DETECTING DOMINANT DISCOURSES IN SELECTED DETECTIVE FICTION BY ENID BLYTON AND AGATHA CHRISTIE

by

Liesel Coetzee

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor Litterarum

University of Pretoria

Pretoria

2010

© University of Pretoria

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own original work. Where secondary sources are used due acknowledgement is given and reference made according to departmental requirements.

This thesis is submitted to the University of Pretoria in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Doctor Litterarum. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or for examination to any other university.

____

Liesel Coetzee

DEDICATION

Gerhard, you have made all the difference in my life. Every day, I love you more.

Mom and Dad, you have always been there for me. Thank you for all your love, patience and encouragement.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my supervisor, Ann Smith, I am sincerely grateful to you for your unwavering guidance and understanding. Your support throughout this journey has made it an enjoyable experience filled with learning and growth. Thank you.

ABSTRACT

Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie were the most successful British women writers of their time. Christie and Blyton were contemporaries, living and writing in the United Kingdom during the first half of the twentieth century. This study takes into consideration these similarities in its examination of the depiction of dominant discourses in relation to emergent, alternative and oppositional discourses in their writing. This thesis suggests that while Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie offer alternatives to the dominant patriarchal discourses of the British Empire in the first half of the twentieth century, they show allegiance, too, to the dominant discourses of their time. Specific consideration is given to the portrayal of discourses concerned with gender, feminism, classism, British colonialism, racism, and xenophobia in their writing.

The work of Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie was extremely popular in their time and still is today. Their important contribution to popular literature in England in the early twentieth century justifies a study of a selection of their work in relation to detective fiction and children's literature as well as to studies of social history that include the investigation of how dominant discourse is both endorsed and challenged.

KEY WORDS

Agatha Christie

Enid Blyton

Detective Fiction

Children's Literature

Discourse

Horizon of expectation

Hegemony

Michel Foucault

Raymond Williams

Antonio Gramsci

Hans-Georg Gadamer

Hans Jauss

Gender

Race

Class

Nationality

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abstract	v
Key Words	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter One **Of power: discourses, hegemony and horizons of expectation**	8
Chapter Two **The production of a text: the life and times of Blyton and Christie**	37
Chapter Three **Detective fiction: definitions, conventions and formulae**	69
Chapter Four **Gender constructs: the portrayal of gender roles in the writing of Blyton and Christie**	106
Chapter Five **Classism, ethnocentrism, xenophobia and racism: the portrayal of social constructs in the writing of Blyton and Christie**	164
Conclusion	211
Bibliography	220

INTRODUCTION

Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie were the most successful British women writers of their time. Their success in terms of income, as well as their enduring popularity and the fact that they remain household names today, is indicative of the vast popularity[1] and success of these two women. It is difficult to overlook the important contribution of their writing to the body of fiction produced in England in the early twentieth century, as well as to the greater body of popular literature. Both Christie and Blyton are listed in the top ten authors of a

> UNESCO publication, the Index Translationum, [which] includes a "hit parade" of the world's most translated authors for 1985-1995. Agatha Christie tops Walt Disney, the Bible, Lenin, Jules Verne, Barbara Cartland, Enid Blyton, Hans Christian Andersen, the Brothers Grimm, William Shakespeare, Isaac Asimov, Georges Simenon, Alexandre Dumas (the elder), Jack London, Arthur Conan Doyle.
>
> (UNESCO)

Although the writing of Blyton and Christie differs in a number of respects – in particular that Christie wrote for adults and Blyton for children – there are also marked similarities in their work. This is hardly surprising since these women were contemporaries. Agatha Christie was born in 1890, and Enid Blyton was born seven years later in 1897. The conservative Victorian[2] and Edwardian[3] environment in which they were raised would definitely have shaped their horizons of expectation. Their upbringing would have been characterised by a conservative and rigid class system, economic growth and industrialisation, as well as emergent social changes and an increased interest in socialism, the plight of the poor, and women's issues would also have influenced their frame of reference.

[1] While I made every effort to consult a wide range of resources – the most recent research available, the Internet, bookstores and various media sources – I came to realise that like all authors the work on Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie is affected by academic and popular trends. Indeed, one of the reasons behind my choice of this topic was the dearth of material on these writers, particularly in relation to each other.

[2] The Victorian Era is the period of Queen Victoria's reign in the United Kingdom, from 1837 until 1901.

[3] The Edwardian Era followed: King Edward VII reigned from 1901 until 1910.

Both Christie and Blyton began writing at a young age and while their first literary attempts were rejected, both women persisted. Blyton had a poem accepted for publication by *Nash's Magazine* in 1917 while Christie's first novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles,* was published in 1920. Success spurred them on and they continued to write. Both Blyton and Christie lived through the First and Second World Wars and the influence of this political landscape on the dominant discourses in England to which Blyton and Christie were exposed cannot be overlooked. These influences included the imperialist attitudes and the colonialism that both promoted and resulted from the dominance of the British Empire.

Blyton and Christie were both shaped by the same dominant patriarchal discourses, and exposed to similar emergent and alternative discourses. Both women divorced their first husbands at a time when divorce was not considered acceptable, and both remarried. Both Blyton and Christie were independent women of independent means at a time when men were considered to be the breadwinners of the family. Moreover, they both wrote detective stories in the years between 1913 and 1936 which would later become known as the Golden Age of Detective Fiction. In addition, they fit well within the context of popular literature and, therefore, to a great extent, popular culture. Enid Blyton "is a cultural reference point" (Rudd 2000: 37) while Agatha Christie "is part of a British cultural consciousness: everybody 'knows' something called an 'Agatha Christie'" (Plain 2001: 24). However, the commonalities between Blyton and Christie have received very little critical attention. In this study I take into consideration these similarities in an examination of the influence of discourses in their development of characterisation and their use of setting in their writing.

The writing of Blyton and Christie is examined and compared within the context of the time in which they wrote in terms of the differing degrees to which they show allegiance to, and

counter, the dominant patriarchal discourses of the British Empire in relation to gender, race, class, nationality, religion and ethnicity in the first half of the twentieth century. This study will link the theoretical framework to the biographical context of the life and times of these two writers.

Research question

In this study I seek to investigate how Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie include emergent, oppositional and alternative discourses in their writing while at the same time portraying the dominant discourses of the society in which they lived and wrote. I examine the contradictory portrayal of discourses of the time in the writing of Blyton and Christie, in particular discourses surrounding gender, race, class, nationality, religion and ethnicity. Given that detective fiction is the medium of this portrayal I examine, too, the discourses that informed this genre during the Golden Age.

Selection of texts

Christie is one of the most successful writers of all time. Over two billion copies of Agatha Christie's books have been sold worldwide and her fiction "has been translated into over 45 languages…. Agatha Christie wrote eighty novels and short story collections. She also wrote over a dozen plays" (http://www.agathachristie.com/about-christie/) as well as six romance novels under the pen name Mary Westmacott and is described by Bargainnier as "the most popular writer of the twentieth century" (1980:1). Bargainnier goes on to comment that the "very fact of that popularity, as well as critical disdain for the genre in which she wrote, has prevented her work from receiving much serious attention" (1980:1). Like Christie, Rudd remarks that "it needs to be asked, [why] has there been so little serious attention given to Blyton, the all-time bestselling children's author" (2000:1-2). According to Watson, Blyton is

"arguably the best-selling children's writer of all time" (2001:91).[4] Blyton wrote over 800 books in her lifetime.

Since Blyton and Christie were such prolific authors it is necessary to limit the number of texts I consider in this study. Close examination of Blyton's texts is limited to the *Famous Five* series, in particular the first six books[5] in the series of 21 because, according to Rudd (2000: 112), Blyton initially intended to only write six books in the series. However, I also refer to a number of other books in the *Famous Five* series, as well as to some of Blyton's other works. My reason for choosing the *Famous Five* books lies in the fact that this series is one of Blyton's most popular and best-known series. The manner in which Blyton has a group of children solve a crime or mystery is considered to fall within the contemporary definition of detective fiction and is juxtaposed against the role of the individual detective in detective fiction for adults. The characterisation of George in the *Famous Five* books, in particular, provides scope for the consideration of the portrayal of gender roles in Blyton's writing. Furthermore, the relationship between and among the children and foreigners as well as people of different classes and races is considered.

While I make reference to several of Agatha Christie's novels and a number of her short stories, I consider four texts closely in this study. Christie's first detective novel to be published, and the first novel to feature the detective Hercule Poirot, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, is examined. I also examine another novel featuring Poirot, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. These texts provide an opportunity for me to consider Christie's manipulation of the

[4] Watson's description of Blyton as the "best-selling children's writer of all time" was made prior to the success of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter phenomenon and the publication of Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Saga.

[5] The following are the first six titles in Blyton's *Famous Five* series: *Five on a Treasure Island; Five Go Adventuring Again; Five Run Away Together; Five Go to Smuggler's Top; Five Go off in a Caravan;* and *Five on Kirrin Island Again.*

traditional formula of the detective novel, with particular reference to her use of the detective's sidekick and her use of the narrator. Poirot's nationality also provides me with an opportunity to contemplate Christie's representation of foreigners, and to explore, further, her treatment of race and class. The first Miss Marple novel published by Christie, *Murder at the Vicarage*, and *A Murder is Announced* are the two Miss Marple novels I examine closely in the study. In particular, these texts allow me a close reading of Christie's portrayal of gender roles in society. In addition, the choice of texts covers a period from 1920 to 1950 and allows for an examination of the overlapping, at times, of discourses in Christie's writing as well as her sometimes monolithic use of dominant discourse.

Summary of chapters

In the first chapter of this study I provide the theoretical framework. I explain the concepts of 'discourse', 'hegemony' and 'horizon of expectation' as used in the study in terms of how they relate to each other, and their relevance to this study. In this framework I refer to the work of Michel Foucault, Raymond Williams and Antonio Gramsci, as well as Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Hans Jauss. Dominant discourses on gender, race, class, nationality, religion and ethnicity most often manifest in asymmetrical power relations between individuals in which one individual is dominated or oppressed by the other. I reflect on the portrayal of power relations and the way in which traditional, stereotypical power relations are both echoed and opposed in detective fiction by Blyton and Christie. This chapter provides the theoretical foundation upon which this portrayal of discourses is examined in this study.

Before offering a detailed examination of Blyton and Christie's writing, it is necessary for me to contextualise these writers in relation to the period in which they lived and wrote, and the influences of this society on them so as to examine how they both subvert and reflect the

body of beliefs and systems of control of their time in their writing. 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 to my purpose. Dominant discourses concerning, among other issues, sex, gender, race, class, nationality, and the treatment of foreigners of the time informed their horizons of expectation and are reflected in their writing. Furthermore, emergent, oppositional and alternative discourses are also echoed in their novels and stories. 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. The purpose of this chapter is not to provide a comprehensive history of the early twentieth century, or a detailed biography of Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie. Rather, it will provide an overview of some of the opinions and perspectives of the early twentieth century to which Blyton and Christie were likely to have been exposed, and will offer some insight into Blyton and Christie's own lives in relation to these viewpoints.

The decision to consider selected writing by Blyton and Christie necessitates clarification of what I consider, for the purposes of this study, to be detective fiction. It is necessary to take into consideration contemporaneous definitions of detective fiction since these definitions would have shaped the horizons of expectation of Blyton and Christie, as well as those of contemporary readers. In Chapter Three of this study I examine the conventions and definitions of detective fiction at the time of writing. I also offer a brief survey of Golden Age detective fiction to provide an overview of the definitions and conventions of detective fiction within which Christie and Blyton were working, and to make available a platform from which to indicate how Blyton and Christie reinforce and subvert these conventions.

In Chapter Four I specifically examine the representation of gender relations in the writing of Agatha Christie and Enid Blyton. Both Christie and Blyton wrote and published fiction in a society dominated by patriarchal heteronormative discourses in which gender stereotyping defined the role and acceptable social and cultural behaviour of women. In this chapter I explore the complex relationship of Blyton and Christie to the dominant heteronormative discourse of their time. Blyton and Christie appear to both endorse and reinforce some of the dominant discourses of the time, while simultaneously offering opposition to these discourses and presenting alternative discourses. In the chapter I discuss this contradiction and the difficulty of establishing with certainty how Blyton and Christie reacted to the social expectations relative to the appropriate gender roles of the time.

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 and, in turn, reflects the manifestation of asymmetrical power relations between dominant and marginalised groups. I examine the manifestation of power relations between and among individuals of different racial groups, classes and nationalities in Chapter Five. I discuss widespread social changes in Britain in the early twentieth century in relation to the dominant shared beliefs and practices of the white English-speaking middle class. While Blyton and Christie portray the intolerant attitudes and prejudices of their time in their writing, they also offer alternatives to this pervasive point of view. Hence, in this chapter I consider the difficulty of determining whether Blyton and Christie endorse and reinforce this dominant discourse that discriminates against individuals who are of a different race, class, nationality, religion and ethnicity, or whether they challenge this discourse by exposing stereotypes and, in turn, offer alternative ways of thinking and being.

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

[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 HEGEMONY

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

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.
>
> ([1980] 2005:38)

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

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,

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)

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 Knowledge-Power

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 CONCLUSION

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.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PRODUCTION OF A TEXT: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF BLYTON AND CHRISTIE

1 INTRODUCTION

As I have already indicated, I believe that a text cannot be examined in isolation; the social, political and economic principles and opinions that influence the production of a text must be considered in relation to two perspectives. We have to consider, first, the narrow context of the author's own horizon of expectation and the potential influences of the individual author's life experiences on the text, and, second, the broader context of the time in which the text was written and the dominant body of beliefs of the society at that time.

Therefore, before offering a detailed examination of Blyton and Christie's writing, it is necessary for me to contextualise these writers in relation to the period in which they lived and wrote, and the influences of this society on them so as to examine how they both subvert and reflect the body of beliefs and systems of control of their time in their writing. In the first half of the twentieth century, when Blyton and Christie first became established as authors, many changes were beginning to take place in Britain, and the rest of the world, and new systems of thought gathered momentum as emergent discourses. These changes included economic and social changes in relation to both gender and class, and represented the effects of the continued influence of the industrial revolution on all aspects of life. It is important to bear in mind that no one is a true product of one particular discourse. As I pointed out in Chapter One of this study, systems of thought are constantly fluctuating and individuals are influenced simultaneously by a number of emergent and dominant discourses.

The purpose of this chapter is not to provide a comprehensive history of the early twentieth century, or a detailed biography of Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie. Rather, since this study discusses the social, political and economic environment that affected Blyton and Christie, and the acceptance or rejection of these systems of thought in their writing, this chapter will provide an overview of some of the opinions and perspectives of the early twentieth century to which these writers were likely to have been exposed, and will offer some insight into Blyton and Christie's own lives in relation to these viewpoints, taking into consideration the creation of a public persona by both women.

2 BLYTON AND CHRISTIE: A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

2.1 Growing up

Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller, the youngest of three children, was born on 15 September 1890 at Ashfield, in Torquay, Devon, to an American-born father, Frederick Miller, and a British mother, Clarissa (known as Clara). In the same year, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle published his second detective fiction novel featuring Sherlock Holmes *The Sign of Four* an indication of the growing popularity of detective fiction in the years around the turn of the century and a possible portent of things to come. Seven years later, on 11 August 1897 Enid Mary Blyton, the eldest of three children, was born at Lordship Lane, East Dulwich, London, to Theresa and Thomas Carey Blyton. Christie was born at Ashfield – her childhood home, "a large comfortable villa in two acres of grounds" (Wagstaff & Poole 2006:8) – and Blyton was born in a small flat above a shop; Christie's father was a gentleman of leisure while Blyton's father worked first as a cutlery salesman and then at a clothing warehouse. While both Blyton and Christie could be considered middle class, it is evident from their circumstances that Christie would have been considered upper middle class. However, regardless of this class status, life was not always easy for young Agatha Christie: her father squandered his inheritance and the family suffered a number of financial difficulties.

In her autobiography Christie describes her childhood as "very happy" (Christie 1993:13) and, according to Laura Thompson, she had a "sense that her parents' marriage was serene and stable" (2007:14). While she loved her father very much, Christie had a very close relationship with her mother; according to Rowland, "Christie adored her mother" (2001:6). This idea is reiterated by Thompson who claims that Clara's "influence upon Agatha – both by omission and involvement – was almost absolute…. She was also, probably, the love of Agatha's life"

(2007:8). Christie's close relationship with her mother may have been reinforced by the death of her father when she was 11, leaving her and her mother at home with just each other for company; following Frederick's death "Clara depended largely on Agatha for companionship and amusement" (Morgan 1985:35). "Agatha spent much of her early childhood without the companionship or competition of other children" (Morgan 1985:23) – she was 11 years younger than her sister, Madge, and 10 years younger than her brother, Monty. Being so much younger than her brother and sister meant that Christie was much more like an only child, one who was often left to entertain herself. When Christie was growing up, "if there was no one whose business it was to play with children then the child had to play by itself" (Christie 1993:59).

In contrast to Christie, Blyton and her mother had a very difficult relationship. Blyton was very close to her father, and he encouraged her love of reading and her interest in the arts, and in nature, and taught her to play the piano. But what is most interesting here is her father's influence in relation to the significance of nature and the importance of animals. We can see evidence of this influence in her writing in the important roles played by animals, in particular that of Timothy, or as he is sometimes called Timmy, the dog, known as the fifth member of the *Famous Five*. In *Five Go to Smuggler's Top* George is told that she may not take Timothy with her to Smuggler's Top, but she disobeys her parents and has the driver stop *en route* to pick up Timmy so that he can go with her. For Blyton, possibly as a result of her father's love of animals and her close relationship with him, the love of animals is important and she justifies George's disobedience when she has the other children show their support for George.

> "Well," said the driver, doubtfully, "I don't know if you're supposed to take that dog in, Miss. Your father didn't say anything about him."

> "It's all right," said George, her face red with joy. "Quite all right. You needn't worry. Start the car again, please."
> "You *are* a monkey!" said Julian, half-annoyed with George, and half-pleased because Timmy was with them after all. "Mr. Lenoir may send him back, you know."
> "Well, he'll have to send *me* back too," said George, defiantly. "Anyhow, the main thing is we've got Timmy after all, and I am coming with you."
> "Yes – that's fine," said Anne, and gave first George and then Timmy a hug. "*I* didn't like going without Tim either."
>
> (Blyton [1945] 1967:29)

George and the other children, with the help of Sooty, who lives at Smuggler's Top, smuggle Timothy into Sooty's bedroom via a secret passage and arrange for a place to hide him. George also shows responsibility in terms of caring for Timmy by pointing out that the children "must arrange to feed him and exercise him" (Blyton [1945] 1967:53). Conversely, characters who dislike animals, and those who are cruel towards animals, such as Lou and Tiger Dan in *Five Go off in a Caravan,* are usually revealed to be the villains in Blyton's stories. When they first meet these children Lou tries to kick Timmy (Blyton [1946] 1967: 53), while later in the book they try to poison him;

> "Who threw him the poisoned meat, do you think?" said Anne, in a small voice.
> "Who do you suppose?" said George, in a hard scornful voice. "Lou and Tiger Dan!"
>
> (Blyton [1946] 1967:102)

An exception is Sooty's father Mr Lenoir in *Five Go to Smuggler's Top.* Mr Lenoir does not like dogs and this causes the children to suspect that he might be a villain. However, at the end of the book it is revealed that he is not evil, and he even makes an attempt to be pleasant to Timmy:

> Timmy looked at Mr Lenoir out of his big brown eyes. He trotted straight up to him, and held up his right paw politely to shake hands, as George had taught him.
> Mr Lenoir was rather taken aback. He was not used to good manners in dogs. He couldn't help putting out his hand to Timmy – and the two shook hands in a most friendly manner....
> "Well – he doesn't seem like a *dog*!" said Mr Lenoir, in surprise.
>
> (Blyton [1945] 1967:185-186)

In line with the widespread opinions on appropriate gender behaviour of British society at the turn of the century, Theresa Blyton "believed strongly in the prevailing motto that a woman's place was in the home. Women were to be domesticated, grow up, marry and have children; that was their sanctioned role" (Greenfield 1998:2-3). Blyton's mother "felt it was her duty to bring up her daughter to manage a home and family" (Baverstock 2000:9), hence occupations like reading and going to school were not part of the acceptable activities for a young girl to follow. In addition to training her daughter for what she considered to be the only proper future for a girl – marriage, home and children – Theresa felt that Blyton should help about the house and spend more time learning to cook and sew. However, "Thomas naturally defended his daughter, of whose growing accomplishments he was enormously proud" (Greenfield 1998:3) and aggravated the situation by supporting his daughter's "resistance to Theresa's disciplining" (Stoney 1992:19). The influence of Blyton's relationship with her mother and that of her father in his opposition to her mother can be seen in the stark contrast between her own mother and the mother figures portrayed in her books, as well as in the positive feelings that the children have towards these maternal characters. In *Five Run Away Together* the children are described as being "fond" of their Aunt Fanny and Blyton describes her as "gentle and kind" (Blyton [1944] 1967:11). This sentiment is re-iterated in *Five on Kirrin Island Again:*

> Aunt Fanny was at the station to meet them in the pony-trap. The children flung themselves on her, for they were very fond of her. She was kind and gentle, and did her best to keep her clever, impatient husband from finding too much fault with the children.
>
> (Blyton [1947] 1967:19)

In addition to being described in positive terms, the mother figures portrayed in Blyton's books also always ensure that the children have more than enough to eat.

> "Well, I'll soon get fat at Kirrin Cottage, don't you worry. Aunt Fanny will see to that. She's a great one for trying to fatten people up. It will be nice to see your mother again, George. She's an awfully good sort."
>
> (Blyton [1945] 1967:8)

In *Five Go Adventuring Again* Mrs Saunders, the farmer's wife, offers the children "some new shortbread baked yesterday" (Blyton [1943] 1967:36), while in *Five Go Off in a Caravan* the farmer's wife is

> a fat, round-cheeked woman, whose little curranty eyes twinkled with good humour. She made them very welcome and gave them hot buns from the oven and told them to help themselves to the little purple plums on the tree outside the old farm house.
> (Blyton [1946] 1967:67)

In 1910 Blyton's father left his wife for another woman. Blyton experienced a great sense of rejection; Baverstock claims that she was "shattered to hear that her father had taken someone else into his life" (2000:12). Again, we can see the influence of this emotional response in her writing. For example, the conflict between Blyton's parents contrasts with some of the parental relationships portrayed in her writing. In *Five Go to Smuggler's Top*, for example, Uncle Quentin comforts Aunt Fanny after a tree falls on their house: "[t]hen [Uncle Quentin] calmed down, seeing that Aunt Fanny was really shocked and upset, very near to tears. He put down his cocoa and slipped his arm round her" (Blyton [1945] 1967:19-20). Similarly, in *Five Run Away Together* when Aunt Fanny is taken ill Uncle Quentin shows concern for his sick wife and stays with her at the hospital.

In the early twentieth century, divorced women of the middle classes were often pariahs and Theresa Blyton did not see why she, the 'innocent party' should become a social outcast so she refused to divorce her husband. Nonetheless, while Thomas Blyton "continued to support his family and pay for his children's education" (Greenfield 1998:3) he moved out. In an effort to prevent a scandal, Theresa Blyton did her utmost to keep up appropriate appearances after Blyton was forbidden to discuss the matter of her parent's separation with anyone. Blyton and her mother engaged in subterfuges and made excuses to members of the community in

which they lived, in an attempt to explain Thomas Blyton's absence, thus creating additional stress in the relationship between mother and daughter.

As a child, Agatha Christie had no formal schooling. But she began to learn to read, as do most children, by asking available adults, in her case, her nurse, questions about words she saw written above shops or on signs. The decision not to send her to school was not particularly unusual at the time since the importance of formal education, especially for female children, was not stressed, but it was odd that her older sister was sent to school, and that she did not have a governess (although the Millers' financial difficulties might account for this). According to Thompson, Christie's lack of formal education

> was probably the making of her. Agatha was one of those auto-didacts who go on learning and reading all their lives and whose minds, therefore, develop in the way most suitable to them.
>
> (2007:19-20)

This is evident in the reflection of a number of different areas of expertise in her writing – the most obvious of which are her use of poison as a method for murder (knowledge of which she gained working in a dispensary during the First World War), and her inclusion of archaeological detail and information about the Middle East (of which she learned during her marriage to archaeologist Max Mallowan). These are discussed in more detail later in this chapter. From about the age of 13, Christie attended Miss Guyer's school in Torquay two days a week where she learned some grammar, arithmetic and composition. Thereafter, Christie attended a number of 'finishing' schools in Paris. Unlike Christie, in 1907 Blyton began to attend a local school, St. Christopher's School for Girls in Beckenham, when she was 10 years old.

After school Blyton began to train as a teacher. This is significant when we consider that that she wrote books for children and her training as a teacher is likely to have helped her pursue this career. Blyton claimed that she chose to follow a career in teaching since she wanted to write books for children and "because she believed that this would provide a useful background to her writing" (Ray 1982:11). According to Stoney,

> [q]uite suddenly, she knew what she must do – become a teacher. In that way she could carry on with her writing and if she were with children all day long – something that now appealed to her greatly – she would be able to study them closely and then, perhaps, learn how to write about and for them.
>
> (1992:31)

However, this account is questionable because Blyton did try to write for adults, but all her attempts to do so were rejected, thus she might have claimed to have a desire to write for children to cover her failure as an author of books for adults. Therefore, her statement that she studied teaching with the intention of writing books for children should be considered in relation to Blyton's creation of a persona, which I discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

2.2 Writing as a career

Both Blyton and Christie began writing poetry at a very young age. However, while Christie's family encouraged her to write, Blyton's mother scorned her writing.

Christie's "earliest surviving poem is carefully inscribed in an exercise book and dated April 1901" (Thompson 2007:41) and her first appearance in print was a poem about electric trams published in an Ealing newspaper when she was 11 years of age. Christie was sick in bed with influenza as a young girl when her mother encouraged her to write a book and thus she completed her first novel, *The House of Beauty,* which was never published. However, when Christie mentioned that she would like to try to write a detective novel, her sister was "dismissive" of the idea (Christie 1993:217), but Christie would prove her wrong; during the

First World War Christie worked in a hospital dispensary, and during quiet periods at work she began working on her first detective novel. In her autobiography Christie explains: "[i]t was while I was working in the dispensary that I first conceived the idea of writing a detective story. The idea had remained in my mind since Madge's earlier challenge" (1993:261).

The story would eventually be published as *The Mysterious Affair at Styles.* Christie's first attempts to have this novel published were unsuccessful and it was published only in 1920. According to Binyon, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* was a "landmark";

> Poirot was an original character; the writing has life and sparkle; the narration is short and succinct; and the method of murder – bromide is added to a tonic containing strychnine, thereby precipitating the strychnine and making the last dose fatal – is ingenious.
>
> (1989:34)

During March 1917 Blyton had a poem accepted for publication by *Nash's Magazine* – "the first recorded publication of an Enid Blyton work" (Greenfield 1998:9). Like Christie, many of Blyton's early attempts at writing were rejected, but it "was her determination and driving ability, coupled with the encouragement of her best friend, Mabel Attenborough, that kept her writing" (Greenfield 1998:6). Over time she built a name for herself in the book world, and in "1921 and 1922 some of her short stories and poems appeared in the *Saturday Westminster Review,* the *Bystander,* the *Londoner, Passing Show,* and other magazines of the period" (Greenfield 1998:11). Her first book, a collection of poems called *Child Whispers,* was published in 1922 and her first novel, *The Adventures of the Wishing Chair* was published in 1937. Blyton's first full length adventure story, *The Secret Island*, was published in 1938 and reflects her use of the series, and of formula writing (which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Three of this study).

In October 1912 Agatha met Archibald Christie, a second lieutenant in the Royal Field Artillery and they were married on 24 December 1914. During the First World War Archie Christie went to war as a member of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) while Agatha Christie worked as a volunteer in the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD), first as a nurse and then in the pharmaceutical dispensary. While Christie does not discuss the events of the war directly in her writing, she does mention the effect of the war on ordinary people. In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* Christie has Mrs Inglethorp remind the reader that "…one must set an example of economy. We are quite a war household; nothing is wasted here" (Christie [1920] 1969:13). Christie also comments on the decrease in the number of gardeners: "Only three now, sir. Five, we had, before the war, when it was kept as a gentleman's place should be…. Ah, these are dreadful times!" (Christie [1920] 1969:48), and in *The Murder at the Vicarage* she remarks that "[e]ver since the war there has been a loosening of moral fibre" (Christie [1930] 1972:78).

Christie also used her experiences of life during the First World War to enrich her writing and characters. Like Christie, Cynthia Murdoch in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* is a member of the VAD and works in the local hospital dispensary (Christie [1920] 1969:12-13). In the short story, *The Blue Geranium*, Christie has Miss Marple claim "I have done a little nursing myself" (Christie [1929] 2008:428), while in *The House of Lurking Death* Tuppence Beresford remarks: "I happened to work in a hospital during the War" (Christie [1924] 2008b:121). It was while working in the dispensary that Christie gained a knowledge of poisons which feature in a number of her books and, according to Binyon, her use of poison in her novels is always "technically sound" (1989:34). "The original idea for *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* was a method for murder. It came from Agatha's dispensing work and could not have come to her otherwise, because it entirely depends upon a knowledge of poisons" (Thompson 2007:103).

As Christie remarks, "[s]ince I was surrounded by poisons, perhaps it was natural that death by poisoning should be the method I selected" (Christie 1993:261). Bargainnier reiterates this point and comments that "poison is Christie's favourite weapon for murder" (1980:157).

Christie's detective Hercule Poirot, who first appears in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920), was also conceived as a result of circumstances brought about by the First World War. The character of Poirot, a retired detective from the Belgian Police Force, was inspired by the influx of Belgian refugees into Britain as a result of the war. (I discuss the discourses of the time as they related to xenophobia and the treatment of foreigners in more detail in this study in Chapter Five.) In addition, Captain Hastings, Poirot's sidekick, had been "invalided home from the Front" (Christie [1920] 1969:5), again reflecting the circumstances of the time of writing.

During the First World War Enid Blyton was studying to become a teacher. Her poor relationship with her mother necessitated her leaving home to find a job; at the time teaching and nursing were two of the few options available to women to earn a living. When Blyton left home, in an attempt to prevent the embarrassment associated with having a daughter leave home to follow a career, her mother told people that Blyton had joined the Women's Land Army. Blyton's decision could be described as brave and it definitely ran counter to the norm at the time. Following her qualification as a teacher Blyton began working as a junior teacher at Bickley Park School in 1919, where she taught for a year, before taking up a position as a nursery governess to children. She continued to write while teaching and, after a few years,

> her output of literary work was becoming so prolific that she began to keep an account book. This shows that during 1923 alone, her writing earned her well over £300 – the price of a small suburban house at the time.
>
> (Stoney 1992:50)

During the early twentieth century it was very unusual for a young woman to be earning such a large sum of money so her financial success and the resultant independence was directly opposed to the contemporaneous beliefs and opinions about appropriate behaviour and status for a young woman.

Agatha and Archie Christie had one daughter, Rosalind (born 5 August 1919). However, in contrast to her relationship with her own mother, Christie was not always around for Rosalind and, in further contrast to the discourses that encouraged women to stay at home and raise children, Christie's career "helped to make Agatha the absent mother she undoubtedly was" (Thompson 2007:435).

In the early 1920s Archie Christie struggled to find a job and the couple was under some financial strain. At this time, Christie's writing provided money to support her family, although over time Archie Christie found employment and his income became more stable and he began earning well. Like Blyton, Christie's financial success challenged ways of thinking that insisted on giving men responsibility for the financial security of the household. Christie began to publish more regularly and she engaged the services of Edmund Cork, a literary agent, and signed a three-book contract with Collins Publishers at the beginning of 1924. Christie's first novel for Collins, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd,* was published in 1926. These developments marked the start of her career as a writer but "she really did not see it that way at the time. Her life now was with Archie and Rosalind. She was a wife and a mother with a home to run. She would remain an amateur, writing for fun" (Thompson 2007:120). Even though Agatha Christie's success "had gone beyond what either of the Christies had expected – and she still put Archie first, even if he did not think so. Her marriage was by far the most important thing in her life" (Thompson 2007:163). It is evident that the contemporaneous discourses that

encouraged women to remain at home and play the roles of wife and mother informed Christie's thinking and her own expectations of how she, as a woman, should behave. Christie was to some extent shaped by the social conventions of her time which put marriage before a career for a woman. However, emergent discourses, especially those related to her earning potential and financial success, are also clearly reflected in her life choices.

In 1923 Enid Blyton met Major Hugh Alexander Pollock. Pollock was the editor of the Newnes book department which had published two of her books that year. Pollock was married at the time but his wife had left him for another man while he was serving during the First World War. His divorce went through in spring 1924 and on 28 August 1924 the couple was married. According to Greenfield, there is "little doubt that Hugh expedited her career" (1998:33). "He encouraged her writing, and was very helpful over contracts and royalties" (Baverstock 2000:21). Blyton's "marriage made no difference to her prolific writing output" (Stoney 1992:66); she became more productive and was soon earning "probably as much as, perhaps more than, Hugh's salary from Newnes" (Greenfield 1998:14). Like Christie, Blyton's financial success countered popular opinions that men should be the primary, if not the sole source of income in an early twentieth century household.

While Blyton experienced some difficulty falling pregnant, she eventually conceived and she and Pollock had two children, Gillian (born 15 July 1931) and Imogen (born 27 October 1935). Like Christie, it is also fair to describe Blyton as an 'absentee' mother. "The births of her daughters were not allowed to disrupt her regular writing and editing commitments" (Druce 1992:13).

> In 1989, Imogen published a memoir entitled *A Childhood at Green Hedges* which was widely serialised and which contained a poignant portrait of a neglectful mother and a consequently miserable child. Ironically, it seemed, the woman who opened

> her arms to the world's children and offered them her love was too busy doing so to allow time for a kiss and a hug for her younger daughter… Gillian, though, describes her mother in retrospect as loving and attentive.
>
> (Greenfield 1998:55)

Not only is Blyton's portrayal of mothers in her writing quite different from what she experienced with her own mother, but it is also significantly different from her own behaviour as a 'neglectful' mother. The mothers portrayed in Blyton's writing are often ideal in terms of then current dominant discourse: loving, caring, kind-hearted women who stay at home, in spotless homes, and make sure that their husbands and children are well fed – they always have something baking in the oven.

By the mid-1920s Archie and Agatha Christie began drifting apart. "Agatha's earnings were giving her the appearance of an independent being. The Christies shared a home and a child, but in other ways their lives had become quite separate" (Thompson 2007:166). Then, on 5 April 1926 Agatha Christie's mother died. As I mentioned earlier, Christie and her mother were very close so her mother's death must have been a considerable emotional strain for her. Christie went to Ashfield after her mother's death to sort through the house, but her husband remained in London. The physical distance had a further bad impact on their strained relationship and towards the end of 1926 Archie Christie told his wife that he had fallen in love with another woman and asked her for a divorce. In 1926 "[o]btaining a divorce was difficult and shaming; the only admissible ground was adultery, which had to be proved" (Morgan 1985:132). It was around this time that Christie infamously disappeared for 11 days, but, taking into consideration the emotional strain she had experienced during 1926 it is likely that she might have been somewhat emotionally unstable. Christie blamed herself for Archie's decision. She said,

> [i]f I had not gone to Ashfield and left him in London he would probably never have become interested in this girl. Not with this particular girl. But it might have

> happened with someone else, because I must in some way have been inadequate to fill Archie's life.
>
> (Christie 1993:362-363)

"After her divorce Agatha never again took communion in church. Always she felt shame and guilt, especially towards her daughter, for having 'given in' to Archie's demands for a divorce" (Thompson 2007:263). These feelings of shame and guilt echo the established notions about how scandalous divorce was thought to be. This seems to be reinforced in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* in which Christie has Dorcas, Mrs Ingelthorp's maid, refer to the scandal associated with divorce when she repeats her employer's comment that "[s]candal between husband and wife is a dreadful thing" (Christie [1920] 1969:46).

In 1928, Christie was due to travel to the West Indies on holiday. However, after attending a dinner party where she sat next to a man who had just returned from Baghdad, she changed her ticket so as to take the Orient Express to Baghdad – perhaps the inspiration behind *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934). This decision changed her life. In Baghdad, Christie met and stayed with renowned archaeologist Leonard Woolley and his wife, Katherine, who were working on an archaeological dig at Ur in Iraq. On her second visit to the Woolleys in February 1930, Christie met Woolley's assistant Max Mallowan, and in September 1930 she and Mallowan were married. She chose to keep Christie as her surname for public recognition since she was already a popular author, but in private she referred to herself as Mrs Mallowan. "On the dig she was not 'Agatha Christie', she was not even 'Agatha': She was 'Mrs Mallowan', wife of the man in charge" (Thompson 2007:316) – even her grave stone reads 'Agatha Mary Clarissa Mallowan". As I mentioned earlier, the powerfully dominant discourses that encouraged women to remain at home and play the role of supportive wife and mother seem to have informed Christie's thinking and her own expectations of how she,

as a woman, should behave. This discourse is clearly reflected in comments in Christie's autobiography:

> I don't think, even then, that I considered myself a bona fide author. I wrote things – yes – books and stories. They were published, and I could count upon them as a definite source of income. But never, when I was filling in a form and came to the line asking for Occupation, would it have occurred to me to fill it in with anything but the time-honoured 'Married woman'. I was a married woman, that was my status, and *that* was my occupation. As a sideline, I wrote books.
>
> (Christie 1993:445)

Her devotion to her role as wife reflected in her behaviour relating to her marriage to Max Mallowan – she travelled extensively in the Middle East with Mallowan to archaeological digs. A number of Christie's novels are inspired by these travels: *Death Comes as End*, *Murder in Mesopotamia, Appointment with Death, They Came to Baghdad*, and *Death on the Nile* among others.[7] In *The Murder at the Vicarage* Dr Stone is an archaeologist – *The Murder at the Vicarage* was published in 1930 and the publication date corresponds with Christie's early experiences in the Middle East.

"By the outbreak of war in 1939, Blyton had published some sixty-nine titles with fourteen publishing houses" (Druce 1992:13). During the Second World War paper for printing was strictly rationed: the paper shortage meant that non-essential publications were reduced. However, these restrictions provided Blyton with an advantage over other authors in two ways: because "she was respected by her publishers... for her punctiliousness in meeting a deadline" (Druce 1992:14-15) and they were confident that she would produce material for publication; and because she "spread her wares" (Greenfield 1998:28) among fourteen different publishers, she increased the likelihood that her work would be published.

[7]Christie's writing reflects her love of travel and, in addition to those books set in the Middle East, a number of her books have foreign settings, for example, *The Caribbean Mystery* (fictional island of St Honore), *The Man in the Brown Suit* (South Africa), *Murder on the Links* (France), among others.

> Despite the shortage of paper, she had no difficulty in obtaining further commissions for her work, for the publishers had long since realised that a book by Enid Blyton was usually guaranteed to sell almost as soon as it left the presses. But the accolade for the most enterprising idea for making use of her talents and what little paper was available during those early war years, must surely go to Brockhampton Press… to use previously scrapped off-cuts… to produce child's hand-size cartoon booklets…. She suggested, at their meeting in bomb-scarred London, that a mouse might provide a good central character and within a few days had completed outline stories. By late 1942, ten thousand copies of *Mary Mouse and the Dolls House,* printed in two colours and selling for a shilling each, were on the market.
>
> (Stoney 1992:129)

By the end of 1945, Blyton had published "one hundred and sixty-seven titles" (Druce 1992:15).

While the *Famous Five* series was published after the end of the Second World War, the discourse of war – secrets, spies and the safeguarding of the Empire – remained in the public consciousness and this is reflected in Blyton's writing. In the *Famous Five* books there are several references to Uncle Quentin "working out a secret theory … [that] will be used for the good of the country" (Blyton [1943] 1967:14). Readers are also often reminded of the importance of being able to keep secrets, and Anne is frequently reprimanded by the other characters because she is not very good at doing so. In *Five Go Adventuring Again* Anne is about to tell Mr Roland about the piece of linen they found that has directions to a 'Secret Way';

> "It's a - " began Anne, and all at one all the others began to talk, afraid that Anne was going to give the secret away."
>
> (Blyton [1943] 1967:49)

When the children are alone again Dick reprimands Anne and she is suitably ashamed of her slip-up. Here we see the enduring emphasis on the importance of keeping secrets.

> "You nearly gave our secret away, you silly," said Dick to Anne. "I didn't think," said the little girl, looking ashamed of herself."
>
> (Blyton [1943] 1967:50)

Anne learns from this experience and later in the same book, when she is pressured by the adults to reveal what she knows about the camphorated oil found in the study, she refuses to do so. In this instance, Julian and the other children support Anne's decision not to tell, even though they do not even know the truth, and in doing so Blyton again emphasises the importance of keeping secrets:

> "Don't bother Anne," [Julian] said to the grown-ups. "If she thinks she can't tell you, she's got some very good reason."
>
> (Blyton [1943] 1967:111)

"During the thirties Agatha Christie produced, year after year, puzzle stories of varied ingenuity and constant liveliness" (Symons 1992:136). Like Blyton, Christie's output during the Second World War was substantial; the years between 1937 and 1945 were Christie's most productive. Christie was alone for much of the war because Mallowan was away serving his country and "she spent much of her free time writing" (Campbell 2005:17). In her autobiography Christie reflects on the number of books that she wrote during the Second World War: "[i]t is only now that I fully realise, looking back over my wartime output, that I produced an incredible amount of stuff during those years" (Christie 1993:527). But, as Thompson comments, Christie

> was under intense pressure to produce books throughout the war. Her financial situation had changed and, for a time, she was effectively living hand-to-mouth. Yet this does not fully explain the insatiable creativity of her middle years: the brilliance of these books produced under duress.
>
> (2007:306-307)

This highlights the fact that for Christie writing had become a profession – a significant development at a time when women usually stayed at home, managed the household and cared for the children and seldom pursued a career.

Bargainnier highlights the fact that in most of the works that Christie produced during the Second World War, she does not mention the war itself, but

> the after effects of the war on day-to-day life is clearly presented in the novels of the late 'forties and 'fifties. Rationing, the black market, the difficulty of obtaining eggs, butter or sugar, weed grown gardens, reduced staffs, identity cards, unemployed and restless veterans, women performing formerly masculine jobs: these are all there
>
> (1980:36)

As she does in her portrayal of the First World War, Christie focuses on the effect of the Second World War on ordinary people. This post-war setting is evident in *A Murder is Announced,* which was published in 1950. Christie points to the effect of the war years on the country estate, Dayas Hall:

> Dayas Hall had certainly suffered during the war years. Couch grass grew enthusiastically over what had once been an asparagus bed, as evidenced by a few waving tufts of asparagus foliage. Groundsel, bindweed and other garden pests showed every sign of vigorous growth.
>
> (Christie [1950] 1979:58)

Christie reflects the patriotism of the post-war era by including the character of Phillipa Haymes whose husband was a deserter. Mrs Haymes lies to the police about her husband, highlighting not only the humiliation she feels about his lack of patriotism, but also her desire to conceal his actions from the community. This speaks to the dominant viewpoint in Britain in the years following the Second World War – deserters were regarded with scorn at the very least.

> "I think you told me, Mrs. Haymes, that your husband was killed fighting in Italy?"
> "Well?"
> "Wouldn't it have been simpler to have told me the truth – that he was a deserter from his regiment."
> He saw her face grow white, and her hands close and unclose themselves.
> She said bitterly:
> "Do you have to rake up *everything*?"
>
> (Christie [1950] 1979:154)

Her shame at her husband's actions is again emphasised in her desire to protect her son, Harry, from finding out about his father's desertion: "my son, he doesn't know. I don't want him to know. I don't want him to know – ever" (Christie [1950] 1979:155).

In 2004 a box of Agatha Christie's notebooks and two previously unpublished manuscripts were discovered at her former home, Greenway. This led to the publication of *The Capture of Cerberus*, the first Poirot tale to be published since 1975. According to Paul Harris (2009), the dictator August Hertzlein in *The Capture of Cerberus*, originally submitted for publication in 1939, bears a "thinly disguised resemblance to Adolf Hitler". Even though their initials are the same, John Curran remarks that while "the similarities to Hitler are quite clear in the story, there is no mention of the actual name" (2009:431). However, Curran goes on to point out that in Christie's Notebook 62, in which she sketched the outline for the story, she refers to "Herr Hitler" (2009:431). It is possible to speculate that in 1939 as a result of the sensitive political milieu and the threat of war the publishers may have considered the subject matter too sensitive for publication. Even Christie describes the atmosphere as "a very disturbed state – every nation alert and tense. At any minute the blow might fall – and Europe once more be plunged into war" (Christie, in Curran 2009:433).

By 1939 Enid and Hugh's marriage was under strain. In 1941 Blyton met Kenneth Fraser Darrell Waters, a London surgeon. In the meantime, Pollock had become "romantically involved with Ida Crowe" (Stoney 1992:133). Blyton found out about this and asked him for a divorce. He "agreed to be the 'guilty party' (a requirement for divorce in those days) provided he had regular access to his two daughters" (Greenfield 1998:32). On 20 October 1943 Blyton and Darrell Waters were married. However, Greenfield claims that Blyton did not comply with her arrangement with Pollock "and he never saw Gillian or Imogen again" (1998:33). In

addition, Blyton had her daughters' surname legally changed to Darrell Waters and "encouraged them to accept Kenneth as their 'father'" (Greenfield 1998:57).

Enid Blyton's response to her divorce from Hugh Pollock stands in contrast to Blyton's mother's attitude towards divorce: while Theresa Blyton refused Thomas Blyton's request for a divorce, Enid Blyton divorced Hugh Pollock without much ado. However, Blyton's divorce is not mentioned in her autobiography. Druce describes her as having been "silent about her first marriage and divorce" (1992:14). Common knowledge of her divorce might have tainted her public persona as an educationalist and would have caused her to lose some of the moral high-ground on which she placed much importance.

Following her divorce, Christie began to write to make money; she observes that "[t]hat was the moment when I changed from an amateur to a professional. I assumed the burden of a profession, which is to write even when you don't want to" (Christie 1993:369). She had become a professional writer and her work gave her financial security. Thompson comments that Christie "was tough when it came to selling her work" and "very rarely could she be prevailed upon to do something for love rather than money" (2007:150). In addition, she had strong opinions about her work and "she always stood her ground on issues like blurbs and book jackets" (Thompson 2007:152).

Blyton also had "an amazing capacity for hard work and a shrewd business acumen" (Stoney 1992:185). Like Christie, she was involved in all aspects of the publication of her books, and insisted on being consulted over "the choice of type face and size, the page layout, the dustjacket and the proposed illustrator" (Greenfield 1998:52-53). It seems likely that she had learnt a lot about the publishing industry from Hugh Pollock and the various other publishers

with whom she worked throughout her career; she was therefore certainly able to make informed decisions about her books. In addition, the

> same business acumen which had led to the adoption of her holograph signature as her personal 'trademark' had prompted her to integrate her name into the title of at least sixty-two of her books published before 1949 (and at least one hundred and twenty-six books published thereafter.
>
> (Druce 1992:18)

In essence, Blyton created a "brand name" (Rudd 2000:30).

Both Blyton and Christie were prolific writers as well as very astute business women and were much involved in the publication of their books. In addition, they were both published in a number of then current popular magazines. This was, quite clearly, a contributing factor to their success and popularity.

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

3 THE WRITER'S PERSONA

Both Blyton and Christie presented themselves in a manner constructed to reinforce their public image. In their apparent attempt to gain the consent of society at large, they created public personae that appeared to conform to the popular opinions of the time regarding the ideal author of children's stories or detective fiction, and the behaviour thought appropriate to women. Blyton and Christie attempted to portray a public image that conformed to the expectations of society, as shaped by the dominant social conventions at the time. In the patriarchal heteronormative society in which they operated Blyton and Christie were not only women, but also career women and writers. Blyton and Christie seem to have internalised the norms of the society which classified how both women and writers of books in their genres should typically behave, and then sought to conform to these expectations by exercising self-regulation without the show of force – what, as I have discussed earlier in this thesis, Foucault refers to as "bio-power" (Foucault, in Rudd 2000:14).

Throughout her career Agatha Christie promoted herself as a shy person. Janet Morgan believes that "[i]n her quiet childhood she grew up to be a listener" and was easily "overcome by nervousness" (1985:27). She often shunned the public eye, and she "refused countless requests throughout her career to broadcast on either radio or television" (Curran 2009:98). In the preface to her biography of Agatha Christie, Janet Morgan (1985:xi) emphasises the value of privacy to Christie: "[s]he rarely gave interviews and never put herself on display…. Her reputation, she believed, should stand or fall by her work." She referred to herself as a "terribly shy person" (Christie 1993:125) in her autobiography, further reinforcing this image. This is in contrast with Curran's claim that she "happily posed for photographs" (2009:174) with guests at the launch of her fiftieth title, *A Murder is Announced.* However, regardless of

whether she was genuinely shy or not, this behaviour and the image of being secretive maintained the public perception that a writer of detective fiction is mysterious and thus it served to reinforce Christie's persona. Agatha Christie "encouraged the image of the 'Queen of Crime', the 'Duchess of Death'" (Thompson 2007:363) and over time the Agatha Christie persona "came to embody the very idea of English murder" – "'Agatha Christie' became the living definition of classic English mystery fiction" (Thompson 2007:377). In fact, she came to embody what the dominant discourse in England at the time regarded as essential to detective fiction. While these works fall outside of the scope of this study, it is useful to note that Christie reinforces the stereotypical image of a 'English detective fiction author' in the character of Mrs Ariadne Oliver in *Cards on the Table, Mrs GcGinty's Dead, Dead Man's Folly, The Pale Horse, Third Girl, Hallowe'en Party,* and *Elephants Can Remember*. Mrs Oliver "is generally accepted as Christie's own alter ego. She is a middle-aged, successful and prolific writer of detective fiction and creator of a foreign detective, the Finnish Sven Hjerson. She hates literary dinners, making speeches, or collaborating with dramatists" (Curran 2009:73). Curran emphasises that "[t]here can be little doubt that when Mrs Oliver speaks we are listening to Agatha Christie" (2009:73).[8]

According to Thompson, "all her life Agatha would value the ability to maintain a façade" (2007:82). During the early twentieth century, the prevalent system of thought considered it to be a sign of decorum and good breeding not to show emotion. Christie has Miss Marple comment on this in *A Christmas Tragedy*: "I remember my dear mother teaching me that a gentlewoman should always be able to control herself in public, however much she may give away in private" (Christie [1930] 2008a:463).

[8] While I agree to some extent with Curran, it is necessary to recognise that Christie's caricatured representation of Mrs Oliver militates against this. Mrs Oliver is often portrayed as ridiculous. (I am indebted to Professor Margaret Mackey of the University of Alberta for this observation.)

Christie's mysterious and secretive persona could also function as a mechanism for self-protection. Christie had a strong dislike of the press and publicity, and her façade would have protected her from self exposure. Christie's apparent dislike of the publicity could have been the result of her resentment of the media because of the wave of publicity that followed her infamous disappearance in December 1926. According to Morgan, after this Christie "took pains to establish that she was bewildered and forgetful, the better to sustain the public explanation of the events that followed" (1985:128) – creating a façade and suppressing any information about her disappearance that might have damaged her reputation. Morgan believes that following Christie's disappearance in 1926,

> it is as if Agatha became two people. One, Agatha Christie, was regarded by the press and to some degree the public as their property, someone in whom there would be continuing interest, about whom there would always be talk, a popular author.… The other person was Agatha, natural, domestic, an ordinary human being rather than a myth.
>
> (1985:162)

Like Christie, Blyton created a carefully guarded public image and suppressed "information that did not fit the image" (Rudd 2000:24). Druce (1992:9) believes that Blyton's autobiography *The Story of My Life* is contrived and written to reinforce her persona and present an idealised picture of her life: in her autobiography she omits reference to her marriage to Hugh Pollock, her miscarriages, and her parents' troubled marriage. Like Christie's Ariadne Oliver, there are a number of references that claim that George in the *Famous Five* series is based on Blyton. These claims are indicative of the correlation between and reflection of Blyton's life and her writing – like Blyton, George rebels against dominant discourses that reinforce the domestic and submissive role of women. I discuss the character of George in more detail in Chapter Four of this study.

As I have already pointed out, Blyton claimed that she chose to follow a career in teaching because she wanted to write books for children, because it would "provide a useful background to her writing" (Ray 1982:11), and that by becoming a teacher she would be exposed to children and thus "learn how to write about and for them" (Stoney 1992:31). Her alleged desire to write for children is evident in comments such as the following:

> I must train as a kindergarten teacher, of course!… I would learn what the children wanted to read and also what they ought to read! I could write all the time I was training! I could try out my stories and poems on the children themselves. They should be my critics.
>
> (Blyton, in Druce 1992:10)

It seems convenient that Blyton, who was writing her autobiography and looking back on her life, insisted that she always wanted to write for children; after all, she was unsuccessful in all her attempts to write for adults. Thus, as I have already suggested, she might have claimed to have had a desire to write for children to compensate for her failure to write books successfully for adults. Rudd believes that Enid Blyton "constructed her own *persona*" (2000:24) to fit society's image of a children's writer. In addition, Blyton's desire to write for adults is an indication of the discourses surrounding literature at a time when children's literature was marginalised; there was far more status associated with being an author of adult novels than with being a writer of books for children. Children's books were viewed as inferior to adult books. As I have observed elsewhere, "discourses about literature have held that children's literature is inferior, or 'other' and, therefore, not of interest to purist academics" (Coetzee 2003:42).

The writing process described by Blyton is also unrealistic and idealised. According to Baverstock (2000:27), Stoney (1992:139) and Greenfield (1998:66), Blyton described the writing process as something like a movie being played in her mind as she wrote. These

descriptions are reinforced by Blyton's description of her writing process as she described it in a letter to psychologist Dr Peter McKellar.

> I shut my eyes for a few minutes… I make my mind a blank and wait – and then, as clearly as I would see real children, my characters stand before me in my mind's eye. I see them in detail… and I always know their Christian names but never their surname. (I get these out of a telephone directory afterwards!)… As I look at them, the characters take on movement and life… and perhaps I see that one of them has a dog, or a parrot, and I think – 'Ah – that's good. That will liven up the story….That's enough for me… I begin…. The story is enacted in my mind's eye almost as if I had a private cinema there… I am in the happy position of being able to write a story and read it for the first time, at one and the same moment.
>
> (Blyton, in Greenfield 1998:69)

Like Christie's image of herself as the 'Queen of Crime' and the 'Duchess of Death', Blyton's persona created a "brand name" (Rudd 2000:30) that was successfully sold to the world, but to some extent it also protected her private life from being exposed to the press, and the possible judgement that may have been exercised by society about aspects of her life, such as her divorce, that did not conform to the acceptable norm and might well have influenced the sales of her books.

4 CONCLUSION: CHILDREN OF THEIR TIME

In 1950 Agatha Christie was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and on 1 January 1956 she became Commander of the British Empire. In 1971, aged 81, she became Dame Commander of the British Empire. When asked how she would like to be remembered, Christie modestly replied: “I would like to be remembered as a rather good writer of detective stories” (Curran 2009:68). Agatha Christie died of natural causes on the afternoon of 12 January 1976.

In 1957 Enid Blyton began complaining of chest pain and in the early 1960s she began to show signs of Alzheimer’s disease. “She was unable to write anything after 1963 and her last three books were published the following year” (Baverstock 2000:31). Enid Blyton died on 28 November 1968.

Modern ideas feature in the writing of Agatha Christie. Thompson remarks that “[h]er villages are especially alive; and what is rarely appreciated is that they move with the times” (2007:279). As discussed earlier in this chapter, *A Murder is Announced,* written in 1949, reflects the post-war effects on rural British society, while in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* Christie refers to the pervasiveness of cocaine use in society when she has Miss Russell comment: “Drugs do a lot of harm. Look at the cocaine habit…. It’s very prevalent in high society” (Christie [1926] 1974:17). Christie also goes on to refer to an article in the *Daily Budget* on the “smuggling of cocaine” (Christie [1926] 1974:136). She even includes reference to real-life murderer Hawley Harvey Crippen, the American physician hanged in 1910 who “cut up his wife” (Christie [1930] 1972:60). Thompson believes that:

> For all that she was a product of her background, Agatha was also a creature of her time: she engaged deeply with the middle years of the twentieth-century. 'Agatha Christie' may be fossilised in time but Agatha herself was not. She wrote about the world she lived in: about class mobility in *Endless Night*; political fanaticism in *One, Two Buckle My Shoe*, *Destination Unknown* and *The Clocks;* the effects of war in *Taken at the Flood, The 4.50 from Paddington* and *A Murder is Announced;* social engineering in *They Do It with Mirrors;* virtual reality in *At Bertram's Hotel;* café culture in *The Pale Horse;* drug culture in *Third Girl;* changing attitudes towards the death penalty, heredity, the nature of justice, guilt and criminal responsibility. She did not draw attention to the fact that she was writing about these things. That was not her way. Nor did she particularly agree with much contemporary thinking, even though she engaged with it. She was, at root, a late Victorian who believed in God and the human spirit rather than 'ideas'.
>
> (2007:388)

However, in spite of the dramatic changes taking place in society, and the discourses emerging in the first half of the twentieth century, Blyton and Christie were embedded in a number of the ways of thinking, attitudes and belief structures of the time and these, of course helped to create and sustain their horizons of expectation.

While Christie tried to reflect social changes in her writing she held onto these certain values and judged changes from this viewpoint – she was, after all, a creature of her Edwardian upbringing. She "welcomed new friends, new books, plays and films, she discussed new ideas and visited new places, but her tastes and habits were fixed" (Morgan 1985:282).

> Agatha Christie is stuck for all eternity at a tea-party in a country vicarage, sticking a fork into her seedcake as the bank manager's wife chokes on a strychnine sandwich. Around her the real world turns, but she remains fixed in 1932: a time when servants were adenoidal, ladies never showed their feelings in public and Jews had to be asked for the weekend, damn them.
>
> (Thompson 2007:385)

Bargainnier refers to Christie's "nostalgia for an earlier, simpler, and 'more moral' society" (1980:194), and in *A Murder is Announced* Mrs Blacklock emphasises her preference for her own times. Perhaps Christie, too, was aware of her own feelings of nostalgia.

> "I suppose there was once heaps of coke and coal for everybody?" said Julia with the interest of one hearing about an unknown country.
> "Yes, and cheap, too."

> "And anyone could go and buy as much as they wanted, without filling in anything, and there wasn't any shortage? There was lots of it there?"
> "All kinds and qualities – and not all stones and slates like what we get nowadays."
> "It must have been a wonderful world," said Julia, with awe in her voice.
> Miss Blacklock smiled. "Looking back on it, *I* certainly think so. But then I'm an old woman. It's natural for me to prefer my own times. But you young things oughtn't to think so."
>
> (Christie [1950] 1979:24)

However, Miss Blacklock's comment that "you young things oughtn't to think so" is evidence of Christie's awareness of emergent discourses and changes in society, and illustrates her understanding of the fluctuating discourses of the society in which she lived. Christie also includes a number of Victorian elements in her writing, which reflect her own frame of reference. In *A Murder is Announced* Miss Blacklock wears "a set of old fashioned cameos – a Victorian touch" (Christie [1950] 1979:43). Miss Blacklock's drawing-room is also described as a "[t]ypical Victorian double drawing room" (Christie [1950] 1979:43).

Like Christie, Enid Blyton was "a product of the period in which she lived and wrote" (Ray 1982:11). This point is reiterated by Greenfield who believes that "the Edwardian era in which Enid Blyton grew up and which coloured her conscious and sub-conscious thought" (Greenfield 1998:73). Enid Blyton "was caught in a kind of time-warp, ignorant of modern slang and idioms" (Greenfield 1998:53). The use of terms like 'queer' and 'gay' have new connotations in comparison to their meaning in Blyton's time: in the *Noddy* series Noddy is described as 'gay', carefree and merry, not homosexual. Similarly, in *Five on Kirrin Island Again* Martin draws pictures of birds, flowers and butterflies – Blyton describes these as "queer pictures for a boy to draw" (Blyton [1947] 1967:116) where the term queer means strange, unusual or inappropriate, not homosexual.

Both the dominant and emergent discourses of the time shape the background which informs Blyton and Christie's lives and works. While Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie reflect some of the emergent discourses of the time in both their writing and in their personal lives, we also see the influences of old-fashioned opinions and beliefs.

CHAPTER THREE

DETECTIVE FICTION:
DEFINITIONS, CONVENTIONS AND FORMULAE

> When I began writing detective stories I was not in any mood to criticise them or think seriously about crime. The detective story was the story of the chase; it was also very much a story with a moral; in fact it was the old Everyman Morality Tale, the hunting down of Evil and the triumph of Good. At the time, the time of the 1914 war, the doer of evil was not a hero: the enemy was wicked, the hero was good: it was as crude and as simple as that.
>
> Agatha Christie *An Autobiography*

> "Murder is so crude," he said. "I take no interest in it."
> That statement did not take me in for a moment. They say all the world loves a lover – apply that saying to murder and you have an even more infallible truth. No one can fail to be interested in a murder.
>
> Agatha Christie *The Murder at the Vicarage*

1 INTRODUCTION

"Ours is a culture fascinated by crime" (Thompson 1993:1). Indeed, crime is part of our global experience. It features prominently in the media in numerous television programmes, movies, books, and in real life – "by any estimate, most contemporary films concern crime" (Thompson 1993:1). According to Symons, "[c]rime is almost certainly more widely read than any other class of fiction in the United States, the United Kingdom and many other countries" (1992:5-6), and is a genre enjoyed by all kinds of readers – the wealthy and the poor, academics and non-academics, professionals and tradesmen, men and women, children and adults, thus crossing many apparent barriers created by social conventions such as age, sex, culture, race, and religion. The popularity of detective fiction is reflected even in Christie's own writing when, in *The Murder at the Vicarage*, she has the Vicar suggest that Lawrence Redding has been reading G.K. Chesterton (Christie [1930] 1972:99). Similarly, in the short

story collection *Partners in Crime* (1929) Christie parodies well-known literary detectives of the time in her stories, including G.K. Chesterton's Father Brown, Sherlock Holmes and her own creation, Hercule Poirot.

The decision to consider selected writing by Blyton and Christie necessitates clarification of what I consider, for the purposes of this study, to be detective fiction. Here, the term 'detective fiction' is used to denote a fictional work in which a crime is committed, a violation of the law takes place, and in which the plot centres on the investigation of the crime, the search for a solution to the problem and ultimately, the restoration of order. The theme of detective fiction, for my purposes, is "good versus evil, innocence versus guilt" in which "good *always* prevails" (Bargainnier 1980:190-191).

This study seeks to examine how the portrayal of discourses around the social, the political, the economic and the literary in the work of Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie is similar to, and different from, what was prevalent at the time in which they lived and wrote. Therefore, it is necessary to take into consideration contemporaneous definitions of detective fiction since these definitions would have shaped the horizons of expectation of Blyton and Christie, as well as those of contemporary readers. I present a brief survey of Golden Age detective fiction in this chapter so as to provide an overview of the definitions and conventions of detective fiction within which Christie and Blyton were working.

2 THE GOLDEN AGE OF DETECTIVE FICTION

Crime fiction was the dominant genre of fiction in Britain in the early twentieth century so it is unsurprising that this era became known as the Golden Age of Detective Fiction. For David Glover this era stretched from 1913 to 1936 (Glover 2000:36), and from 1919 to 1939 for Gill Plain (2001:31). John Curran simplifies this by referring to the Golden Age as "roughly the period between the end of the First World War and that of the Second, i.e. 1920 to 1945" (2009:29). Symons remarks that during "these years the detective story reached peaks of ingenuity that have never since been attained and are now rarely attempted" (1992:109). In fact, the Golden Age could be said to have created a dominant discourse, as it were, of detective fiction by influencing the points of view which determined the definition of the genre of detective fiction in the first place.

During the Golden Age Agatha Christie first rose to prominence and published her first detective novel, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920). Even though "her books span a period from 1920 to 1976, Agatha Christie's detective fiction is essentially of the type called 'Golden Age'" (Bargainnier 1980:4) because she "continued writing the form after 1939" (Bargainnier 1980:16).

During the years after the First World War, Enid Blyton published a number of stories for children, and in 1938 she published her first full-length adventure story *The Secret Island*. This was also Blyton's first step towards writing series fiction, which, in this case, fit the specific formula of child protagonists uncovering and solving a mystery.

Towards the end of the Golden Age many writers stopped producing series fiction. However, a number of writers of modern detective fiction now produce series fiction which is hugely successful. These include, for example, Patricia Cornwell's series featuring Kay Scarpetta, Peter Robinson's Inspector Banks series, the series featuring Rebus by Ian Rankin, and Temperance Brennan by Kathy Reichs, James Patterson's series featuring Alex Cross, and Jeffrey Deaver's Lincoln Rhyme series, to name but a few. According to Priestman (2000:50), the series is one of the two most prevalent fictional forms or our time, the other being TV serials.

2.1 <u>A 'cosy' puzzle for the reader to solve</u>

The type of detective stories most popular in Britain during the Golden Age are sometimes referred to as 'cosies' – in contrast to the 'hard-boiled' detective fiction preferred in the United States of America.

> Two paradigms of detection were established in the interwar period. The first was the domain of the 'soft-boiled' British – quietly committed to a peaceful regime of poison and pokers, expertly wielded in the peaceful environs of their country vicarages. The second witnessed 'hard-boiled' Americans clubbing each other to death with empty bourbon bottles amid grim scenarios of urban decay.
>
> (Plain 2001:30)

In cosies, an outsider or gifted amateur investigates a murder committed in a closed environment, with a limited number of suspects. "Christie is usually said to be the doyenne of the Cosy School" (Bargainnier 1980:7), in which she presents the reader with a complex puzzle to unravel. However, hard-boiled detective fiction even permeated Christie's own work and in *A Murder is Announced* Christie has Miss Marple refer to the American author of hard-boiled detective fiction Dashiel Hammett.

> "I may have got the term wrong," she murmured. "I am not very clever about Americanisms – and I understand they change very quickly. I got it from one of Mr Dashiel Hammett's stories. (I understand from my nephew Raymond that he is considered at the top of the tree in what is called the 'tough' style of literature.)"
>
> (Christie [1950] 1979:79)

The primary interest of the Golden Age detective story is the investigation of the crime and its solution. The detective story is "the result of plot arrangement. Instead of telling the story so that the perpetrator of a crime is known, the author arranges the incidents to allow that perpetrator to hide his act, and, therefore, there is a process of discovery" (Bargainnier 1980:7). It is through the plot arrangement and the investigation of the crime that the reader is presented with the puzzle of detective fiction.

The participation of the reader in solving the puzzle is a characteristic of detective fiction. Other than the intellectual challenge offered to the reader, the opportunity to test her or his wits against those of the author, and the desire to find out 'who did it', the participation and interaction of the reader with the text creates an opportunity for a relationship between the reader and the author. In this relationship, when it is considered in terms of the power relations I discussed in Chapter One of this study, the author – the "puppet-master" (Campbell 2005:13) – is in control. The author is responsible for "the shaping of a narrative, the careful parcelling out of information to the reader, mystification with the promise of eventual enlightenment" (Chernaik 2000:108). The author "will choose who is guilty, she will deceive with her bluff and double-bluff, she will show you just who's in charge" (Campbell 2005:12).

The participation and interaction of the reader with the text can be discussed with reference to a number of psychological reasons that have been proposed to explain the popularity of detective fiction. The first of these is theological. According to this approach, human beings

are creatures of sin and, therefore, detective fiction "addresses our inborn sense of guilt" (Swales 2000:xii-xiii). This view of humans should be considered within the context of the role played by the dominant discourses in encouraging individuals to conform to specific beliefs and appropriate behaviour, and the non-coercive consensual control maintained and reinforced through institutions such as religion and education.

The second psychological reason proposed for the popularity of detective fiction is that detective fiction is thanatological; it addresses our fascination with, and fear of, death. According to Freudian theory, humans have two primal instincts: eros, the desire for self-preservation or the life instinct, and thanatos, the desire for death which allegedly compels humans to engage in dangerous and self-destructive behaviour that could lead to their own death. This fascination with death is important to bear in mind when we consider detective fiction in relation to the *Famous Five* series and other children's literature written in the early twentieth century in which death was a taboo subject. Blyton's *Famous Five* books provide a safe avenue for children to interact with danger. The child protagonists are confronted with a number of crimes that violate the law and threaten the status quo, but they are not confronted with death. Enid Blyton believed that children's authors should not deal with "murders, rapes, violence, blood, torture and ghosts [because] these things did not belong to the children's world" (Stoney 1992:153).[9]

The third psychological reason proposed is cognitive-philosophical. In detective fiction rationality and logic do battle with the irrationality of psychological promptings (Swales

[9] Curran highlights the use of nursery rhyme themes by Christie in her detective fiction, for example *Three Blind Mice; Ten Little Niggers; A Pocket Full of Rye; One, Two Buckle My Shoe;* and *Hickory Dickory Dock,* among others. Curran believes "[t]he attraction is obvious – the juxtaposition of the childlike and the chilling, the twisting of the mundane into the macabre" (2009:105-106).

2000:xii-xiii). There is a sense of urgency – the perpetrator must be discovered before more crimes are committed and the status quo is further disrupted. Thus, by solving the crime and restoring order, the detective is in fact restoring the status quo. According to Chernaik, "emotions are aroused in the reader in the course of a work in order to be purged at the end, restoring a sense of balance" (2000:106). When the reader is presented with the solution and order is restored, there is a form of catharsis. "Detective fiction is designed to raise emotions of both fear and pity only to assuage them through the agency of the sleuth who solves the mystery, captures the criminal, and restores order" (Klein 1995:4).

2.2 <u>Escape to the world of the Golden Age</u>

The detective fiction of the Golden Age is rhetorical and artificial in nature. The writing is not intended to be realistic, but is meant rather to entertain and to present readers with an opportunity to escape, and often to be challenged intellectually by being presented with a puzzle. The murders are seldom disturbing, violent or messy, or even described in much detail – in fact it is only the discovery of the body that indicates that murder has taken place. In the detective fiction of the Golden Age readers looked for "pleasurable excitement removed from the reality of their own lives" (Symons 1992:6). The escapist nature of this detective fiction contributed to its popularity at the time since many people wished to escape the depression of the First World War and its aftermath. Plain mentions that

> the absence of violence within Christie's interwar oeuvre is symptomatic of a state of national post-traumatic stress.... In the aftermath of the First World War, British society was unable or unwilling to engage with the all too familiar realities of death and destruction.
>
> (2001:33)

However, even though typical detective stories of the Golden Age are "remarkably free from the realities of violence" (Symons 1992:12), detective fiction has death at its core. As

mentioned earlier in this chapter, detective fiction addresses our thanatological fascination with death, and thus it provides a safe opportunity for adult readers to interact with death. Mark Campbell argues that Christie's

> genteel murder mysteries were far more gripping precisely *because* they were so bloodless. Death stalked in broad daylight down some country lane, a person everyone hated would end up murdered in a conspicuous location, all the villagers would be suspected… it wasn't the blood that was scary, it was the paranoia.
> (2005:12)

The feeling of paranoia is often accentuated by the creation of a claustrophobic setting in which the characters are isolated or trapped. To achieve this Christie often sets her stories in a closed environment, like a country house or a small village, where the cast is necessarily limited. The paranoia is heightened because the identity of the murderer is unknown. "[I]t could be anyone. And I mean *anyone.* And there's nothing cosy about that, is there?" (Campbell 2005:12). This calls into question the motives of all the characters and thus the "identification of the guilty person is a necessity for removing the pervasiveness: then evil is not longer 'everywhere,' but within a single individual" (Bargainnier 1980:191).

3 DEFINITION, RULES AND CONVENTIONS

3.1 The problem of definition

In any consideration of the definitions of detective fiction it is essential to remember that definitions have social importance – they designate the way that existing institutions organise and classify things. Definitions provide the parameters of socially institutionalised ways of thinking: they perpetuate the conventions of the society in which they operate. Therefore, the conventions of the genre of detective fiction, as determined by the definition of detective fiction, "are themselves subject to social pressures and social mediation. As society changes, formerly accepted conventions become unacceptable or are revised" (Cranny-Francis 1990:17). It is important to bear in mind that genres are social constructs: "[g]enres encode ideological information. They have a specific social function to perform as the expression of conservative ideological discourses" (Cranny-Francis 1990:17).

As a social construct that underpins a particular way of thinking, a definition of detective fiction outlines the conventions, the 'formula', of the genre. Definitions, as part of the dominant discourse, are internalised by readers, writers and critics, and in turn, they inform their horizons of expectation.

> [C]lassical detective fiction has form. Because it does, the reader knows beforehand what to expect when he begins a detective novel or short story. He chooses to read it, because he has enjoyed previous ones and he knows, though perhaps unconsciously, that it will conform to the expected pattern. The author provides what is expected and, at the same time, wishes to ring as many changes as he possibly can within the limits of the pattern, even to exploit the reader's expectations, to give his work distinctiveness.
>
> (Bargainnier 1980:11-12)

However, as discussed in Chapter One of this study, by setting out rules and conventions that define detective fiction we are placing constraints and boundaries on it. Defining detective

fiction is in fact a means of controlling it. Dividing practices are then applied to texts that do not conform to the definition, and such texts are often rejected or isolated because of this.

3.2 <u>Playing the game by the rules</u>

During the Golden Age of Detective Fiction several critics outlined rules and conventions characterising what they defined as detective fiction. While definitions of detective fiction reinforced what society referred to as detective fiction, the rules expanded the control of the genre. The rules "set up an expectation that readers will have a real possibility of solving the mystery that the author has devised" (Glover 2000:37).

In 1928, Willard Huntington Wright, under the pseudonym of S.S. van Dine, published an article in *The American Magazine* entitled 'Twenty rules for writing detective fiction' in which he argues that

> [t]he detective story is a kind of intellectual game. It is more – it is a sporting event. And for the writing of detective stories there are very definite laws – unwritten, perhaps, but none the less binding; and every respectable and self-respecting concoctor of literary mysteries lives up to them.
>
> (Van Dine 1928)

Also in 1928, Ronald Knox published his 'Decalogue' of Detective Fiction in which he lists 10 rules for writing detective fiction:

1. The criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow.
2. All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course.
3. Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable.
4. No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end.
5. No Chinaman must figure in the story.
6. No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right.
7. The detective must not himself commit the crime.
8. The detective must not light on any clues which are not instantly produced for the inspection of the reader.

9. The stupid friend of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal any thoughts which pass through his mind; his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader.
10. Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them.

(Knox 1928)

Other authors and critics also proposed rules: T.S. Eliot (1888-1965), lists a number of conventions that authors of detective fiction should avoid: "elaborate and incredible disguises", "occult phenomena", "mysterious and preposterous discoveries made by lonely scientists" (in Glover 2000:38). According to Eliot, the skills of the detective and the motives of the criminal should be "within the grasp of ordinary human consciousness", the "motives of the criminal should be normal", while the detective should be "highly intelligent but not superhuman" (in Glover 2000:38). Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957) presents four viewpoints of detective fiction: the reader may be given only the detective's external actions; the reader may be given what the detective sees but not what he observes; the reader may be given what he sees, and his conclusions; and the reader may be taken inside the mind of the detective (in Bargainnier 1980:179). Bayard proposes two rules: the truth must be hidden throughout the book; and "[w]hile being hidden this truth must be accessible to the reader, even in plain view" (2001:19-20).

The rules were apparently intended to ensure that authors give readers all the information necessary for them to be able to solve the crime, and not cheat them by leaving out necessary information or by relying on devices such as coincidence and the supernatural. However, "few books actually conform to [the rules]" because "these rigid classifications simply don't work in practice" (Symons 1992:3). Glover reiterates that "in practice the development of detective fiction was never so straightforwardly linear nor so self-directed as this simplified picture of the Golden Age suggests" (2000:36). According to Symons, *The*

Murder of Roger Ackroyd fits some of the conventions of the genre of detective fiction: "[t]he setting is a village deep in the English countryside, Roger Ackroyd dies in his study, there is a butler who behaves suspiciously, but whom we never really suspect, and for good servant measure a housekeeper, a parlourmaid, two housemaids, kitchenmaid and cook" (1992:110). However, Christie does break some of the rules listed in Knox's 'Decalogue', in particular the rule that the criminal "must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow", and the rule that "[t]he stupid friend of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal any thoughts" because the villain is Dr Sheppard, who plays the role of the narrator and that of Poirot's sidekick. Not only is the reader privy to some of Dr Sheppard's thoughts because he is the narrator, but he also conceals some of his thoughts because he hides the truth. By breaking some of the rules, Christie undermines the conventions of the genre and challenges the horizon of expectations of the reader. (This aspect of Christie's writing is examined in more detail later in this chapter.)

3.3 Confronting the monstrous in detective fiction for children

"By the 1930s, solving a mystery had become an established plot formula for both boys' and girls' series" (Mason 1995:15), and mirrors the popularity of detective fiction for adults in the 1920s and 1930s. Enid Blyton was becoming established as a writer at this time.

It is important to bear in mind that the definition of detective fiction applied in this study states that detective fiction refers to a fictional work in which a crime is committed and in which the plot centres on the investigation of the crime and the search for a solution. Thus, the *Famous Five* adventures can be said to fit into the genre of detective fiction because in the books the child protagonists encounter a mystery or a crime, and the children, for the duration of the book, search for a solution to this mystery or crime. This leads to the conclusion in which a

solution is reached and order is restored. Blyton's child protagonists solve the mystery through logical methods – they look for clues and gradually reach a solution.

In this study, I take into consideration Symons' perspective and propose that some of the writing of Enid Blyton, in particular the *Famous Five* series, is a variation on the detective story. "Historians of the detective story have been insistent that it is a unique literary form, distinct from the crime or mystery story, not to be confused with the police novel, and even more separate from the many varieties of thriller" (Symons 1992:1). However, Symons remarks that, "[f]or most critics the detective story has been taken as the central theme on which other crime stories and thrillers play variations" (1992:1). This idea is further reinforced by John Thompson's reference to the hybrid nature of genre fiction: "Conan Doyle's detective fiction, for example, is read as a hybrid of the adventure story, sensational literature, and the ratiocinative detective story formula defined by Poe" (1993:4).

"The form [of mystery stories for children] is borrowed from adult detective stories, and while children's mysteries, too, stress a strong sense of justice and social order, they aren't whodunits – for murders are taboo – but adventures" (Mason 1995:6). This argument is supported by Watson (2001) who believes that children's detective fiction is often an "adventure" story rather than a story revolving strictly around solving a crime. Plain refers to the ideological compatibility between the thriller genre and detective fiction with reference to Christie's thriller *N or M:* "the detective must identify the 'enemy within' and it matters little whether this enemy takes the form of a murderer or a traitor" (2001:44). In the same way there is ideological compatibility between the detective fiction of Agatha Christie and the children's literature of Enid Blyton: in Christie's detective stories the detective confronts the

enemy, the murderer; similarly, in the *Famous Five* series the children confront the enemy. However, rather than a murderer, the children are usually on the trail of thieves or smugglers. Children's detective stories take place in a simplified world within which there is a clear distinction between good and evil and in which the characters pursue a challenge in the battle between these two forces. "Crime fiction in general, and detective fiction in particular, is about confronting and taming the monstrous. It is a literature of containment, a narrative that 'makes safe'" (Plain 2001:3). In the *Famous Five* books and other series by Blyton directed at an older audience, such as the *Barney* series and *Adventure s*eries, the child protagonists sometimes travel away from home and are involved in dangerous adventures. In *Five Run Away Together* not only do the children run away to Kirrin Island where they live on their own, but they rescue a young girl who has been kidnapped, and hidden on the island, while in *Five Go off in a Caravan* the children undertake a caravan holiday without adult supervision. In addition, the children are threatened with violence in a number of the books. In *Five on Kirrin Island Again* George is threatened by a villain with a revolver: "there came a deafening crash, as the man pulled the trigger, and a bullet hit the roof somewhere in the passage" (Blyton [1947] 1967:148), and in *Five Go off in a Caravan* the thieves shoot at Timmy: "a shot rang out. It was Lou, shooting blindly at where he thought Timmy was" (Blyton [1946] 1967:174). Similarly, in *Five on a Treasure Island* Anne tells Aunt Fanny about their adventure "Oh, Aunt Fanny, the man had a revolver – and oh, he made Julian and George prisoners in the dungeons" (Blyton [1942] 1967:159).

Obvious questions arise about the plausibility of detective stories for children in which children outwit criminals and solve a crime committed by adults. Not only is this unlikely, but children are also restricted in their "lack of resources, physical strength, knowledge and experience" (Ray 1982:171). In addition, one has to question how the same children always

manage to land in situations where crimes have been committed and treasures are discovered. One way of overcoming the problem of the lack of plausibility of children solving crimes committed by adults is to allow the children to solve the crime by accident or as a result of their everyday activities. In Blyton's books this is usually the case. In *Five on a Treasure Island* the children discover hidden treasure while exploring Kirrin Island and thus discover that criminals are attempting to buy the island for far less than it is worth. The children are often on holiday when they encounter suspicious characters, such as the thieves Lou and Tiger Dan encounter in *Five Go off in a Caravan* because they happen to be camping in the same area. Similarly, the children witness suspicious events, as they do in *Five Go to Mystery Moor* when an aeroplane drops parcels in the vicinity of their camp in the middle of the night.

3.4 Characters

One of the criticisms of Golden Age detective fiction is the use of stereotypical and one-dimensional characters. However, Symons argues that during the Golden Age, "logical deduction was the heart of the detective story" (1992:2); hence there was "little room for any depth of characterization or any flourish of style". "The archetypical pattern underlying all of Christie's novels and stories does not allow for extensive psychological development of characters, for it would only impede the plot action" (Bargainnier 1980:38). While Golden Age detective fiction has generally been criticised for poor characterisation, the primary concern of such detective fiction is ascertaining the truth; hence, the plot centres on the investigation of the crime rather than character development. Symons argues that, in detective fiction "good people and bad people are clearly defined" (1992:10).

Similar criticism was levelled at the writing of Enid Blyton. However, Rudd (2000) believes that children read Blyton because of the safety offered by these stereotypes. Stereotypes offer the reader affirmations, they reinforce the horizon of expectations, and they confirm the reader's perceptions. Blyton's plots endorse certain dichotomies, including: "Englishness/foreignness, white/non-white … 'Us'/'Them'" and these "dichotomies underlie the stereotyped and formulaic characterization" (Druce 1992:221). As in Golden Age detective fiction, in Blyton's works there are few characters and these are clearly defined as being either good or bad. When the children have to stay with Mrs Stick in *Five Run Away Together*, it is clear from the beginning of the book that she is bad. In the first description of Mrs Stick Blyton refers to her as a "sour-faced woman" (Blyton [1944] 1967:13). The negative image of Mrs Stick is reinforced when Blyton has Julian remark: "[s]he looks a real old stick. But all the same I hope she doesn't stick here for long. I hope Joanna comes back. I liked fat old Joanna, and she was nice to Timmy" (Blyton [1944] 1967:13).

In *Five Go off in a Caravan* the first description of the villain Tiger Dan is also negative:

> 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.
> He didn't look as if he could make a singe joke, or do anything in the least funny. In fact, he looked really bad tempered….
>
> (Blyton [1946] 1967:14)

Blyton highlights Tiger Dan's negative characteristics by having Nobby explain: "[t]hey call him Tiger Dan because of his rages" (Blyton [1946] 1967:51). Tiger Dan's friend Lou is described as "a long-limbed, loose-jointed fellow with an ugly face, and a crop of black shining hair that curled tightly…. The children thought that he and Tiger Dan would make a good pair – bad-tempered, scowling and unfriendly" (Blyton [1946] 1967:51). The description of Lou's hair as "curled tightly" also has racist connotations. (I explore the reflection and subversion of

racist discourses in the writing of Blyton and Christie in more detail in Chapter Five of this study.)

The stereotypical child protagonists in the *Famous Five* series also represent a "personality type" (May 1995:90). Each child in the group has a specific role: George is a stereotypical tomboy; Anne a stereotypical girl; and Julian the stereotypical oldest male leader. Dick, the second male in the group, is the most nondescript character in the *Famous Five* stories. The different characters represented in the *Famous Five* books provide a greater opportunity for the reader to identify with a character in the story, and may reinforce positive feelings in the child reader that he or she, too, may be a hero.

3.4.1 The detective

By far the most important character in detective fiction is, of course, the detective around whose investigation the plot centres and who is responsible for restoring order. Standing in opposition to the social disorder represented by the crime, "the great detective moves untouched and incorruptible amidst the chaos of earthly existence, employing his intellect to conquer the chaos" (Bargainnier 1980:42).

In Christie and Blyton, the detectives operate "outside the officialdom of the law, but [are] on the same side as the law" (Bargainnier 1980:41); they are not police officers or professional detectives, but they work to maintain the status quo and reinforce the established social order. It is ironic that in Blyton and Christie's writing the detectives, who act to enforce the current status quo, are in fact marginal figures in the society in which they operate. In a patriarchal heteronormative society children, women and especially elderly spinsters, and foreigners, operate on the fringes of society and are often disregarded as merely marginal

figures. As a result, they have "great personal freedom" (Bargainnier 1980:43) in that their activities are overlooked, making it easier for them to go about the business of detecting. In Blyton's *Famous Five* adventures the children are free to roam about. In *Five on a Treasure Island* the children go to the island without Aunt Fanny because she conveniently has "some gardening to do" (Blyton [1942] 1967:49). In *Five Run Away Together* Aunt Fanny is taken ill and the children are left in the care of Mrs Stick, but the villainous cook seems hardly perturbed when the children run away together.

Binyon identifies three main classes of fictional detective: "the professional amateur, or private detective, such as Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot; the amateur amateur, or dilettante, such as Dupin or Dorothy Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey; and the professional, or policeman" (1989:6). Smith adds to this the "accidental detective" (1995), who becomes caught up by chance in solving the crime. "The essential difference between Poirot and Miss Marple is that he is a professional detective, while she is an amateur, if extremely effective busybody" (Cranny-Francis 1990:151). In the *Famous Five* stories, the role of the detective is "shared among a group of child protagonists who… may act in unison or as individuals" (Druce 1992:146). Like Marple, the children in the *Famous Five* series usually become involved in the crime by chance: they fit Smith's definition of the accidental detective.

"Some critics have stated that readers do not identify with the detective because of his superiority and freedom" (Bargainnier 1980:43). Therefore, since this may indeed be the case, the author needs to create a connection between the detective and the reader. Bargainnier (1980) refers to three ways to create this bond. First, the author may use an amateur detective because it could well be easier for the reader to relate to an amateur than to an official or to a police officer. Symons agrees with this argument and claims that in a

story that has an amateur detective "the reader was able easily to put himself in the detective's position" (1992:11). Second, the author may choose to include a sidekick 'Watson' character as an aide or friend of the detective. The 'Watson' character is "the reader's surrogate, allowing [the reader] to be in continuous and close contact with the detective's investigation (but without ever actually knowing his thoughts)" (Bargainnier 1980:43). In addition, the sidekick "is a character to whom the reader can feel superior" (Bargainnier 1980:43). (I investigate the use of the 'Watson' character in more detail later on in this chapter.) Third, the author may choose to give the detective personality traits "which make his intellectual and moral superiority less formidable" (Bargainnier 1980:44). This is particularly evident in Christie's Poirot whose peculiar mannerisms "offset his immense intellect" (Bargainnier 1980:44). The author makes use of humour to soften the detective's intellectual superiority and make him or her more 'human'. (These idiosyncrasies are discussed in more detail later in this study with specific reference to individual detectives.)

The portrayal of power relations in Golden Age detective fiction is particularly evident in the ways in which the relationship between the detective and the criminal is presented. The detective novel places emphasis upon the contest between the detective and the murderer, rather than upon the actual deed and the victim. By committing the crime, and having knowledge about the details of the crime and how the crime was committed, the criminal is exerting power over both the detective and the society, in particular the individuals affected by the crime. Throughout the story, until the crime is solved and the identity of the criminal is revealed, the wrong-doer has the power because he or she has the knowledge and thus can exercise power and control over the rest of the characters in the book. In other words, the crime exacerbates fear and stimulates the search for answers. However, as the investigation proceeds, the detective begins to gain knowledge about the details of the crime and thus

knowledge about the criminal. This knowledge places the detective in a position of power, which ultimately results in the solution of the crime and the most obvious exercise of power – the restoration of order and the reinforcement of the status quo through the apprehension of the criminal.

3.4.2 The 'Watsonesque' sidekick

In detective fiction "often there is a friend, a helper, a trusted sidekick" (Swales 2000:xv) who accompanies the detective in his or her investigations and also often narrates the story. As discussed earlier, sidekick characters are slow to see the significance of clues, thus allowing readers to develop a sense of superiority over such characters. In addition, they act as a surrogate for the reader, ensuring that the reader is privy to the details of the investigation.

According to Kinsman, "[t]he origins of the sleuth and the assistant device can be traced back to Poe's 1840s 'chevalier Dupin' stories… the blueprint of an abiding structural convention of the formula: the superhuman sleuth assisted by a trusted, but less able sidekick" (2000:158). Poe was followed by Arthur Conan Doyle and many of the sidekick characters are modelled on Sherlock Holmes's sidekick, Dr Watson.

> In common with the fictional Watson, the reader 'sees' things differently from the detective. By contrast with the sleuth's superior reasoning powers, the dazzled friend's diligent questions and guesses, slower and more mundane but at the same time illustrative of intuition and imagination, include the reader.
>
> (Kinsman 2000:160)

Christie portrays the sidekick-detective relationship in that existing between Hercule Poirot and Captain Arthur Hastings. Hastings appears in eight novels and 26 short stories and he narrates all the stories in which he appears. Hart emphasises that

> the importance of Hastings in the history of detective literature should not be underestimated. Besides his contribution as Poirot's must [*sic*] trusted advisor on the English, Hastings set a style in recording the great detective's achievements

> that has addicted readers ever since. Poirot himself perceived him as a major influence and counted him as his dearest friend.
>
> (1990:132)

Poirot and Hastings's close friendship is illustrated by the fact that Poirot refers to Hastings as "mon ami" in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (Christie [1920] 1969:21). As Poirot recalls:

> "Always, when I have had a big case, he has been by my side. And he has helped me – yes, often he has helped me. For he had a knack, that one, of stumbling over the truth unawares – without noticing it himself, *bien entendu.* At times, he has said something particularly foolish, and behold that foolish remark has revealed the truth to me! And then, too, it was his practice to keep a written record of the cases that proved interesting."
>
> (Christie [1926] 1974:196)

Christie takes advantage of the reader's expectations about the conventions of the genre of detective fiction and the stereotypical detective's sidekick to mislead the reader in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd.*

In Blyton's *Famous Five* adventures, Anne, the youngest of the children, plays the role of the sidekick and reader's surrogate. Explanations offered to Anne ensure that the child readers understand the details of the mystery. In addition, Anne is slow to see the significance of clues so younger readers who do not understand might then not feel stupid, while older readers might not feel that Blyton and the other characters are talking down to them by explaining terms and concepts that they already understand. In fact, readers who do not require clarification are invited to feel superior to Anne. Blyton has various characters explain words and terms to Anne with which readers might not be familiar:

> "Ingots!" said Anne, puzzled. "What does that mean? I've never heard that word before."
> But the two boys had. "Ingots!" cried Dick. "Why – that must be the bars of gold. They were called ingots."
> "Most bars of metal are called ingots," said Julian, going red with excitement.
>
> (Blyton [1942] 1967:89)

> "What are kidnappers?" said Anne.
> "People who steal away children or grown-ups and hide them somewhere till a large sum of money is paid out for them," explained Julian. "It's called ransom. Till the ransom is paid, the prisoner is held by the captors."
>
> (Blyton [1944] 1967:158)

> "…scientists are V.I.P.!"
> "What's V.I.P.?" asked Anne.
> "Very Important People, baby!" said Julian, with a laugh.
>
> (Blyton [1947] 1967:64)

> "What's a cart-wheel?" said Anne.
> "What that boy's doing over there," said Dick. "Look." He pointed to a boy who was turning cart-wheels very quickly, going over and over on his hands and feet, turning himself like a wheel. It looked easy, but it wasn't, as Dick very well knew.
>
> (Blyton [1946] 1967:11)

Blyton also hints at taboo subjects, such as death, when she has the other characters explain things to Anne:

> "Well, don't step off the road," warned the driver, stopping the car. "And don't you let that dog out, Miss. Once he runs off the road and gets into the marsh he'll be gone for good."
> "What do you mean – gone for good?" said Anne, her eyes wide.
> "He means the marsh will suck down Timmy at once," said Julian.
>
> (Blyton [1945] 1967:32)

> "What are catacombs?" asked Anne, with a vague picture of cats and combs in her head.
> "Winding, secret tunnels in the hill," said Sooty. "Nobody knows them all. You can get lost in them easily, and never get out again. Lots of people have."
>
> (Blyton [1945] 1967:52)

Like Hastings, Anne also has "a knack, that one, of stumbling over the truth unawares' (Christie [1926] 1974:196).

> "And then Anne found the entrance! It was quite by accident. She was tired and sat down to rest. She lay on her front and scrabbled about in the sand. Suddenly her fingers touched something hard and cold in the sand. She uncovered it – and lo and behold, it was an iron ring! She gave a shout and the others looked up."
>
> (Blyton [1942] 1967:115)

Timothy the dog and the fifth member of the *Famous Five* can also be described as a sidekick character because he provides additional information to the reader. In *Five go Adventuring*

Again Timothy's dislike of the tutor Mr Roland on their first meeting is a signal of things to come when Mr Rowland is later revealed to be the villain. Blyton's message to the reader is clear: trust Timothy.

> Then, very slowly and deliberately, Timothy turned his back on Mr Rowland and climbed up into the pony-trap! …
> "He doesn't like you," said George, looking at Mr Rowland. "That's very queer. He usually likes people. But perhaps you don't like dogs?"
>
> (Blyton [1943] 1967:31)

3.4.3 The Villain

In Blyton's *Famous Five* series villains "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" (Druce 1992:222). (The depiction of foreigners and lower class characters as villains is explored in Chapter Five of this study.)

One of the most important characteristics of the villain in detective fiction is that it could be one of us.

> For Christie, as her characters must always realise with alarm, the criminal is first of all *one of us*, someone who for nine-tenths of the novel must carry on seeming successfully to be just that….The most innocent (the least likely) person may turn out to be the criminal…. It is within the charmed circle of *insiders* that the criminal must be sought.
>
> (Light, in Chernaik 2000:105)

The villain conceals his or her true nature and attempts to act normally. Bargainnier remarks that the murderer "is nearly always from the same class as his victims – the dead and the suspected – he can hide behind the accepted and expected social pattern of that class" (1980:119-120). Thompson believes that a requirement of detective fiction is that it

> call into question the identity of every individual within the circumscribed boundaries of the community in which the crime takes place… the identity of the murderer is always in question since it could plausibly be just about anyone. Thus the formal English novel of detection operates on the premise that the individual's claim to a certain identity is false… appearances are not necessarily commensurate with reality.
>
> (1993:130)

In a Christie novel, there is a "closed circle of suspects – a strictly limited number of potential murderers" (Curran 2009:37). No one can be trusted because "each character is both a potential murderer and potential victim" (Chernaik 2000:105). "*Anyone* may be the murderer" (Bargainnier 1980:121) and the identity of the murderer is never obvious. In the *Mysterious Affair at Styles,* Christie allows Poirot to remind her readers that "[i]t is always wise to suspect everybody until you can prove logically, and to your own satisfaction, that they are innocent" (Christie [1920] 1969:109). This idea is repeated in *The Murder at the Vicarage,*

> "Ah!" said Miss Marple. "But I always find it prudent to suspect everybody just a little. What I say is, you really never *know*, do you?"
>
> (Christie [1930] 1972:101)

The idea that the murderer could be anyone echoes Campbell's argument, observed earlier in this chapter, that Christie's works create a sense of "paranoia" (2005:12) among the characters and in the readers. The isolated setting, such as a country house or small village, and the fact that the killer is unknown creates a situation in which the characters feel trapped, and this heightens their feelings of paranoia and fear. According to John Thompson, Christie is concerned with exploring the "effects of the criminal transgression on the individuals involved" (1993:124). As I mentioned in the discussion of how hegemony works in Chapter One of this study, individual members of society internalise the values, attitudes and beliefs of the dominant class and, consequently, these systems of thought come to be regarded as natural and normal. Individuals seek to perpetuate the status quo, and are threatened when criminal transgression jeopardises this.

3.5 The crime: a threat to the status quo

"One of the most marked features of the Anglo-American detective story is that it is strongly on the side of law and order" (Symons 1992:10). By committing an act that is deemed unacceptable by society, the villain in detective fiction stands in opposition to society, and therefore the villain threatens the social order because any violation of the law must include a violation of the established social, political and economic policies, since the law is shaped by these perspectives. Dennis Porter, quoted in Thompson, contends that

> a crime implies the violation of a community code of conduct and demands a response in terms of the code. It always depends on a legal definition, and the law, as both Gramsci and Althusser make clear, is a key element of the superstructure in ensuring the reproduction of existing power relations in a society. As a result, in representing crime and its punishment, whether evoked or merely anticipated, detective novels invariably project the image of a given order and the implied value system that helps sustain it. By naming a place and by evoking, however glancingly, the socio-economic order that prevails within it, they confirm, in fact, that there can be no transgression without a code, no individual crime act without a community that condemns it.
>
> (Porter, in Thompson 1993:124)

According to Bedell (in Bargainnier 1980:10), the traditional function of the detective is to restore the social and moral status quo. This makes it permissible to refer to detective fiction as an agent of hegemony, as an institution which encourages people to exercise bio-power, conform to the norm and maintain the status quo of the society in which they operate. As John Thompson contends, Arthur Conan Doyle's detective fiction did not simply affirm the values of the time in which he lived and wrote, but "it helped to produce them. His fiction, that is, helped to define the kinds of beliefs to which a reasonable, educated Victorian or Edwardian gentleman might subscribe" (1993:76). "On the social level, then, what crime literature offered to its readers for half a century from 1890 onwards was a reassuring world in which those who tried to disturb the established order were always discovered and punished" (Symons 1992:11).

The subject of typical Blyton and Christie novels is "'the unexpected violence which manifests itself… in the most apparently secure of places, family life', as in the course of the narrative, 'a safe, known world', familiar in its contours, is suddenly thrown out of kilter" (Light, in Chernaik 2000:105). In the *Famous Five* adventures everyday events – such as meals and household chores – form a "realistic background for unlikely events" (Fisher 1985:273) such as interaction between smugglers, villains and thieves. In Christie's fiction disorder, violence, and behaviours believed to be socially aberrant such as theft, adultery, drug abuse and illegitimate children are concealed behind the façade of everyday events, the rituals and activities, the social conventions and formations that define acceptable behaviour, thoughts and actions. In detective fiction the *unheimlich* – not the 'uncanny' but rather that which is supposed to be concealed, or kept secret – is inadvertently revealed.

The "domesticisation of crime" (Light, in Mezei 2007:105) by Christie – her location of crime and evil in a domestic setting – reflects a moral disorder and dysfunction hidden beneath the veneer of a seemingly orderly hierarchical society. Rowland remarks that the Golden Age "located crime at home. It is to be found amongst the colonels, spinsters, minor gentry, middle-aged businessmen, impecunious relatives and young feckless socialites" (2001:68). In *The Murder at the Vicarage* Christie has a number of characters contribute to the domestic disorder: the incompetent servant Mary; the abandoned daughter Lettice, the abusive Colonel Protheroe, the adulterous Mrs Protheroe, the ailing Mrs Lestrange, the thieving Mr Hawes, and the impostor posing as Dr Stone. These characters offer an opportunity for Christie to pass comment on the dysfunctional society in which she lived, in which all is not as it seems: "[c]ivilization may house barbarity within its walls" (Mezei 2007:110). The crime presents an opportunity for the real truth about the society to be revealed – without the crime no one would have known about all the corruption under the surface.

3.6 The search to restore order

3.6.1 Formula

Sheila Ray makes the point that "children read Blyton for the same reasons that adults read Agatha Christie when they want to dip into something well ordered and predictable" (Ray 1982:103). For some readers the pleasure of escape literature "may lie precisely in this 'timelessness' and in a repetitiousness which offers instant access to a familiar cast of characters and situations" (Druce 1992:114). The repetition of the formula in the different books creates a set of expectations in the reader; the readers know what to expect when they pick up a novel by Blyton or Christie, and thus will not be disappointed. The readers know that a solution will be reached and that order will be restored. Christie points out in her autobiography that when one is writing a certain type of fiction it is important to take the market, the intended reader, into consideration, and that an author needs to conform to the conventions of the genre.

> You have got to do something you feel you can do well and that you enjoy doing well, and you want to sell it well. If so, you must give it the dimensions and appearance that are wanted…. If you want to write a book study what sizes books are, and write within the limits of that size. If you want to write a certain type of short story for a magazine you have to make it the length, and it has to be the type of story, that is printed in that magazine…. You must submit to the discipline of form.
>
> (Christie 1993:345)

As already discussed, both Blyton and Christie enjoyed a great deal of commercial success and significant financial benefits from their writing. Druce highlights some of the commercial benefits for writers like Blyton and Christie who write series and formula fiction. These include "[a]dvertising [which] can be aimed at a known, relatively well-defined audience", and "a more generous budget" (Druce 1992:111) which would be based on the sales of previous books in the series. Writers of series have the opportunity to exploit their readers' brand loyalty. Stories with predictable structures guarantee the fulfilment of expectations because readers

"not only [recognise] the formula on which fictions were built, they also [expect] it" (Klein 1995:4). To meet the expectation of readers of detective fiction the stories should conform to the predetermined conventions of the genre.

Detective fiction has a strict linear plot structure with a clear beginning, middle and end. The detective story usually starts with the violation of the law, or in some cases the discovery that a crime has been committed before the story even begins. The beginning of the story, in which the objective is stated, is usually short compared to the middle in which the investigation takes place because the plot centres on the investigation of the crime. In the conclusion the perpetrator is revealed and order is restored. Dorothy Sayers argues that Golden Age detective fiction "possesses an Aristotelian perfection of beginning, middle, and end" (Sayers, in Chernaik 2000:108). According to Binyon, this attempt to link detective fiction to Aristotle is an obvious "attempt to establish its intellectual respectability and defend it against the accusation often levelled that it is cheap, sensationalist trash with no literary value whatsoever" (1989:2). It is an attempt to legitimise detective fiction by placing it within the acceptable boundaries about what is good literature. In other words, it is an attempt to conform to society's expectations of what good literature is, as defined by the dominant discourse.

Blyton and Christie perfected the series formula "in which individual books, while regularly offering an immediately recognisable *cluster* of characters – recurrent protagonists, identical settings, or plots which repeat a familiar formula" (Druce 1992:112) have little or no chronological relationship with any other books in the series. The children in the *Famous Five* books often claim to be one year older:

> "Golly, you've grown."
> They all had. They were all a year older and a year bigger than when they had had their exciting adventures on Kirrin Island.
>
> (Blyton [1944] 1967:10)

However, there is little actual change in their age over the 21 *Famous Five* titles. In addition, reference to earlier episodes is vague and does not have any impact on the events of the current story. As Druce reminds us, "the clock and the calendar are both reset to zero at the commencement of each story, and Georgina remains thirteen and Anne ten years old twenty-one years after their first appearance" (1992:114).

Even though Christie changed some elements of her work over time, "the basic form of her fiction did not change. Each new 'Christie for Christmas' could be counted upon to be another surprising variation on the general pattern" (Bargainnier 1980:4). There is no need to read the books featuring Poirot or Marple in a particular order because each story stands alone within the series. While Christie wrote novels in which she has both Marple and Poirot die, these books were written several years before their publication and do not have an impact on the reader's enjoyment of her other stories.

The Secret Island (1938) was Blyton's first application of the series formula in which the actions of a recurrent cast of characters are featured. "Once she had begun a series, it was Enid Blyton's unvarying practice to sit down and write a new volume each year" (Druce 1992:16). Blyton made few changes from book to book, and she reworked "material for different age groups, different markets, and different word-length requirements' (Rudd 2000:157). In 1942 she began writing the *Famous Five* series. Initially intended to consist of only six books, Blyton eventually published 21 books in the *Famous Five* series.

The predictable pattern used by Blyton is characteristic of formula fiction: during a school holiday a group of children become involved in an adventure in which they uncover a crime and help to apprehend the criminals. As in Golden Age detective fiction, plot is essential here and "must be unfolded in a way which attracts and holds the reader's interest" (Ray 1982:128). Blyton's cliff-hanger chapter endings contain the promise of excitement and help to keep the reader's attention. In *Five Go Adventuring Again,* Chapter Three ends with a cry of surprise as George cries: "Look! Mrs Sanders, come and look!" (Blyton [1943] 1967:37). Since the following chapter heading is 'An exciting discovery' the reader is encouraged to read further to find out more about the discovery. In addition, Blyton maintains the reader's attention by the use of allusions to the coming mystery in her books – the reader is constantly reminded that "something is going to happen" (Cullingford 1998:104). In *Five Have a Wonderful Time* Blyton allows Dick to hint of the coming adventure:

> "Did I hear something about an adventure? Are you looking for one already?"
> "Good gracious no!" said Anne. "It's the last thing I want! And the last thing we'll get into too, in this quiet little place, thank goodness."
> Dick grinned. "Well, you never know"
>
> (Blyton [1952] 1968:22)

The secret of Blyton's success is that she encourages her readers to turn over the page and keep reading. Like Blyton, Christie was able to "make readers continue from the top to the bottom of the page and then turn that page; and the make them do that 200 times in the course of any, and in her case, every, book" (Curran 2009:35).

One of the essential elements of Christie's formula is misdirection and concealment of the truth through a multiplicity of meanings, as she has Miss Marple point out in *The Moving Finger*: "[m]isdirection, you see – everybody looking at the wrong thing" (Christie [1942] 1971:154). Christie uses a number of methods to misdirect the reader in an attempt to outwit her readers and prevent them from working out the solution. These include large numbers of

suspects, a second murder later in the story, the concealment of the murderer's identity, and so on. The author can also use the reader's expectations of detective fiction to misdirect the reader by not conforming to the conventions of the genre.

In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, Christie disguises the murderer to misdirect the reader. Christie presents Dr Sheppard as the village doctor. "[K]nown and respected by everyone, he attracts less attention than a servant" (Bayard 2001:31). As I have already noted above, Christie further disguises him by using him as Poirot's sidekick and as the narrator, playing on the reader's expectations that because Hastings, Poirot's usual sidekick and narrator, is trustworthy, Dr Sheppard will also be. The reader's perception is constrained by her or his expectations of the sidekick character in conformity with the rules of the formula. She reinforces the role of the sidekick by allowing Dr Sheppard to point out that "[he] played Watson to [Poirot's] Sherlock" (Christie [1926] 1974:124), and by having Poirot refer to Sheppard as "[m]y friend, Dr Sheppard" (Christie [1926] 1974: 67). We can see that this association with Hastings protects Dr Sheppard from suspicion. Christie reinforces this association between Hastings and Dr Sheppard through a number of comments by Poirot that highlight the similarities between them:

> "Indeed," said the little man cheerfully, "this has not been a wasted morning. I have made the acquaintance of a man who in some ways resembles my far-off friend."
>
> (Christie [1926] 1974:22)

> Poirot lingered about until the inspector had gone back towards the house. Then he looked at me.
> "You must have been sent from the good God to replace my friend Hastings," he said, with a twinkle.
>
> (Christie [1926] 1974:81)

> "You and I, M. le docteur, we investigate this affair side by side. Without you I should be lost."
>
> (Christie [1926] 1974:91)

In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* the viewpoint of the narrator further assists in disguising Dr Sheppard as the murderer because he does not tell us about himself. Christie has Poirot contrast Sheppard's account of the events in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* to similar accounts produced by Hastings in which Hastings refers to his own thoughts about the crime – something that Sheppard does not do:

> "Not so did Hastings write," continued my friend. "On every page, many, many times was the word 'I'. What *he* thought – what *he* did. But you – you have kept your personality in the background; only once or twice does it obtrude – in scenes of home life, shall we say?"
>
> (Christie [1926] 1974:198)

When Dr Sheppard asks Poirot what he thinks of the doctor's version of the events surrounding the death of Roger Ackroyd, Poirot describes it as

> "[a] very meticulous and accurate account,"... "You have recorded all the facts faithfully and exactly – though you have shown yourself becomingly reticent as to your own share in them."
>
> (Christie [1926] 1974:198)

Sheppard tells the truth, "but he does not tell *the whole* truth' (Bayard 2001:37). The lie by omission is a clever technique used by Christie in this work.

> "You see now why I drew attention to the reticence of your manuscript," murmured Poirot. "It was strictly truthful as far as it went – but it did not go very far, eh, my friend?"
>
> (Christie [1926] 1974:208)

Blyton also misdirects her readers by manipulating stereotypes. In *Five Go to Smuggler's Top* the children are particularly suspicious of Sooty's stepfather, Mr Lenoir. Moreover, as I have already mentioned above, Mr Lenoir does not like dogs – a common characteristic of the villains in Blyton's books. Throughout *Five Go to Smuggler's Top* the readers are led to believe that he is the possible villain. Blyton even has Dick remark: "I'm sure Mr Lenoir is at the bottom of all this" (Blyton [1945] 1967:137), only for them to discover that he is innocent.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, detective fiction calls into question the identity of every character. Everyone is a suspect. Not only does this underline the mayhem concealed behind the façade of the ideal middle class life, but it also allows authors of detective fiction to distract readers from the truth and the actual perpetrator by attracting their attention to several possible suspects. Among those present some have a secret that they wish to conceal, and as a result of this they "falsify information to protect themselves" (Bargainnier 1980:132). In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* Christie has Poirot tell Dr Sheppard:

> "…You will find, M. le docteur, if you have much to do with cases of this kind, that they all resemble each other in one thing."
> "What is that?" I asked curiously.
> "Everyone concerned in them has something to hide."
>
> (Christie [1926] 1974:71)

This point is reiterated later in the same novel,

> "But – just that, monsieur. Every one of you in this room is concealing something from me." He raised his hand as a faint murmur of protest arose. "Yes, yes, I know what I am saying. It may be something unimportant – trivial – which is supposed to have no bearing on the case, but there it is. *Each one of you has something to hide.* Come now, am I right?"
>
> (Christie [1926] 1974:117)

Christie uses crimes and secrets unrelated to the murder – affairs, skeletons in the closet – to distract the reader from the truth. In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd,* Mrs Ackroyd confesses to Dr Sheppard that she has rung up a large amount of debt:

> "Those dreadful bills. And some I didn't like to show Roger at all. They were things a man wouldn't understand. He would have said the things weren't necessary. And of course they mounted up, you know, and they kept coming in."
>
> (Christie [1926] 1974:127-128)

Mr Raymond reveals that he was also "in debt, badly" (Christie [1926] 1974:137), Parker is exposed as a blackmailer (Christie [1926] 1974:151), Miss Russell confesses to having an illegitimate child (Christie [1926] 1974:180), and Poirot discovers that Ursula Bourne is secretly married to Ralph Paton: "[i]t is not Ursula Bourne, is it, my child – but Ursula Paton? Mrs Ralph Paton" (Christie [1926] 1974:189). In *The Murder at the Vicarage* the vicar

discovers that Lawrence Redding is having an affair with Mrs Protheroe (Christie [1930] 1972:21), and the individual who is thought to be the archaeologist Dr Stone is exposed as an impostor by Miss Marple's nephew Raymond:

> "But, my dear fellow – that wasn't Stone."
> "Not Stone?"
> "Not the archaeologist. I know him quite well. The man wasn't Stone – not the faintest resemblance."
>
> (Christie [1930] 1972:127-128)

Mrs Lestrange not only turns out to be Lettice's mother, but Christie also reveals that she is dying: "Didn't you ever guess? Mrs Lestrange is my mother. She is – is dying you know. She wanted to see me and so she came down here under an assumed name" (Christie [1930] 1972:186), and Mr Hawes is exposed as a thief responsible for "the misappropriations of the church funds" (Christie [1930] 1972:182).

Bayard observes that "several characters lie on minor points, promoting the reader's distrust" (2001:32) – if a character lies about one thing it is easy to assume that they might lie about having committed murder. "One of Christie's greatest skills is the spreading of motive, means, and opportunity among those involved in such a manner as to make any statement by any character suspicious or worse" (Bargainnier 1980:132).

Another way that Christie uses the reader's expectations of the formula of detective fiction to misdirect the reader is by placing the murderer in plain sight, and sometimes even having him or her confess to the murder. Bayard contends that "the reader is inclined to think that if the writer is introducing them with such ostentation, they must be innocent" (2001:28). In *The Murder at the Vicarage,* Christie misleads readers by manipulating the widely held assumption that the murderer would never give himself up when she has Lawrence Redding

confess that he is the murderer. In addition, the reaction of the other characters on hearing about his arrest casts further doubt on his guilt.

> "Would you believe it? The baker's just told me. They've arrested young Mr Redding."
> "Arrested Lawrence," cried Griselda incredulously. "Impossible. It must be some stupid mistake."
> "No mistake about it, mum," said Mary with a kind of gloating exultation. "Mr Redding, he went there himself and gave himself up. Last night, last thing. Went right in, threw down the pistol on the table, and 'I did it,' he says. Just like that."
> (Christie [1930] 1972:38)

In fact, in *The Murder at the Vicarage* following Lawrence Redding's confession (Christie [1930] 1972:38), his lover, Anne Protheroe, also claims to have killed her husband: "it was I who killed my husband" (Christie [1930] 1972:49) thus misdirecting the reader even more. In fact, following his discovery of Anne Protheroe's confession, the vicar describes Lawrence Redding's confession as a "heroic self-accusation" (Christie [1930] 1972:47).

3.6.2 Closure

The detective story traditionally ends with the identification of the criminal and the restoration of order and therefore collaborates with conservative social forces. As part of the formula, the conclusion is "preordained" (Chernaik 2000:106).

> At the narrative's inevitable, carefully foreshadowed conclusion, the mysteries are solved, the elements of fear, suspicion and doubt are banished, order is restored: readers come to detective fiction expecting to find reassurance, to have their formal and ideological expectations confirmed.
> (Chernaik 2000:104)

The reader knows that order will be restored since the goal of detective fiction is to ascertain the truth and to ensure that the status quo is preserved. The knowledge that a resolution will be reached drives the reader to keep reading. Therefore the *denouement*, while often a very short part of the story as a whole, is an essential part of the plot. Throughout the story the

perpetrator and the method are concealed from the reader. The *denouement* is the 'at-last', the 'ah-ha' moment in which the reader can breathe a sigh of relief at the revelation.

One of the conventions of Christie's detective fiction is the *denouement* in which Christie has the characters gather together in a type of reunion during which the detective reconstructs the crime and unveils the truth. In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* Poirot asks Mary Cavendish for her permission "to hold a little *reunion* in the *salon*? It is necessary for everyone to attend" (Christie [1920] 1969:167). After reconstructing the events of the murder, Poirot melodramatically reveals the murderer: "*Messieurs, mesdames,*" said Poirot, with a flourish, "let me introduce you to the murderer, Mr. Alfred Ingelthorp!" (Christie [1920] 1969:177). In *A Murder is Announced* Christie has the characters gather around Miss Marple, like children listening to a story, as she unravels the events leading to the arrest of Miss Blacklock.

> Miss Marple sat in the tall arm-chair. Bunch was on the floor in front of the fire with her arms around her knees.
> Reverend Julian Harmon was leaning forward and was for once looking more like a schoolboy than a man foreshadowing his own maturity. And Inspector Craddock was smoking his pipe and drinking a whisky and soda and was clearly very much off duty. An outer circle was composed of Julia, Patrick, Edmund and Phillipa.
> "I think it is your story, Miss Marple," said Craddock.
> (Christie [1950] 1979:199)

The conclusion is also an important element in fiction for children, especially fiction in which a mystery is to be solved. As Gavin and Routledge point out, "to leave a child reader in uncertainty [is] pedagogically wrong" (2001b:2). Closure and a predictable pattern play an important role in the psychological development of the child; children are secure in their enjoyment of the dangerous elements of the story because they know that good will triumph and that the child protagonists will escape unharmed.

4 CONCLUSION

Golden Age of detective fiction influenced the dominant opinions which determined the definition of the genre of detective fiction. In fact, the Golden Age was pre-eminent "in establishing still-current definitions of the detective novel" (Klein 1995:95) so the Golden Age could be said to have created a dominant discourse of detective fiction. In addition, the repetitive formula of detective fiction creates a set of expectations in the reader. However, regardless of her status as a writer of Golden Age detective fiction and member of The Detection Club, Christie did not always conform to the conventions of detective fiction. She broke the rules of the age in her writing, subverted the dominant discourse and manipulated the reader's horizon of expectations.

Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* series does not strictly conform to the definition of detective fiction but in the early twentieth century some elements of detective fiction, in particular death, were not considered suitable in literature for children. As indicated in this chapter, in this study I take the point of view that Blyton's *Famous Five* books are a variation on the detective fiction genre because, like detective fiction, the stories focus on the solving of a mystery, the restoration of order, and the maintenance of the status quo.

CHAPTER FOUR

GENDER CONSTRUCTS:
THE PORTRAYAL OF GENDER ROLES IN THE WRITING OF BLYTON AND CHRISTIE

> The position of women, over the years, has definitely changed for the worse. We women have behaved like mugs. We have clamoured to be allowed to work as men work. Men, not being fools, have taken kindly to the idea. Why support a wife? What's wrong with a wife supporting herself? She wants to do it. By Golly, she can go on doing it!
>
> It seems sad that having established ourselves so cleverly as the 'weaker sex', we should now be broadly on a par with the women of primitive tribes who toil in the fields all day, walk miles to gather camelthorn for fuel, and on trek carry all the pots, pans and household equipment in their heads, whilst the gorgeous, ornamental male sweeps on ahead, unburdened save for one lethal weapon to defend his women.
>
> You've got to hand it to the Victorian women; they got their menfolk where they wanted them. They established their frailty, delicacy, sensibility – the constant need of being protected and cherished. Did they lead miserable, servile lives, downtrodden and oppressed? Such is not my recollection of them. All my grandmothers' friends seem to me in retrospect singularly resilient and almost invariably successful in getting their own way. They were tough, self-willed, and remarkably well-read and well-informed.
>
> Agatha Christie *An Autobiography*

1 INTRODUCTION

As I have pointed out in Chapter One of this study, dominant discourses often manifest in asymmetrical power relations between individuals in which one individual is dominated or oppressed by the other. We have seen that both Agatha Christie and Enid Blyton were successful women writers in a society wherein which the prevailing body of beliefs promoted patriarchal heteronormative discourses in which gender stereotyping defined the role and acceptable social and cultural behaviour of women. In England in the early twentieth century these systems of thought advocated that women should be passive creatures and that they should focus on domestic roles and activities such as raising children and managing the

household rather than following a career such as writing novels. Laura Barton remarks that "[a]s children, we soon learned, it was different for boys" (2007:31) and that girls and women were 'other', not male. Before going any further I think it is useful for my discussion to define a few key terms relevant to this chapter, and to begin by noting that Smith highlights the need for us "to be aware of the problems related to the use of the terms 'sex' and 'gender' as though they are interchangeable" (2009:1) when we discuss gender roles and constructs. She goes on to define sex as "the bodily properties, qualities or parts that identify a person as being either male or female" (Smith 2009:1). These bodily properties include genital organs and hormones. Gender,

> is a social construct…. It refers to the dominant norms and expectations that a society or group has of girls and boys, women and men. These norms and expectations, which vary across societies and groups, include ideas about what counts as 'typically feminine' behaviour for girls and women and what counts as 'typically masculine' behaviour for boys and men. In addition to these norms and expectations about behaviour, society decides the appropriate or 'proper' characteristics and abilities of girls and women on the one hand, and boys and men on the other. In other words, gender is about the commonly shared expectations about the appearance, abilities, characteristics, attitudes, needs and desires, and the behaviour, in different situations, of women and men. Religion, cultural, educational and political institutions, families, schools, the workplace, the media, advertising and so on all contribute to the construction of gender. The roles and activities of girls and women, and men and boys, their responsibilities, the amount of power they have – politically, socially and economically – are all influenced by these gendered norms and expectations.
>
> (Smith 2009:2)

Following from Smith's definition of gender, femininity refers to the accepted and proper social behaviour expected of girls and women, while masculinity refers to the appropriate social behaviour accepted among boys and men. Heteronormativity is the term used to describe the presumption that people fulfil predetermined complementary gender roles in a society in which heterosexuality, the experience of attraction primarily to persons of the opposite sex, is the norm. Heteronormativity can be linked to the concept of the gender binary which delineates gender roles as either distinctly masculine or feminine; women are allocated

domestic tasks while men fill leadership positions. Patriarchy is a social structure in which the father or eldest male is head of the household and has authority over women and children.
In this chapter I seek to explore the complex relationship of Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie to the dominant heteronormative discourse of their time. However, in the discussions that follow, it is evident that Blyton and Christie appear to both endorse and reinforce some of the dominant discourses of the time, while simultaneously offering opposition to these discourses and presenting alternative discourses.

Blyton and Christie's horizons of expectation, and thus their ways of thinking about gender roles in society, were shaped by the dominant discourses of their society. On the one hand, they would have assimilated and internalised the norms of the dominant group in society that advocated different roles for men and women, boys and girls. The dominant perspectives of the time in which Blyton and Christie lived and wrote reinforce the separation of women from men in a male-dominated society; women are regarded as 'other' and defined by their relationships with men as wives and mothers. Blyton and Christie still held onto some of the more conservative discourses of the early twentieth century that defined gender roles. The strict norms of the nineteenth century concerning acceptable behaviour for women remained widespread in the early twentieth century and many of them remain common even today. However, on the other hand, as I mentioned in Chapter One of this study, an individual's horizon is not fixed, it is constantly changing as a result of the influences of emergent and alternative discourses. Thus Blyton and Christie would also have been influenced by emergent and alternative discourses relating to female agency and gender equality. Plain believes that "the assumption underlying [Christie's] interwar fiction is one of female agency. Women can do, and they do" (2001:47). Christie and Blyton do not always restrict the behaviour of the female characters to ensure that they conform to the feminine gender roles encoded in the

dominant discourses of gender prevalent at the time. On occasion, Blyton and Christie raise feminist questions about power, gender and the social roles of women, as well as female participation in society. Thus, in their writing Christie and Blyton explore some aspects of "social conventions and morals, and normalizing concepts of home and heterosexual families" (Mezei 2007:104). In this chapter, I consider the often contradictory presentation of gender roles in the writing of Blyton and Christie and examine how they present femininity and masculinity and "covertly query power and gender relations while simultaneously upholding the status quo" (Mezei 2007:104).

In relation to the portrayal of emergent discourses in the writing of Blyton and Christie in terms of their representation of gender roles in their writing, it is important to bear in mind that "not all women writers are feminist writers" (Cranny-Francis 1990:1). According to Cranny-Francis, the term feminist fiction refers to "genre fiction written from a self consciously feminist perspective, consciously encoding an ideology which is in direct opposition to the dominant gender ideology of Western society, patriarchal ideology" (1990:1). In relation to this definition, the writing of Blyton and Christie cannot be described as feminist fiction. Nonetheless, as discussed in Chapter Two of this study, it is important to bear in mind that their decisions reflect some of the emergent discourses around female independence in the early twentieth century: Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie were "the two richest women writers" of their time (Greenfield 1998:81), they were successful career women of independent means, and they both divorced their first husbands at a time when divorce was considered shameful. It is possible to argue that Christie even thought of herself as a feminist. As I said in Chapter Two of this study, it is widely believed that the character of Mrs Oliver is Christie's 'alter ego'. In *Cards on the Table* Christie refers to Mrs Oliver as "a hot-headed feminist"

(Christie [1936] 1963:14). Later in the same novel, when the men play a game of bridge against the women, Christie has Mrs Oliver remark:

> "Mind you win," said Mrs Oliver, her feminist feelings rising. "Show the men they can't have it all their own way".
>
> (Christie [1936] 1963:21)

Christie might well have been using the character of Mrs Oliver as a platform to express her own opinions about gender roles in society.

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

2 GENDER AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

Gender, as a social construct, plays a role in classifying and defining individuals and underpins a particular way of thinking about an individual's roles in society. In a patriarchal and heteronormative society girls and women, boys and men are expected to fill specific gender-appropriate roles – girls and women fill a more submissive role and participate in domestic and home-based activities, while men and boys dominate, and fill the role of the authority figure responsible for maintaining control. As discussed earlier in this study, to define is to control. The dominant discourse seeks to control and regulate individuals by defining the socially and culturally acceptable and appropriate behaviour of males and females.

It is also important to bear in mind that definitions of gender influence the horizons of expectation of individuals in a society: the social norms and conventions, as determined by the dominant discourse, expect men and women to behave in certain ways. Individuals internalise current social conventions about gender behaviour as determined by the dominant discourses of their society and conform to what is considered 'normal' behaviour. Institutions such as religion, education, and the family promote consensual control by reinforcing the values and practices of the dominant discourse with regard to dominant perceptions and conventions of gender, and with a view to encouraging social order and conformity in line with these. In turn, the practices of sexist discourse become thought of as normal behaviour. Klein believes that "[i]n such a world view, criminals and women are put in their proper, secondary places"(1995:1).

Discussions of gender and sexism, including this chapter, must take into consideration the social context as well as the readers' viewpoint on gender and sexism in society. Rudd believes that, as a result of dominant discourses about appropriate gender behaviour, child readers have "gender expectations" (2000:120) – their horizons of expectation are moulded by the dominant discourse and ways of being valued by society. As such, they expect to see gender-specific behaviour reflected in the books they read.

Blyton appears to endorse and reflect socially acceptable gender stereotypes of the time in her choice of a male leader, Julian, in the *Famous Five* series. In addition, as I have already observed, she portrays mothers in a loving and nurturing domestic role. In Blyton's *Famous Five* books there are several situations in which the female characters stay behind, fulfilling the gender expectation that girls should be protected from danger, while the male characters become involved in the more 'dangerous' activities in the story. In *Five Go off to Camp* the boys prevent George from joining them on excursions to the dangerous railway yard at night to watch for spook-trains because she is a girl. However, when the children's friend Jock, a boy, asks if they will be going to the railway yard, Julian replies:

> "We might go," said Julian. "We'll take you with us, if we do. But the girls aren't to come."
>
> (Blyton [1948] 1967:74)

In *Five Go Down to the Sea* the girls stay at home, where it is safe, when the boys go with Mr Penruthlan to capture the villains.

> "Not the girls," [Mr Penruthlan] said….
> "I'll keep the girls here with me," said Mrs Penruthlan.
>
> (Blyton [1953] 1969:172)

These examples illustrate the marginal position of women and girls in a society dominated by men and boys. Blyton's portrayal of gender relations appears to promote what was thought appropriate, generally speaking, at the time. According to Maureen Reddy "[l]iterature reflects

reality, and since most real-life detectives are men it is only natural that the detective story reflects this situation" (Reddy, in Bergland 2000:138). This reflection of reality is particularly evident in Christie's portrayal of the patriarchal heteronormative roles filled by the detecting couple Tommy and Tuppence Beresford. When they go under cover to run The International Detective Agency in the short story *A Fairy in the Flat* Tommy fills the role of the detective, while Tuppence fills the inferior role of his "confidential secretary" (Christie [1924] 2008a:12). This secondary status afforded to Tuppence is apparent in Christie's description of Tuppence's office:

> In the adjoining room was Tuppence, a typewriter, the necessary tables and chairs of an inferior type to those in the room of the great Chief, and a gas ring for making tea.
>
> (Christie [1924] 2008a:8)

This discrepancy in their roles would have been entirely appropriate in terms of the gender expectations at the time of writing. Hence, Christie appears to reinforce the status quo which promoted male dominance by placing Tuppence in a perceived secondary position. However, by having Tuppence actually solve the mystery, thereby placing her in a position of power, Christie simultaneously resists the dominant discourse. In addition, Christie's sarcastic reference to Tommy as the "great Chief" also undermines the widespread perception of the time that men were superior. When we consider the reflection of these apparently contradictory discourses in Christie's writing, it is important to bear in mind that she wrote to earn money. It would not have been practical nor would it have been very sensible for her to overtly challenge the gender role expectations of her readers whose horizons were shaped by the dominant discourse of the society in which they operated. Doing so might have alienated readers and reduced sales of her books.

2.1 Discourses of the time: stereotypes about the roles of men and women

In the first half of the twentieth century women were encouraged to conform to the traditional family roles of wife and mother, to find happiness in marriage and to bear children (Miles 2001:102). These values would have been assimilated by both Christie and Blyton, and would have shaped their horizons of expectation. At the same time, social changes led to an increase in literacy and education among women. The twentieth century also brought greater awareness of women's social issues which contributed to the establishment of the Women's Social and Political Union on 3 October 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst – members later became known as suffragettes. Women in Britain achieved voting equality on 2 July 1928. However, in spite of greater gender awareness and the social changes in the first half of the twentieth century, a number of strict conservative discourses about appropriate gender behaviour remained dominant. This illustrates my earlier recognition of the ways in which different discourses – dominant, oppositional or alternative, and emergent – operating in society overlap and how the balance between and among these discourses is constantly fluctuating.

During the First World War women were called on to work and take on jobs outside the home in opposition to the dominant discourse that dictated against this, and in opposition to the notion that a woman earning an income and gaining financial independence and security was an overturning of the natural order of things. As a result,

> British women's attitudes about working began to change. Young middle-class women felt themselves entitled to work; working-class women who had done men's work questioned female subordination on the job; and the number of women in trade unions rose.
>
> (Rowbothham, in Klein 1995: 96)

Women became more emancipated. However, regardless of these changes, dominant social conventions and patterns of behaviour that encouraged subordinate female behaviour

continued to dominate society in the years after the war. Klein describes the period after the First World War in Britain as "a time of antifeminism" (1995:97). "[P]ublic opinion was hostile to women workers who were keeping men's jobs instead of keeping house; they were seen as leeches and bloodsuckers for wanting decent wages and not being willing to go back to domestic work" (Klein 1995:96-97).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century large patriarchal and hierarchical families, in which traditional roles for men and women were clearly defined, were a middle class norm. There is a clear distinction between stories written for girls with a domestic and family setting – such as *Little Women* (1868) and *Good Wives* (1869) by Louisa May Alcott, *Lorna Doone* (1869) by Richard Doddridge Blackmore, and Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) – and heroic adventure stories that seemingly encourage bravery, independence, and physical strength in boys including Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* (1876), *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) by Rider Haggard, works by Rudyard Kipling such as *The Jungle Book* (1894) and *Kim* (1901), and stories by Captain W.E. Johns featuring Biggles, a teenage fighter pilot in the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) during World War I, which were first published in 1932. Laura Barton recalls the books she read when she was a child and that the pages of stories for girls

> were riddled with ladies who swooned, and simpering boarding-school girls who dreamed of ponies, while on television women were always assistants, love interests or girls who get the collywobbles at the sight of a ghost or a spider. Boys had heroics and derring-do; girls had niceness.
>
> (2007:31)

Books provided a platform for promotion of patriarchal hegemony and those texts published for children during the late 1800s and the early 1900s reinforce "definite male and female roles" (Norton 1983:63).

Patriarchal expectations of women were often based on their being ‘pure’ and ‘decent’ and these expectations had an impact on perceptions about a woman’s reputation. The importance of a woman’s reputation, necessary to making a good marriage, is emphasised by Christie when she has Mrs Ackroyd comment that it is fortunate that Flora’s engagement to Ralph Paton was never formally announced because an engagement to a man with a dubious reputation would cast a shadow over her own reputation, and thus affect her chances of making a ‘good’ marriage to someone else:

> “I must say,” [Mrs Ackroyd] observed in a plaintive voice, “that Ralph’s absence is most peculiar – most peculiar indeed. Not to come forward at such a time. It looks, you know, as though there were something *behind* it. I can’t help thinking, Flora dear, that it was a very fortunate thing your engagement was never formally announced.”
>
> (Christie [1926] 1974:115)

Through marriage women gained a feeling of ‘power’ – married women were far more respected than unmarried women of similar age because they were conforming to the status quo. A refusal to marry was often regarded as a sign of independence in a society concerned with keeping women in a submissive position. And, of course, the status and/or class of the men they married would have also been significant: a man in an influential position in society would transfer this influence to his wife, thus elevating her social standing. In *The Murder at the Vicarage,* when asked why she married the vicar, Christie has Griselda respond: “[i]t made me feel so powerful” (Christie [1930] 1972:9).

Within married life, the role of the woman was defined by a domestic framework – she was responsible for managing the servants and the household, preparing food, teaching, nursing, and midwifery. Blyton reinforces this role in her *Famous Five* adventures. She has Aunt Fanny tell Anne and George, the girls, to help her make the sandwiches: “[y]ou and Anne can help to make the sandwiches” (Blyton [1942] 1967:50) while the boys are sent to pick plums

in the garden and buy some bottles of lemonade or ginger beer. A number of similar examples can be found throughout the *Famous Five* series. In *Five Go off in a Caravan* we hear:

> "You get the breakfast, Anne and George, and Dick and I will catch the horses and put them in the caravan shafts," said Julian.
>
> (Blyton [1946] 1967:64)

Similarly, in *Five on Kirrin Island Again* "[t]he girls washed up the tea things, and cleared away neatly" (Blyton [1947] 1967:120).

In the early twentieth century, sex before marriage and the birth of children out of wedlock was also considered scandalous. In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* it is revealed that Miss Russell, the housekeeper, has a son who was born out of wedlock.

> "Mademoiselle," said Poirot, interrupting her, "in this matter I must have the whole truth. What you tell us need never go beyond these four walls. Dr. Sheppard will be discreet, and so shall I. See, I will help you. This Charles Kent, he is your son, is he not?"
> She nodded. The colour had flamed into her cheeks.
> "No one has ever known. It was long ago – long ago – down in Kent. I was not married…."
>
> (Christie [1926] 1974:180)

Christie emphasises Miss Russell's shame by pointing out her blush when the truth is revealed. Christie goes on to reveal that while Miss Russell supported her son financially, she "never told him that [she] was his mother" (Christie [1926] 1974:180) in an effort to avoid the shame associated with having – or, in this case, being – an illegitimate child. Similarly, divorce was also still considered taboo: even in the 1940s "despite the relaxation in moral attitudes which life in wartime was to bring, divorce was still widely regarded as shocking, an occasion for scandal" (Druce 1992:14). As I noted in Chapter Two, Christie highlights this attitude in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* when she reminds her readers that "[s]candal between husband and wife is a dreadful thing" (Christie [1920] 1969:45).

In *The Murder at the Vicarage* Christie illustrates what was considered to be socially unacceptable behaviour for an unmarried woman at the time. Christie portrays the current gender expectations by having Mrs Price Ridely point out that it is "[n]ot quite nice" (Christie [1930] 1972:14) that Lettice is posing for a painting in her bathing dress. Similarly, we hear Miss Wetherby comment in a horrified tone that it is inappropriate for an unmarried woman, Miss Cram, to be a secretary to Dr Stone, an unmarried man.

> Miss Wetherby said tersely: "No nice girl would do it," and shut her thin lips disapprovingly.
> "Do what?" I inquired.
> "Be a secretary to an unmarried man," said Miss Wetherby in a horrified tone.
> "Oh! My dear," said Miss Marple. "*I* think married ones are the worst. Remember poor Millie Carter."
> "Married men living apart from their wives are, of course, notorious," said Miss Wetherby.
> "And even some of the ones living with their wives," murmured Miss Marple. "I remember–"
> I interrupted these unsavoury reminiscences.
> "But surely," I said, "in these days a girl can take a post in the same way a man does."
> "To come away to the country? And stay in the same hotel?" said Mrs Price Ridely in a severe voice.
> Miss Wetherby murmured to Miss Marple in a low voice.
> "And all the rooms on the same floor…"
>
> (Christie [1930] 1972:12-13)

However, Christie also counters these socially acceptable ways of thinking by having the vicar remark that, surely, "in these days a girl can take a post in the same way a man does" (Christie [1930] 1972:13). This presents evidence of Christie's opposition to the dominant discourse that encouraged women to stay at home while men went out and worked. It is possible to argue that by having the vicar refer to the women's "unsavoury reminiscences" (Christie [1930] 1972:13), Christie is in fact criticising the promotion of the dominant discourse by these stereotypical rural English women.

In the *Famous Five* stories Blyton portrays asymmetrical power relations and emphasises the 'dependence' of female children by highlighting the physical 'weakness' of female children and their need to be protected by males. In *Five Go to Smuggler's Top* Blyton reinforces the protective role of the boys:

> [Julian] wished the girls were not there.
> "Now listen," he said. "George, you go and sleep with Anne and Marybelle next door. Lock your door and keep the light on. Dick and I will sleep here, in Sooty's old room, also with the light on, so you'll know we are quite nearby."
> It was comforting to know that the boys were so near.
>
> (Blyton [1945] 1967:138)

In a further manifestation of their alleged weakness, women and girls often cry and need to be comforted by the men and boys,

> "Mrs Lenoir was now crying quietly, with Marybelle sobbing beside her. Mr Lenoir put an arm around his wife and kissed Marybelle, suddenly appearing very much nicer than he had ever seemed before."
>
> (Blyton [1945] 1967:143)

As a result of the belief that women are weaker and require protection, they are also treated differently. Different punishment is given to boys from that meted out to girls.

> "I must apologize for my stepfather," said Sooty. "He has such a terrible temper. He wouldn't have punished you like this if he had thought you were a girl. But he keeps thinking you're a boy."
>
> (Blyton [1945] 1967:117)

Even the villains in Blyton's writing treat boys and girls differently.

> "You stay up there with him, then," he said. "And the girl can stay with you, holding the dog. But the other boy can come out here."
> He thought that George was a boy. George didn't mind. She liked people to think she was a boy. She answered at once. … But Julian was not going to let George be hurt. She might like to think of herself as a boy, but he wasn't going to let her be treated like one.
>
> (Blyton [1946] 1967:171-172)

These examples illustrate how Blyton has the characters monitor and regulate their own behaviour in line with the dominant socially acceptable behaviour and opinions of the time regarding the appropriately different treatment of girls and women, and men and boys. Blyton

even has George demonstrate acceptance of Julian's position of authority over her when she begs to accompany the boys:

> "Oh, let me come too," begged George.
> "No," said Julian. "Certainly not. This is rather a dangerous adventure, and Mr. Barling is a bad and dangerous man. You and Marybelle are certainly not to come, I'll take Dick."
>
> (Blyton [1945] 1967:146)

When it comes to committing murder, Christie argues that women choose less 'masculine' means to kill; "women never like fiddling about with firearms. Arsenic's more in their line" (Christie [1930] 1972:76). This reflects Christie's assimilation of the stereotype that guns are masculine, while poison is feminine. In this way, girls and women are portrayed as the 'weaker' sex. And of course, attractive women, who epitomise the feminine ideal, are less likely to commit murder: "Surely no woman as beautiful as Mary Cavendish could be a murderess" (Christie [1920] 1969:129).

While social gender stereotyping dictates appropriate social and cultural behaviour for women, it also delineates the acceptable role of men in society. The patriarchal heteronormative discourse in England in the early twentieth century advocated that men hold power over women and that they should exhibit masculine characteristics and behaviour – they should exercise control and make decisions, and they should be brave, adventurous and independent. These ways of thinking became entrenched and were regarded as normal by society.

Within the domestic environment portrayed by Blyton, men play the role of the decision-maker, and women do not make decisions without first consulting their husbands. When the

children in *Five Go off in a Caravan* ask if they may go on a holiday in a caravan, Blyton displays a patriarchal relationship between the husband and wife by having Mother respond:

> "I'll have to talk it over with Daddy," said Mother. "Now, don't look so disappointed – I can't decide a thing like this all by myself in a hurry."
>
> (Blyton [1946] 1967:19)

After consultation with her husband Mother lets the children know:

> "Yes, we've talked it over," she said. "And Daddy says he doesn't see why you shouldn't have a caravan holiday."

That Blyton has Mother tell the children that "Daddy says" (Blyton [1946] 1967:19) creates the impression that Mother was not part of the decision-making process and this reinforces her submissive role and her lack of decision-making power or control. In addition, this is an example of hegemony in action because Blyton portrays the mother as accepting of her submissive role; the mother consents to her subordinate position.

Similarly, in *Five Go to Smuggler's Top* when a tree falls on Kirrin Cottage, Uncle Quentin takes control of the situation:

> "*I'm* seeing to things, Mrs Daly," said Uncle Quentin. "My wife has had a great shock. She is not fit to see to things herself."
>
> (Blyton [1945] 1967:23)

As we have seen, Blyton also portrays the dominant patriarchal discourse of the time by having Julian, the eldest male child take responsibility in a number of situations in the *Famous Five* tales. These extracts demonstrate this.

> Julian went as usual to ask permission to camp, and Dick went with him, leaving the two girls to prepare a meal.
>
> (Blyton [1946] 1967:42)

> "You will be in complete charge, you understand, Julian," said the boy's father. "You are old enough now to be really responsible. The others must realize that you are in charge and they must do as you say."
> "Yes, sir," said Julian, feeling proud. "I'll see to things all right."
>
> (Blyton [1946] 1967:20)

The established system of thought at the time expected men and boys to behave in a so-called masculine manner. This includes not showing a 'feminine' emotion like sadness or misery. In *The Ship of Adventure*, one of Blyton's books from the *Adventure* series, she portrays the children as scornful of Lucian who cries (Blyton [1950] 2000:82). Similarly, in *Five on Kirrin Island Again,* Blyton reiterates the widespread opinion of the time that boys should behave in a masculine manner by having Martin's 'father' react with contempt about Martin's drawing of pictures of flowers, trees, birds and butterflies.

> They were queer pictures for a boy to draw, for they were of flowers and trees, birds and butterflies – all drawn and coloured most perfectly, every detail put in lovingly. Julian looked at them in surprise. This boy was certainly gifted. Why, these drawings were as good as any he had ever seen in exhibitions! He picked a few up and took them to the window.
> "Do you mean to say your father doesn't think these are good – doesn't think it's worth while to let you train as an artist?" she said, in surprise.
> "He hates my pictures," said Martin, bitterly. "I ran away from school, and went to art-school to train – but he found me and forbade me to think of drawing any more. He thinks it's a weak, feeble thing for a man to do. So I only do it in secret now."
> (Blyton [1947] 1967:116)

That such pictures were widely regarded as inappropriate gender behaviour for a boy is emphasised by Martin's statement that his father thinks that drawing is a "weak, feeble thing for a man to do" (Blyton [1947] 1967:116). The implication is that men who draw are not masculine; rather they are effeminate and perhaps even homosexual. However, to a certain extent Blyton subverts this narrow-minded thinking by having the children endorse Martin's drawing of such pictures by complimenting him on them. In this way, Blyton is offering an alternative discourse to what the dominant discourse promotes as appropriate behaviour for boys.

To a certain extent Christie's Hercule Poirot subverts gender role expectations by behaving in a "stereotypically 'feminine'" (Smith 2002:29) way. He is described as "a great dandy" (Christie [1920] 1969:11), someone overly concerned with the elegance of his appearance –

he arranges "his moustache with exquisite care" (Christie [1920] 1969:35) and "[t]he neatness of his attire was almost incredible; I believe a speck of dust would have caused him more pain than a bullet wound" (Christie [1920] 1969:21). He is even mistaken for a retired "hairdresser", not a typically masculine career and, therefore, one often stereotypically associated with homosexuals, by Dr Sheppard in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (Christie [1926] 1974:19&23). In the short story *The Tragedy at Marsdon Manor"* Christie gives Poirot given feminine characteristics when she has Hastings remark that "Lady Yardly, aptly ministered to by Poirot, who is as good as a woman in these matters, was sufficiently recovered to be able to tell her story" (Christie [1924] 1958a:23). Not only is Poirot "relatively unmasculine" (Smith 2002:29) in his behaviour, but he is also shorter than the average male "hardly more than five feet four inches" (Christie [1920] 1969:21). Many of these descriptions hint at the possibility that Poirot may be homosexual. However, Hart argues against this and claims that "[t]here is a hint on the last page of *The Big Four* that Poirot was trying to summon up courage to propose marriage to the Countess" (1990:190). In the closing paragraph of *The Big Four* we hear Poirot comment: "I might even marry and arrange myself!" (Christie [1927]1994:221). However, this statement does not exclude the possibility that Poirot might be homosexual. An individual does not have to be heterosexual to consider marriage – the two are not mutually exclusive. It could be argued that Christie has Poirot make this comment to cast doubt on his sexual preferences so as not to portray him as openly homosexual, and thus not overtly challenge the dominant discourse.

Nonetheless, he is still a man and is able to act in a 'feminine' manner only because he already has male privilege. According to Klein male detectives in fiction are "privileged in society" (1995:9) because they are male. "[T]he very world they occupy ensures that their

credibility and efficacy are never in question, given that they are privileged males to begin with" (Smith 2002:30).

Christie has Poirot use the expectations of society to gain the confidence of characters by having him fill the role of a father figure. He is often referred to as "Papa Poirot" (Christie [1920] 1969:148) in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* and in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*,

> Poirot leant forward, looking at her.
> "See now, mademoiselle," he said very gently, "it is Papa Poirot who asks you this. The old Papa Poirot who has much knowledge and much experience. I would not seek to entrap you, mademoiselle. Will you not trust me – and tell me where Ralph Paton is hiding?"
>
> (Christie [1926] 1974:114)

Similarly, in the short story *The Adventure of the "Western Star"* Christie has Poirot refer to himself as "Papa Poirot" (Christie 1958 [1924]:11) when speaking to Miss Marvell. His role as a father figure places Poirot in a dominant position because in a patriarchal society men and fathers in particular, have authority. He uses this position to gain the confidence of the characters and to fulfil the role of a confessor, much like a priest who is also referred to as 'father'.

In *A Murder is Announced* Christie uses the characters of Miss Hinchcliffe and Miss Murgatroyd to present an alternative to the dominant gender role expectations because they live together in an implied lesbian relationship, which would have been considered inappropriate given the social conventions of the time. But, throughout the text Hinchcliffe is compared to a man in terms of her appearance. She is described as being "attired in corduroy slacks and battledress tunic" (Christie [1950] 1979:13) and she has a "short man-like crop and weather-beaten countenance" (Christie [1950] 1979:13). "She's as tall as a man" (Christie [1950] 1979:152) and Julia Simmons describes her stance as "manly" (Christie [1950]

1979:52). In addition, her actions and comments mirror those of the male characters in the novel. Hinchcliffe reacts to the announcement of a murder in the same way as the rest of the men in the book by describing it as "daft" (Christie [1950] 1979:13). When the characters arrive at Miss Blacklock's house on the night of the murder the men (Patrick Simmons, Colonel Easterbrook and Edmund Swettenham) notice that the central heating is on:

> "You've had the central heating lit," said Patrick.
>
> (Christie [1950] 1979:23)

> "Quite a mild evening. Notice you've got your central heating on. We haven't started ours yet" [said Colonel Easterbrook].
>
> (Christie [1950] 1979:27)

> "You've got your central heating on, haven't you?" asked Edmund, with an air of originality.
>
> (Christie [1950] 1979:28)

Christie draws a parallel between Hinchcliffe and the men by having her notice, too, that the central heating is on:

> "You've got your central heating on," said Miss Hinchcliffe.
>
> (Christie [1950] 1979:28)

In contrast, Murgatroyd is feminine. Christie describes her as

> fat and amiable, [wearing] a checked tweed skirt and a shapeless pullover of brilliant royal blue. Her curly bird's nest of grey hair was in a good deal of disorder and she was slightly out of breath.
>
> (Christie [1950] 1979:13)

Her voice is described as "wistful" (Christie [1950] 1979:13) when she talks about the announcement in the *Gazette,* while Hinchcliffe is "made of sterner and more single-minded stuff… no announcement in a paper, however enigmatic, could deflect her" (Christie [1950] 1979:13). Christie further links Murgatroyd to the other women in the novel by having her, like Mrs Easterbrook and Mrs Swettenham, notice the flowers on her arrival at Miss Blacklock's house:

> "Aren't you chrysanthemums *lovely*?" gushed Mrs Easterbook.
>
> (Christie [1950] 1979:27)

> "The evenings do draw in so quickly now, don't they?" said Miss Murgatroyd to Patrick in a rather fluttery way. "What *lovely* chrysanthemums!"
>
> (Christie [1950] 1979:28)

> [Mrs Swettenham] added: "What *lovely* chrysanthemums!"
>
> (Christie [1950] 1979:28)

In addition, "Miss Murgatroyd is murdered while taking in the washing, a typically 'feminine' task" (Smith 2002:85).

The relationship between Miss Hinchcliffe and Miss Murgatroyd can also be compared to the relationship between Miss Blacklock and Miss Bunner in *A Murder is Announced*. Like Hinchcliffe, Blacklock, the so-called 'butch' and dominant partner, is also compared to a man by Mrs Goedler:

> "Letitia, you know, has really got a man's mind. She hasn't any feminine feelings or weaknesses. I don't believe she was even in love with any man. She was never particularly pretty and she didn't care for clothes. She used a little make-up in deference to prevailing custom, but not to make herself look prettier."
>
> (Christie [1950] 1979:129 -130)

Miss Blacklock's masculine behaviour is described with tongue-in-cheek sympathy: "[p]oor darling, she'd never had any of the usual fun – being in love, and leading men on and teasing them – and having a home and children and all the real fun of life" (Christie [1950] 1979:131). This implies that there is reason for the other characters to ridicule her because she does not conform to the norm.

Like Murgatroyd, Christie describes Bunner in more feminine terms. At school she was "a pretty, fair-haired, blue-eyed rather stupid girl" (Christie [1950] 1979:19), she has "flabby cheeks" (Christie [1950] 1979:19) which "quivered" (Christie [1950] 1979:19) – a sign of weakness. Moreover, she is the submissive partner in the relationship: "Miss Bunner

obediently surrendered the paper to Miss Blacklock's outstretched hand, pointing to the item with a tremulous finger" (Christie [1950] 1979:18).

However, even though Christie could use her portrayal of a lesbian couple to subvert the dominant gender role expectations, they are still described in terms of heteronormative discourse. Smith comments that "[t]hese highly caricatured lesbians, Hinch and Murgatroyd, [are] 'masculine' and 'feminine' according to the heterosexist model" (2002:73). Like Blacklock and Bunner, Anne and George, as well as Nancy Drew's friends George and Bess, the portrayal of Hinchcliffe and Murgatroyd is an example of stereotypical heteronormative discourse in which one is either 'butch' – masculine – or 'femme' – feminine. In addition, the heterosexual couples in *A Murder is Announced* are also portrayed in a stereotypical heteronormative butch/femme manner "so that Christie appears to be setting up a fairly rigid model of male/female dichotomy into which these women are placed" (Smith 2002: 70).

> The heterosexist implication is clear – it is only in traditionally sanctioned heterosexual marriage that human beings can find fulfilment – so these two, in the next best arrangement given that they are of the same sex, are portrayed as male and female and this is faithfully adhered to throughout the text.
>
> (Smith 2002:73)

Christie appears to have these characters regulate their behaviour to conform to the heteronormative norm. This presents evidence of the assimilation of the dominant heteronormative discourses of the time by Christie: even while presenting an alternative discourse such as homosexuality, Christie still reinforces the dominant contemporary heteronormativity.

In the debate about whether Christie is promoting dominant or alternative discourses in her portrayal of homosexual couples, it is essential to take into consideration the dominant social and cultural context at the time of writing, as well as Christie's own horizon of expectation.

The oppression of homosexuals was a common practice of the dominant discourse in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – Oscar Wilde was sentenced to two years hard labour for homosexual relations with male prostitutes in London in 1895. Smith (2002:78) remarks on the widespread belief that homosexuality allegedly has "inherent connections to evil and sin" and speculates about the "effect this thinking had on Christie's decision to kill off Miss Murgatroyd, a woman who transgressed the gender codes of respectability and, therefore, acceptability in Chipping Cleghorn" (2002:78). Within the context of the prevalent system of thought that scorned homosexuality, Christie's portrayal of lesbians might even be regarded as "relaxed and 'liberal'" (Thompson 2007:387) because she presented an alternative to the socially acceptable behaviour. Curran believes that the portrayal of the couple is "matter of fact and, as far as the villagers are concerned, unremarkable" (2009:179). Curran goes on to point out that the depiction of Hinchcliffe and Murgatroyd is an improvement on earlier representations of homosexual characters in Christie's writing such as Mr Pye in *The Moving Finger,* "an extremely ladylike plump little man" (Christie [1942] 1971:24), and Mr Ellsworthy in *Murder is Easy* – who are "figures of fun" (Curran 2009:179) – and Christopher Wren in *Three Blind Mice* – "one of her campest creations" (Curran 2009:179). While socially acceptable viewpoints of the time did not consider sexuality an appropriate topic for inclusion in literature for children, Druce remarks that "a number of critics have noted what they see as a submerged lesbianism in [Enid Blyton's] girls' school stories" (1992: 255).

2.2 <u>The female detective</u>

The horizon of expectation of readers, writers and critics is shaped by the dominant discourses of their time. Individuals internalise ways of being that are valued by the society in which they operate and come to accept these as normal and natural. Their expectations about the detective in contemporaneous detective fiction would have been defined similarly.

The appropriate way for the detective to behave while carrying out the investigations and, of course, the sex of the detective were pretty much pre-defined – "readers were also members of societies whose sex-role definitions allocated all the detectives' usual talents to men" (Klein 1995:4). The female detective "is an affront to many traditional readers for whom detecting is 'man's work'" (Cranny-Francis 1990:20). Female detectives do not conform to the dominant definition of the detective of the time. Readers and critics seeking to conform to the social norms of the time in turn exercise normalising judgement to judge detective fiction against society's norms. Detective fiction that does not conform to the norm might well be judged as inferior, and sidelined, thus influencing its popularity and success and, therefore, its economic potential. As a result, in "both the classical and the hard-boiled form, detectives remained predominantly male throughout the interwar period" (Plain 2001:25).

In line with the gender role expectations of the time, in Golden Age detective fiction women were cast as "wives and mistresses, murderers and victims, assistants and troublemakers" (Klein 1995:96), but seldom as detective heroes. Women who conform to the feminine ideal of the time "can really only be suited to the role of victim – either rescued by the hero in the nick of time or ending up as the pretty, blonde body in the library" (Berglund 2000: 139). As I have mentioned earlier, knowledge works in conjunction with, and as an instrument of, power. Women who know too much are often scorned or treated with contempt because they have knowledge of sexuality, politics and science – all topics that the dominant discourse considers inappropriate for women to know about. And the education of women was not deemed necessary – even Christie, as I have noted, did not attend school when she was a young girl. A woman who does not live up to society's expectations of an ideal woman; "a woman who is independent, resourceful and assertive, will most probably be cast in the role of the perpetrator, the villainess" (Berglund 2000:139). Maureen Reddy emphasises that in a society

such as that in which Blyton and Christie lived and wrote "the whole notion of a woman in charge, and especially a woman presumably dedicated to ideals of law and order, works against traditional expectations" (Reddy, in Berglund 2000:139). Therefore, being a detective, gaining knowledge and showing an interest in unwomanly things like murder, was unsuitable for a woman. This attitude remained dominant throughout much of the twentieth century. As the title of P.D. James's detective novel reminds us, it was still an *Unsuitable Job for a Woman* in 1972 when James's novel was first published.

As an author of detective fiction Christie succeeded in a role that the society in which she worked considered unsuitable for a woman and thus she transgressed the boundaries and conventions put in place by the dominant discourse. Frances Fyfield links the prevailing viewpoint that an interest in crime was unsuitable for women, to the public fascination with Christie's disappearance in 1926. Fyfield argues that the public may have felt a "certain satisfaction" about the fact that Christie's disappearance appeared to be "the result of a disordered mind" (2006:5) because

> [s]he was, after all, a woman who wrote about murder, a female who dabbled in blood and wielded the not so blunt instruments of homicide with unseemly satisfaction and considerable success. Such an unsuitable job for a woman. Of course she had to be bonkers.
>
> (Fyfield 2006:5)

Christie reflects on this violation of the dominant systems of thought in *The Murder at the Vicarage* where Miss Marple remarks that others might think it "unwomanly" (Christie [1930] 1972:162) of her to be interested in murder. Resistance to the character of the female detective in detective fiction is associated with the idea that

> placing a female character in a male role transforms not only the role itself, but every other element of the plot as well. To have a female detective convincing as character, to have her operate as more than just an honorary male, reinforcing the masculine identity of the characterization by her aberrant, but temporary,

> occupation, requires a radical assessment of the characterization of the detective and the narrative in which she functions.
>
> (Cranny-Francis 1990:143)

"Gender stereotypes of the 1930s and 1940s clearly established woman as a creature ruled by her heart, not her head" (Plain 2001:44), and in an attempt to meet the expectations of society with regard to appropriate and acceptable gender behaviour, writers often portrayed female detectives as amateur detectives who "employed the more stereotypically feminine talents of gossip and intuition" (Klein 1995:3). In conventional culture the relational and intuitive are feminine, while the analytical is masculine – "[i]f masculinity claims exclusively to occupy the territory of reason and science, then the feminine becomes, by default, suspect, deviant and uncanny" (Rowland 2001:136-137). But, in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* Christie has Poirot emphasise the value of female 'intuition' (which is in fact the result of observation) while discussing Caroline Sheppard:

> "*Les femmes,*" generalised Poirot. "They are marvellous! They invent haphazard – and by miracle they are right. Not that it is that, really. Women observe subconsciously a thousand little details, without knowing that they are doing so. Their subconscious mind adds these little things together – and they call the result intuition. Me, I am skilled in psychology. I know these things."
>
> (Christie [1926] 1974:119)

The value of female intuition is again emphasised by Christie in *The Tuesday Night Club.* When Mr Petherick comments that "[t]o be able to sift evidence impartially, to take the facts and look at them as facts – that seems to me the only logical method of arriving at the truth" (Christie [1930] 2008:306), Christie has Joyce Lemprière counter his argument when she remarks that "women have an intuition that is denied to men" (Christie [1930] 2008:306). In this way, Christie presents an alternative to the dominant opinion that regarded men and the masculine as superior.

According to Klein, the female detective creates an additional dilemma because "contradictory scripts" (1995:107) are often provided for a female detective – investigation career, or marriage and motherhood (in which the romantic subplot reinforces dominant discourses about a woman's domestic role in society as a mother and home-maker). There is a dichotomy between professional success and romantic fulfilment because the female detective cannot succeed in both a domestic role and as a detective.[10] By creating an elderly spinster, Christie avoided the complication of a love interest or a romantic sub-plot and was able to focus on the investigation of the crime. The domestic role expected of the woman is negated in Marple because she is elderly, unmarried and a spinster with no husband or children to care for.

[10] Although this relationship does not form part of the scope of this study, it is interesting to note that Christie presents the dichotomous relationship between detective and wife in the character of Tuppence Beresford who marries her detecting partner Tommy at the end of their first book, *The Secret Adversary* (1922). Tommy and Tuppence are happily married and raise three children. Of interest to the discussion of gender roles in this chapter is that in the short stories written by Christie in which the couple are already married, Christie refers to Tuppence as "Mrs Thomas Beresford" (Christie [1924] 2008a:3) and has Mr Carter refer to her as "Mrs Tommy" (Christie [1924] 2008a:6); Tuppence is defined in terms of her status as Tommy's wife, rather than as an individual in her own right.

3 EMPOWERING WOMEN IN BLYTON AND CHRISTIE

Regardless of the prevalence of conservative patriarchal heteronormative discourses, toward the end of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century, emergent discourses about female independence became more widespread. Evidence of this can be found in the popularity of the rebellious and independent character Jo March in *Little Women* (1868). Similarly, Frank L. Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) depicts female rulers and portrays housework as oppressive. The Nancy Drew books, first published in the United States of America in 1930, and books that followed this trend, illustrated the emergent discourses about the role of young women and girls and allowed for the inclusion of the "resourceful, high spirited heroine" (Hunt 1994:107). Mason elaborates on the "growing market for female adventurers, and eventually the girl detective emerged as the most 'liberated' and celebrated of heroines" (1995:10).

> Nancy manages the almost impossible feat of being wholesomely 'feminine' – glamorous, gracious, stylish, tactful – while also proving herself strong, resourceful, and bold, the most independent of girl sleuths. Nancy is a paradox….
>
> (Mason 1995:49)

According to Bindel, "[m]ore than half of all novels in the [crime fiction] genre are written by women, and their books are most popular with a female audience" (2007:5). In addition, "women read more books than men". This idea is reiterated by Symons who remarks that "[m]any of the detective stories were written by women, and essentially also *for* women" (1992:96). In line with dominant heteronormative gender roles which place men in positions of power, the detective in Golden Age detective fiction is more often than not a man: Christie has Hercule Poirot, Dorothy L. Sayers created Lord Peter Wimsey, Margery Allingham's hero is Albert Campion and Ngaio March's writing features Roderick Alleyn. Fyfield argues that

Christie's success (coupled with her disappearance in 1926 and evidence of her having a "disordered mind"),

> inadvertently created the idea that women are ideally suited to the writing of murder mysteries, even though this talent means that they are possibly intriguingly warped, manipulative and unfeminine personalities to do it in the first place.
> (2006:5)

The popularity of detective fiction among both men and women readers crosses social boundaries between the sexes. In the same way, Mason comments that, among children, "[m]ysteries are the favourite genre of both sexes" (1995:6). Enid Blyton's writing was popular with both boys and girls and this may be attributed to the fact that "Blyton's adventure and family stories are about groups of children of both sexes" (Druce 1992:256), and thus would appeal to child readers of both sexes. Birgitta Berglund reiterates this point by referring to Maureen Reddy's suggestion that "writers who want to reach large groups of readers tend to choose a male protagonist rather than a female one, as women are on the whole much more willing to read about men than the other way round" (2000:138). This is a clear indication of how the dominant discourse operated in society at the time – girls and women, in their inferior position, were willing to read about boys and men, but superior boys and men were seldom willing to 'lower' themselves to read about girls and women.

3.1 Miss Jane Marple

Miss Marple is "the most famous of female fictional detectives" (Bargainnier 1980:66); she appears in 12 novels and 20 short stories, with her first appearance being in the short story *The Tuesday Night Club*, published in *The Royal Magazine* in December 1927.[11] Few female detectives have been as popular as Hercule Poirot and Sherlock Holmes, with only Miss Marple coming close to achieving the popularity of her male counterparts.

[11] *The Tuesday Night Club* was later published as a chapter in *The Thirteen Problems* (1932).

In her creation of Miss Marple, Christie wrote about what she knew, presenting a "tall, slender, dignified late-Victorian of great shrewdness" (Bargainnier 1980:68) with an upper middle-class Victorian background. Christie remarks that her grandmother provided inspiration for the character of Miss Marple:

> Miss Marple has some faint affinity with my own grandmother, also a pink and white pretty old lady who, although having led the most sheltered and Victorian of lives, nevertheless always appeared to be intimately acquainted with all the depths of human depravity.
>
> (Christie [1953] 2008: Foreword, n.p.)

In addition, Caroline Sheppard in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* also laid the foundation for the development of the character who would come to embody the archetypal spinster detective:

> I liked the part [Caroline Sheppard] played in village life: and I liked the idea of village life reflected through the life of the doctor and his masterful sister.
> I think at that moment, in St. Mary Mead, though I did not yet know it, Miss Marple was born….
>
> (Christie 1993:499)

Like Miss Marple, Caroline uses the tools available to an unmarried spinster in a rural English village – observation and gossip – to gather her information.

> Caroline can do any amount of finding out by sitting placidly at home. I don't know how she manages it, but there it is. I suspect that the servants and the tradesmen constitute her Intelligence Corps. When she goes out, it is not to gather information, but to spread it. At that, too, she is amazingly expert.
>
> (Christie [1926] 1974:7)

Barton notes that in fiction female detectives often use their marginal status "to their advantage – Miss Marple and Jessica Fletcher (of *Murder She Wrote*) rather benefited from being the observer, slightly removed" (2007:31). Throughout *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* Caroline makes a number of correct observations, including the fact that Mrs Ferrars killed her husband: "Mrs. Ferrars's husband died just over a year ago, and Caroline has constantly

asserted, without the least foundation for the assertion, that his wife poisoned him" (Christie [1926] 1974:8), and that the police are wrong to suspect Parker of the murder. We read:

> "The police suspect Parker," I said as I rose to my feet and prepared to ascend to bed. "There seems a fairly clear case against him".
> "Parker!" said my sister. "Fiddlesticks! That inspector must be a perfect fool. Parker indeed! Don't tell me."
>
> (Christie [1926] 1974:60)

Even though Poirot's sidekick in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* appears to be Dr Sheppard, it is Caroline who actually assists Poirot with his investigations:

> Caroline was at home. She had had a visit from Poirot and was very pleased and important about it.
> "I'm helping him with the case," she explained.
>
> (Christie [1926] 1974:132)

The spinster "has been a recurring icon in British literature, dating from Jane Austen's Miss Bates in *Emma* and proliferating between the wars" (Mezei 2007:104). According to Berglund, the spinster detective was a familiar figure in fiction at the time Agatha Christie was writing and it reflected the reality of an England that was experiencing a "surplus of unmarried women" (2000:144) following the First World War. "F.M. Mayor mockingly called this character the 'U.F.' (Unnecessary Female)" (Mezei 2007:104) – emphasising the marginal role of this character and the fact that the lonely unmarried and childless spinster is often the object of pity, and sometimes ridicule. The spinster is isolated and divided from society at large and does not conform to the heteronormative gender role expectations of wife and mother. However, elderly spinsters are sexually unavailable and assumed to be undesirable anyway, and this shifts the traditional balance of power from male authority into the hands of the spinsters because they offer no threat to male domination. The sexual temptation of men by women such as Lilith, Eve and Morgaine Le Fay, among others, has long been regarded as a ploy by evil women to seek to dominate men. But elderly spinsters in their sexual unavailability offer no temptation or threat.

In her depiction of the character of Miss Marple Christie manipulates the pity and ridicule invoked by the stereotypical spinster who is assumed to have no power or authority. But, as Christie's novels about her prove, Marple does have power. By solving crimes, she exercises power over, and can be said, even, to emasculate those traditionally considered to have power, thus subverting traditional power relations. Like Caroline Sheppard, at first glance Miss Marple appears to conform to expectations. She appears to be a harmless old lady caught up in the spinsterish pastimes of knitting and gossip. However, there is in fact far more to her than meets the eye:

> [H]er careful observation of human nature and her distrust of mere surface appearance, her orderly approach to her cases, her independence and fearlessness, her ability and willingness to use the images which others have of her, her consciousness of her own worth both as an individual and as a detective, and her essential ruthlessness on behalf of the innocent – expressed in her self-confidence and determination – make her a formidable adversary of evil. In Miss Marple, Christie has taken the traditional spinster of literature and added qualities which contrast with or transcend the convention and in so doing has created one of the most famous women of twentieth century fiction.
>
> (Bargainnier 1980:78)

Christie uses social expectations of how a spinster should behave to give Marple power. The spinster observes society without being observed, as a socially marginal figure on the fringes of society, "[o]utside the immediate family circle, yet part of the household or village" (Mezei 2007:106).

> Even though these spinsters occupy a *place* outside the conventional family unit and possess limited powers in both the private and public sphere, during cataclysmic events like murder or the death of a mother, their perceptions and roles are pushed to the fore, ways of seeing are called into question, and readers are, as a consequence, forced to examine their own (mis)perceptions and deceptions. Yet, in each case, once the cataclysmic event is resolved, the conventional order is, on the whole, re-established by these spinsters through their effective surveillance.
>
> (Mezei 2007:116)

The power of the village spinster is highlighted in *The Murder at the Vicarage* when we hear the vicar make the following point to Lawrence Redding:

> "My dear young man, you underestimate the detective instinct of village life. In St Mary Mead every one knows your most intimate affairs. There is no detective in England equal to a spinster lady of uncertain age with plenty of time on her hands."
>
> (Christie [1930] 1972:25)

Christie also emphasises this idea in *A Murder is Announced* when she has Sir Henry Clithering, the former Commissioner of Scotland Yard, remark to Craddock about spinsters like Miss Marple, to whom he refers as "old Pussies":

> "Don't you despise the old Pussies in this village of yours, my boy," he said. "In case this turns out to be a high-powered mystery, which I don't suppose for a moment it will, remember that an elderly unmarried woman who knits and gardens is streets ahead of any detective sergeant. She can tell you what might have happened and what ought to have happened and even what actually *did* happen! And she can tell you *why* it happened!"
>
> (Christie [1950] 1979:36)

He reiterates his belief in the detecting skill of elderly spinsters when he remarks that "[t]hey hear everything. They see everything. And, unlike the famous adage, they speak all evil" (Christie [1950] 1979:73). Christie even has Sir Henry claim that Miss Marple is "just the finest detective God ever made. Natural genius cultivated in a suitable soil" (Christie [1950] 1979:36). Nonetheless, it is important to remember that, even though Clithering has much praise and admiration for Miss Marple, his reference to elderly spinsters like her as "old Pussies" (Christie [1950] 1979:36) is blatantly sexist and derogatory as is the remark that "they speak all evil" (Christie [1950] 1979:73).

Part of Marple's logical and well-ordered strategy of investigation is to mislead the characters into thinking that she is merely a harmless old spinster who spends her days engaged in idle gossip over a cup of tea or a sherry. She also often uses her day-to-day activities to screen her observation of village life: "[g]ardening is as good as a smoke screen, and the habit of observing birds through powerful glasses can always be turned to account" (Christie [1930] 1972:15). Christie reinforces this idea by having the vicar refer to Miss Marple's garden as the

"danger point" (Christie [1930] 1972:19). She appears frail, with a black lace cap and mittens, a shawl over her shoulders and knitting clutched in her hands.

> Miss Jane Marple was very nearly, if not quite, as Craddock had pictured her. She was far more benignant than he had imagined and a good deal older. She seemed indeed very old. She had snow-white hair and a pink crinkled face and very soft innocent blue eyes, and she was enmeshed in fleecy wool that she was knitting and which turned out to be a baby's shawl.
>
> (Christie [1950] 1979:74)

Marple also dismisses her own talents, further leading the reader, and of course the murderer, to underestimate her: "I've no doubt I am *quite* wrong. I'm so stupid about these things" (Christie [1930] 1972:142). As Berglund notes, "the spinster sleuth can also turn her own low status to her advantage by making people tell her things they would never tell a real detective, because they never suspect her capacity" (2000: 145). It is possible, even, to claim that, like Christie and Blyton, the character of Miss Marple is presented as a self-created persona – dressing and behaving in a manner expected of an elderly spinster. She successfully misleads one into thinking that she is a harmless old lady. As Hart observes,

> she wore a good disguise. How shamelessly unthreatening she was! No notebook, no car, no assistants, no artificial capacity – all she appeared to be was a sweet old lady, sometimes even a dotty old lady.
>
> (1997:124)

Regardless of Miss Marple appearing to be a harmless old lady, in *The Murder at the Vicarage* Christie hints early in the novel that readers should not underestimate the elderly spinster: she has the vicar describe Marple as "dangerous":

> "Miss Marple is a white-haired old lady with a gentle, appealing manner – Miss Whetherby is a mixture of vinegar and gush. Of the two Miss Marple is much the more dangerous."
>
> (Christie [1930] 1972:12)

While it might seem odd, initially, to describe Miss Marple as dangerous, it is in fact a very appropriate description, because while she initially appears fragile and frail, she sees all,

knows all, and is ruthless in her drive to expose the villain. Christie reinforces this idea by having the vicar comment on the virtues of Miss Marple:

> Of all the ladies in my congregation, I considered her by far the shrewdest. Not only does she see and hear practically everything that goes on, but draws amazingly neat and apposite deductions from the facts that come under her notice.
> If I were at any time to set out on a career of deceit, it would be of Miss Marple that I should be afraid.
>
> (Christie [1930] 1972:161-162)

This image of Miss Marple as dangerous is also evident in *Nemesis* when the Home Secretary describes Miss Marple as the "most frightening woman I ever met" (Christie [1971] 1974:216).

As I mentioned earlier, Miss Marple and female detectives in general have often been criticised for depending too much on intuition. However, Marple's position on the edge of society provides her with the opportunity to observe that society without being observed herself – "in the art of seeing without being seen, Miss Marple had no rival" (Christie [1930] 1972:140) – and in turn develop her knowledge of human nature. Hence "her 'intuition' is actually the result of close observation of human types" (Bargainnier 1980:74). This idea is emphasised when Christie has Marple say:

> "Really, I have no gifts – no gifts at all – except perhaps a certain knowledge of human nature. People, I find, are apt to be far too trustful. I'm afraid that I have a tendency always to believe the *worst.* Not a nice trait. But so often justified by subsequent events."
>
> (Christie [1950] 1979:77-78)

Here, again, we learn about Miss Marple's intuition, this time from the spinster detective herself:

> "You're laughing, my dear," said Miss Marple, "but after all, that is a very sound way of arriving at the truth. It's really what people call intuition and make such a fuss about. Intuition is like reading a word without having to spell it out. A child can't do that because it has had so little experience. But a grown-up person knows the word because they've seen it before."
>
> (Christie [1930] 1972:65)

Miss Marple "observes keenly and deduces soundly, drawing for her knowledge of human duplicity and evil on a lifetime spent watching the inhabitants of St Mary Mead" (Binyon 1989:34). She

> first collected all the available facts by all the available means viewed them in light of her vast knowledge of erring human nature in the anthill of St Mary Mead, and then applied logic to reach a conclusion.
>
> (Hart 1997:127)

Smith notes that "the success of Christie's Miss Marple relies on her having 'masculine' abilities along with 'feminine' modes of behaviour" (2002:29). Here, her 'masculine' abilities refers to the logical and orderly way she processes all the information available to her to solve the mystery. The 'feminine' modes of behaviour include the "available means" that Miss Marple uses to collect the facts – tea with the neighbours, a visit with friends, a sherry here, a chat over the garden gate there – all of which are part of Miss Marple's investigative process. While Miss Marple has also been criticised for her dependence upon "social chit-chat and gossip" (Bargainnier 1980:75), this is also a characteristic of the expected behaviour of a woman in her position. The horizon of expectation of the reader, and that of the characters in the fiction, create an expectation of an old spinster who is essentially harmless and who fills her time with idle gossip. If she went about making enquiries like a typical detective her disguise of a nosy old spinster would fall away and she would not make nearly as much progress in solving the case – "[i]t is her success in playing the expected spinster role which enables her to gather needed information" (Bargainnier 1980:75). As part of the first description of Miss Marple in *The Murder at the Vicarage*, Christie has the vicar and his wife Griselda discuss some of the elderly spinsters in the village, pointing out their stereotypically spinsterish knowledge of everything that happens in the village:

> "Mrs Price Ridley, Miss Wetherby, Miss Hartnell, and that terrible Miss Marple"
> "I rather like Miss Marple," I said. "She has, at least, a sense of humor."

> "She's the worst cat in the village," said Griselda. "And she always knows every single thing that happens – and draws the worst inferences from it."
>
> (Christie [1930] 1972:8)

The idea of Marple often being engaged in gossip is reinforced in *A Murder is Announced* when we hear Julia comment about her: "That old woman is the prying kind. And a mind like a sink, I should think. Real Victorian type" (Christie [1950] 1979:139). However, while gossip and snooping are not widely considered to be positive character traits, a characteristic of Miss Marple that I personally find appealing, is that Christie created her with an awareness of her own weaknesses, especially her penchant for observing her neighbours and engaging in gossip. When remarking on Lawrence Redding and Anne Protheroe meeting in the studio to conduct their affair, Miss Marple observes: "Mrs. Protheroe is met at the studio by Mr. Redding. They go in together – and, human nature being what it is, I'm afraid they realise that I shan't leave the garden till they come out again!" (Christie [1930] 1972:180). The vicar also holds this opinion about Miss Marple's self-knowledge: "I never liked Miss Marple better than at this moment, with her humorous perception of her own weakness" (Christie [1930] 1972:180). With reference to gossip, Christie has Marple remark that "idle tittle-tattle is very wrong and unkind, but it is so often true, isn't it?" (Christie [1930] 1972:16).

Because of her marginal position in society, Marple is not expected to have much experience or worldly knowledge, and she is not expected to be a successful detective. This is evident in *The Murder at the Vicarage* when the Chief Constable remarks about Miss Marple. He says:

> "I really believe that wizened-up old maid thinks she knows everything there is to know. And hardly been out of this village all her life. Preposterous. What can she know of life?"
>
> I said mildly that though doubtless Miss Marple knew next to nothing of Life with a capital L, she knew practically everything that went on in St. Mary Mead.
>
> (Christie [1930] 1972:57)

However, the vicar's unspoken thoughts about Miss Marple knowing "practically everything that went on in St. Mary Mead" should not be overlooked, since by the end of the novel this is proven to be true. In *A Murder is Announced,* Rydesdale also underestimates the detective skill of Miss Marple. In fact, the reference to his "smiling tolerantly" (Christie [1950] 1979:79) emphasises that he has a patronising attitude towards her. This attitude would have been informed by the socially entrenched ways of thinking about how an elderly spinster is expected to behave.

> Rydesdale said, smiling tolerantly:
> "Are you suggesting that he was persuaded by someone to go out and take pot shots at a room full of people? Rather a tall order."
> "I think he was told that it was a *joke*," said Miss Marple. "He was paid for doing it of course. Paid, that is, to put an advertisement in the newspaper, to go out and spy out the household premises, and then, on the night in question, he was to go there, assume a mask and a black cloak and throw open a door, brandishing a torch, and cry 'Hands up!'"
>
> (Christie [1950] 1979:79)

While Rydesdale is obviously dismissive of Miss Marple's opinion of the events that led up to Rudi Sherz's entering Miss Blacklock's house and threatening the guests with a gun, towards the end of the novel Christie reveals that Marple's interpretation of the events is in fact correct, and it is revealed that Miss Blacklock "told her story of a sham hold-up at a party to Rudi Sherz, explained that she wanted a stranger to act the part of the 'gangster,' and offered him a generous sum for his co-operation" (Christie [1950] 1979:205).

Many people underestimate Marple. However, Christie has the vicar in *Murder at the Vicarage* point out that "[f]or all her fragile appearance, Miss Marple is capable of holding her own with any policeman or Chief Constable in existence" (Christie [1930] 1972:51). And she is usually right! When the vicar suggests that "Miss Marple may be mistaken" Griselda disagrees with her husband and argues that "[s]he never is. That kind of old cat is always

right." (Christie [1930] 1972:17). Later in the same novel, the vicar defends Marple on two different occasions:

> "If Miss Marple says she had no pistol with her, you can take it for granted that it is so," I said. "If there was the least possibility of such a thing, Miss Marple would have been on to it like a knife."
>
> (Christie [1930] 1972:57)

> I was quite sure that Anne Protheroe had had no pistol with her since Miss Marple had said so. Miss Marple is not the type of elderly lady who makes mistakes. She has got an uncanny knack of being always right.
>
> (Christie [1930] 1972:74)

Klein (1995:89) remarks that Miss Marple is often the only female detective included in surveys of readers' most popular fictional detectives. Why was Christie's Miss Marple such a successful creation? Perhaps it is because in the character of Miss Marple Christie does not challenge and threaten the status quo and the dominant discourses of the time about the role of women in society relative to male authority. Miss Marple is "so essentially feminine in her ways and manners, that she can get away with murder – or at least the detection of murder – without threatening male authority" (Berglund 2000:145). She is frail and fragile so she outwits the authority of the professional detective and her brilliant nephew, not to mention the villain and the rest of the village, in a subtle and indirect way, without overtly threatening their authority and superiority. Berglund links Miss Marple to the expectations in the early twentieth century of a Golden Age detective:

> [A]t first glance she would seem to go against all rules. What we have is a detective who is not only a woman, but also a woman who is neither young nor pretty nor, it would seem, prominent in any other way, but quite plain, usually badly dressed, ostensibly quite unprofessional, seemingly scatter-brained and even slightly ridiculous old maid. We are light-years away from Sherlock Holmes, the mastermind – and that is precisely the reason for her success.
>
> (2000:145)

In the character of Miss Marple, Christie exploits the dominant discourse of her society that expected an elderly spinster to be slightly scatter-brained and senile, often engaged in gossip,

and essentially harmless. However, as is evident from the discussion above, even though Miss Marple appears to fit into the stereotype of an elderly spinster, she is not harmless. Thus Christie subverts and undermines that expectation without challenging the dominant patriarchal discourse of the time.

3.2 Georgina (George) Kirrin

Georgina, or George as she prefers to be called, is arguably the most popular character in the *Famous Five* series, if not the most popular character created by Enid Blyton. According to what respondents said when questioned by Rudd, "the Five was by far the most popular series" (2000:88) and George the most popular character.

> [N]ot only was George pre-eminently popular among girls, but she was also the most popular Five (human) character with boys…. Given the unwillingness of most boys to read fiction about girls (albeit girls will read fiction about boys) – let alone find them more popular than the boys – this is quite an achievement.
>
> (Rudd 2000:88)

Her tomboyishness may well allow George to appeal to both male and female readers. George as tomboy would fit in with the male characters, thus appealing to male readers. However, the rebellious tomboy would appeal to similarly rebellious female readers.

George was "Blyton's all time favourite character" (Rudd 2000:111), and as mentioned in Chapter Two, there are a number of references that claim that George is based on Blyton. According to Baverstock, Blyton "told her agent that she realised that George was a reflection of herself as a child, longing to be like her brothers" (2000:29), and Druce claims that Blyton "admitted that George came close to a self portrait" (1992:120). Like Blyton, George rebels against some of the dominant discourses that reinforce the domestic and submissive role of women – both George and Blyton are strong, independent females.

Perhaps because of the autobiographical nature of George, Blyton places emphasis on George in the series. For example, in *Five Go Adventuring Again*, the second book in the series, Blyton provides readers with a detailed description of George:

> She would not allow anyone to call her Georgina, and now even the mistresses called her George. She really was very like a boy with her short curly hair, and her boyish ways.
>
> (Blyton [1943] 1967:9)

Blyton does not, however, offer a description of George's cousin Anne who is featured in the scene with her.

As I have already noted, in line with the dominant heteronormative discourse of the time, Julian, the eldest male character in the *Famous Five* stories fills the stereotypical male role as protector and is physically more powerful. Julian plays the role of leader. Male characters who show 'weak' or 'feminine' behaviour, such as Lucian in *The Ship of Adventure,* are portrayed in a negative light because they do not conform to the social expectations of male behaviour at the time. According to Lurie, many authors "conventionalised" their stories and characters to suit the "contemporary tastes" (2003:15) of the time – they regulated their stories to ensure conformity with the current expectations. Hence, the independence and power of the character of George is significant in relation to the time of writing because, through her portrayal of George, Enid Blyton challenges this dominant heteronormative discourse and presents an alternative – an independent female. However, during the war years women were called on to "step outside traditional gender roles" (Rudd 2000:112). Therefore the independence of the character of George could be seen to have been a reinforcement and reflection of some discourses at the time which called on women to show strength of character, and self-sufficiency.

Blyton also reinforces the widespread belief that boys were more valued by society at the time by having George believe that being like a boy is better than being a girl. This point of view is reinforced in her writing in comments that laud the masculine by implying that masculine behaviour is decent while girls are petty and catty:

> Julian gave George a gentle clap on the back. "Good old George! She's actually learned, not only to give in, but to give in gracefully! George, you're more like a boy than ever when you act like that."
> George glowed. She liked Julian to say she was like a boy. She didn't want to be petty and catty and bear malice as so many girls did. But Anne looked a little indignant.
> "It isn't *only* boys that can learn to give in decently, and things like that," she said. "Heaps of girls do. Well, I jolly well hope I do myself!"
> (Blyton [1947] 1967:23)

Blyton does point out that not all girls should be described in a negative manner when she has Anne comment that girls can also behave decently. Nonetheless, Anne's comment comes across more as an afterthought and creates the impression that while 'decent' behaviour is the norm among boys, it is an exception among girls.

George's desire to behave like a boy and shun any kind of expectations related to her femininity is emphasised by Blyton throughout the *Famous Five* books. One of the ways that Blyton reinforces George's preference for being seen to be masculine is by having George call herself by a boy's name – George, instead of Georgina.

> "No," she said. "I'm not Georgina."
> "Oh!" said Anne, in surprise. "Then who are you?"
> "I'm George," said the girl. "I shall only answer if you call me George. I hate being a girl. I won't be. I don't like doing the things that girls do. I like doing the things that boys do. I can climb better than any boy, and swim faster too. I can sail a boat as well as any fisher-boy on this coast. You're to call me George. Then I'll speak to you. But I shan't if you don't."
> (Blyton [1942] 1967:18)

This sentiment is reinforced in *Five Run Away Together* when Blyton points out that George "had always wanted to be a boy, and would never answer if she was called Georgina. So

everyone called her George" (Blyton [1944] 1967:7-8). It is interesting to note that other characters, including George's parents, comply with her wish to be called George rather than Georgina.

> "Do you call her 'George'?" asked Anne, in surprise. "I thought her name was Georgina."
> "So it is," said her aunt. "But George hates being a girl, and we have to call her George, as if she was a boy. The naughty girl won't answer if we call her Georgina."
> (Blyton [1942] 1967:14)

This highlights the power that Blyton gives to the character of George in that other characters obey her wishes.

One might speculate that the character of George was influenced by Jo March in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* which was "radical at the time of writing" (Lurie 2004:14) and is referred to as one of Blyton's favourite novels. Jo March in *Little Women* was nothing like the typical female characters of the time, and like Alcott did with Jo, Blyton gave George a boy's name. Similarly, in Edward Stratemeyer's Nancy Drew series (first published in 1930), Nancy's tomboy friend George also prefers the masculine version of her name, reinforcing her desire for others to perceive her as masculine. A female character named Jo features twice in the *Famous Five* adventures: in *Five Fall into Adventure* and *Five Have a Wonderful Time.* Like George, Jo is a girl who prefers to be called by a boy's name and who behaves like a boy.

> "…What's you name?"
> "Jo," said the girl.
> "But that's a *boy's* name," said Dick.
> "So's George. But you said she was a girl," said Jo.
> (Blyton [1950] 1991:33)

Another tomboy with similar characteristics, Henry, is featured in *Five Go to Mystery Moor*. Blyton has George show evidence of character growth in her interaction with these other tomboy characters by showing her learning to accept these characters even though their tomboyish nature, which mirrors her own, threatens George's distinctiveness and individuality.

In addition to calling herself by a boy's name, George's appearance reinforces her wish to be seen as a boy: she wears her hair short and she dresses in boy's clothes. We read that "[s]he had very short curly hair, almost as short as a boy's" (Blyton [1942] 1967:18); and that "George was dressed, as usual, exactly like a boy, in jeans and jersey" (Blyton [1944] 1967:7-8). Throughout the *Famous Five* series George's tomboy behaviour is reinforced through repeated references that associate her with being a boy. Even in the first reference to George in *Five on a Treasure Island* Blyton has Julian comment: "I wonder what Georgina's like. Funny name, isn't it. More like a boy's than a girl's." (Blyton [1942] 1967:9). Alf, the fisher-boy, uses a masculine form of address and calls George "Master George" (Blyton [1942] 1967:38), as does Old Mr Sanders at Kirrin Farm:

> "Why, if it isn't Master George!" said the old fellow with a grin. George grinned too. She loved being called Master instead of Miss.
>
> (Blyton [1943] 1967:35)

George's mother, Aunt Fanny, also compares her to a man: "…You'll be quite safe with George. She can handle a boat like a man" (Blyton [1942] 1967:49). Blyton also has George undertake traditionally masculine tasks like driving the caravan in *Five Go off in a Caravan*:

> "I'm going to drive *our* caravan," said George. "Anne wouldn't be any good at it, though I'll let her have a turn at it sometimes. Driving is a man's job."
>
> (Blyton [1946] 1967:28)

The above examples also illustrate how Blyton has George and Aunt Fanny assimilate the dominant discourse which leads them to believe that tasks like steering a boat and driving a caravan should be undertaken by men because women are not capable of such activities.

On several occasions George is mistaken for a boy. This mistaken identity allows Blyton to have George behave in a traditionally masculine manner and gives her power in a man's world. Blyton has George express a great deal of pleasure at these cases of mistaken

identity, portraying her desire to be thought of as masculine rather than feminine in a positive light:

> George couldn't help feeling pleased. This boy thought *she* was a boy! George was always gracious to people who made the mistake of thinking she was a boy.
> (Blyton [1947] 1967:60)

In *Five Go to Smuggler's Top* George is delighted when Mr Lenoir mistakes her for a boy:

> "… Three boys for Sooty, and one girl for Marybelle. Ha ha!"
> He evidently thought George was a boy, and she did look rather like one – she was wearing shorts and a jersey, as usual, and her curly hair was very short.
> Nobody said that George wasn't a boy. Certainly George was not going to! She, Dick and Julian shook hands with Mr Lenoir.'
> (Blyton [1945] 1967:49-50)

> "Everyone grinned when Mr Lenoir called George a boy. He never seemed to realise she was a girl. She grinned, too. She wasn't going to tell him she wasn't a boy!"
> (Blyton [1945] 1967:186)

Like George, the tomboy characters Jo and Henry not only have boys' names but are also mistaken for boys. In *Five Fall into Adventure*, Dick mistakes Jo for a boy and punches her:

> The boy hit out with his right fist and caught Dick unexpectedly on the jawbone. Dick looked astounded. He hit out, too, and sent the tousle-headed boy flying.
> (Blyton [1950] 1991:17)

However, when he discovers his mistake he regrets his actions: "It's the first time I've ever hit a girl, and I hope it'll be the last" (Blyton [1950] 1991:19). Dick's expression of regret draws attention to the difference in what was, and still is, considered to be acceptable treatment of boys and girls – while it is acceptable to hit another boy, it is not acceptable to hit a girl. Blyton has Dick regulate his own behaviour and express disappointment at his not conforming to the social expectations of how boys and men should treat girls and women.

Even though Blyton endorses and reinforces some of the dominant gender role expectations of the time, she also presents alternatives. In particular, Blyton has George break the gender rules that defined the expected behaviour of women at the time of writing. Even though

George is not a boy, Blyton subverts the dominant expectations of how girls should behave by making her capable in various situations. George succeeds at activities where boys and male characters would traditionally dominate, such as swimming and rowing her boat. Her skill in such activities and situations empowers her. In the *Famous Five* books readers are regularly reminded of George's skills: "…the boys found that George was a much better swimmer than they were" (Blyton [1942] 1967:35); "the girl cleverly worked her boat in and out of the rocks" (Blyton [1942] 1967:51); "the others watched in admiration as the girl guided the boat skilfully in and out of the hidden rocks" (Blyton [1944] 1967:85). George is better at rowing than the boys. She manoeuvres the boat in the more difficult situations, and she even takes the oars from the traditional eldest male leader, usurping his power:

> "Isn't George going to take the oars and guide to boat in?"
> "Yes," said George. "We've come to the difficult bit now, where we've got to weave our way in and out of the different rocks that keep sticking up. Give me the oars, Ju."
> (Blyton [1944] 1967:84-85)

In this way Blyton presents the possibility that girls can do the same things as boys, and just as well as boys, if not better.

Blyton also emphasises George's dominant position over Julian in *Five are Together Again*, when George, with the help of Timmy, pushes the villains' boat into the sea and sets it adrift. Blyton has Julian recognise that "he would never have thought of doing such daring things himself!" (Blyton [1963] 1971:174). Blyton also gives George power in *Five Go Adventuring Again.* Throughout the novel George is suspicious of the tutor Mr Roland. However, the other children and George's parents refuse to believe her. In the end Mr Roland is revealed to be the villain: "[h]er father looked most uncomfortable. He felt very guilty for having punished George and Timothy. They had been right about Mr Roland and he had been wrong" (Blyton [1943] 1967:167). In this way Blyton highlights how girls and women (and children) are

marginalised in a hierarchical patriarchal society, and how their opinions are often disregarded by the dominant adult males.

As a result of the depiction of often contradictory discourses in her writing, it is difficult to establish whether Blyton supports the dominant heteronormative discourses of her time, or whether she promotes alternative discourses that challenge the status quo and advocate female agency. It appears that she does both. Even though Blyton has George break the gender rules and explore alternative discourses to those advocated by society, Blyton often reminds us that George is "as good as a boy any day!" (Blyton [1963] 1971:66). In this regard, Rudd refers to Cadogan and Craig who describe George as being in a "false position… like all tomboys, she can be 'as good as', but this implies a basic deficiency. She can never be the genuine article" (2000:111). This links to the dominant opinion of the time that because George is still not a boy she is inferior, even 'other'. Blyton reinforces this opinion by having Anne accuse George of being a fake:

> You won't find that my brothers take much notice of you if you act as if you knew everything. They're *real* boys, not pretend boys, like you.
>
> (Blyton [1942] 1967:18)

However, in *Five on a Treasure Island,* when George helps Anne to swim, Blyton has Anne comment: "I'll never be as good as you – but I'd like to be as good as the boys" (Blyton [1942] 1967:46). In this way Blyton has Anne imply that George is in fact better than the boys.

An aspect of the social conventions of the time reflected in Blyton's writing reinforces stereotypical masculine behaviour and the idea that 'boys don't cry'. Boys and men are expected to be strong, to be leaders, and to be in control of their emotions. In *Five Go to Smuggler's Top* Blyton emphasises that, in an effort to conform to social expectations of masculine behaviour, George does not cry:

> "Anne began to cry. Marybelle, frightened and puzzled, at once began to sob too. George felt tears pricking the backs of her eyelids, but she blinked them away. George never cried!"
>
> (Blyton [1945] 1967:137)

This desire for George to fit into the mould of appropriate masculine behaviour by not crying is evident in *Five on a Treasure Island*:

> "… Father said I couldn't keep Timothy any more, and Mother backed Father up and said Tim must go. I cried for days – and I never do cry, you know, because boys don't and I like to be like a boy."
> "Boys do cry sometimes," began Anne, looking at Dick, who had been a bit of a cry-baby three or four years back. Dick gave her a sharp nudge, and she said no more.
> George looked at Anne.
> "Boy's don't cry," she said, obstinately. "Anyway, I've never seen one, and I always try not to cry myself. It's so babyish. But I just couldn't help it when Timothy had to go. He cried too."
>
> (Blyton [1942] 1967:31)

Blyton has George comment that she "never" cries because "boys don't cry". In addition, Blyton also has Dick show his desire to be masculine and conform to social expectations about how boys should behave when he gives Anne "a sharp nudge" to prevent her from revealing that he used to cry.

When George does cry, lose her temper and sulk, Blyton portrays this behaviour in a negative light and associates it with typically feminine behaviour. This is evident in *Five Go to Mystery Moor:* "[t]o think that George would behave like a sulky little girl" (Blyton [1954] 1969:51). By including this aspect of George's behaviour and allowing her to show her emotions (more so than any of the other characters in the series), Blyton has George display behaviour that would have been regarded as appropriate gender behaviour at the time. In this way Blyton may be deliberately highlighting the tension between subverting the dominant discourse and reinforcing it. Even though Blyton has George rebel against femininity by preferring to behave in a masculine manner, she still has George display stereotypically feminine behaviour by crying and sulking. Evidence of stereotypical female behaviour is also evident in *Five Fall into*

Adventure. Even though George appears to oppose the dominant social conventions about acceptable female behaviour at the time, in this story Blyton has George remark: “Well, there’s one thing certain – I shall NEVER marry a scientist” (Blyton [1950] 1991:14). The underlying assumption in George’s remark is that, in line with the social conventions that promote marriage and a domestic role among women, she assumes that she will get married. George overlooks the possibility that she might become a scientist, or pursue another career herself because this is not a choice readily available to girls and women in her experience.

It is possible to speculate about whether or not in George Blyton created a girl who wants to be a boy because the only way George can be successful in a male dominant world is to be masculine, or whether Blyton may have wanted to emphasise that George is a girl, not a boy. By not having George conform to the gender role expectations of the time, Blyton may be undermining, at least to some extent, the social conventions of the time.

However, George’s desire to be like a boy can be seen to be evidence of sexism in Blyton since it reinforces the idea that males are more privileged than the females who are often thought of as inferior. In the *Famous Five* series, when the children succeed in solving the mystery and assist in capturing the villains, George’s father, Uncle Quentin, often praises George. In *Five on a Treasure Island,*

> [Uncle Quentin] “ruffled George’s short curly hair. “And I’m proud of you, too, George,” he said. “You’re as good as a boy any day!”
>
> (Blyton [1942] 1967:162)

This is also evident in *Five on Kirrin Island again,*

> “Good girl,” said her father, and gave her a big hug. “Honestly, George, you do behave as bravely as any boy. I’m proud of you.”
> George thought that was the nicest thing her father had ever said to her.
>
> (Blyton [1947] 1967:144)

In the examples above it is important to note that he expresses his pride by comparing George to a boy, thus for George to earn her father's respect she must behave in a masculine manner. The examples suggest that, according to Uncle Quentin, boys are better than girls. Here it is difficult not to assume that Blyton is reinforcing the widespread social viewpoint that supports male dominance.

While Blyton appears to promote some emergent and alternative discourses about female independence in her portrayal of George, these discourses are contradicted by her portrayal of ways of being valued by her society. In the *Famous Five* stories male characters are placed in a position of privilege and power. George appears to have power and authority only because she behaves in a masculine manner, not because, as a girl, she is equal to the boys.

3.3 Anne

With regard to the gender behaviour of both adult and child characters, I believe that, with the exception of George, Blyton largely portrayed the patriarchal heteronormative gender roles of the time in which she wrote. This is an indication of Blyton's assimilation of the socially acceptable behaviour and opinions of the time. Accusations of sexism in Blyton's writing stem from the portrayal of passive and submissive female characters who are often involved in stereotypical female domestic roles, like cooking and cleaning; mothers are usually found in the kitchen and involved in such domestic activities, while men and boys are dominant, independent and in control. Heteronormative gender roles are reinforced through the presentation of women as the physically weaker sex who requires protection from physically more powerful men.

Blyton reinforces gender-biased discourses by portraying older male characters like Julian as leaders and young female characters like Anne as being dependent. The character of Anne conforms to a number of the dominant discourses about the stereotypically feminine. She is physically small and dainty and requires 'protection' from the male characters, thus reinforcing their superiority. These physical characteristics allow Blyton to develop Anne's stereotypically gendered role – she is often afraid and not ashamed to say so. She also enjoys her feminine domestic role of playing house.

Blyton often has Anne express her fears through her actions: "Anne slipped her arm through Julian's. She felt rather small and scared" (Blyton [1942] 1967:62); "Anne slipped her hand into Dick's. She felt scared" (Blyton [1942] 1967:117); "Anne began to cry" (Blyton [1943] 1967:84). There are also a number of occasions where Anne chooses not to join the other characters in the more dangerous activities. In *Five on Kirrin Island Again* Julian tells Anne that she may not accompany the others to capture the villains:

> "Anne, you're not to come," said Julian, to his little sister. "You're to go back and tell Aunt Fanny what's happened. Will you do that?"
> "Yes. I don't want to come," said Anne.
>
> (Blyton [1947] 1967:167)

However, what is significant in the above extract is that Anne accepts her submissive position and chooses not to go along with the others. This is also evident in *Five Run Away Together* when Anne decides not to go with the other children into the dungeon.

> "I think perhaps I'll stay up here with Timothy", said Anne, suddenly. She didn't like the dark look of the dungeon entrance. "You see, George – Timmy might be frightened or lonely up here by himself."
> The others chuckled. They knew Anne was frightened.
>
> (Blyton [1944] 1967:131)

Blyton also has Anne remark: "I don't think I'm a very adventurous person, really" (Blyton [1946] 1967:76), and that she would rather occupy her time with typical feminine tasks than become involved in the adventure:

> Anne was torn between wanting to go with the others, and longing to play 'house' again. She did so love arranging everything and making the beds and tidying up the cave. In the end she said she would stay and the others could go.
> (Blyton [1944] 1967:138)

As a result of Anne's showing fear when the children in the *Famous Five* adventures become involved in dangerous activities, the male characters conform to stereotypical masculine roles and offer protection to this 'weaker' female. In *Five on a Treasure Island,* when Dick and Anne attempt to rescue George and Julian, who have been locked in a dungeon by the villains Anne suggests that they try to get into the dungeon by going down the well. However, Dick will not allow Anne to take the risk: "Well," said Dick, "I'll try it – but not you, Anne. I'm not going to have you falling down that well" (Blyton [1942] 1967:141). It is of interest to note that George also fills the role of protective male, again reinforcing her desire to fill a masculine role.

> "Do you really think they are dangerous?" asked Anne rather afraid.
> "Yes, I should think so," said Julian. "But you needn't worry, Anne. You've got me and Dick and Tim to protect you."
> "I can protect her too," said George, indignantly. "I'm as good as a boy any day!"
> "Yes, you are, really," said Dick. "In fact, you're fiercer than any boy I know!"
> (Blyton [1943] 1967:147)

Blyton reinforces socially acceptable feminine behaviour by portraying stereotypical feminine domestic activities in a positive light: Anne is presented as enjoying domestic chores and activities. In *Five Run Away Together* the children live in a cave on Kirrin Island. Anne undertakes the domestic role of making the cave into a 'home'.

> "Let's arrange everything very nicely in the cave," said Anne, who was the tidiest of the four, and always liked to play at 'homes' if she could. "This shall be our house, our home. We'll make four proper beds. And we'll each have our own place to sit in.

> And we'll arrange everything tidily on that big stone shelf there. It might have been made for us."
> "We'll leave Anne to play 'houses' by herself," said George, who was longing to stretch her legs again. "We'll go and get some heather for beds."
>
> (Blyton [1944] 1967:109-110)

> [Julian] could hear Anne singing down in the cave as she tidied up her 'house'. Her voice came through the cave-roof hole, rather muffled. Julian smiled. He knew Anne was enjoying herself thoroughly.
>
> (Blyton [1944] 1967:110-111)

> Anne had a very happy morning. She arranged everything beautifully on the shelf – crockery and knives and forks and spoons in one place – saucepan and kettle in another – tins of meat next, tins of soup together, tins of fruit piled on top of one another. It really was a splendid larder and dresser!
> She wrapped all the bread up in an old tablecloth they had brought, and put it at the back of the cave in the coolest place she could find. The containers of water went there too, and so did all the bottles of drinks.
> Then the little girl set to work to make the beds. She decided to make two nice big ones, one on each side of the cave.
>
> (Blyton [1944] 1967:111-112)

This domestic role is also evident in *Five Go off in a Caravan* when Anne keeps the caravan neat and clean:

> "I shall keep everything very clean," said Anne. "You know how I like *playing* at keeping house, don't you Mother – well, it will be real this time. I shall have two caravans to keep clean, all by myself."
> "All by yourself!" said her mother. "Well, surely the boys will help you – and certainly George must."
> "Pooh, the boys!" said Anne. "They won't know how to wash and dry a cup properly – and George never bothers about things like that. If I don't make the bunks and wash the crockery, they would never be made or washed, I know that."
>
> (Blyton [1946] 1967:26)

Readers are repeatedly told that Anne enjoys playing at "houses" (Blyton [1944] 1967:110) and feels pride when she is praised for success in chores such as "housekeeping" (Blyton [1946] 1967:39). The highest praise that the other characters can give to Anne is to refer to her as good housewife.

> [Julian] looked round admiringly. "My word, Anne – the cave does look fine! Everything in order and looking so tidy. You are a good little girl."
> Anne was pleased to hear Julian's praise, though she didn't like him calling her a little girl.
>
> (Blyton [1944] 1967:112)

This domestic behaviour is portrayed as normal and natural feminine behaviour and Blyton portrays Anne as seeking to conform to this behaviour. Unlike George, Anne is not successful at traditionally more 'masculine' tasks, like keeping watch:

> "Isn't she a good little house-wife!" said Julian, in great admiration. "She may go to sleep when she's look out, but she's wide-awake enough when it comes to making a house for us out of a cave."
>
> (Blyton [1944] 1967:115)

While Anne takes pride in her domestic prowess, Blyton has George feel guilty that she does not play more of a domestic role. George does not regulate her behaviour and does not seek to conform to the social gender role expectations. George's feelings of guilt are a result of her social knowledge about what is considered acceptable feminine behaviour by society, and her knowledge that she does not conform to these conventions. In contrast with George's feelings of guilt, Blyton does not mention any guilt feelings among the boys, because boys were not expected to participate in domestic tasks:

> "I like this holiday better than any we've ever had" said Anne, busily cooking something in a pan. "It's exciting without being adventurous. And although Julian thinks he's in charge of us, *I* am really! You'd never get your bunks made, or your meals cooked, or the caravans kept clean if it wasn't for me."
> "Don't boast!" said George, feeling rather guilty because she let Anne do so much.
> "I'm not boasting!" said Anne, indignantly. "I'm just telling the truth. Why, you've never even made your own bunk once, George. Not that I mind doing it. I love having two houses on wheels to look after."
> "You're a very good little housekeeper," said Julian. "We couldn't possibly do without you!"
> Anne blushed with pride. She took the pan off the camp-fire and put the contents on to four plates. "Come along!" she called, in a voice just like her mother's. "Have your meal while it's hot."
>
> (Blyton [1946] 1967:39-40)

Even though Blyton presents George's rebellion against conventional gender roles, it is significant that in *Five Go off in a Caravan* Blyton has Anne's mother insist that George "must" (Blyton [1946] 1967:26) help Anne with the domestic tasks of keeping the caravans clean and tidy, obviously because George is a girl. Thus, in this example, Blyton is firmly

reinforcing the dominant perceptions of how girls and women should behave. Similarly, in *Five Go off to Camp* Anne tells George that she "must help with the preparing of the meals and washing-up" (Blyton [1948] 1967:27), even though George "hated doing all the things that girls had to do, such as making beds and washing-up" (Blyton [1948] 1967:27). Blyton also seems to assume that it is expected of girls to participate in domestic activities by her comment on "the things that girls *had* to do" (Blyton [1948] 1967:27). This heteronormative behaviour is further emphasised by Blyton when the boys offer to help with domestic tasks and Anne insists that she and George are responsible for these tasks:

> "Shall we help you clear up, Anne?" [said Julian.]
> "No. That's my job and George's," said Anne firmly.
>
> (Blyton [1948] 1967: 81)

Further emphasising Anne's femininity, and in contrast with George's name, short hair and boy's clothes, Anne is portrayed as a 'girly' girl. Laura Barton remarks that "Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* girls provided a neat delineation of the type of girl you were: an Anne or a George" (2007:31).

> The two girls stared at one another for a moment.
> "Don't you simply hate being a girl?" asked George.
> "No, of course not," said Anne. "You see – I like pretty frocks – and I love my dolls – and you can't do that if you're a boy."
> "Pooh! Fancy bothering about pretty frocks," said George, in a scornful voice. "And dolls! Well you *are* a baby, that's all I can say."
> Anne felt offended. "You're not very polite," she said.
>
> (Blyton [1942] 1967:18)

Not only is Anne portrayed as playing with dolls,

> "Anne wanted to take all her fifteen dolls with her last year," said Dick, "Do you remember, Anne? Weren't you funny?"
> "No I wasn't," said Anne, going red. "I love my dolls, and I just couldn't choose which one to take – so I thought I'd take them all. There's nothing funny about that."
>
> (Blyton [1942] 1967:10)

but she is also interested in more feminine activities, like picking flowers:

> "Well, while the boys are looking for arrow-heads we'll look for primroses," said Anne, pleased. "I like picking flowers."
>
> (Blyton [1947] 1967:70)

Throughout the *Famous Five* series there are several examples where Blyton illustrates the differences between Anne and George.

> "George can do anything in the water," said Anne, admiringly. "I wish I could dive and swim like George. But I never shall."
>
> (Blyton [1944] 1967:107)

> "George and Anne pulled out the dolls. They were lovely ones. Anne cuddled them up to her. She loved dolls, though George scorned them."
>
> (Blyton [1944] 1967:152)

By highlighting the distinction between Anne and George as female characters, Blyton presents contrasting gender stereotypes. In this way, Blyton offers readers an opportunity to identify with the different aspects of these female characters: she reassures female readers that, while it is acceptable to be a tomboy like George, it is also acceptable to be domestic and feminine like Anne.

Anne conforms to gender role expectations and in the characterisation of Anne, Blyton shows evidence of how the gender relations dictated by the dominant discourse become entrenched and are regarded as natural and normal by individuals operating in society. While the domestic environment and motherhood appear to offer women power, social conventions regard this as an acceptable role for women in confining and defining them it helps maintain the status quo. Individuals like Anne consent to a submissive role, and even monitor and regulate their own behaviour in an effort to conform to these social practices. In this way Blyton reinforces the prevalent systems of thought about appropriate gender behaviour.

4 CONCLUSION

While Blyton and Christie portray social conventions and expectations about heteronormative gender roles in a patriarchal society in their writing through the behaviour of their characters, and while they offer examples of stereotypical heteronormative gender behaviour, they also present alternatives to this behaviour, and explore some of the alternative discourses emerging at the time. Blyton presents an alternative in which girls participate in many of the same activities as boys do when they are solving mysteries, rowing boats and climbing trees. In the *Famous Five* books George is a successful, independent girl who can do anything that a boy can do. In the character of Miss Marple, Christie uses the widespread social expectations about elderly women to undermine the dominant discourse so as to place her in a position of power. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, in the writing of Christie and Blyton, "[w]omen can do, and they do" (Plain 2001:47) and these alternatives imply that, while women are often constrained by the dominant patriarchal discourse of the time, it is possible for them to 'do'.

Yet, even though Blyton and Christie provide their female characters with an opportunity to exercise power within a male-dominated world, this exercise of power does not overtly threaten the status quo or challenge the patriarchy. Miss Marple conforms to the conventions because she appears to be a stereotypical elderly lady. Anne's domestic role is portrayed in a positive manner and thus reinforces the discourse that promotes a domestic role for women. Even though George behaves like a boy, she is still a girl and thus she remains 'other' in relation to boys and men. Furthermore, by emphasising George's desire to be thought of as a boy, Blyton is supporting the widespread social viewpoint of the time that promotes male dominance and the belief that boys are 'better' than girls.

While it is difficult to conclude whether Blyton and Christie opposed or supported the dominant gender discourses of the time, their writing does show evidence of an awareness of the alternative and emergent ideas operating in society. However, the exploration of alternatives to the dominant system of thought in their writing does not overtly challenge or resist the dominant discourse of the time, nor does it threaten the status quo in any telling way.

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 then 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 is society is to care for their masters; there is no need for this is 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 from 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 Dorces 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 scrubbings 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). Colonialism[13] 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 conjectures, 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 he 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. His 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 <u>Racism</u>

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," sail 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.

CONCLUSION:

REFLECTION AND CONSIDERATION OF OBSERVATIONS

> "Remember, if you please," said my friend, looking at me over his spectacles, "that I am a Victorian by birth and education, and that the Victorian tree may not unreasonably be expected to bear Victorian fruit"
>
> M.R. James *A Neighbour's Landmark*

"[A]ll literature takes colour from its surroundings and at the same time gives them a further element of meaning" (Symons 1992:178). The society in which Blyton and Christie were born, raised, lived and wrote influenced them, therefore it is only natural that they, in turn, bore fruit that reflected their world – both in terms of the dominant discourses of their time and the discourses that emerged during their time as these discourses shaped and moulded their horizons of expectation and are embedded in their writing. As Symons ascertains that,

> [t]o ask whether Agatha Christie would have written differently if she had been born half a century later is like asking whether a modern Shakespeare would have written in blank verse. The questions beg themselves by their absurdity. Nobody born in 1940 could possibly have thought like Agatha Christie, and so would not have written like her.
>
> (1992:177)

While there is evidence of emergent, oppositional and alternative discourses in their writing Blyton and Christie did not directly and overtly challenge or resist the dominant discourses and/or the attendant status quo; perhaps, not only because their own horizons were formed by these dominant discourses, but also because the horizons of their readers were. Even though significant social changes took place in society in the years between the publications of their different books, the dominant discourses of the early twentieth century remain apparent in their writing. Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie did not write to challenge ideas and change systems of thought; they wrote popular literature, escapist literature for readers to enjoy. By overtly challenging the dominant opinions of society at the time they would likely

have offended their readers while also making it difficult for them to relate to the stories. This would also have had an impact on their success and popularity as authors, and on their income. Certainly, part of the reason for their popularity at the time was because they were not controversial authors. They offered readers fun and easy reading: readers did not have to contemplate or evaluate the social structures of the society in which they lived.

The Golden Age of detective fiction influenced the prevailing opinions about the genre of detective fiction. In addition, the repetitive formula and artificial nature of detective fiction creates a set of expectations in the reader that can be said to operate outside of their social situation and its values, at least to some extent. Detective fiction as a genre was popular long before the Golden Age of detective fiction even began, and the genre was popular among adults and children long before Blyton began writing detective fiction for children. Therefore it stands to reason that there are certain characteristics of detective fiction that contribute to the immense popularity of this genre that appeal to both child and adult readers alike. Even though Enid Blyton was writing for children, it is possible to assume that the popularity of the detective fiction genre at that time influenced her writing. Which, in turn, influenced her popularity – she adapted her writing to fit in with market trends.

While Blyton and Christie portray stereotypical social conventions and traditional expectations about heteronormative gender roles in a patriarchal society in their writing, they also present alternatives to this. However, even though Blyton and Christie provide their female characters with an opportunity to exercise power within a male-dominated world, their portrayal of this exercise of power does not overtly threaten the status quo or challenge the patriarchy.

Similarly, while Blyton and Christie present alternatives to the dominant social expectations with regard to the behaviour of individuals of a different race, class, nationality, religion and

ethnicity – an indication that they do not completely support and endorse the prejudiced dominant discourse of their time – they often portray some of the social prejudices of that time. War-time culture permeates their writing and perpetuates patriotism. The ease with which they use derogatory terms to describe individuals of a different nationality or skin colour reflects their assimilation the hegemonic ideological practices of the time.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The scope of this study does not allow for a detailed examination of the objections that have been made against the writing of Blyton and Christie, or an examination of the criticism of detective fiction and popular culture in general. The description of fiction by Blyton and Christie as part of popular culture, therefore 'sub-literary' and inferior also allows scope for further research into the genre of detective fiction as part of larger culture and the widely accepted argument that "massive popularity is frequently equated with poor quality" (Druce 1992: 38). This discussion can be related to Thompson's comment that "in most circles, the work of [Christie] is generally regarded as sub-literary, mere pulp, a disposable product whose inferiority can be inferred from its large sales" (1993:27). Thompson goes on the remark that

> [t]he usually unspoken assumption behind the dismissal of crime fiction seems to stem from two beliefs: first, that when it comes to popular fiction, quantity and quality are mutually exclusive, and second, that crime fiction suffers from formulaic restrictions that true fiction or literature transcends.
>
> (1993:27)

Terry Eagleton argues that literature is "any kind of writing which for some reason or another somebody values highly" (Eagleton 1996:9). Literature is a "*functional* rather than *ontological* [term]: [it] tells us about what we do, not about the fixed being of things" (Eagleton 1996:9). This argument is supported by Tony Bennet who concedes that while "there is a difference between the writing of, say, [James] Joyce and Conan Doyle… we cannot attribute value to one form of writing or another on this basis" (in Thompson 1993:31).

While there has been an "attempt by some critics to judge Blyton as a literary writer, [this is] something she herself never claimed to be" (Rudd 2000: 46). This is also true of Christie who

also disregarded critical comments about her work, after all, as she points out in her autobiography, "[her] writing was for entertainment" (Christie 1993:445).

The widespread and vehement criticism of Enid Blyton would also offer scope for further research. Blyton was criticised by a number of sources for reasons that include literary criticism – simplistic language and style, a predictable plot and events, stereotypical characters, and a lack of imagination and intellect – and social criticism – her portrayal of racist, xenophobic and ethnocentric attitudes, classist attitudes, and sexism, among others. It is interesting to note that regardless of this criticism Enid Blyton is one of the most popular and prolific children's authors ever, she is "arguably the best-selling children's writer of all time" (Watson 2001:91). While Blyton was widely respected as an author of children's literature in the early part of her career, "those that came into the developing field of children's literature after the war were heavily influenced by Leavis and American 'new criticism', which tended to foreground the literary text at the expense of the reader" (Rudd 2000:32) and, therefore perhaps also to the detriment of a child-oriented approach. Many modern editions of Blyton's books have been modified to conform to contemporary discourses – the names of the characters Dick (in the *Famous Five* series) and Fanny (in the *Adventure* series) have been replaced with Rick and Frannie[15], while the golliwogs in the *Noddy* books have been replaced with teddy bears. However, these changes have also been criticised as tampering with an important piece of children's literature history. Further research on the implications of, and reasons for, modern changes to Blyton's work, such as the removal of racist and sexist connotations, would be significant, as well the considerable changes in Blyton's reputation and the reception of her books by the public which present evidence of changing discourses

[15] The replacement of the names Dick and Fanny is most likely because these words now have new connotations and are slang terms for penis and bottom.

over the years since she lived and wrote. While her writing was widely criticised after the Second World War and in the years towards the end of the twentieth century, recently there has been a greater "readiness to think of Enid Blyton as a great classic writer and to regard some of her works… as great classics of their time" (Watson 2000a:4).

In addition, because of the prolific number of work by these women, there are several opportunities for further research into other texts by Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie. These might include Blyton's school stories, the *Malory Towers* series and the *St Clare's* series, as well as the popular *Secret Seven* series, and the *Adventure* series, among others. It could also be of interest to consider fiction featuring other detectives created by Christie such as Tommy and Tuppence, Parker Pyne, as well as her romantic fiction, published under the pen name Mary Westmacott.

A further examination of Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie from a social perspective may be of interest to students of social and historical criticism who are concerned with what is viewed as acceptable by society and the influence of changing discourses on society at large. Furthermore, Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie were not the only writers to reflect the prevalent discourses of their time in their writing. Similar reflections of discourse may be found in detective fiction by other authors and in children's literature. In particular, the portrayal of gender discourses in Edward Stratemeyer's *Nancy Drew* series with reference to feminine Bess and tomboy George might be of interest, as would a comparative study of the portrayal of the tomboy George in the *Nancy Drew* series and George in the *Famous Five* series. Comparative studies of Christie and other British women writers of detective fiction from different eras such as Dorothy L. Sayers, P.D. James and Ruth Rendell would also be relevant. The portrayal of dominant discourses in British authors of detective fiction, such as

Arthur Conan Doyle, and British authors of children's literature, such as Edith Nesbit could also be revealing. In addition, studies of the portrayal of discourses in the writing of British authors of detective fiction might be compared to American writers of the same period, in particular taking into consideration the difference between the British 'cosies' and the 'hard-boiled' detective fiction of the United States of America. A comparison of Christie and other Golden Age writers with writers of modern detective fiction such as Patricia Cornwell, Ian Rankin, Kathy Reichs, James Patterson and Jeffrey Deaver may be thought provoking, as would a comparison of Blyton with successful modern authors of children's literature such as J.K. Rowling.

An exploration of how Blyton's books give children a chance to be powerful would be engaging, especially in relation to the dominant discourse of ageism prevalent at the time of writing. The portrayal of ageism in relation to Miss Marple in Christie's writing would also be of interest.

CLOSING REMARKS

> We have become too tied up over whether Blyton is racist or sexist. Books should make you happy. I remember Enid Blyton making me happy and we must hang onto that.
>
> Fred Inglis (in Greenfield 1998:85)

Not only did Christie successfully create two exceptionally memorable detectives who remain household names today, Hercule Poirot and Miss Jane Marple, but she succeeded as a playwright too, with *The Mousetrap* famous as the longest running show in the world. Her fiction has also been filmed for television and made into movies.

"Even though there are numerous critics who find fault in her work, for every critic of Blyton there are a number of readers who vehemently defend her" (Coetzee 2003:199). Anne Fine ascertains that

> Enid Blyton should be saluted for her contribution to children's literacy by hooking millions of us on reading…. She knew what we were dreaming about. You wanted to be in her free, airy world of caves and coves and secret tunnels and, most importantly, absentee parents.
>
> (in Greenfield 1998:85)

In addition to having her series turned into television series, and even updated and "given a modern makeover" (Revoir 2008) by the Disney Company for modern audiences, Blyton and her characters have become cultural reference points and are even used in the names of music bands such as 'Noddy's Puncture', 'Die Fűnf Freunde' and 'The Enid' (Rudd 2000:38).

The extraordinary output and enduring influence of Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie on readers and their subsequent influence on the genres of detective fiction and children's literature cannot be overlooked. That Christie and Blyton remain in print today, long after many of their contemporary writers are out of print, stands as testament to their success and

to the value of academic and social projects on their work. They remain widely read. This is particularly significant when the writing of these women is considered in relation to the vast changes in discourses and socially acceptable systems of thought since their time. It is clear the Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie have stood the test of time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bargainnier, E.F. 1980. *The Gentle Art of Murder: The Detective Fiction of Agatha Christie*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press.

Barton, L. 2007. Girl Wonders. *Mail & Guardian,* July 20 to 26 2007, p. 31.

Baverstock, G. 2000. *Enid Blyton*. London: Mammoth.

Bayard, P. 2001. *Who Killed Roger Ackroyd: The Mystery Behind the Agatha Christie Mystery*. New York: New Press.

Bearne, E. and Watson, V. (Eds) 2000. *Where Texts and Children Meet.* London: Routledge.

Berglund, B. 2000. *Desires and Devices: On Women Detectives in Fiction.* In: Chernaik, W, Swales, M. & Vilain, R. (Eds). 2000. *The art of detective fiction*. Houndmills: MacMillan.

Bindel, J. 2007. Murder She Wrote. *Mail & Guardian,* February 9 to 15 2007, p.5.

Binyon, T.J. 1989. *Murder Will Out*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Blyton, E. [1942] 1967. *Five on a Treasure Island*. Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton.

Blyton, E. [1943] 1967. *Five Go Adventuring Again*. Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton.

Blyton, E. [1944] 1967. *Five Run Away Together*. Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton.

Blyton, E. [1945] 1967. *Five Go to Smuggler's Top*. Leicester: Knight Books.

Blyton, E. [1946] 1967. *Five Go off in a Caravan*. Leicester. Knight Books.

Blyton, E. [1947] 1967. *Five on Kirrin Island Again*. Leicester: Knight Books.

Blyton, E. [1948] 1967. *Five Go off to Camp*. Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton.

Blyton, E. [1950] 1991. *Five Fall into Adventure*. Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton.

Blyton, E. [1950] 2000. *The Ship of Adventure*. London: Macmillan.

Blyton, E. [1952]. 1980. *Five Have a Wonderful Time*. Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton

Blyton, E. [1952] 2000. *The Circus of Adventure.* London: Macmillan.

Blyton, E. [1953] 1969. *Five Go down to the Sea*. Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton.

Blyton, E. [1954] 1969. *Five Go to Mystery Moor*. Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton.

Blyton, E. [1957] 1970. *Five Go to Billycock Hill*. Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton.

Blyton, E. [1963] 1971. *Five are Together Again*. Sevenoaks: Hodder & Stoughton.

Boggs, C. 1976. *Gramsci's Marxism.* London: Pluto Press.

Campbell, M. 2005. *Agatha Christie.* Harpenden: Pocket Essentials.

Chernaik, W., Swales, M. and Villain, R. (Eds). 2000. *The Art of Detective Fiction*. Houndmills: MacMillan.

Chernaik, W. 2000. *Mean Streets and English Gardens*. In: Chernaik, W, Swales, M & Vilain, R (Eds). 2000. *The Art of Detective Fiction*. Houndmills: MacMillan.

Christie, A. [1920] 1969. *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. London: Pan.

Christie, A. [1922] 1955. *The Secret Adversary.* London: Pan.

Christie, A. [1924] 1958a. *The Tragedy at Marsdon Manor.* In: Christie, A. 1958. *Poirot Investigates.* London: Pan.

Christie, A. [1924] 1958b. *The Adventure of the 'Western star'.* In: Christie, A. 1958. *Poirot Investigates.* London: Pan.

Christie, A. [1924] 1958c. *The Adventure of the Cheap Flat.* In: Christie, A. 1958. *Poirot Investigates.* London: Pan.

Christie, A. [1924] 2008a. *A Fairy in the Flat/A Pot of Tea.* In: Christie, A. 2008b. *Detectives and Young Adventurers: The Complete Short Stories.* London: Harper.

Christie, A. [1924] 2008b. *The House of Lurking Death.* In: Christie, A. 2008b. *Detectives and Young Adventurers: The Complete Short Stories.* London: Harper.

Christie, A. [1926] 1974. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. London: Fontana.

Christie, A. [1927] 1994. *The Big Four.* London: HarperCollins.

Christie, A. [1929] 1961. *Partners in Crime.* London: Collins.

Christie, A. [1929] 2008. *The Blue Geranium.* In: Christie, A. 2008a. *Miss Marple and Mystery: The Complete Short Stories.* London: Harper.

Christie, A. [1930] 1972. *The Murder at the Vicarage*. London: Fontana.

Christie, A. [1930] 2008a. *A Christmas Tragedy.* In: Christie, A. 2008a. *Miss Marple and Mystery: The Complete Short Stories.* London: Harper.

Christie, A. [1930] 2008b. *The Tuesday Night Club.* In: Christie, A. 2008a. *Miss Marple and Mystery: The Complete Short Stories.* London: Harper.

Christie, A. [1931] 2008. *Death by Drowning.* In: Christie, A. 2008a. *Miss Marple and Mystery: The Complete Short Stories.* London: Harper.

Christie, A. [1932] 1971. *Peril at End House.* London: Collins.

Christie, A. [1936] 1963. *Cards on the Table*. London: Collins.

Christie, A. [1937] 1994a. *Murder in the Mews*. London: HarperCollins.

Christie, A. [1937] 1994b. *Murder in the Mews*. In: *Murder in the Mews*. London: HarperCollins.

Christie, A. [1937] 1994c. *Dead Man's Mirror*. In: *Murder in the Mews*. London: HarperCollins.

Christie, A. [1939] 1969. *Ten Little Niggers.* London: Collins.

Christie, A. [1942] 1971. *The Moving Finger.* London: Collins.

Christie, A. [1946] 1979. *The Hollow.* London: Collins.

Christie, A. [1950] 1979. *A Murder is Announced*. Aylesbury: Fontana.

Christie, A. [1953] 2008. *Author's Foreword to Miss Marple and the Thirteen Problems.* In: Christie, A. 2008a. *Miss Marple and Mystery: The Complete Short Stories.* London: Harper.

Christie, A. 1958. *Poirot Investigates.* London: Pan.

Christie, A. [1971] 1988. *Nemesis.* London: Fontana.

Christie, A. 1993. *An Autobiography*. London: HarperCollins.

Christie, A. 2008a. *Miss Marple and Mystery: The Complete Short Stories.* London: Harper.

Christie, A. 2008b. *Detectives and Young Adventurers: The Complete Short Stories.* London: Harper.

Christie, A. 2009. *Capture of Cerberus.* In: Curran, J. 2009. *Agatha Christie's Secret Notebooks: Fifty Years of Mysteries in the Making.* London: HarperCollins.

Coetzee, L. 2003. *Beyond the Horizon: An Enquiry into the Production and Reception of the Writing of Enid Blyton.* M.A. Thesis. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.

Cranny-Francis, A. 1990. *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Cullingford, C. 1998. *Children's Literature and its Effects: The Formative Years.* London: Cassell.

Curran, J. 2009. *Agatha Christie's Secret Notebooks: Fifty Years of Mysteries in the Making.* London: HarperCollins.

De Beauvior, S. 1953. *The Second Sex.* London: Jonathan Cape.

Druce, R. 1992. *This Day Our Daily Fictions: An Enquiry into the Multi-million Bestseller Status of Enid Blyton and Ian Fleming.* Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Eagleton, T. 1996. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Escarpit, D. (Ed.) 1985. *The Portrayal of the Child in Children's Literature: Proceedings of the Sixth Conference of the International Research Society for Children's Literature 1983*. Bordeaux: University of Gascony.

Fillingham, L. A. 1993. *Foucault for Beginners*. New York: Writers and Readers Publishing.

Fisher, M. 1985. *The Child in Adventure Stories.* In: Escarpit, D. (Ed.) 1985. *The Portrayal of the Child in Children's Literature: Proceedings of the Sixth Conference of the International Research Society for Children's Literature 1983*. Bordeaux: University of Gascony.

Foucault, M. [1969] 2002. *The Archaeology of Knowledge.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Foucault, M. [1976] 1978. *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*. London: Penguin.

Foucault, M. 2000. *Power: Essential Works of Michel Foucault: 1954-1984: Volume 3*. London: Penguin.

Fyfield, F. 2006. Vanishing Act. *Mail & Guardian*, November 10 to 16 2006, p.5.

Gadamer, H.G. 1975. *Truth and Method.* Translated by W. Glen-Doepel. London: Sheed and Ward.

Gavin, A.E. and Routledge, C. (Eds) 2001a. *Mystery in Children's Literature: From the Rational to the Supernatural.* Houndmills: Palgrave.

Gavin, A.E and Routledge, C. 2001b. *Mystery in Children's Literature: From the Rational to the Supernatural*. In: Gavin, A.E. and Routledge, C. (Eds) 2001a. *Mystery in Children's Literature: From the Rational to the Supernatural.* pp 1-13. Houndmills: Palgrave.

Girard, D. (ed.) 1962. *Cassell's New French-English English-French Dictionary*. London: Cassell & Company.

Glover, D. 2000. *The Writers Who Knew Too Much: Populism and Paradox in Detective Fiction's Golden Age*. In: Chernaik, W, Swales, M & Vilain, R (Eds). 2000. *The Art of Detective Fiction*. Houndmills: MacMillan.

Greenfield, G. 1998. *Enid Blyton*. Phoenix Mill: Sutton.

Harris, P. 2009. Forgotten Agatha Christie novel discovered 30 years after her death … in the attic of her holiday home. *Mail Online,* 20 August 2009. Available: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1207710/Forgotten-Agatha-Christie-novel-discovered-30-years-death--attic-holiday-home.html [Cited 20 August 2009].

Hart, A.1990. *The Life and Times of Hercule Poirot: An Affectionate Profile of Agatha Christie's Most Famous Detective*. New York: G. P Putnam's Sons.

Hart, A. 1997. *Agatha Christie's Marple: The Life and Times of Miss Jane Marple*. London: HarperCollins.

Holub, R.C. 1984. *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction.* New York: Methuen.

http://www.agathachristie.com/about-christie/ [Cited 17 September 2010].

Hunt, P. 1991. *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Hunt, P. 1994. *An Introduction to Children's Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hunt, P. and K. Sands, 2000. *The View from the Center: British Empire and Post-Empire Children's Literature.* In: McGillis, R. (Ed.) 2000a. *Voices of the Other: Children's Literature and the Postcolonial Context*. New York: Garland Publishing.

James, P.D. [1972] 2005. *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman.* London: Faber and Faber.

James, M.R. 2007a. *Collected Ghost Stories.* Available: http://books.google.co.za/books ?id=-4HcMwvzgDkC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false [Cited 8 November 2010].

James, M. R. 2007b. *A Neighbour's Landmark.* In: James, M.R. 2007a. *Collected Ghost Stories.* Available: http://books.google.co.za/books?id=-4HcMwvzgDkC&printsec =frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false [Cited 8 November 2010].

Jauss, H.R. 1982. *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception.* Translated by T. Bayati. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Kinsman, M. 2000. *A Band of Sisters.* In: Chernaik, W, Swales, M & Vilain, R (Eds). 2000. *The Art of Detective Fiction*. Houndmills: MacMillan.

Klein, K.G. 1995: *The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Knox, R. 1928. 'The 10 Commandments for Detective Novelists'*. The American Magazine.* http://www.ronaldknoxsociety.com/detective.html [Cited 04 December 2009].

Le Guin, U.K. 1993. *Earthsea Revisioned.* Cambridge: Green Bay Publications.

Lurie, A. 2003. *Boys and Girls Forever: Children's Classics from Cinderella to Harry Potter*. London: Vintage.

May, J.P. 1995. *Children's Literature and Critical Theory.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Mason, B.A. 1995. *The Girl Sleuth*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

McGillis, R (Ed.). 2000a. *Voices of the Other: Children's Literature and the Postcolonial Context*. New York: Garland Publishing.

McGillis, R. 2000b. *Introduction.* In: McGillis, R (Ed.). 2000a. *Voices of the Other: Children's Literature and the Postcolonial Context*. New York: Garland Publishing.

McGuigan, J. 1993. *Reaching for control: Raymond Williams on Mass Communication and Popular Culture.* In: Morgan, W.J. and Preston, P. (Eds) 1993. *Raymond Williams: Politics, Education, Letters.* pp. 163-188. New York: St Martin's Press.

McHoul, A. & Grace, W. 1993. *A Foucault Primer*. New York: New York University Press.

Mezei, K. 2007. 'Spinsters, Surveillance, and Speech: The Case of Miss Marple, Miss Mole, and Miss Jekyll'*. Journal of Modern Literature.* Winter 2007, Vol. 30, Issue 2, pp.103-120.

Miles, R. 2001. *Who Cooked the Last Supper: The Women's History of the World.* New York: Three Rivers Press.

Mitchell, C. and Pithouse, K. (Eds) 2009. *Teaching and HIV & AIDS.* Johannesburg: Macmillan.

Morgan, J. 1985. *Agatha Christie: A Biography.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Morgan, W.J. and Preston, P. (Eds) 1993. *Raymond Williams: Politics, Education, Letters.* New York: St Martin's Press.

Nodelman, P. 1994. 'Humane ideology'. In: Butler, F., Dillard, R.H.W. & Keyser, E.L. (Eds). 1994. *Children's literature: Annual of the Modern Language Association Division on*

Children's Literature and the Children's Literature Association, Vol. 22. pp.173-177. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Norton, D.E. 1983. *Through the Eyes of a Child: An Introduction to Children's Literature.* Columbus: Charles E. Merrill.

Plain, G. 2001. *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Priestman, M. 2000. *Sherlock's Children: The Birth of the Series*. In: Chernaik, W, Swales, M & Vilain, R (Eds). 2000. *The Art of Detective Fiction*. Houndmills: MacMillan.

Ray, S. 1982. *The Blyton Phenomenon: the Controversy Surrounding the World's Most Successful Children's Writer*. London: Andre Deutsch.

Revoir, P. 2008. Gosh! Look what Disney's done to Enid Blyton's Famous Five. *Mail Online,* 20 March 2008. Available: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-540056/Gosh-Look-Disneys-Enid-Blytons-Famous-Five.html [cited 23 September 2010].

Rowland, S. 2001. *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British Women Writers in Detective and Crime Fiction.* Houndmills: Plagrave.

Rudd, D. 2000. *Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children's Literature.* Houndmills: MacMillan.

Shavit, Z. 1985. *The Portrayal of Children in Popular Literature: The Case of Enid Blyton.* In: Escarpit, D. (Ed.) 1985. *The Portrayal of the Child in Children's Literature: Proceedings of the Sixth Conference of the International Research Society for Children's Literature 1983*. Bordeaux: University of Gascony.

Smart, B. 2002. *Michel Foucault*. London: Routledge.

Smith, A.L. 1995: *Femcrime or the Womansleuth and Romance*. In Jewish Affairs, Autumn, (56-60).

Smith, A.L. 2002. *From the Drawing Room to the Mean Streets: A Feminist Reading of Detective Fiction Written by Women*. PhD Thesis. Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand.

Smith, A.L. 2009. *What's Gender got to do with it?* In: Mitchell, C. and Pithouse, K. (Eds) 2009. *Teaching and HIV & AIDS.* Johannesburg: Macmillan.

Stephens, J. 1992. *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction.* Burnt Mill: Longman Group UK Ltd.

Stoney, B. 1992. *Enid Blyton: The Biography*. London: Hodder Children's Books.

Strinati, D. 1995. *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture.* London: Routledge.

Swales, M. 2000. *Introduction*. In: Chernaik, W., Swales., M & Vilain., R (Eds). 2000. *The Art of Detective Fiction*. Houndmills: MacMillan.

Symons, J. 1992. *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel.* New York: The Mysterious Press.

Thompson, J. 1993. *Fiction, Crime and Empire*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press.

Thompson, L. 2007. *Agatha Christie: An English Mystery*. London: Headline Review.

UNESCO. http://www.unesco.org/bpi/eng/unescopress/97-54e.htm [Cited 6 September 2010].

Van Dine, S.S. 1928. 'Twenty rules for writing detective stories'. *American Magazine.* [Online]. Available: http://gaslight.mtroyal.ab.ca/vandine.htm [Cited 29 June 2009].

Wagstaff, V. & Poole, S. 2006. *Agatha Christie: A Reader's Companion.* London: Aurum Press.

Watson, V. 2000a. *Introduction: Children's Literature is Dead: Long Live Children's Reading.* In: Bearne, E. and Watson, V. (Eds) 2000. *Where texts and children meet.* London: Routledge.

Watson, V. 2001. *The Cambridge Guide to Children's Books in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Williams, H. 2005. *Cassell's Chronology of World History.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Williams, R. [1980] 2005. *Culture and Materialism.* London: Verso.

Further reading

Alcott, L.M. [1868] 1994. *Little Women.* London: Penguin.

Avery, G. and Briggs, J. (Eds) 1990. *Children and their Books: A Celebration of the Work of Iona and Peter Opie*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Belsey, C. 2002. *Post Structuralism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Boone, T. 2001. *The Juvenile Detective and Social Class: Mark Twain, 'Scouting for girls', and the Nancy Drew Mysteries*. In: Gavin, A.E. and Routledge, C. (Eds) 2001. *Mystery in Children's Literature: From the Rational to the Supernatural.* Houndmills: Palgrave.

Briggs, J. 1995. 'Transitions (1890-1914)'. In: Hunt, P. 1995. (Ed.) *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History*. pp. 167-191. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Butler, F., Dillard, R.H.W. and Keyser, E.L. (Eds). 1994. *Children's Literature: Annual of the Modern Language Association Division on Children's Literature and the Children's Literature Association*, Vol. 22. pp.173-177. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Carpenter, H. 1985. *Secret Gardens: The Golden Age of Children's Literature.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Culler, J. 1997. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Dorsch, T.S. (Ed.). 1965. *Aristotle, Horace, Longinus: Classical Literary Criticism*. Harmondsworth: London.

Doyle, A.C. 2009. *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes.* London: Penguin.

Doyle, A.C. [1890] 2009. *The Sign of Four.* In: Doyle, A.C. 2009. *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes.* London: Penguin.

Forgacs, D. (Ed) 2000. *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*. New York: New York University Press.

Foucault, M. [1961] 2001. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Foucault, M. [1963] 2003. *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Foucault, M. [1966] 2002. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Germino, D. 1990. *Antonio Gramsci: Architect of a New Politics*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Gilman, S. L. 1985. *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Gramsci, A. 1975. *Prison Notebooks: Volume 1.* Translated by J.A. Buttigieg and A. Callari. New York: Columbia University Press.

Gramsci, A. 1994. *Letters from Prison: Volume 1.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Gutting, G. 2005. *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Haviland, V. (Ed.) 1973. *Children's literature: Views and Reviews*. Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company.

Hollindale, P. & Sutherland, Z. 1995. 'Internationalism, Fantasy And Realism (1945-1970)'. In: Hunt, P. (Ed.) *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History*. pp. 252-288. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Horrocks, C. & Jevtic, Z. 1997. *Foucault for Beginners*. Cambridge: Icon.

Hunt, P. (Ed.) 1990. *Children's Literature: The Development Of Criticism*. London: Routledge.

Hunt, P. (Ed.) 1992. *Literature for Children: Contemporary Criticism.* London: Routledge.

Hunt, P. (Ed.) 1995. *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Irons, G. 1995. *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Jones, S. 2006. *Antonio Gramsci*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Lukens, R.J. 1995. *A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature.* New York: Harpercollins.

Lurie, A. 1990. *Don't Tell the Grown-Ups: The Subversive Power Of Children's Literature*. Boston: Little, Brown & Company.

Malmgren, C.D. 2001. *Anatomy of Murder: Mystery, Detective and Crime Fiction.* Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.

Maxwell-Mahon, W.D. (Ed.) 1988. *Critical Texts: Plato to the Present Day*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.

Maxwell-Mahon, W.D. and Titlestad, P.J.H. (Eds) 1994. *Ways with Words*. Pretoria: Lexicon Publishers.

McNay, L. 1992. *Feminism and Foucault.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Montgomery, L.M. [1908] 1994. *Anne of Green Gables.* London: Penguin.

Moran, M.J. 2001. *Nancy's Ancestors: The Mystery of Imaginative Female Power in 'The Secret Garden' and 'A Little Princess'*. In: Gavin, A.E. and Routledge, C. (Eds) 2001. *Mystery in Children's Literature: From the Rational to the Supernatural.* Houndmills: Palgrave.

Munt, S.R. 1994. *Murder By the Book: Feminism and the Crime Novel.* London: Routledge.

Newton, J. and Rosenfelt, D. (Eds) 1985. *Feminist Criticism and Social Change: Sex, Class and Race in Literature and Culture.* New York: Methuen.

Nikolajeva, M. (Ed) 1995. *Aspects and Issues in the History of Children's Literature*. Westport: Greenwood Press.

O'Connor, A. 1989. *Raymond Williams: Writing, Culture, Politics.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Pearl, M. 2006. *Introduction.* In: Poe, E.A. 2006. *The Murders in the Rue Morgue.* London: Vintage.

Pilley, K. 2008. Crime Queen: deep, dark and dangerous…really? *Saturday Star,* 5 July 2008, p. 14.

Poe, E.A. 2006. *The Murders in the Rue Morgue.* London: Vintage.

Rabinow, P. (Ed.) 1984. *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction*. London: Penguin.

Reddy, M. T. 2003. *Traces, Codes and Clues: Reading Race in Crime Fiction.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Rice, E. 2003. *Who's who in Enid Blyton*. London: Orion Media.

Routledge, C. 2001. *Children's Detective Fiction and the Perfect Crime of Adulthood.* In: Gavin, A.E. and Routledge, C. (Eds) 2001. *Mystery in Children's Literature: From the Rational to the Supernatural.* pp. 64-81. Houndmills: Palgrave.

Rudd, D. 2001. *Digging up the Family Plot: Secrets, Mystery and the Blytonesque*. In: Gavin, A.E. and Routledge, C. (Eds) 2001. *Mystery in Children's Literature: From the Rational to the Supernatural.* pp. 82-99. Houndmills: Palgrave.

Schmid, D. 2000. *The Locus of Disruption: Serial Murder and Generic Conventions in Detective Fiction*. In: Chernaik, W., Swales, M. & Vilain, R. (Eds). 2000. *The Art of Detective Fiction*. Houndmills: MacMillan.

Strathern, P. 2002. *The Essential Foucault*. London: Virgin.

Tompkins, J.P. 1980. *Reader-response Criticism: From Formalism To Post-Structuralism.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Townsend, J.R. 1974. *Written for Children*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Van Dover, J.K. 1994. *You Know My Method.* Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.

Warner, M. 1994. *Six Myths of our Time: Little Angels, Little Monsters, Beautiful Beasts and More.* New York: Vintage.

Weiss, S. and Biddle Rinear, L. 2002. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Women's History*. Indianapolis: Bookends.

Williams, R. 1893. *Writing in Society.* London: Verso.

Wollstonecraft, M. 2004 [1792]. *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. London: Penguin.