CHAPTER ONE

OF POWER:
DISCOURSES, HEGEMONY AND HORIZONS OF EXPECTATION

1 INTRODUCTION

Detective fiction "offers unique possibilities for exploring social and political relations" (Thompson 1993:49). I explore some of these social, political and economic power relations and the social context in which they manifest, as portrayed in selected texts by Agatha Christie, and in Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* series, in this study in terms of the theoretical framework outlined in this chapter. The purpose of this chapter is to explain the concepts of discourse, hegemony and horizon of expectation as used in the study and how these concepts relate to each other; to explain with reference to these concepts how power relations between and among members of society manifest; and to explain the relevance of these concepts and power relations to the study.

2 DISCOURSE

Every society has institutionalised systems of thought in which paradigms, ideas, attitudes, beliefs and practices form a framework that defines socially acceptable behaviour and opinions about social, political and economic issues such as gender, race, class, nationality, age, religion, and the treatment of foreigners, among others. These systems of thought construct the subjects and the social context in which they operate and they define ways of being that are more valued by a specific society. They construct and define the prevailing body of beliefs of a society. In turn, they reflect the values and norms based on these beliefs.

In this study, these socially institutionalised ways of thinking, speaking and behaving that determine the parameters of what is acceptable or unacceptable within a specific social context, are referred to as discourses. "The term discourse can be defined as the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation; [we are] able to speak of clinical discourse, economic discourse, the discourse of natural history, psychiatric discourse" (Foucault [1969] 2002:121), among others. McHoul and Grace describe discourses as "areas of social knowledge" (1993:31). Social knowledge refers to the knowledge that an individual has about the expectations of society – what society considers acceptable or unacceptable in terms of the dominant discourses. Social knowledge is usually embodied in the 'truths' promoted by social institutions such as the legal system, the education system and the religious authorities, among others. Institutions contain discourses that give meaning to, and organise social processes.

Within these discourses, there are dominant as well as oppositional or alternative ones.[6] The dominant viewpoints, ideas and concepts are compatible with the contemporary social, political and economic dominant policies of the given society and therefore serve to confirm and entrench the current dominant ideas and approaches. These are referred to as dominant discourses in this study. Dominant discourses both influence and reflect the nature of society. They shape, maintain and create meaning systems that have gained the status of 'truth', and they play a role in the social processes of making power legitimate, emphasising the construction of current truths, how they are maintained, and what power relations they carry with them. In addition, dominant discourses determine how we define and organise ourselves and our social world.

Alternative and oppositional discourses are marginalised systems of thought that, while not necessarily in direct conflict with the dominant discourses, are, to a large extent, contrary to dominant discourses and hence they offer, at least potentially, sites in which dominant ideas and practices can be contested, challenged and resisted. Raymond Williams distinguishes between alternative and oppositional practices, "between someone who simply finds a different way to live and wishes to be left alone with it, and someone who finds a different way to live and wants to change the society in its light" ([1980] 2005:41-42). Thus, some alternative opinions, attitudes, meanings and values can be accommodated and tolerated

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[6] Raymond Williams also refers to residual discourses. These are familiar, established systems of thought belonging to the past, rather then the present, but that are still active in the cultural process. They are "experiences, meanings and values, which cannot be verified or expressed in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous cultural formation" (Williams [1980] 2005: 40). A residual discourse, for example the superstitious practice of throwing spilt salt over one's shoulder, may be either embraced by individuals in society because of its familiarity, "because some part of it…will in many cases have had to be incorporated if the effective dominant culture is to make sense in those areas" (Williams [1980] 2005:41), or in other cases dismissed as old-fashioned. Residual discourses may also present an alternative to dominant discourse, or oppose it.

within the dominant culture. Michel Foucault discusses the relationship between contradictory discourses:

> There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy.
>
> (Foucault [1976] 1978:101-102)

Foucault illustrates his point by referring to a "reverse discourse". For example, "homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" (Foucault [1976] 1978:101). Such reverse discourse can be illustrated with a contemporary example: words like 'queer' and 'dyke' that were previously used in a derogatory manner towards homosexuals are re-appropriated and used now with positive meanings.

Alternative and oppositional discourses can be considered in relation to the idea of a subculture in which a group of people share viewpoints and systems of thought that differentiate them from the larger culture in which they exist or operate, and are often considered to be in opposition to, or subversive of, the dominant systems of thought. Whether this subculture seeks to exist within the prevailing society or to replace it determines whether the subculture can be referred to as alternative or oppositional.

Within the context of dominant discourses operating in society it is essential not to overlook the fact that "new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences, are continually being created" (Williams [1980] 2005:41). These are referred to as emergent discourses. Emergent discourses act as agents of change. They are those new systems of

thought that facilitate change because they shape an emerging way of thinking and introduce new ideas, attitudes, beliefs and practices. Emergent discourses and new social movements offer real opposition to the dominant discourses, and thus may be used by those who wish to challenge dominant ideas. If they are influential enough, emergent discourses have the potential to effect changes in the status quo. The struggles of the women's movement and the civil right's movement, among others, are examples of emergent discourses that sought to challenge the dominant patriarchal (and most often white) discourse and, at least to some extent, succeeded in doing so.

Systems of thought are "continually active and adjusting" (Williams [1980] 2005:39); therefore, discourses exist in a constant state of flux and have a fluid nature. There is not a clear cut differentiation between the dominant, oppositional or alternative, and emergent discourses operating in society because the balance between these discourses is constantly fluctuating. Hence, discourses are a temporary construction. "[H]uman subjects and historical events are not firm and discrete (id)entities but are fragmented and changing *sites* across which the flows of power move" (McHoul & Grace 1993:41). Twenty years ago the dominant discourse in South African society maintained that Apartheid was the acceptable norm, and separate development was pursued as a matter of course. People of colour were regarded as inferior second class citizens. Today, the dominant discourses champion equality among members of society, regardless of their race, skin colour, sex, religion or sexual orientation. It is evident that some of the dominant discourses in South Africa over the past 20 years have changed dramatically and discourses that were regarded as oppositional and emergent 20 years ago are now dominant discourses, such as those, for example, that promote racial and gender equality, and religious and racial tolerance. This does not mean to say that all individuals in society necessarily accept these changes; after all, there are always oppositional or

alternative discourses operating within any given society. Rather, the dominant political institutions have determined that this new discourse is the legislated norm. Similarly, current dominant discourses are in opposition, for example, to smoking so depictions of cigarettes in film and on television. Cigarette advertisements are strictly legislated. However, in the early twentieth century smoking was common, even considered stylish. In *Five Go Adventuring Again* Anne considers buying Mr Roland a packet of cigarettes as a Christmas gift – "I'm going to buy him a packet of cigarettes. I know the kind he smokes" (Blyton [1943] 1967:62). This would not be considered appropriate in current literature for children, notwithstanding the fact that today not all children would be able to purchase cigarettes anyway because there is an age restriction on buying tobacco products in many countries. The point is, rather, that to advocate smoking in any way in a book aimed at children is impermissible given the new anti-smoking dominant discourse.

In summary then, emergent discourses are influenced by the discourses of the past, and the discourses of the past are viewed through the discourses that follow them. Each era defines its own discourse and these definitions are constantly changing over time. Even discourses that present an alternative or oppositional view to a current discourse do so in relation to that current discourse. This is particularly pertinent in a consideration of the subversion and reflection of discourses in the writing of Blyton and Christie, since the writing of both women highlights that they, too, are caught between dominant and emergent discourses, as this study will show.

3 <u>HEGEMONY</u>

> [T]he magic of a really good spell is that you don't know its working. It just 'is', the way things 'are'.
>
> <div align="right">Ursula K. le Guin Earthsea Revisioned</div>

In any particular society a number of dominant social, political and economic discourses, among them discourses about the acceptable and appropriate behaviour of individuals towards individuals of different gender, class, race, cultural background, sexual orientation, age, among other categories, interact to form a multidimensional matrix of discourses about social and political issues. In this study, hegemony refers to the strategy of combining principles from different systems of thought and social structures into one prevailing coherent ideology that, while possibly different from the many small structures, assimilates them. Hegemony, for Raymond Williams, is

> a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of man and his world. It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming.
>
> <div align="right">([1980] 2005:38)</div>

It is an organising principle that is assimilated into everyday life. As a result of socialisation, hegemonic ideas and practices are internalised by the population and become common sense; the "philosophy, culture and morality of the ruling elite comes to appear as the natural order of things" (Boggs 1976:39). It is a system of values, attitudes, and beliefs that is "organised and lived" (Williams [1980] 2005:38), and in turn permeates society and has the effect of maintaining the status quo.

Hegemony also refers to the ability of the dominant class to project its own way of seeing the world so that those who are subordinate accept this view as natural or, simply, as common

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sense. Theories of hegemony attempt to explain how dominant groups or individuals (hegemons) maintain power. These theories examine the capacity of dominant classes to persuade subordinate classes to accept, adopt and internalise their values, norms and practices, and thereby legitimise their power. Cultural hegemony must be achieved before power can be achieved. The values, norms and practices of a particular social or cultural group are often entrenched in their cultural artefacts, such as, for instance, the literature of that community, and are portrayed as 'natural'. This encourages individuals who read such literature to accept and internalise such opinions and behaviour. Those who do not or cannot read this literature are influenced by those who can, and do. The dominant values, norms and practices about issues such as gender, race and class, among others, of the early twentieth century are reflected in the writing of Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie. In a reflection of the prevalent viewpoints with regard to appropriate gender behaviour at the time of writing, in Blyton's *Famous Five* series Julian, the oldest male child, plays the role of the leader, while Anne, the youngest girl, is fragile and feminine. Christie reflects widespread opinions that foreigners are eccentric in her portrayal of Poirot, while Miss Marple fits the stereotype of the elderly spinster preoccupied with knitting and gossip. However, Blyton and Christie also subvert some of these discourses. Even though George in Blyton's *Famous Five* adventures is a girl she is portrayed as being as capable in many situations that are traditionally described as masculine. Miss Marple is hardly a frail and senile old woman, and Poirot's eccentric persona disguises his logical approach to solving crimes. The examination of the dual subversion and reinforcement of these discourses is the focus of this study.

Cultural hegemony is a process of moral and intellectual leadership through which dominated or subordinate classes consent to their own domination by ruling classes, as opposed to being simply forced or coerced into accepting inferior positions. According to Thompson,

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hegemony is "the struggle by different classes, blocs, and groups for moral, cultural, and ultimately political leadership over society" (1993:75). It "refers to the process in democracies in which a dominant class or class alliance struggles for intellectual, moral, and political ascendancy by winning the consent of subordinate classes" (Thompson 1993:6). Hegemony is "acquired by getting the various groups and classes of society, especially the subordinate ones, to consent to the rule of the dominant classes" (Thompson 1993:75). It is the capacity of the dominant class to get the subordinate class to accept, adopt and internalise the norms of the dominant class through willing and active consent. But Williams emphasises that "hegemony is not singular; indeed that its own internal structures are highly complex, and have continually to be renewed, recreated and defended; and by the same token, that they can be continually challenged and in certain respects modified" ([1980] 2005:38).

It is important to understand the subtle forms of ideological control and manipulation that perpetuate the status quo in a hegemonic society. No regime could sustain itself primarily through organised state power; it must have popular support and legitimacy to maintain stability. Hence, Thompson argues that "the production of consent among those governed in Western democracies is the most crucial element in maintaining and reproducing existing social relations" (1993:75). In a hegemonic culture dominant groups combine their own interests with the interests of the masses and the values of the bourgeoisie become 'common sense' values and are perceived as natural or normal values by the masses, even though they are constructed to protect the status quo. McGuigan believes that hegemony

> has to be seen as 'lived' through social experience and cultural practice. That which is lived cannot be entirely illusory: it is inscribed in common-sense, the practical reasoning of everyday life and, because hegemonic leadership is never all encompassing, it is the site of perpetual negotiation and struggle.
>
> (1993:170)

Consensus culture develops when the subordinate class identifies its own good with the good of the dominant class and therefore helps to maintain the status quo. Cultural perspectives become skewed to favour the dominant group resulting in the assimilation of the values and practices of the dominant group and the partial exclusion of others. Individuals voluntarily assimilate the views of the dominant group which in turn maintains domination by consent of the masses. Stephens emphasises that "[if] a child is to take part in society and act purposively within its structures, he or she will have to master the various signifying codes used by society to order itself" (1992:8). While Stephens refers specifically to children, the same is true of all members of society; to feel a sense of belonging within any given society it is necessary for individuals to assimilate and internalise the norms of that society, and to behave in an appropriate manner as determined by the dominant discourses of that society.

Non-coercive consensual control is maintained and reinforced through civil society institutions such as churches, schools, trade unions, political parties, cultural associations, clubs, and the family. Institutions reinforce the values and practices of the dominant class and encourage the creation of a consensus culture by encouraging social order and conformity. In the West, the dominant discourse is often linked to education – "educational institutions are usually the main agencies of the transmission of an effective dominant culture" (Williams [1980] 2005:39) – religion and Christianity, as well as various intellectuals who help build society and produce hegemony by means of ideological apparatuses such as mass media.

> The processes of education; the processes of a much wider social training within institutions like the family; the practical definitions and organization of work; the selective tradition of an intellectual and theoretical level: all these forces are involved in a continual making and remaking of an effective dominant culture.
>
> (Williams [1980] 2005:39)

Everyday practices and shared beliefs as well as cultural norms provide the foundation for complex systems of domination and ensure the maintenance of the dominant class. "In

Western societies since the Middle Ages, the exercise of power has always been formulated in terms of the law" (Foucault [1976] 1978:87). This leads to the creation of a discourse of right and refers to the discussions on the operation of power relations in society.

Furthermore, institutions and structures in society play a role in defining individuals. In *The Second Sex* (1953), Simone de Beauvior looks at the role of social conditions – structures – that limit the freedom of women in society. She argues that women are defined by men in a world that is defined by men. In the same way, I would argue, children are defined by adults in a world that is defined by these same adults, and people of different classes, races and colours are defined by the middle-class and upper-class white men in a world defined by these same men. In this way the dominant discourses result in the classification of some marginalised groups such as women, and ethnic and religious minorities as 'other' in relation to the dominant group. Agatha Christie's Belgian detective Hercule Poirot is an example of a marginalised figure who is viewed as 'other' in relation to the dominant English community in which he is featured. Similarly, in Blyton, circus children, like Nobby in *Five Go off in a Caravan,* are also regarded as 'other' in relation to the white middle class child protagonists.

Foucault discusses the way in which the human and natural sciences, disciplines, institutions and structures of society classify things and people through the use of discourses. Institutions use discourses and their knowledge of the modes or organisation of thought, to classify individuals. Institutions determine their own 'truth' and they define and classify individuals according to this 'truth'. Foucault argues that the human sciences – particularly psychology – in conjunction with courts, prisons, churches and schools, among other institutions, use knowledge and power to regulate the behaviour of individuals by exercising "supervisory control" (Foucault 2000:59) of the norm – deciding what is normal according to their dominant

discourse and reinforcing this. Foucault refers to this as "social orthopedics" (2000:57), in a type of society that he calls a "disciplinary society". In *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* Foucault describes medicine, the law, the religious authority, and literary and art criticism as "authorities of delimitation" ([1969] 2002:46):

> in the nineteenth century, medicine (as an institution possessing its own rules, as a group of individuals constituting the medical profession, as a body of knowledge and practice, as an authority recognised by public opinion, the law, and government) became the major authority in society that delimited, designated, named, and established madness as an object; but it was not alone in this: the law and penal law in particular (with the definitions of excuse, non-responsibility, extenuating circumstances, and with the application of such notions as the *crime passionel,* heredity, danger to society), the religious authority (in so far as it set itself up as the authority that divided the mystical from the pathological, the spiritual from the corporeal, the supernatural from the abnormal, and in so far as it practised in the direction of conscience with a view to understanding individuals rather than carrying out a casuistical classification of actions and circumstances), literary and art criticism (which in the nineteenth century treated the work less and less as an object of taste that had to be judged, and more and more as a language that had to be interpreted and in which the author's tricks of expression had to be recognised).
>
> (Foucault [1969] 2002:46)

The knowledge that members of a discipline have of the discourse of that discipline provides them with the power to classify individuals and thus allows them power over those individuals who lack this knowledge. In other words, those who have power create discourses and knowledge about these discourses. In turn, the application of this knowledge reinforces the power that created the discourses. These institutions formalise power; beaurocracy makes power abstract because it is not attached to an individual.

In the same way that institutions classify individuals, they also classify things and produce meaning. In terms of the production of meaning, power resides with those producing cultural artefacts – those who control culture are those who produce cultural artefacts. Literature can be described as a cultural artefact and within this framework and, as I discuss in Chapter Three of this study, the genre of detective fiction is encouraged to conform to the rigid formula

that dominant cultural conventions define and classify as detective fiction. In the cases where texts reflect the dominant discourses, the

> texts forcefully manipulate readers into espousing socially acceptable ideas about who and what they individually are by offering specific positions or points of view from which fictional events are perceived and understood and then encouraging readers to occupy those positions themselves.
>
> (Nodelman 1994:176)

The writing of Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie presents specific social conventions and points of view, particularly those of early twentieth century Britain, and it is from this viewpoint that readers experience their texts. Nodelman ascertains that "texts that encourage agreement [with mainstream ideas on freedom and individuality] are themselves manipulative and therefore strangely repressive of readers' individual freedom" (1994:175). This "fosters an illusion that readers are in control of the text whereas they are highly susceptible to the ideologies of the text" (Nodelman 1994:176).

According to Nodelman, those who object to a "politically correct" approach are convinced that their "universal truth" reality, as they view it themselves, is that reality "as it has been traditionally understood and described by white upper-class and middle-class males of European extraction and their female companions" (1994:173). According to such individuals, worthwhile literary texts reflect the essence of that one true and universal reality. Much popular culture has been criticised for being "aesthetically inferior to canonical literature" (Thompson 1993:26). Stemming from the above argument, it would stand to reason that dominant discourse, in general, considers popular literature to be inferior – "detective fiction is categorised as belonging to 'low' popular culture" (Smith 2002:23). However, this categorisation of detective fiction is based on the dominant cultural conventions of the time, rather than the quality of the text itself. Williams argues that there is no division between high and low culture, only ways of seeing culture. Thompson remarks that, for Williams, "both

popular and high culture are part of one cultural process that uses similar techniques, forms and ideologies" (1993:28). Regardless of whether the dominant point of view of the time describes detective fiction as low/popular culture or high culture, the mainstream ideas of the dominant population are still reflected in detective fiction.

By classifying or defining an individual or a thing, such as a detective fiction text, the dominant discourse sets parameters that outline the acceptable or expected behaviour and characteristics of an individual or, as in this case, a text.

As I have noted above, the classification of individuals and things informs and defines how people and things are expected to behave. In this regard, Rudd observes that this classification can lead to the development of a reverse discourse: "the process of defining children as incompetent, irresponsible, clumsy or whatever, actually gives the child a warrant to behave in this way, simultaneously empowering the child" (2000:15). In the same way, Christie uses the dominant discourse's classification of elderly spinsters as nosy and gossipy in her character Miss Marple to create a reverse discourse. By classifying Miss Marple as a typical elderly spinster in terms of the dominant discourse, Miss Marple is expected to be nosy and to interfere in her neighbours' affairs. In addition, few members of the community in which Miss Marple functions take her seriously. Hence, they reveal far more information than they would to a typical detective or police officer. So Christie uses people's expectations of how a spinster should behave to empower Miss Marple. Both Blyton and Christie also use society's expectations of how authors of detective fiction and children's literature should behave to create public personae. These personae allowed Blyton and Christie to protect their private lives and to conceal aspects of them that did not conform to the acceptable norm

and this safeguard them from public scrutiny. (I discuss this in more detail in Chapter Two of this study.)

Foucault considers three primary techniques or instruments of control which are used to maintain the status quo of the society in which they operate: hierarchical observation (the connection between visibility and power in which apparatus designed for observation and surveillance induces effects of power); normalising judgement (in which deviant behaviour is judged against society's norms and non-conformity is punished); and examination control (which combines observation and normative judgement). These three techniques of control are germane to the genre of detective fiction. By enforcing the status quo, the detective is using the technique of normalising judgement. In Blyton's fictions for children, "[t]he knowledge gained by being observant is not recommended for its own sake, or for the sake of a deeper understanding of things, but as a technique of social control" (Druce 1992:220). "In their role as vigilantes in a society under attack, Blyton's child heroes and heroines exercise techniques of social surveillance" (Druce 1992:220) and hierarchical observation. In the same way, Miss Marple uses her skill at observing society without being observed (as I discuss in Chapter Four) to solve crimes and thus ensure the restoration of the status quo.

4 HORIZON OF EXPECTATION

The matrix of dominant discourses, the hegemony that operates in a given society, is usually internalised by individual members of that society and in turn this shapes their world view. This is referred to as the individual's horizon of expectation – as translated from the German term *erwartungshorizont*, formulated by Hans-Robert Jauss. Hans-Georg Gadamer refers to the horizon as "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (1975:269).

The horizon of expectation influences an individual's reactions, responses, behaviour and perspectives, and is circumscribed by the dominant discourses that surround the individual. Each individual is a product of his or her environment, which is shaped by the dominant discourses. However, an individual's horizon of expectation is not only informed by the dominant discourses of the society in which that individual operates, the foundation on which his or her cultural reference points are based, but is also influenced by the emergent, oppositional, and alternative discourses – sites which may challenge the dominant discourse – to which he or she is exposed. The society in which Blyton and Christie lived and wrote regarded women, largely, as marginal figures. However emergent discourses at the time increasingly advocated women's rights and promoted gender equality. These fluctuating discourses are reflected in Blyton *Famous Five* series in which Anne conforms to the dominant expectations of the time, while George's tomboy behaviour and independence challenges these expectations. (I discuss the portrayal of gender roles in the writing of Blyton and Christie in relation to the dominant and emergent discourses of the time in more detail in Chapter Four of this study.) Similarly, the English middle class generally marginalised foreigners; by creating Poirot as a typical eccentric foreigner Christie conforms to these

expectations. However, by having him solve crimes committed by his 'English superiors' she subverts the dominant discourse and places Poirot in a dominant position. (In this study, I examine, in Chapter Five, the portrayal of foreigners and individuals of different classes and races in the writing of Blyton and Christie.) In addition, an individual's prejudices (as embodied in discourses) form a horizon "over which [he or she] cannot see" (Holub 1984:42). Hence, an individual's horizon of expectations informs the individual's world view; it is "a 'system of references' or a mind-set that a hypothetical individual might bring to any text" (Holub 1984:59). The horizon is the historical, psychological and cultural assumptions and conventions that are imbedded in the reader, the writer and the text. Since each individual's world view and system of references are different, the horizons of reader and writer will also differ. The reader's horizon influences the way a reader interprets a text, while the writer's horizon influences what the writer includes in the text, and the way the writer portrays events and the behaviour of characters in the text. In every reading the reader brings a set of expectations to the text that will either be or not be met. This includes the expectation related to the formula of the text, especially in the case of detective fiction, as well as the expectation concerning the behaviour of the characters. Bargainnier emphasises that detective fiction has a "rigid" formula with a "prescribed" (1980:5) pattern – a linear plot structure with a clear beginning, middle and end. In detective fiction the reader expects a crime to take place at the beginning of the text, the investigation to take place in the middle, and the detective to reach a solution and restore order and, therefore, the status quo, at the conclusion. (In Chapter Three of this study I discuss the application of formula writing to detective fiction and some of the conventions of the genre in more detail.)

"Readers of detective novels… not only [recognise] the formula on which fictions were built, they also [expect] it" (Klein 1995:4). For example, the detective might have a number of

eccentricities and idiosyncrasies, like Hercule Poirot, and the detective's sidekick will be a trustworthy character, like Arthur Hastings. In much literature written in the early twentieth century, the social context and expectations of society at the time are reflected: the girls and women are expected to be submissive and obedient towards men; children are expected to be seen and not heard, respectful of their elders at all times; and minorities (blacks, Indians, foreigners, etc.) are expected to be inferior and even less intelligent than white middle-class individuals. In *A Murder is Announced* Christie portrays the widespread expectations at the time of her writing concerning the behaviour of foreigners in her portrayal of the stereotyped foreign maid, Mitzi:

> Through the door there surged a tempestuous young woman with a well-developed bosom heaving under a tight jersey. She had on a dirndl skirt of a bright colour and had greasy dark plaits wound round and round her head. Her eyes were dark and flashing.
>
> (Christie [1950] 1979:21)

The portrayal of Mitzi is in direct contrast with Dorcas, who fulfils the readers' expectations of the ideal English maid in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*:

> 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)

Blyton conforms to dominant expectations with regard to age and gender. Julian, the eldest male child in the *Famous Five* books naturally takes the role of leader. In *Five Go Adventuring Again* Anne suggests that the children ask Mr Roland to assist them in deciphering the map, but Julian tells her: "You leave that to me to decide" (Blyton [1943] 1967:50). (I explore the social expectations of society with particular reference to gender, race, class and ethnicity in more detail in Chapters Four and Five of this study.)

A wide range of factors can affect readers' horizons of expectations. The discourses and hegemonic structures of the society in which a reader lives is one factor. Another factor is life experience. The child's horizon can be expected to be more limited than that of an adult because of their relatively limited life experience. Of use, here, is Hunt's reference to the reader's "background and purpose" (Hunt 1991:46); "adult readers can never share the same background (in terms of reading and life experience) as children" (Hunt 1991:46).

Holub refers to the term 'horizon' as "our situatedness in the world, but it should not be thought of in terms of a fixed or closed standpoint" (1984:42), because, like discourses and hegemony, an individual's horizon of expectation is in a constant state of flux. It changes and adapts; it "is not a rigid frontier, but something that moves with one and invites one to advance further" (Gadamer 1975:217). As mentioned earlier, it is influenced by the discourses to which an individual is exposed. A reader constantly revises his or her expectations in the same way that discourses and hegemony are constantly changing. These changing discourses, and the different factors that shape an individual's horizon of expectation, affect the way in which a text is read and this results in a different reception of the text by each reader, and, furthermore, at each time of her or his re-reading of a particular text. In addition, this also differs every time the text is read by a different reader, particularly at a different time. This is significant in any examination of the reception and criticism of texts over time, in particular those by Enid Blyton. In the early twentieth century Blyton was revered as an authority on education and highly respected as a writer for children. However, towards the end of the twentieth century she was severely criticised for including poor language, and for her depiction of racism and gender stereotypes. Here we see how perceptions of Blyton changed over time and this, of course, validates the idea that texts should be considered in terms of the context in which they are both written and read.

While an awareness of Blyton and Christie's horizons of expectation informs a reader's understanding of the reflection of discourses in the text, the relevance of the reader's horizon of expectation can be examined in relation to reader response and reception theory. Reader response theory advocates the idea that a text should be considered in terms of three areas: first, the production of the text and the discourses surrounding the writer; second, the content and the discourses portrayed in the text; and last, the reception of the text by a reader and the context in which the text is read.

> The relationship of literature and reader has aesthetic as well as historical implications. The aesthetic implication lies in the fact that the first reception of a work by the reader includes a test of its aesthetic value in comparison with works already read. The obvious historical implication of this is that the understanding of the first reader will be sustained and enriched in a chain of receptions from generation to generation; in this way the historical significance of a work will be decided and its aesthetic value made evident.
>
> (Jauss 1982:20)

According to Holub,

> the text that we read is never separable from its history of reception. The horizon in which it first appeared is both different from our own and a part of our own in that it is temporally distant from, yet constitutive of the present horizon.
>
> (1984:148-149)

Reader response theories consider the reader's experience of a literary work. Jauss emphasises that the reader does not play a "passive" role, and that the "historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its addressees" (Jauss 1982:19). The reader actively participates in the experience of the text and completes the meaning of the text through her or his interpretation. "[T]he reader is an active maker of meaning" and texts contain "'gaps' that readers must themselves fill" (Rudd 2000:10). Hence, each reader creates a unique interpretation which is shaped and moulded by her or his own horizon of expectation and life experiences: meaning is created in the relationship between the individual reader and the text. In *Truth and Method* Gadamer stresses that

[to] try to eliminate one's own concepts in interpretation is not only impossible, but manifestly absurd. To interpret means precisely to use one's own preconceptions so that the meaning of the text can really be made to speak for us.

(1975:358)

Gadamer goes on to say that there cannot "be any one interpretation that is correct 'in itself'" because every interpretation "has to adapt itself to the hermeneutical situation to which it belongs" (1975:358).

A horizon of expectation can be both individual and shared; while an individual has a unique personal horizon that is shaped by her or his own personal experiences, a group may have a common understanding of things formed by common experiences. Individuals within a specific society share a common understanding of acceptable ideas, attitudes, beliefs and practices that define socially acceptable behaviour and opinions. This common understanding in turn reinforces the development of a consensus culture which helps to maintain the status quo in favour of the dominant group as individuals assimilate the values and practices of this dominant group as part of the shared horizon of expectation.

5 **POWER RELATIONS**

> Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.
>
> Michel Foucault *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*

"In conveying knowledge, discourses simultaneously embody power and, thereby, a set of social relations" (Rudd 2000:11). Social relations are dictated by the dominant discourses and the hegemonic structures of the society and they define how individuals are expected to behave and interact with each other; "[p]ower relations are embedded in social life" (Smart 2002:xiv). However, power differences and relations change in different situations and depend on how individuals choose to behave. According to Foucault,

> [r]elations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are imminent in the latter; they are the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibriums which occur in the latter, and conversely they are the internal conditions of these differentiations; relations of power are not in superstructural positions, with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment; they have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play.
>
> ([1976] 1978: 94)

Dominant discourses about issues such as gender, race, nationality, class and age often manifest in asymmetrical power relations between and among members of the society in which these discourses operate. Asymmetrical power relations result in situations in which one individual is dominated or oppressed by another. There are a number of similarities in the asymmetrical power relations that have dominated and continue to dominate society – in particular these can be seen in the treatment of those individuals considered to be 'other' in terms of the dominant discourses and related hegemony. These include the relationships between adults and children, "children, like women, have been silenced" (Hunt & Sands 2000:41), men and women, between white people and those of 'colour' (of African, Asian,

Aboriginal and Native American descent), and between heterosexual and homosexual people. However, "where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault [1976] 1978:95), and, as I mentioned earlier in this study, resistance of (and to) the current status quo can lead to the development of alternative and oppositional discourses. Some of the power relations examined in this study are asymmetrical. Hence, I discuss, in this thesis, the manner in which Blyton and Christie reflect dominant asymmetrical power relations in their writing, as well as their reflection of alternatives to these power relations.

In an examination of power relations in society it is useful to consider Foucault's theories on power. Foucault's term 'pouvoir' is usually translated into English simply as 'power'. However, this translation is rather limited, since the French definition includes the concept of ability and capacity: "[t]o be able… to have power; to be allowed… to be possible" (Girard 1962:585). This is significant because Foucault does not refer to a power that is always repressive, oppressive, and/or a form of domination.

> For Foucault 'power' is very different from traditional socio-political conceptions of it. Discourse is not a mere effect or end-product of pre-existing Power (with a capital 'P'). Nor is power 'owned' by some privileged person or group and exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who 'do not have it'.
>
> (McHoul & Grace 1993:39)

For Foucault, "power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" ([1976]1978:93). Hence,

> [d]iscourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power, it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it.
>
> (Foucault [1976]1978:100-101)

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The notion that power is not always oppressive, conscious or intentional is also evident in Gramsci's theory that people allow themselves to be controlled; that the exercise of power creates common sense values and a consensus culture, in which the dominant ideology is practised and spread and in which dominant groups strive to secure the consent of subordinate groups to their leadership.

> Dominant groups in society, including fundamentally but not exclusively the ruling class, maintain their dominance by securing the "spontaneous consent" of subordinate groups, including the working class, through the negotiated construction of political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups.
>
> (Strinati 1995:165)

5.1 <u>Objectification of the subject</u>

Foucault explains that his objective is to "create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects. [His work deals] with three modes of objectification that transform human beings into subjects" (2000:326). Foucault's discussions on the three modes of objectification of the subject are also relevant to my examination of power relations in detective fiction, especially in relation to the influence of the dominant discourses and related hegemonic practices on individuals, their behaviour and their social relations. "The first is the modes of inquiry that try to give themselves the status of sciences… in this first mode, the objectivizing of the productive subject, the subject who labours… [or] the objectivizing of the sheer fact of being alive in natural history or biology" (Foucault 2000:326). The second mode Foucault calls dividing practices. "The subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others. This process objectivizes him. Examples are the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the 'good boys'" (Foucault 2000:326). Dividing practices promote the spatial and social exclusion of individuals; the segregation and isolation of certain groups of people such as the elderly, children, lepers and the insane. The "aim of all these institutions – factories, schools, psychiatric hospitals, hospitals, prisons – is

not to exclude but rather to attach individuals" (Foucault 2000:78); however, dividing practices are applied to isolate individuals who do not conform to the norm. Another example is the separate development in South Africa during the Apartheid era with the formalisation of townships where people of colour were forced to live. This mode of objectification can also refer to the isolation of women, children and the elderly in society. The third mode, subjectification, is concerned with "the way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject" (Foucault 2000:327). Individuals achieve a sense of themselves as subjects. They internalise norms as defined by the dominant discourse and, as a result, they monitor their own behaviour and actions in an effort to conform to the status quo. This effort by individuals to act 'normally', to try to control themselves, is referred to as normalising behaviour and is related to that concept of a consensus culture that I have discussed earlier in this chapter. Individuals internalise the dominant discourse and regulate their behaviour accordingly: individuals are controlled as objects and as subjects. As a result of this internalisation of the dominant discourses, it stands to reason that these influence and shape an individual's horizon of expectation. Individuals strive to fit into the moulds described by dominant social, political, and scientific discourses, among others, and consequently institutions focus on what Foucault calls the normalisation of individuals.

> Foucault also has an interest in examining the methods, practices and techniques by which official discourses go about this process of normalization and, in the process, occlude forms of knowledge which are different from them, by dividing the normal person from the pathological specimen, the good citizen from the delinquent, and so on.
>
> (McHoul & Grace 1993:17)

5.2 <u>Knowledge-Power</u>

Knowledge works as an instrument of normalisation, as a form of power used to enable administrative control of the population. It manoeuvres populations "into 'correct' and 'functional' forms of thinking and acting" (McHoul & Grace 1993:17).

Social knowledge is an individual's knowledge of the acceptable conventions of behaviour within a given society. These conventions are guided and determined by the dominant discourses and hegemonic structures and practices of the society in which they operate. As I have already pointed out, social knowledge guides 'acceptable' behaviour in terms of what the dominant discourse refers to as acceptable such as, for example, the treatment of women, children, foreigners and members of different races. A violation of the law would contravene these particular dominant discourses, leading to social knowledge that ensures individual conformity. Individuals will continue to monitor themselves if they believe that they are being monitored – even if they are not. This is why criminals, real and fictional, will almost always try to conceal their crimes.

Knowledge and power do not necessarily function in a hierarchical relationship. In relation to the subjectification of individuals, as discussed earlier in this chapter under the third mode of objectification, those with knowledge may use their knowledge to restrict and control their own behaviour. Self-knowledge leads to self-regulation – an individual's knowledge of his or her own characteristics which separate him or her from the norm may result in self-regulation in order for the individual to conform to the norm. Foucault calls self-regulation – the tendency of people to monitor and regulate their own behaviour without the show of force – "bio-power" (Foucault, in Rudd 2000:14). This bio-power is moulded by disciplinary institutions and structures which encourage people to conform to the norm and maintain the status quo. Anything that differs from the norm is considered abnormal (Fillingham 1993:15), or 'other'. Institutions such as schools, churches and prisons encourage individuals to exercise bio-power.

The relationship between power and knowledge is portrayed in the relationship between the detective and the perpetrator in detective fiction. The relationship between power and knowledge can be examined in detective fiction because the perpetrator's knowledge (of having committed the crime) gives him or her power over the detective who initially does not have this knowledge. As the plot progresses the detective gains knowledge of the details of the crime and ultimately gains power over the perpetrator. According to John Thompson, for writers of detective fiction like Edgar Allan Poe and many of his Victorian successors, knowledge "is gained when observation is combined with intuition or deductive forms of reasoning" (1993:45).

6 <u>CONCLUSION</u>

An awareness of the dominant discourses of the society in which Blyton and Christie lived and wrote and how hegemony and its practices operated is essential for the purposes of this study. Dominant discourses around sex, gender, race, class, age, nationality, the treatment of foreigners, and so on, of the time in which Blyton and Christie lived and wrote, informed their horizon of expectation and are reflected in their writing. Furthermore, emergent, oppositional and alternative discourses are also echoed in their writing. In Chapter Two of this study I contextualise the lives and times of Christie and Blyton and examine some of the dominant viewpoints that may have shaped their world views as they lived and wrote, thus influencing them and their writing. In Chapter Three I examine the conventions and definitions of detective fiction at Christie and Blyton's time of writing, and I look at how these women reinforce and/or subvert these conventions. I go on to consider power relations in a social context and their portrayal in Blyton and Christie's writing. In Chapter Four I specifically examine the representation of gender relations. I discuss the manifestation of power relations between and among individuals of different racial groups, classes and nationalities in Chapter Five.

As Perry Nodelman points out in his examination of *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* by John Stephens, "[no] human being is or ever was separate from the ideology of a specific time and place and culture" (1994:173). Hence, one cannot overlook the fact that Blyton and Christie were influenced by the discourses of the time in which they lived and wrote, as well as the time during which they grew up. It is important to take into consideration the historical, social and theoretical context of the text because discourses and contemporary values and ideologies surrounding the writing are embedded in the texts. According to Rudd,

authors are far less in control of their material than previous ideas suggest; that any text is, in fact, a reworking of others, both literary and oral: snatches of conversation, idiomatic expressions, current news, personal experiences, and so forth.

(2000:66)

Therefore, in this study, I investigate how Blyton and Christie include emergent, oppositional and alternative discourses in their writing while at the same time portray the dominant discourses of their society and time. I further examine the manifestation of power relations in the writing of these two women and the reflection of dominant as well as of alternative and oppositional discourses in these power relations.