Have *you* any right to criticise my actions?”
“It will be the talk of the village! My mother was only buried on Saturday, and here you are gadding about with that fellow.”
“Oh,” she shrugged her shoulders, “if it is only village gossip that you mind!”
“But it isn’t. I’ve had enough of that fellow hanging about. He’s a Polish Jew, anyway.”

(Christie [1920] 1969:125)

The prejudice is also evident when later in the same novel Christie reveals that Dr Bauerstein is a spy when he is arrested for espionage.

“He is, of course, a German by birth,” said Poirot thoughtfully.... “A very clever man – a Jew, of course.”

(Christie [1920] 1969:137)

That Christie has Poirot point out that Dr Bauerstein is a Jew emphasises his difference and status as ‘other’, a marginal figure in British society. This also highlights Christie’s portrayal of the prevailing body of beliefs of the time in her writing.

Criticism of Blyton’s portrayal of racist stereotypes is often linked to the golliwog character in her *Noddy* books, in particular the portrayal of golliwogs as criminals in *Here Comes Noddy Again!* when Noddy’s car is stolen by the golliwogs. Blyton denied the accusations of racism

¹⁴ Over time, and as a result of changes in dominant discourse that advocated greater ethnic and political sensitivity, the words of the nursery rhyme used in Christie’s novel have changed from ‘10 Little Niggers’, to the equally racist ‘10 Little Indians’, and the contemporary ‘10 Little Soldiers’.

“saying that she had written far more good golliwogs into her stories than bad” (Stoney 1997:171). In Blyton’s opinion, the golliwogs portrayed in her books:

are merely loveable black toys, not Negroes. Teddy bears are also toys, but if there happens to be a naughty one in my books for younger children, this does not mean that I hate bears!

(Blyton, in Stoney 1997:171)

Druce contends that “[g]olliwog dolls, whatever their racial characteristics, were loved by many children and Enid Blyton could point out several stories where they played an entirely kindly role” (1992:230). In fact, in the Noddy series there are more situations where other characters commit criminal acts: “goblins and monkeys are persistent villains... [and] golliwogs still score better than bears” (Rudd 2000:145).

Enid Blyton was not the first writer to use the golliwog character. As Rudd argues, racism, discrimination and prejudice “are readily found, for example, in Barrie, Eliot, Greene, Huxley, and Nesbit” (2000:133). However, emergent discourses which promoted racial sensitivity dubbed her portrayal of golliwogs racist and unacceptable, even though the earlier uses of the golliwog character by other authors were not condemned as aggressively as was their portrayal in Blyton’s work. Nonetheless, Blyton’s use of the term ‘golliwog’ is itself racist, regardless of whether Blyton portrayed these characters as pleasant or not. Her nonchalant use of the term is a reflection of her assimilation of racist discourses.

That Blyton and Christie were part of a racist society that regarded white, English speaking middle-class men as superior does not mean that one should condone the racist attitudes in Blyton and Christie’s books but rather take into consideration the context and dominant discourse of the time and the reflection of such attitudes in their writing. According to Rudd “many adults proclaim that they personally were never harmed by her works” (2000:132).

There are also critics who deny the effects of racism in books written for children: “These are innocent gestures; children are unaffected by them. They are not conscious of the implications” (Cullingford, in Rudd 2000:132). However, this defence has been opposed by those who claim that the effect of these portrayals is irrelevant: racism is wrong and it should be removed. “It’s what *all* racist books have done to *all* children over a long period of time that matters. Whether a particular child was affected by a particular book or not is irrelevant” (Dixon, in Rudd 2000:132). The examination of this racism contributes to a greater understanding of the socially acceptable attitudes and opinions of Christie and Blyton’s time as well as to the significance of their inclusion of alternatives to these dominant discourses.

5 CONCLUSION

...there is a dual, even contradictory, quality in Christie's personality, which is reflected in her presentation of the social scene: a nostalgia for a gracious past, with a clear-eyed amusement at its follies, and an acceptance, however regretful, of the necessity for change.

Earl Bargainnier *The Gentle Art of Murder: The Detective Fiction of Agatha Christie*

While Blyton and Christie present alternatives to the dominant social expectations of their time with regard to the behaviour of individuals who are of a different race, class, nationality, religion and ethnicity, there are a number of examples, as I have shown above, in which they portray some of the widespread prejudices of their time. Even though there are exceptions, on the whole, domestic staff and servants remain in the background; foreigners are largely portrayed in a stereotypical manner while a "discourse of Englishness" (Rudd 2000:89) is prevalent in their writing, all of which contributes to an idealistic and unrealistic portrayal of England. The influence of war-time culture also permeates their writing; they create an atmosphere of patriotism helped along by their casting of doubt and suspicion on foreigners. In addition, the ease with which they use offensive terms to describe individuals of a different nationality or skin colour is evidence of their assimilation of the prevailing systems of thought.

Nonetheless, their inclusion of alternative discourses could be an indication that they do not completely support and endorse the prejudiced dominant discourse of their time. It is difficult to determine with certainty whether Blyton and Christie challenge these viewpoints because "while middleclass values and behaviour are undoubtedly the unquestioned norm, there is no simple formula of middle-class equals good, working-class equals bad" (Rudd 2000: 94). There are a number of occasions where Blyton and Christie use social expectations about

how individuals of a different race, class, nationality, religion and ethnicity are expected to behave to challenge the stereotype when these characters do not behave as anticipated.