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**BEYOND THE HORIZON:
AN ENQUIRY INTO THE PRODUCTION AND RECEPTION OF THE WRITING
OF ENID BLYTON**

by
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To Stephen Finn, for setting this in motion, and Idette Noomé, for guiding me to the end,
to my parents, for their unlimited support, and to Gerhard Potgieter, for his strength and encouragement,
thank you.

SUMMARY

This study explores reasons for Enid Blyton's vast popularity. Blyton and her life are discussed in terms of the production and reception of her texts in the light of changing dominant discourses in society and varying horizons of expectation. It has been found that selected aspects of reception theory (in particular the horizon of expectation posited by Hans-Georg Gadamer and developed by Hans Jauss) and the theories of Michel Foucault on power and discourse can be used to examine the influence of societal and literary discourses on both Blyton's writing and on those who read her work, including adults and children.

The study includes a discussion of Blyton's personal life, her role in education and her success in business. Blyton's horizons of expectation – shaped not only by the dominant discourses that surrounded her, but also her training in the Froebel method of education – are examined. Furthermore, a number of aspects of Blyton's life and writing subvert dominant discourses and these are discussed in terms of Foucault's ideas on power relations. Evidence of the influence of her life on her work has been found in her texts. The criticism of Blyton is discussed in terms of both literary criticism and social criticism.

Blyton's popularity as a storyteller is also considered and it has been found that, regardless of criticism by adults, she remained popular with children. Furthermore, Blyton used a number of specific techniques (such as fast-paced plots and simple language and style) and it has been found that her techniques can be linked to both formula writing, the oral tradition, and to her training as a teacher in the Froebel method of education. These techniques are examined in terms of their manifestation in her writing, particularly in her series books – including adventure stories and school stories. In conclusion, the place of Blyton's writing in contemporary society is deliberated and recommendations for further research are made.

Key words

Children's literature

Enid Blyton

Horizons of expectation

Gadamer

Jauss

Reception theory

Foucault

Power

Discourse

Criticism of Enid Blyton

Oral tradition

Froebel

Adventure stories

School stories

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Why does a writer accused of being landlocked in an outmoded age, of being middle-class, snobbish, sexist, racist, colonialist, and so on, continue to fascinate in our multicultural world?

David Rudd (2000:3)

1.1 THE FASCINATION OF ENID BLYTON

Enid Blyton may be one of the most controversial authors of our time, but she is also one of the most popular and prolific – ‘arguably the best-selling children’s writer of all time’ (Watson, 2001:91). Hence, regardless of whether critics choose to praise or condemn her, they cannot overlook her. No study of children’s books would be complete without reference to the impact of Enid Blyton.

Blyton’s reputation has ‘changed substantially’ (Rudd, s.a.:5), both during her lifetime and after her death. Initially, Blyton was regarded as ‘defining’ children’s literature during her time (Watson, 2000a:7) and she was popular among both children, as readers, and adults, who encouraged their children to read her work, for many years. In the 1950s, however, there was a change in adult attitudes to Blyton: she remained popular with children, but some adults began to view her work with distaste. In yet another shift in her popularity, ‘this attitude is changing now that adults who loved her work when they were children are gaining positions of influence’ (Wall, 1991:189). Towards the end of the 20th century, Blyton and some of her characters have been used as cultural reference points (Rudd, 2000:37), icons not only to other authors – such as Adele Geras in her ‘Egerton Hall’ trilogy, and Jacqueline Wilson in *Double Act* (Rudd, 2000:37) – but also to music bands – such as ‘Noddy’s Puncture’, ‘Die Fünf Freunde’ and ‘The Enid’ (Rudd, 2000:38). One could argue that the description of Blyton as a ‘cultural icon’ highlights a need to examine her work in relation to her role as a popular author in popular culture.

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One of the possible reasons for Blyton's popularity (Ray, 2000:34) is that her books target children 'from babyhood to adolescence' (Wall, 1991:205). Essentially, Enid Blyton wrote 'every kind of book for children of all ages' (Stoney, 1992:154). She manages to appeal to children 'from four to fourteen' (Greenfield, 1998:88), thus supplying reading matter for most of the childhood years. Her influence now spans five generations and she is credited with writing between six and seven hundred titles for children – although 'nobody knows just how many books Enid Blyton wrote' (Ray, 2000:46). Books by Blyton have been translated into several languages – 149 translations in fifteen different countries (Ray, 1982:7) – making her the fourth most translated author in the world in 1974, after impressive names such as Lenin, Marx and Jules Verne (Ray, 1982:7; Ray, 2000:33,34).

Hunt (1995b:216) describes Blyton as 'the most successful children's writer ever' and her influence on the world of children's books is undeniable. She is a formidable figure in the world of publishing, not only because of the volume of work she produced, but because she wrote so many different types of books. While 'the main staple of her writing was fiction' (Greenfield, 1998:23), her work includes not only popular story books such as the *Famous Five* and the *Secret Seven*, but also collections of poetry, plays, short stories, religious books and educational or reference books. The variety of media in which her work is now available – such as audio books and television programmes (Baverstock, 2000:45) – has continued to expand her popularity.

1.2 WHAT MORE CAN BE SAID ABOUT ENID BLYTON?

The broad aim of this study is to explore some of the factors that have contributed to the production of Blyton's work, to the immense and continued popularity of Blyton's work, and to the criticism against her work over time, throughout a period characterised by changing discourses about society and

about children's literature. In other words, why has Blyton remained so popular? In order to pursue this aim, several questions have been posed.

Firstly, is it possible to find a theoretical approach that sheds light on this broad and complex research question? An attempt is made to combine the discourse and power theories of Michel Foucault and the Reader Reception concept of horizons of expectation, posited by Hans-Georg Gadamer and developed by Hans Jauss. These theories are explored in terms of changing discourses in society, including educational discourses, psychological discourses and literary discourses and their possible effect on Blyton and her reception.

Secondly, is it possible to ask whether Blyton's own life and the discourses of the times in which she lived influenced her writing? Blyton's biographical context is examined to identify evidence of specific discourses in her writing. The question of whether Blyton's training as a teacher influenced her writing is also briefly explored.

Thirdly, by referring to discourses used by both society and literary critics, the study addresses the question of why Blyton was so severely criticised, and whether this criticism of her is justified. Views of Blyton have changed dramatically over time and, in relation to the changing discourses of society, it seems reasonable to ask why Blyton's reputation has shifted. Inevitably, this raises the question of why Blyton remains so popular among children yet is so severely criticised by adults.

1.3 SELECTION OF TEXTS

Bearing in mind the number of books Blyton is credited with writing, it was essential to limit the number of texts used in this study by careful selection. As Blyton's school series and her adventure series are arguably the most popular of her works, and remain in print, a selection of these provided the scope of primary

texts examined in this study. In addition, the selection of texts was also limited in terms of the age of the reader to those texts directed at children in middle childhood, roughly between six and thirteen years. Other books by Blyton are referred to briefly, where apposite.

The fifteen *Secret Seven* books were produced for readers between eight and nine years (Druce, 1992:18). (As the *Secret Seven* are directed at a younger audience, the *Secret Seven* are not discussed in detail in this study.) The ideal readers of the twenty-one *Famous Five* books would be between nine and thirteen years (Druce, 1992:18). The popular *Adventure* series, consisting of eight books, was recommended for readers between thirteen and fifteen years.

The first series book written by Blyton was *The Secret Island*, and was followed by the publication of four other *Secret* books. The *Mystery* series, often referred to as the *Five Find-Outers* series, consisted of fifteen books, while the *Barney* series, or the 'R' mysteries (a series in which the titles of all the books have a word beginning with an 'R'), add another six titles to the list.

Enid Blyton wrote three very popular series of school stories: three *Naughtiest Girl* books, six *St Clare's* and six *Malory Towers* books. (As the *Naughtiest Girl* series is directed at a younger audience, the *Malory Towers* and *St Clare's* series are discussed in greater detail.)

This study does not explore in any detail the twenty-four *Noddy* books, although some of the criticism of these books is briefly discussed. It was decided to focus less on the controversial *Noddy* books in the study because they do not include 'real people' but rather toys as their central characters and are set in an unrealistic world. Furthermore, they are directed at a much younger audience (between three and five years) than the other series books. In *The Blyton Phenomenon*, Ray (1982) includes *Noddy* in her chapter on nursery stories. This categorisation suggests that there is little chance that children would be able to

select these books (parents would), thus contaminating the exploration of Blyton's popularity with children. The *Noddy* books do not fit into the same category as the other series books either.

The two *Wishing Chair* books and the three *Faraway Tree* books also receive less attention, even though they do contain human characters, because they are directed at a very young audience – the three *Faraway Tree* books are directed at children around eight years. However, the element of the fantastic in the *Wishing Chair* and *Faraway Tree* books is briefly discussed in Chapter Five in connection with the genres and settings used by Blyton.

1.4 APPROACHES USED IN THE STUDY

1.4.1 Theory

1.4.1.1 Foucault's concept of power discourses and Reception theory

In Chapter Two of this study, the theoretical approach adopted in this study is discussed in more detail. Selected theories of French philosopher Michel Foucault and aspects of Reception theory as discussed by Gadamer and Jauss form the theoretical basis of the examination of Enid Blyton, influences on Blyton and her texts, the influence of her texts and responses to the texts by a variety of readers. This means that the dominant discourses that influenced Blyton, and which are reflected in her horizons of expectation and hence in her writing, are examined in terms of the production of her texts. In addition, the role played by power relations, as discussed by Foucault, is also of interest in terms of the power relations reflected in Blyton's writing, as well as the discursive power structures that influenced the production of her texts and the reception by both adults – parents, teachers and critics – and children.

1.4.1.2 *Generic and socio-historical discourses*

Academics, literary critics, teachers and even librarians have deliberated the question of what children's literature is for a number of years. The discussion is too vast to cover extensively in this study; however, it cannot be disregarded. The history of those books generally referred to as children's books, specifically fiction written for children in English, is reviewed in order to position Blyton within the discourses of children's literature as a genre and the changes that have taken place in writing for children over the centuries. Children's literature is briefly examined in terms of the authors of children's literature, the content of children's literature and the purpose and role of children's literature.

This study also looks briefly at the place of Enid Blyton in relation to other authors who are described as authors of children's books in terms of the generic historical context of children's literature. Enid Blyton is a British author and thus particular attention is paid to English books, with brief comments on the reaction to Enid Blyton in some Commonwealth countries and by English-speaking readers. The generic historical contextualisation serves to explore some of the discourses influencing Blyton's critics and her fan base.

Western society's definitions of children have been influenced by the discourses of psychological theories on child development and by developments in education. Thus, it was important that shifts in both the philosophy of Western (particularly British) education and child psychology be briefly examined as definitions of children have directly influenced what society has deemed acceptable for children, both in terms of the behaviour expected of children and what children may be exposed to. This, in turn, has influenced developments in children's literature and is hence relevant to this study.

1.4.2 A biographical horizon of expectations

In examining books by Blyton it is helpful to understand Blyton in the context of the discourses that shaped her thinking. In Chapter Three Blyton's life is therefore briefly examined, placing her in her socio-historical context. This allows the process of the production of Blyton's texts to be understood to a greater extent in terms of the dominant discourses that influenced Blyton's life. Enid Blyton's background as a teacher, her place in her society as a woman of independent means and her role as a wife and mother are examined. These aspects of her life are examined in light of the way in which they subverted or reinforced the dominant discourses and conventions of Blyton's society at the time when she wrote, as well as whether they are reflected in her writing.

1.4.3 Critical discourses and their effect on Blyton's reception

The reception of Enid Blyton's work by society and her reputation have changed dramatically over time (Rudd, s.a.:5). This reflects a number of changes in the dominant discourses of society. No study of Blyton would be complete without reference to the vast amount of criticism levelled at her work. After all, it is necessary to know what was said about her before one may agree or disagree.

Initially, Blyton was praised for her contribution to books for children, and she was regarded as a significant figure in education and as a writer. However, criticism of books by Enid Blyton increased in the 1950s when, 'for the first time, librarians and teachers began to speak out against her books' (Druce, 1992:35). She has been criticised by both literary and social critics. Not only have her language, style and characterisation been criticised, but also her alleged portrayal of racist and sexist attitudes. Towards the 1970s 'many libraries and bookshops refused to stock Enid Blyton titles' (Greenfield, 1998:85).

The vast amount of criticism levelled at Blyton is noted in contrast with her great popularity. Regardless of the variety of accusations by adults, Blyton has remained popular with her child audience. Like other controversial children's authors, Blyton is often referred to as a storyteller who was concerned with the enjoyment of her stories by the intended audience, and not her literary style. There was a discrepancy between the reception of Blyton by children and that by adults – she was clearly more popular with children than with adults.

In Chapter Four, selected aspects of the criticism of Blyton are discussed, and selected texts are examined in an attempt to find grounds for these accusations and to either refute or support them.

1.4.4 Blyton's techniques: shaping discourses

In Chapter Five the techniques used by Blyton – those things for which she was criticised by adults and enjoyed by children – are examined. The different genres in which Blyton chose to write – adventure and school stories, as well as fantasy and reality – are discussed. In addition, the techniques used by Blyton, particularly the distinct patterns in Blyton's books, are examined with reference to the formulae she uses.

Characteristics of her books – such as elements that relate to the oral tradition, and the role played by children in contrast with the role played by adults – are discussed in terms of how they manifest in her writing. In addition, the settings used by Blyton, including numerous castles, caves and tunnels, are discussed. These issues are linked again to dominant psychological and educational discourses, in particular the theories of Friedrich Froebel, and the possible influence thereof on Blyton. The chapter includes a brief exploration of whether or not Blyton took psychological and educational theories on the needs and preferences of children into account when she wrote for children.

In addition, the changes made to Blyton's books in an attempt to update them and to remove all the controversial elements are briefly discussed, especially in light of the dominant discourses.

1.4.5 Enid Blyton and contemporary discourse

Contemporary society presents children with many distractions, and the concluding chapter, Chapter Six, speculates on Blyton's place in the early 21st century. The role of Enid Blyton's writing and the relevance of the criticism of Blyton in the context of the contemporary lifestyle are examined.

Chapter Six serves as the conclusion of this study and summarises the findings of the study. In addition, the limitations of this study are set out and suggestions for further research are made.

CHAPTER TWO

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.*

T. S. Eliot (1963:189)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Rudd believes that texts should be examined in terms of their 'production and consumption' (Rudd, 2000:7). This implies a need to examine both the 'context and subtext' (Rudd, 2000:7). In order to respond to this need, this chapter suggests the combination of two theoretical approaches to explain how the discourses surrounding the writing and the reception of the texts are embedded in the texts and responses to them. In this chapter, key concepts used in this study are examined in their historical and socio-theoretical context. The broader history and concepts of children's literature and childhood shape the horizons of expectation – as referred to by Hans-Georg Gadamer, and later by Hans Jauss (Holub, 1984:149) – of the author and reader and need to be taken into account when examining a text. Such horizons are a result of interactions between a number of areas, including those studied in History and Psychology. An overview of these aspects is presented in this chapter to explore the different possible horizons of expectation held by Blyton, her readers and her critics. In this study aspects of Blyton's life and books are examined in terms of selected aspects of reception theory, as considered by Gadamer and Jauss.

Some implications of a horizon of expectation are also discussed in terms of selected theories by French philosopher Michel Foucault. This chapter investigates how a number of Foucault's theories can be applied to the history of the production, reception, content and context of children's literature in general, and to the books of Enid Blyton in particular. The focus of the application of Foucault's theories falls on his notion of 'dominant discourses' – in this case those of western society – which influence the production and reception of a text. Some of Foucault's discussions on the role of power in society, as well as his

theories on knowledge and discourse, are also applied. This discussion of children's literature also takes into account the allegedly 'delicate' nature of the audience – the child and traditional views of the child. Furthermore, it assumes that children's books can be examined as a product of both the writer and the reader's horizons of expectation, which are shaped by the discourses of the time, and influence the production and reception of the text.

2.2 HORIZONS OF EXPECTATION, RECEPTION AND POWER

2.2.1 Threads of discourse

According Horrocks and Jevtic (1997:88), in terms of Foucault's theory, 'discourse creates its object'. Thus, dominant discourses of society determine discourses of and about a text. The dominant discourses of society shape the discourse(s) of the author and the discourse(s) of the reader (including children, adults and literary critics). Furthermore, Fillingham (1993:101) argues that in Foucault's terms each era 'defines its own discourse and definitions may vary over time'. Thus, dominant discourses both influence and reflect the structure of society. Discourses are 'reformulated all the time' (Rudd, 2000:14). So, for example, one could argue that each generation of Blyton's readers is influenced by different discourses and, therefore, their reception of Blyton's books differs from that of other generations. Moreover, one cannot overlook the fact that Blyton herself was influenced by the discourses of the time in which she lived and wrote, including the time during which she grew up. A text does not exist in isolation (Townsend, 1990:69); rather, it is a result of multiple discourses that are woven together by each individual, resulting in a different reception of the text by every reader and it also differs every time the text is read. The influence of discourses on the horizons of expectation of the author, and on the text, can be viewed in terms of T.S. Eliot's essay 'Tradition and the individual talent'. Here Eliot points out that a poet's predecessors influence the poet's work:

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone.
His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his

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relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him for contrast and comparison among the dead.

(Eliot, [1919] 1988:191)

Furthermore, when a new work of art is created, it simultaneously influences, and is influenced by 'all the works of art which preceded it' (Eliot, [1919] 1988:191). (Even those texts that are deemed unacceptable by dominant discourses may influence these discourses by forming a benchmark, indicating what is unacceptable according to dominant discourses. However, if the texts are completely ignored and are not assimilated into society, they do not have an influence on other texts, or on dominant discourses.) In other words, new discourses are influenced by the discourses of the past, and the discourses of the past are viewed via the discourses that follow them. Foucault refers to 'discourses in terms of bodies of knowledge' (McHoul & Grace, 1993:26) or 'areas of social knowledge' (McHoul & Grace, 1993:31). This emphasises that his term 'discourse' is not a linguistic concept but rather a socio-historical one (McHoul & Grace, 1993:40). Discourses 'are concerned with the authority with which people speak, what they speak about, and in what manner' (Rudd, 2000:11). Gordon refers to Foucault's description of discourses as 'identifiable collections of utterances governed by rules of construction and evaluation which determine within some thematic area what may be said, by whom, in what context, and with what effect' (Gordon, in Foucault, 2000:xvi). Thus, discourses are whatever constrain and enable writing, speaking and thinking (McHoul & Grace, 1993:31); they are forms of representation (McHoul & Grace, 1993:35).

2.2.2 Horizons of expectation

As mentioned earlier, the dominant discourses of a culture and generation influence the reception of and responses to a text. Thus, discourses influence a reader's horizons of expectation. The horizon of expectation refers to 'an intersubjective system or structure of expectations, a "system of references" or a mind-set that a hypothetical individual might bring to any text' (Holub, 1984:59).

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According to Gadamer, the horizon is the 'range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point' (Gadamer in Holub, 1984:59). Furthermore, the vantage point would be circumscribed by the dominant discourses that surround it. Therefore, the dominant discourses would influence the horizon. Thus, Gadamer describes understanding as 'a fusion of one's own horizon with the historical horizon' (Holub, 1984:42) and there is no line separating past and present horizons. Holub (1984) refers to Gadamer's description of the term 'horizon' as 'our situatedness in the world, but it should not be thought of in terms of a fixed or closed standpoint' (Holub, 1984:42), because it changes, adjusts and adapts with us. Furthermore, our prejudices (as embodied in discourses) form a horizon 'over which we cannot see' (Holub, 1984:42). This is significant when referring to Blyton as she is accused of reflecting the prejudices evident in the discourses of her time, discourses that shaped her horizon, and in turn her prejudices.

Gadamer's terms have been used by several theorists, particularly by Hans Jauss, in his discussion of the concept of the horizon of expectation in relation to literary texts and reception theory (Holub, 1984:44). Jauss looks at aesthetic perception in the exploration of literary works. He concludes that a writer's horizon influences the production of literature, and that a reader's horizon influences his/her aesthetic perception and reception of literature. According to Holub, in Jauss's aesthetics of reception,

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.

(Holub, 1984:148-149)

Culler (1997:60) considers the reader's horizon of expectation, as discussed by Gadamer and Jauss, stating that a 'work is interpreted as answering questions posed by this horizon of expectations'. He adds that a 'whole range of factors can affect readers' horizons of expectations' (Culler, 1997:60). One of these factors is life experience. The child's horizon can be expected to be more limited than that

of an adult because children have far less life experience than adults and thus, 'children view the story from their more limited experiences' (May, 1995:15). The concept of a horizon of expectation may also be linked to Hunt's reference to the reader's 'background and purpose' (Hunt, 1991a:46). According to Hunt, 'adult readers can never share the same background (in terms of reading and life experience) as children' (Hunt, 1991a:46).

2.2.3 Power

The relationship between adults and children and their literature can be examined in the light of Foucault's theory on power and power relations. Foucault's term '*pouvoir*' is usually translated into English simply as 'power'. This translation is rather limited, as the French definition includes the concept of ability and capacity: 'To be able...to have power; to be allowed...to be possible' (Girard, 1962:585). According to Rabinow (1984:61), Foucault does not believe that power is always 'repressive', oppressive, or a form of domination, nor is it conscious or intentional (McHoul & Grace, 1993:21). Power, for Foucault, is not only the 'ruthless domination of the weaker by the stronger' (McHoul & Grace, 1993:39), but also the ability to carry out a task. Rabinow (1984:61) believes that power, in Foucault's terms, does not 'only weigh on us as a force that says no,...it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse'. One may say that power is the result of the relationship between different discourses and that power resides in discourse:

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)

Although power itself is not 'bad' and is found in all human relations, Foucault warns against asymmetrical and judicial power relations where one individual is dominated or oppressed by another.

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A parallel can be drawn between the power relations between children and adults and other power relations that have dominated and continue to dominate society. These include the relationships between men and women, between white people and those of 'colour' (of African, Asian, Aboriginal and Native American descent), and between heterosexual and homosexual people. Both Foucault and Simone de Beauvoir explored power relations. In the 1960s Foucault looked at the role of structures in society in defining individuals (Fillingham, 1993:91). De Beauvoir looked at the role of social conditions – structures – in limiting the freedom of women in society. In other words, she argues, women are defined by men, in a world that is defined by men. In the same way, children are defined by adults, in a world that is defined by adults. In this way the dominant discourses result in the definition of minorities and the separation and classification of individuals. In all of these power relations some groups of people are described as 'other' in relation to a dominant group. This can be linked to the idea that the easiest way to describe a child is as 'not an adult', which leads to the perception of the child as 'other'.

Adults define children – thus, definitions of children are inherently oppressive to children. However, definitions of children as 'other' to adults also give children the opportunity to behave like children in what may be deemed a 'childish' way. Children can use this definition to manipulate adults and thus exercise power over adults – power in the form of ability rather than power as a form of domination. Children may erupt in temper tantrums (or similarly 'childish' behaviour) when they do not get their own way in an attempt to manipulate adults to grant the children's wishes. Therefore, it is evident that power, as described by Foucault, is often subtle, easy to overlook and difficult to resist (Fillingham, 1993:141), especially as it is a 'discursive relation rather than something which a person or group wields or bears' (McHoul & Grace, 1993:21).

2.2.4 Power and knowledge

'Power, for Foucault, is not something someone wields but "power/knowledge": power in the form of knowledge or knowledge as power' (Culler, 1997:7). Power must be viewed in terms of its relationship with discourse and knowledge because, according to Horrocks and Jevtic (1997:120), in Foucault's terms 'no power is exercised without the extraction, appropriation, distribution or retention of knowledge'. 'The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power' (Foucault 2000:xvi). In other words, those who have power create discourses and knowledge about these discourses. In turn, application of this knowledge reinforces the power that created the discourses. For this reason, Rabinow refers to knowledge and power as 'twin terms' (Rabinow, 1984:12) when used in Foucault's theories.

According to Foucault, knowledge and power work primarily through language, and children learn the rules of culture through language (Fillingham, 1993:12). Language itself is not only a way to 'organise and represent knowledge' (Horrocks & Jevtic, 1997:74); it is a tool of knowledge and a vehicle of discourse. In other words, language is often the medium through which different discourses are conveyed. Different disciplines make use of language (jargon and terminology) and knowledge to develop different discourses and consequently develop power.

Foucault refers to the human sciences as his example of the exercise of power through discourse and knowledge. 'In conveying knowledge, discourses simultaneously embody power and, thereby, a set of social relations' (Rudd, 2000:11). Sciences such as psychology (including child psychology) have a particular discourse that they use to define individuals. The knowledge which members of this discipline have provides them with the power to classify individuals (Horrocks & Jevtic, 1997:55) and thus, power over those individuals who lack this knowledge.

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According to Horrocks and Jevtic, Foucault opposes the fields of psychology (Horrocks & Jevtic, 1997:20) and psychiatry (Horrocks & Jevtic, 1997:48), and refers to psychologists as 'mental police' (Fillingham, 1993:22) who supervise the behaviour of individuals in society. He argues that the human sciences, particularly psychology – in conjunction with courts, prisons, churches and schools, use knowledge and power to regulate the behaviour of individuals (Fillingham, 1993:16) by deciding what is normal and reinforcing this (Fillingham, 1993:12). Furthermore, those with knowledge also restrict their own behaviour. Thus, for example, those with knowledge about dominant literary discourses may choose to only read those texts deemed acceptable by such discourses, thereby restricting themselves. This presents evidence of the fact that, according to Foucault's theory, those with knowledge and power may use their knowledge and power to restrict and control themselves, therefore, knowledge and power do not necessarily function in a hierarchical relationship. Foucault calls the tendency of people to monitor and regulate their own behaviour (self-regulation) without the show of force bio-power (Foucault, in Rudd, 2000:14). This bio-power is moulded by disciplinary institutions which encourage people to regulate their own behaviour and conform to the norm. Knowledge is linked to power throughout Foucault's theory, and self-knowledge leads to self-regulation (bio-power). In other words, an individual's knowledge of his/her own characteristics, which separate him/her from the norm, may result in self-regulation (bio-power), in order that the individual conform to the norm.

Traditional theories of child development can be discussed in the light of Foucault's ideas on normalization. Because of the different discourses of various disciplines, Foucault believes that there is no such thing as truth, as no scientific discourse can represent the truth (McHoul & Grace, 1993:21); what each discipline claims as the 'truth' is merely its own discourse. These arguments have implications for the horizons of expectation surrounding children and children's literature, because dominant discourses influence the horizons of expectation and thus, the discourses of the reader and the author.

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Individuals strive to fit into the moulds described by scientific discourses, and consequently institutions focus on what Foucault calls the 'normalization' of individuals (Rabinow, 1984:58). According to Foucault, normalization refers to the distribution of individuals around a norm (Rabinow, 1984:20) and is necessary for the 'government of life-processes' (McHoul & Grace, 1993:68). In this case, knowledge functions as a form of power used to enable administrative control of the population. Institutions such as schools, churches and prisons ensure the maintenance of power relations because of the access of members of these institutions to knowledge. Knowledge works as an instrument of normalization, 'continually attempting to manoeuvre populations into "correct" and "functional" forms of thinking and acting' (McHoul & Grace, 1993:17). Anything that differs from the 'norm' is classified as abnormal (Fillingham, 1993:15), in other words as 'other':

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)

The developmental theories discussed in this chapter convey prescriptive ideas of what an individual 'should' be. In terms of adult / child relations, it is useful to remember that power relations are not limited to 'pure repression but also [comprise] the intention to teach, to mould conduct, to instil forms of self-awareness and identities' (Foucault, 2000:xix).

The concept of normalization can be linked to Foucault's discussions on the three modes of objectification of the subject. In turn, these modes may be linked to the child and texts written for children. The first of these modes is referred to as **dividing practices** and discusses the segregation and isolation of certain groups of people such as lepers and the insane (Rabinow, 1984:8). This mode of objectification can also refer to the isolation of children in society and is a technique of 'domination' (Rabinow, 1984:11). The second mode of objectification

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involves the **classification** of individuals and is also an oppressive mode. Here 'Foucault shows how the discourses of life, labor, and language were structured into disciplines; how in this manner they achieved a high degree of internal autonomy and coherence' (Rabinow, 1984:9). Foucault refers to the way in which the human and natural sciences classify things and people through the use of discourses. Rabinow (1984:11) calls the third mode of objectification **subjectification**. This mode concerns the 'processes of self-formation in which the person is active' (Rabinow, 1984:11) – the 'way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject' (Rabinow, 1984:11). By taking into account the first two modes of objectification, it is possible to say that human sciences and developmental theories divide children from society at large and categorise children by means of normalizing discourse.

Children's literature inevitably mirrors, to some extent, the discourses and the modes of objectification of society at the time of writing. Hence, the history of children's literature illustrates the dominant discourses of society over time. According to Sutherland and Arbuthnot (1991:15), books

are also affected by the sociopolitical atmosphere, by the causes and protest movements of our time, by the media that pervade our lives, and by society's standards.... [C]hildren's books are affected, perhaps above all, by society's concept of the roles of children.... Not least, the content of books may be affected by what adults think they should *not* contain.

An example of discourses reflected in literature is the literature of the Reformation in England. In this literature there is clear evidence of 'anti-Catholic propaganda' (Avery, 1995:23) directed at children. In the 1600s, martyrs and warnings of damnation that awaited the 'unconverted' (Avery, 1995:21) predominated children's literature. Perry Nodelman (1994:173) points out a more contemporary paradox identified by John Stephens, in that 'texts that strongly encourage child readers to value individual will and choice over social conformity are in fact demanding not only agreement with their adult writers' values but also conformity to the mainstream values of our culture'. Once again it is evident that

dominant discourses of different generations present a set of values regarded as 'normal' and acceptable by the discourses of that generation.

2.3 THE CHILD AS AUDIENCE: RECEPTION OF THE TEXT

It is essential to take note of the audience that is addressed when one examines the reception of children's books. The way in which the audience is addressed separates media directed at children from media directed at adults and, thus, children's books from adult books. According to Wall (1991:3), the 'subtleties of address define a children's book'. The styles of address are a result of the many views of the child that society holds, and has held, over time, in terms of the alleged 'special status of the addressee' (Shavit, 1985:315). However, it is difficult to define what a child is because 'concepts of childhood differ not only culturally but in units as small as the family, and they differ, often inscrutably, over time' (Hunt, 1994:5).

2.3.1 Looking back: views of the child

Power relations between children and adults can be explored in terms of historical definitions of the child. 'Historically, many educators supported the idea that children should be trained as soon as possible to become productive members of the larger society so that the cultural heritage of the society could be preserved from generation to generation' (<http://www.froebelweb.org/web2002.html>). A popular traditional view of children as helpless and innocent has resulted in the alleged protection of children by the censorship of material to which children are exposed. Hunt (1994:164) divides the views of censorship of children's literature into two groups: the views of those who believe children 'should be protected' by 'anyone within the system', and the views of those who believe that censorship is wrong and that instead 'local control' – direct control by a parent or teacher – should be exercised. Whichever view is held, this censorship of children 'confirms their minority status' and reinforces current

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dominant definitions of children because ‘on the one hand they are seen as pure and innocent ... but on the other, they are not allowed to be anything else’ (Rudd, 2000:12).

Because dominant discourses have often encouraged society to view children as helpless, innocent (Rudd, 2000:12) and impressionable, ‘the most satisfactory generalization is that childhood is the period of life which the immediate culture thinks of as being free of responsibility and susceptible to education’ (Hunt, 1994:5). The belief that children are innocent and need to be protected stems from the Romantic era, while the idea of the impressionable child can be traced back further to the 16th century and John Locke’s idea of the child as *tabula rasa*, a blank slate that needs to be guided, moulded and shaped.

Adults buy, publish, review and criticise books for children and control what children read (Townsend, 1990:58; Wall, 1991:18). Furthermore, adults are the professionals involved in the publishing industry and they exercise control over what children read by deciding which books are published for children. Hunt (1994:3) describes children’s literature as ‘powerful’ and emphasises the fact that ‘books are written by, and made available to children by, adults’, and that they are, therefore, part of a ‘complex power-relationship’.

The treatment of children by society in the Middle Ages, when ‘children were dressed and treated as miniature adults’ (Thomas, 1990:45) shows evidence of a certain unity in the views of adults and children. In the Middle Ages, there were no books written especially for children – all readers shared texts and the literature written was ‘the literature of the entire culture’ (Hunt, 1994:37) and literature was read for pleasure and entertainment. However, the Puritan influence resulted in segregation of adults and children during the 300 years before the 19th century. Before the 1800s society held a very negative view of childhood and children – children were regarded as ‘other’ and, therefore, as separate from the dominant adults. There were very few changes in views about the child and the rules of

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behaviour expected by society between the 1500s and the 1800s (Avery, 1995:6). The Puritans focused on the advancement of religion through the use of 'fear' (Sutherland & Arbuthnot, 1991:57; Avery, 1990:108). Children were viewed as damned souls in need of salvation from original sin, salvation that would ultimately result in a joyous death at a young age (Hunt, 1994:38). Knowledge of religious texts placed members of the church in a position of power over those who lacked knowledge, and this knowledge could be used to manipulate the beliefs and subsequently the actions of individuals, especially children.

In the 1600s children learnt to read from small ABC books, and then moved from these texts to the 'accepted goal' (Avery, 1995:7), the Bible. Teaching language skills in line with the accepted morals of the day was more important than instilling a love of literature and enjoyment of reading in children (Avery, 1995:10). Education focused on the socialisation of the child into dominant social patterns of the time where emphasis was placed on religion, manners and virtue. This can be explored in terms of Foucault's theory on normalization. It is important to note that normalization may not always have been a conscious decision by those in positions of power. Rather, certain behaviour was deemed acceptable and so it was encouraged. Children were expected to behave in a serious way and, as a result, there was no time for games or play. These views were reflected in the writing of the time.

Chapbooks, a popular form of literature in the late 17th century, served as an escape from the dominant literature of the time and featured elements such as adventure, suspense, excitement and heroes that appealed to child and adult readers. They included stories on 'many subjects' (Norton, 1983:41) and often depicted the 'child as hero' (Kinnell, 1995:43).

In the early 1700s, society still concentrated on religious objectives and social engineering. The discourses in the dominant disciplinary institutions – such as the church – continued to use knowledge to exercise power and control over individuals. When members of society such as the underprivileged and working

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class were given the opportunity to be educated, it was so that they would be able to perform their tasks and carry out their duties more effectively.

The 'natural child' (Avery & Kinnell, 1995:53) became a popular concept in the late 1700s. Influenced by Jean Jacques Rousseau's writings on education, and used by the Romantics in the late 1700s, the concept of the 'natural child' elevated the views of childhood. In the late 18th century people began to take more pleasure in children, who were now perceived as 'innocent and good' (Thomas, 1990:46). There was a rediscovery of the value of the imagination. Fairy tales arrived from France and were instrumental in the development of an interest in fantasy that was a dominant feature of British literature in the following century. The gruesome, macabre, gothic novels and tales of the supernatural and fantastic grew to become the popular adult literature of the time (Avery & Kinnell, 1995:71). However, fantasy and nonsense were still unacceptable forms of literature for children. The Romantics and their increased interest in childhood had a great influence on the view of the child held in the 19th century. In contrast with the strict Puritan beliefs, play was now regarded as more acceptable and literature was viewed as a means to delight as well as instruct.

After the Napoleonic wars in the early 1800s, the expanding British Empire became a dominant force in the world and imperialism and patriotism were encouraged as Britain became a 'great naval and military power' (Butts, 1995:98). Real life adventures were taking place and this was reflected in the literature that was produced. This explains the interest in the exciting 'empire-building novel' (Hunt, 1994:67) and the right of the British Empire to spread the word of Christianity and to 'plunder' (Hunt, 1994:68) the outside world.

Throughout the 1800s the move to educate the poor – but not 'beyond their station' (Avery & Kinnell, 1994:46) in life – and the increase in literacy continued. This may have been the result of the social engineering that took place in the 18th century. At the same time, the industrial revolution resulted not only in prosperity

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but also in hardship and distress (Butts, 1995:77), which led to violent riots and poverty. An ever-increasing number of people were living in urban areas (Butts, 1995:77) with people moving to the city to work in the factories. The ideology of the capitalist middle class grew and embraced the ideas associated with the Protestant work ethic (Butts, 1995:77). The earlier Romantic movement, which idealised and sentimentalised the idea of childhood, focusing on the instinctive goodness of the child, continued to influence the 19th century view of the child. However, in the 19th century there was a change in the position of the child in society – although upper-class children still fitted into the Romantic view of the child as innocent and good, underprivileged children were now often viewed as victims of society. Education acts were passed to ensure literacy at all levels of society. This ensured control of the population without the use of force and also encouraged the use of bio-power.

Education moved from a religious focus to a social focus and middle class children were encouraged to pity the more unfortunate (Avery & Kinnell, 1995:75). Many middle class children learnt to help others while contributing to their own spiritual welfare and this ‘ministering’ was written into children’s fiction (Briggs, 1990:237-238). Evidence of this concept of ‘ministering’ can be found in Blyton’s writing in *The Put-em-rights*. By drawing attention to the poor, the dominant discourses succeed in classifying them and thereby emphasise the ‘otherness’ of the lower classes. In the 19th century poor or underprivileged children often appeared as characters in the literature of the time, literature equated with ‘fantasy’ owing to the great distance between these unfortunate children and the middle class readers (Avery & Kinnell, 1995:74). Evidence of this fantastic view of the lower classes can be found in Charles Kingsley’s novel, *The Water Babies* (1863).

Although in the 19th century some working class children had the opportunity to be educated, class was still a dominant social structure in Britain. Rural and urban slums were a prevailing problem and many children were employed as

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cheap labour. A series of government acts were passed on behalf of these children to protect them from exploitation. Many homeless children lived in the slums (some resorted to crime) and became a 'burden on the economy' (Briggs & Butts, 1995:132). Emphasis was placed on the socialisation of children as well as their 'moral development and responsibility towards others' (Norton, 1983:66). Still, poverty, child labour and crime remained problems of the late 19th century and continued to plague society in the early 20th century.

By the late 19th century, when Blyton was born and learning to read, realistic family stories that focused on responsibility and duty, yet allowed for warmth, laughter, pleasure and, of course, 'imaginative enjoyment' (Butts, 1995:101) were also popular in the 19th century. Large patriarchal and hierarchical (Butts, 1995:78) families became a middle class norm and religion was an important part of family life. Literature reinforced 'definite male and female roles' (Norton, 1983:63): women were viewed as inferior to men; and girls were encouraged to get married, support their husbands and raise their children. However, there was a gradual change in the religious climate, among some adults at least, and some people's views became more open to new ideas (this may possibly be linked to the discoveries of Charles Darwin).

Adventure stories, popular in the 19th century, encouraged 'honesty and loyalty, pluck and resourcefulness' (Briggs & Butts, 1995:151) as well as patriotism. Yet, the years between the late 1800s and the early 1900s were dominated by many women writers and the 'girl's story' became popular on both sides of the Atlantic with the publication of books such as *Little Women* (1868), *What Katy Did* (1872), *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) and *Pollyanna* (1927). The distinction between the domestic and family stories written for girls, and the bold adventure stories that encourage toughness and physical strength in boys (Briggs, 1990:238) emphasises 'different objectives for males and females' (Norton, 1983:62). This attitude separates women from men in a male-dominated society and, thus,

women may be discussed alongside both children and the lower classes, and viewed as 'other'.

It was common for adults to hold the view that the child was 'other' to the adult – the inferior exception to the ideal adult. Thomas (1990:57) refers to the concept of childhood as a 'juvenile subculture' with its own set of values and priorities, yet the very word 'subculture' emphasises the inferior status of the child. Like the juvenile subculture of children there was also a subculture of women. The idea of a subculture can be linked to Foucault's discussion of a counter discourse. Foucault refers to a 'counter discourse' (McHoul & Grace, 1993:19), which is a discourse against power. Children's literature fits into the category of a subculture at two levels, in that it not only addresses children, but also is primarily written by women. The discourse of women in a society dominated by men, like the discourse of children in an adult world, is a form of counter discourse. It can even be argued that children belong to an 'anti-culture or counter-culture' (Hunt, 1991a:58). However, traditional power discourses maintain that adults are dominant over children and adult women are still able to maintain these traditional power relations to control children.

The technological climate of the industrial revolution made the futuristic concepts created by science fiction writers like Jules Verne 'possible' in the mind of the Victorian reader. At the turn of the century the adventure story maintained its popularity. Adventure stories encouraged patriotism, but were seldom overtly religious or didactic. The dominance of the empire resulted in the representation of much prejudice, racism and arrogance. These characteristics, accepted at the turn of the century, can be found in the stories of the time. The golliwog, for example, was a character featured in several stories written during this period.

An example of a changing approach to childhood at the turn of the century, which subverts the idea of children as inferior, can be seen in Francis Hodgson Burnett's story *The Secret Garden* (1911) in which the child protagonists heal

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themselves psychologically and physically. In terms of Foucault's theory, Burnett's writing reveals both repressive power and use of power that is liberating: the child characters are exposed to repressive power when they are segregated from the adult world, and instructed by adults in what they may or may not do; an action which reinforces their status as 'children', yet they are liberated in their ability to heal and thus exercise power. This healing process culminates in the healing of the adult characters as they reach a new acceptance of childhood.

In the aftermath of the First World War, the years when Blyton lived and first began to write, many changes began to take place in Britain. These included economic changes, social changes in terms of both gender and class, and the development of suburbia. Furthermore, the war influenced the discourses of society. In 1918 the school-leaving age in Britain was raised to 14 years. This is an example of the exercise of adult power through social engineering: giving children the opportunity to be educated meant that they would be moulded and hopefully develop into better adults who fit into the norm of society. The changes in education policy encouraged literacy as learners were spending a longer time at school and were not only able to spend more time reading than they would if they were working, but also able to improve their reading skills. (This literacy may be linked to an increase in the commercial value of children's literature.) Literacy and education also resulted in an increase in the number of schools and the school story also rose to a prominent position. School stories often emphasised and promoted strong 'Christian values' (Briggs & Butts, 1995:154), serious moral attitudes and an interest in sport.

The trend that depicted stereotypes of socialisation (experienced before and during the First World War) was continued in the years after the war. Books that encouraged the earlier distinction between heroic, honourable stories for boys and domestic stories for girls arguably still dominated, and 'girls were exhorted to support the male cause' (Hunt, 1995b:197,198). However, in America, the *Nancy*

Drew books, and books that followed after this trend, illustrated the changing discourses about the role of women and allowed for the inclusion of the 'resourceful, high spirited heroine' (Hunt, 1994:107).

Adventure stories and school stories made up a large proportion of the reading matter written and published for children in both England and America during the early 1900s. A move away from the sentimental Romanticism of the Romantic age and the resultant 'fantastic' stories was highlighted by the interest in the realistic adventure story. Arthur Ransome's outdoor stories were very popular in the 1930s and 1940s as they were described as being realistic with an 'air of probability about them' (Hunt, 1995b:218). (Enid Blyton's adventure stories feature both male and female characters, thus appealing to a much broader market with her series.)

National radio broadcasting was introduced in England in 1922 and the *Children's Hour* was a popular feature. The children's book industry now competed and worked hand-in-hand with some new forms of media. Cartoons took advantage of the developments taking place in the print media, while the cinema offered a whole new world of entertainment: the 'link between broadcast media and print was immediate' (Hunt, 1995b:195) as many books were adapted to suit different media.

In a move away from realism during the late 1940s, literature for children was often filled with the fantastic. Authors such as J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis grew in popularity, as there was a move away from social realism (Hunt, 1995b:198) towards the dominance of fantasy. Blyton is well remembered for her adventure and school stories (although she only began to write school stories in the 1940s), however, her 'output included a good deal of fantasy' (Hunt, 1995b:216), fitting in with the trends of the times.

The traditional nuclear family was still a dominant in the 1940s, and Norton (1983) argues that authors of the time show how the family was essential in the

'stability' (Norton, 1983:66) of the characters, emphasising the 'children's reliance upon the family' (Norton, 1983:66). These stories also reflected the so-called middle class values, focusing on responsibility, respect for others (particularly one's elders), obedience to the law, and patriotism. Normalization of individuals that rested on middle class ideals and values is evident – ideals and values that formed the norm (a horizon of expectation) and were portrayed in the literature. Individuals were encouraged to conform to similar norms and behavioural patterns as those depicted in literature. This can be linked to the normalisation discussed in Foucault's theory.

Enid Blyton and Captain W. E. Johns (the author of the *Biggles* books) were the 'most prolific and commercially successful writer[s] of the immediate post-war period' (Hollindale & Sutherland, 1995:262). Although the *Biggles* series portrayed war, in Blyton's books war is only indirectly alluded to through references to the 'secret work' being carried out by characters such as Uncle Quentin in the *Famous Five*. (The majority of war stories are portrayed in the writing of those who 'experienced it as children' (Hunt, 1994:132), resulting in the stories of the war being told in the 1960s and 1970s. The depiction of war in books of this period can also be linked to the anti-war movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which created a greater awareness of war among society. The Cuban Missile Crisis, the Korean War and Vietnam War influenced the anti-war approach of this period dramatically.) Post-war parents wished to shelter their children from the horrors of the Second World War. The children's books of the time had little place for the real world and this explains why fantasy literature grew to dominate the literature written for children in Britain. In the 1940s writers often drew on the legends of old to tell their stories, which led to a renewed interest in mythology.

Although in the 1950s and 1960s sex and death were still viewed as taboo in children's literature, there was an increase in the spatial and sexual freedom given to children in the mid-1960s, as well as a greater reflection of what were

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previously referred to as adult discourses in children's books. This freedom and a depiction of 'the difficulties of late twentieth-century life' (Hunt, 1994:150) would grow to dominate the children's books of the 1970s. Children became more outspoken and independent and there was a decrease in discipline and 'adult authority' (Norton, 1983:67), or rather, what was considered to be discipline and adult authority by earlier discourses.

After the domination of fantasy during the 1950s and 1960s, what is described as a 'new realism' developed in the late 1960s. There was increased exposure, in both reading and other media, to social problems. Books portrayed a 'streetwise' attitude, and books written for children began to pay attention to political concerns such as multiculturalism, sexism and racism, and current affairs (Arbuthnot & Sutherland, 1972:104). Realistic books, specifically for teenagers, 'dominated the world market after 1970' (Hollindale & Sutherland, 1995:280) and were particularly dominant in America. These books focused on the difficulties of family life and the development of teenage romances combined with a fast-paced plot (Hunt, 1995b:208).

Towards the end of the 20th century, many disciplinary institutions no longer focused on religious education and social awareness, but rather on politically correct behaviour. The dramatic increase in political awareness during the 1970s led to books for children that began to take note of the question of 'identity' (Watkins & Sutherland, 1995:302) – national identity, sexual identity and ethnic identity, as well as personal identity. These aspects of children's literature reflect the dominant adult discourses of the late 20th century.

Contemporary society allows children a lot of freedom and subjects that were previously considered taboo or inappropriate are now topics of open discussion. Children are further encouraged to develop a sense of social responsibility. There is a definite change in the view of the child held by society and this influences the way that children are treated in terms of the responsibility they are given and their

exposure to previously taboo subjects. Nevertheless, there is often still an element of didacticism in contemporary children's literature. Adults decide what subjects may be included in children's literature, and this is 'a central problem of the power relationship between adults and children, what should we include and what exclude?' (Hunt, 1991a:33). Thus, children's literature not only 'reflects much of the controversy in our society regarding moral standards and life-styles' (Sutherland & Arbuthnot, 1991:8), but also the dominant discourses of society.

2.3.2 The development of education and definitions of the child

The characteristic of children's literature that makes it unique is that it is directed primarily at children as an audience. Thus, in order to discuss children's literature it is necessary to clarify what the term 'child' refers to. One way to define a child is according to the age of the child. According to the South African Constitution, for example, a child is a person under the age of 18 years (Act 108 of 1996, Chapter 2, Section 28(3)).

A child-centred approach to children's literature rests on the idea that 'children of different ages will appreciate different things in literature' (Rudd, 2000:9). However, age as a criterion limits the scope of the definition of a child because environmental and social factors play a role in the cognitive and physical development of children. Erikson claims that 'individual development is the result of...genetic and social influences' (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 1989:151-152). Nevertheless, many developmental theories focus on acceptable norms and the general development of children, and thus theories tend to take the age of the child into account.

Age is also a device of segregation, dividing the child from the adult world and classifying the child as a child and inferior to an adult. Furthermore, age, size, cognitive and physical development are adult criteria. Therefore, adults, through the use of adult discourse and knowledge, define what a child is.

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Some of the influential figures who shaped education and views of the child before the 20th century include Richard Mulcaster, William Petty, Amos Comenius, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Mary Wollstonecraft and Friedrich Froebel and their views form the foundation of many views of the child held by modern psychology. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, literature was often used in education to help mould or shape the child into what was deemed acceptable in terms of the discourses of the time. The idea of literature as a tool for education may be linked to Foucault's discussions on normalization. Furthermore, the focus placed on the child by these theories serves to highlight the isolation and segregation of the child from society at large.

In the late 1500s, Richard Mulcaster (1530-1611) expressed many views that are still popular today. He believed that children should enjoy learning and that laughter should be encouraged. Mulcaster wrote about 100 years before Locke, yet, like Locke, he emphasised the benefits of physical exercise and games. In 1648 William Petty (1623-1676) published a pamphlet suggesting that children be taught manual skills, placing an emphasis on trade and industry. He also believed in a broader education including music and the arts of 'gardening, chemistry, anatomy, architecture and technical skills' (Avery, 1995:8), all of which could be used in practical situations by the learner. Amos Comenius (1592-1670) developed a collection of labelled pictures in 1659 (described as the first picture book) portraying a logical view of the world. His pictures show all the harsh realities of life in the 1600s, featuring 'war, torture, death, disease [and] deformities' (Avery, 1995:7). This reflects a change in the censorship of what children are exposed to. Contemporary society condemns media for excessive portrayal of violence, yet, in the 1600s violence and traumatic death often featured in children's literature.

John Locke (1632-1704) was influential in the use of children's literature (both religious and educational) as a means to an end. Locke believed that children's literature should be entertaining and he 'advocated milder ways of teaching'

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(Norton, 1983:43). He also noted the need for motivation and praise, as well as discipline, in the education process. Locke's ideas are credited with bringing about the 'realisation that [children] might benefit from books' (Norton, 1983:44). Locke saw the mind of the child as a *tabula rasa*, thus he believed that guidance was essential to ensure the child's acquiescence with the norm.

Unlike Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) believed that children were able to learn best at their own pace. Rousseau believed that the child should be free and adults only needed to supply necessary information (Norton, 1983:46). Rousseau believed in the concept of natural education; that is allowing children to learn through experience and to encounter difficulties *en route* to becoming a rational adult through natural growth. He encouraged adults to treat children as children, rather than as little adults. By highlighting the difference between children and adults, Rousseau emphasises the idea of the child as 'other' and reinforces the segregation of children from adult society.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) published *Thoughts on the education of daughters* in 1787, although she is more often remembered for her highly acclaimed and 'groundbreaking' (Gilbert & Gubar, 1996:255) work *A vindication of the rights of women* (1792). Wollstonecraft was influential in the changes that took place in terms of the education of women. During the 1700s much education of women was directed at the fulfilment of the accepted female roles of the time and focused on 'accomplishments that were intended to charm and attract men into marrying them' (Briggs, 1990:228). Wollstonecraft believed that the education of women should allow the contribution of women to society to be valuable and she criticised an education system that resulted in many restrictions being placed on women, which in turn led to widespread ignorance among women. Thus, the education of women at the time may be referred to as the 'miseducation of women' (Gilbert & Gubar, 1996:255). She emphasised the importance of rationality in education so that women would be able to manage a household and raise children successfully. In retrospect, this is ironic, as the roles of managing a

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household and caring for children still fit into the traditional stereotyped female roles and contemporary society may interpret the emphasis placed on the importance of being able to succeed in these roles as oppressive. Yet, Wollstonecraft's work is significant because as a woman, in the male-dominated 18th century, in a society that exalted 'feminine inferiority' (Gilbert & Gubar, 1996:255), she succeeded in bringing about a change in the view of women held by society by encouraging rational thought in women. In other words, she contradicted the dominant discourse of the time that claimed that women could not think rationally at all. Her work is significant when looked at from the perspective of Foucault's theories because it is an indication of a subversion of dominant power relations in society, resulting in changes in the views of children and minorities in the future.

Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) advocated the value of play and encouraged children to experience childhood. Enid Blyton was educated in the Froebel method of teaching (<http://www.froebelweb.org/web2010.html>) and, it is thus essential that his theories be discussed briefly.

Froebel believed that nature had a great influence in the lives of children; 'Nature revealed God's laws of growth and development to Froebel' (http://www.froebel.com/Philosophy/About/_Froebels.htm). In addition, he held a strong 'conviction that all creatures and Nature were inexplicably, yet completely and spiritually connected' (<http://www.albany.net/~froebel/history.htm>). This, as well as Blyton's father's love of nature, can be linked to Blyton's great interest in nature and the outdoors and therefore the portrayal of nature in her books as discussed in Chapter Five (Section 5.5).

In his youth a friend drew Froebel's attention to the writings of Comenius, which confirmed Froebel's belief 'that the reform most needed in education was that of the earliest years of childhood' (Duggan, 1936:257). Froebel believed 'that childhood is an important period of human growth and development and that

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adults should not impose their views and ways upon young children' (<http://www.froebelweb.org/web2002.html>). Consequently, Froebel opened a school for little children in 1837; and in 1840 he developed the concept of the 'kindergarten' (Duggan, 1936:258). Thus, Froebel is significant in the educational arena as he is the father of the 'kindergarten' (http://www.froebel.com/Philosophy/About/_Froebels.htm). Kindergarten grew from Froebel's belief that children needed an environment where they 'could play with others of their own age and experience their first gentle taste of independence' (<http://www.froebelweb.org/web2002.html>). This allowed the schoolroom to become a microcosm of society (Duggan, 1936:260).

Like Rousseau, Froebel believed that children should be free to learn at their own pace (<http://www.froebelweb.org/web2002.html>), but that education should guide, but not restrict the child (Duggan, 1936:259). Other views held by Froebel that are similar to those of Rousseau are his belief that education should emphasise motor expression and build on the instincts of the child: the child should 'learn by doing' (Duggan, 1936:259). The value of motor expression can be linked to modern developmental theory, which discusses motor development in children between approximately two and seven years of age. The interest in motor development may also be linked to Froebel's interest in the 'educational value of play' (Duggan, 1936:263) and 'true nature of play' (<http://www.froebelweb.org>), as motor development can be encouraged through play. Furthermore, in 'play the individual reveals himself and finds the social world revealed to him far better than in any other activity' (Duggan, 1936:263). He believed in 'regulating [play] to lead naturally into work' (<http://www.froebelweb.org>). In other words, guidance, through the regulation of the environment – the kindergarten – and play within that environment, would lead to optimal development and, hence, normalization of the child.

In a time when society encouraged children to become contributing members of society as soon as possible, when it was believed that children 'were...tiny

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replicas of adults' (<http://www.albany.net/~froebel/history.htm>), Froebel's views were radical. He thought that the education of his day was defective as it developed the power of thought before it developed the powers of realising action through thought (Duggan, 1936:259).

There is evidence of the segregation of children from society at large in more recent theories that emphasise the age of the child in terms of years. These theories are relevant to this study of Blyton because, even though she may not have knowingly taken them into account, the theories would have filtered into her horizon of expectation. Furthermore, the theories would have influenced the reception of Blyton as they form part of the horizons of expectation of the critics who commented on her work.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), whose theory focuses on the development of the human personality, takes age into account. According to Freud, the personality goes through five stages of development: the oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital stages (Maddi, 1996:41). Each of these stages is characteristic of a certain age, beginning with the oral phase during infancy and ending with the genital phase during puberty (Meyer *et al.*, 1989:59-63).

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) developed theories on the developmental stages of the child. These stages remain relevant in discussions on child development by contemporary theorists as they form a foundation on which many theorists have built. According to Louw (1991:231), the first stage of childhood is early childhood between two and six years. Piaget refers to the period of development between two and seven years as the pre-operational period (Louw, 1991:243). This stage corresponds with Erikson's third stage of development, the play age, between three and six years (Meyer *et al.*, 1989:159). The environment, particularly the 'immediate family' (Louw, 1991:231), influences the child's development at this stage and the child begins to imitate others (Van Niekerk, 2000:20). This stage is

characterised by the development of cognitive and physical-motor skills and play is deemed essential for the development of these skills.

In terms of cognitive development, Piaget argues that the child develops the ability to see things in terms of simple quantitative assessments: things are either big or small (Louw, 1991:232). However, children in this stage are not yet able to distinguish between fantasy and reality (Van Niekerk, 2000:20). Piaget points out that children younger than five years have difficulty grasping moral concepts and are 'not able to judge whether or not a rule has been broken' (Louw, 1991:342). Language skills evolve rapidly as the child uses words to express needs and in social interaction (Louw, 1991:232). Thus, introducing children to reading in this developmental stage could contribute to the development of language skills.

The majority of Blyton's school and adventure stories are directed at children in middle childhood, which takes place between six and twelve years (Louw, 1991:311). Piaget calls the stage between six and twelve years the concrete operational period as the child is now able to use operational thought, but this thought is not yet abstract (Louw, 1991:316). Erikson refers to this stage of development as the school age (Meyer *et al.*, 1989:159) or the latency stage (Maddi, 1996:62). Definition of this stage in terms of age is difficult as this stage takes place before puberty and the onset of puberty is varied. The period of development before puberty is essential in the development of cognitive, social and emotional skills, as well as the development of the self-concept (Louw, 1991:311).

The child's participation in the social environment increases and there is a greater awareness of gender role identity and self-knowledge (Louw, 1991:312). More time is spent away from home and the influence of the family, although still important as a locus of security, is not as great as in earlier stages (Louw, 1991:348). Meanwhile, the influence of peers on the child increases and the child strives to win esteem in eyes of others (Van Niekerk, 2000:24).

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The first few years of middle childhood – between five and ten years – are characterised by ‘moral absolutism’ (Louw, 1991:342). This means that the child has rigid, ‘stereotyped’ (Van Niekerk, 2000:25) views of right and wrong, believing that any infringement of a rule should be punished. After the age of ten children are more morally flexible and can now take motives for behaviour into account (Louw, 1991:342). In Blyton’s adventure and mystery books the children investigate and solve crimes, thus showing an awareness of the distinction between right and wrong.

In terms of language development, at this stage of development children begin to use longer sentences, more complex grammatical forms, and a larger vocabulary (Louw, 1991:335). The child is also able to interpret metaphor, humour and ambiguity in language (Louw, 1991:335). In Blyton’s *Adventure* series there is evidence of the manipulation of language in Kiki’s word play and use of rhyme: ‘Musty, dusty, fusty!’ (*The castle of adventure*, 75). At this age children also master basic skills in the physical manipulation of things and there is enjoyment in producing things, thus developing a sense of industry (Meyer *et al.*, 1989:159).

It is difficult to describe adolescence in terms of years as it may range between ten and twenty-five years, therefore the stages of adolescence are demarcated by ‘specific developmental characteristics rather than age’ (Louw, 1991:377). Adolescence is characterised by puberty and this includes rapid physical, hormonal and emotional changes. Socially, adolescents are more independent (Louw, 1991:377), while intellectually they seek evidence and make use of reason and logic (Van Niekerk, 2000:29).

The difficulty in defining this developmental stage means that books directed at older children need to address issues of both middle childhood and adolescence, posing a challenge to the author. Contemporary society refers to books directed at adolescents as ‘young adult’ novels. These novels focus on the sexual and emotional development of the child, however, because of the difficulty of defining

this developmental stage, many children experiencing the early stages of adolescence might still be reading books directed at those in middle childhood. Hence, although Blyton's books are aimed at those children still experiencing middle childhood, children in adolescence may read them. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the characteristics expected of this stage of development, to understand the reception of Blyton's books.

Critics of Piaget claim that 'children can make moral decisions at an earlier stage than indicated by Piaget's research' (Louw, 1991:434). Furthermore, Piaget's theory is criticised for neglecting the emotional development of children. Piaget adopts a child-centred approach, which suggests that 'children of different ages will appreciate different things in literature' (Rudd, 2000:9). Rudd believes that the child-centred approach, 'in presuming already to know the child, therefore decides to dispense with him or her in actuality' (Rudd, 2000:10). The child-centred approach tends to focus on the norm rather than the differences between individual children (Rudd, 2000:9) and is symptomatic of the exercise of power in the human sciences through normalization.

In terms of Michel Foucault's theory, the stages of childhood, as discussed above, can also be described as forms of classification and normalization. Psychological discourse defines 'normal' activity and the preferences of children at certain ages. For example, according to psychological discourse young children should enjoy more fantasy while older children should prefer more realistic books. However, if an older child admits to preferring fantasy, psychological discourse is given the power to claim that the child is not as well developed or as mature as a child of the same age who likes realistic stories. Defining the 'normal' preferences of a child at a certain developmental stage limits the freedom of that child and exerts control over the child. This is relevant to the discussion as the use of Froebel's theories by Blyton could be described as reinforcing dominant psychological discourses and thus reinforcing what

these discourses describe as 'normal' behaviour. This in turn removes power from the child and emphasises traditional power relations.

2.3.3 The child in this study

After examining the developmental stages of the child it is clear that although age is not an ideal parameter, it is the most common. Therefore, in this study, the child is defined roughly as a person between six and thirteen years. This age range excludes very young children who may be referred to as infants or toddlers, for whom picture books would be more suitable, as well as those teenagers in the pivotal stages of puberty for whom young adult novels would be more suitable.

2.4 THE TEXT

Dominant literary discourses have influenced definitions of literature, and thus definitions of children's literature. Furthermore, these definitions influence the horizons of expectation of both critics and readers of Blyton, as the definitions prescribe what – according to dominant literary discourses – literature should be. Therefore, in order to gain greater understanding of the literary criticism of Blyton's work, it is necessary to examine what dominant discourses describe as literature and children's literature.

2.4.1 Literature

Before we can begin to debate what children's literature is, it is necessary to ask what literature (in general) is. It is a question that has been pondered by intellectuals and academics for many years and they have still not established a definitive answer (Culler, 1997:19). Is literature all books, plays and poetry, or are there specific literary qualities that separate literature from mere texts? In

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Foucault's terms, dominant institutions define the literary norm. In addition, definitions of literature are part of the discourse of literary studies.

Townsend (1990:60) defines literature as 'all works of the imagination which are transmitted primarily by means of the written word or spoken narrative'. This type of literature 'offers, above all, enjoyment' (Townsend, 1990:60). Culler (1997:20) highlights the idea that cultural definitions of what literature is determine what is accepted as literature. The 'current dominant literary/academic establishment prescribes' (Hunt, 1991a:43) the definition of good literature. Cultural and historical factors also influence what different people have accepted as literature over the years. Like Foucault, Hunt argues that the concept of literature is defined by 'the cultural establishment' (Hunt, 1991a:18); however, he divides definitions of literature according to features, cultural norms and the uses of the text (Hunt, 1991a:51).

What constitutes literature seems to be a combination of the literary qualities that provide aesthetic appeal, the context in which the language functions, and the function of the text. Firstly, literature is often described as having literary qualities or 'linguistic features' (Hunt, 1991a:51) – 'the organisation of language that makes literature distinguishable from language used for other purposes' (Culler, 1997:27). While literature, like art, has specific literary qualities that cause it to be examined and appreciated in a different way to other texts, saying that literature has only an aesthetic function limits the definition. Secondly, literature differs from other forms of communication because of the way in which the reader responds to literature (as a result of the reader's horizons of expectation). If a reader is not aware of the accepted literary conventions and structures, the reader may not respond as expected (May, 1995:16). Thirdly, the function of literature, be it aesthetic or educational, influences the definition of the text as literature.

2.4.2 Children's literature

As pointed out above, it is difficult to develop a working definition of literature in general. This makes it even more difficult to define children's literature and many critics have 'lamented the lack of an adequate definition of a children's book' (Wall, 1991:1). Does the term children's literature merely refer to texts that are directed at children? Is it necessary for such texts to comply with conventional definitions of literature?

The field of children's literary criticism is a relatively new area of literary criticism. Consequently, literary theorists focusing on children's literature are in a sense breaking new ground. Traditional discourses about literature have held that children's literature is inferior, or 'other' and, therefore, not of interest to purist academics. This means that the field of children's literary criticism is often overlooked as a field of study.

The traditional canon of so-called literary 'classics' is an indication of what has been accepted as 'good' literature in the past – the canon is formed as a result of what the dominant structures in society hold to be good literature (Hunt, 1991a:54) – however, changing discourses have resulted in questions about the value of this canon and the value of texts that have been overlooked (Culler, 1997:45). Furthermore, the canon is not a true representation of what children (or adults) actually read.

Hunt (1994:25) defines the scope for children's literature as encompassing

everything from board-books to fairy tales, from exercises in bibliotherapy for teenage *Angst* to scarcely disguised political tracts on feminism; from novels dealing with the complete range of human activity to primers for learning to read.

This leads to the question of whether every book that a child reads can be classified as children's literature (Sutherland & Arbuthnot, 1991:5). After all, there are children who enjoy reading books that belong to their parents, while other

children opt for comic books which many people do not regard as literature at all. For this reason Sutherland and Arbuthnot (1991:5) define children's literature as 'books that are not only read and enjoyed, but also that have been written for children and that meet high literary and artistic standards'.

Children's literature is often judged and given value by adult academic standards. Judging children's literature according to adult literary and artistic standards can be regarded as 'oppressive of children' (Wall, 1991:217). Hunt (1991a:43) points out that there is 'wide disagreement as to whether children's literature can be treated in the same way as adult literature'. Townsend (1990:61) states that '[c]hildren are not a separate form of life from people; no more than children's books are a separate form of literature from just books. Children are part of mankind; children's literature is part of literature'. Heins (1973b:408) believes that '[c]hildren's literature is part of general literature'. Smith (1973:396) shares this idea and claims that 'there are certain basic principles which apply to all'. Lickteig (1975:18) suggests that the 'origins of any literature rest in oral tradition'. This implies that the oral tradition is also a foundation of children's literature.

On the other hand, there are those who believe that children's literature has certain characteristics that separate it from adult literature. These characteristics include the mode of address, the vocabulary used, the use of dialogue and the experience of the reader that may limit his/her background knowledge. Lukens (1995:7) claims that 'the expression of ideas must be simpler – both in language and form'. Watson (2000b:51) even states that children's literature 'is unlike any other literature'.

May (1995:12) appears to find a balance between the two views of children's literature. She claims that although children's literature is 'unique', it shares several conventions with literature in general, such as 'genre, story form, and thematic approach'. May (1995:7) draws attention to the fact that professors who teach courses in children's literature 'maintain that although children's literature

has, by the very uniqueness of its intended audience, some stylistic and aesthetic differences from literature as a whole, it has commonalities shared by all literature’.

Watson (2000a:1) believes that ‘it is impossible to reflect upon children’s books without considering the children who read them’. Hunt (1991a:52) also claims that ‘the single thing that distinguishes children’s literature is its audience’. Children’s literature is defined in terms of its audience (Hunt, 1990:1; Hunt, 1991a:56; Hunt, 1994:8). Adults and children have different horizons of expectation as a result of the different discourses to which they are exposed and this influences the way they respond to the text.

2.4.3 The author: who writes books for children?

Chambers (1990:92) mentions that ‘it takes two to say a thing’ and, therefore, there is a relationship between the reader and the author. Whether these participants are to be referred to as the implied reader, the implied author, the narrator or the narratee is a much larger issue than this study allows scope for. However, in children’s literature the relationship between author and reader is one with great possibilities and is representative of the power relations evident in dominant discourse.

When one examines the authors of children’s books one needs to take historical and social factors into account. Traditionally women – who historically fulfilled the roles of mothers and homemakers, who cared for children and participated in their education – have written the majority of children’s books. This is perhaps indicative of the dominant power structures evident in society. The isolation of women in a male-dominated society would have had further repercussions for children’s literature written by women; literature written by women would have been seen as inferior to literature written by men. In addition, dominant

discourses which marginalized women and children could have been reinforced, or subverted, in literature for children.

Both in the past and today, children's books have been and are written by adults. Therefore, the fact that adults hold a certain amount of authority over children should not be overlooked. This authority is evident in the books written (and published) for children. The child reader can easily be influenced and, thus, the author arguably needs to present an example of behaviour to which the child can aspire, creating a clear distinction between right and wrong. The author of children's books has a great deal of influence on both the text and the child reader. Hunt believes that because adults write books for children 'the book is going to be used not to entertain or modify our views, but to form our views of the child' (Hunt, 1991a:51). Therefore, what is of interest is the fact that adults write for children, thereby – intentionally or unintentionally – dictating what children read and exercising power. Watson (2000b:52) believes that 'children cannot lose sight of the fact that the books they are reading are produced by adults'.

No matter how much the author tries to address a child audience on a child's level, that adult author is still separate from the child reader:

Writers who set out to write for children, however, must look further than themselves, for they are separated from children, even from the children they once were, by a substantial barrier of age and experience, a barrier which, though it may in some ways be surmounted or traversed, cannot be removed. Whatever some of them have said to the contrary, writers for children must serve two masters, themselves and their chosen audience.

(Wall, 1991:20)

The voice that addresses the reader in children's literature is an adult voice, and even though Blyton managed to bring that voice to a level appreciated by children, that voice remains one of an adult. Wall describes this voice as standing *in loco parentis* and, for this reason, 'the quality of that voice' (Wall, 1991:273) is important. This gives rise to a certain amount of irony when looking at the criticism of Blyton for the use of a moralising tone in her books. '[T]he adult writer to some

extent at least [is] looking back towards childhood, and young readers [are] always, at whatever deep level, aware of themselves moving ahead' (Watson, 2000b:52). For this reason, adult writers 'can never fully comprehend how their stories will be received by their primary audience' (May, 1995:56). Many of the 'much-vaunted books for children are either not read by them, or much more appreciated by adults' (Hunt, 1994:5). Chambers (1990:91) points out the irony that 'some books are clearly for children in a specific sense – they were written by their authors deliberately for children – and some books, never specifically intended for children, have qualities which attract children to them'.

'By convention every narrative is said to have a narrator' (Culler, 1997:82) and the author creates a voice that speaks to the reader through the text. This narrator has several characteristics. These include the time at which he/she speaks and the way in which he/she speaks – the 'distinctive language' (Culler, 1997:83) that is used to tell the story. 'A narrative that sees things through the consciousness of a child may either use adult language to report the child's perceptions or slip into a child's language' (Culler, 1997:83). Another characteristic of the narrator is the authority that the narrator holds. 'To tell a story is to claim a certain authority' (Culler, 1997:83), thus, the narrator must be perceived as reliable and provide enough information for the reader. In children's literature the nature of the reader has resulted in much debate about the power that the narrator holds over the reader. The narrator is able to express certain values and behaviour as acceptable or not and this may in turn influence the reader in a certain way, thus exercising a certain amount of control over the reader. Furthermore, the adult writer must be able to create a narrator that appeals to a child reader.

Foucault postulates that one should focus on 'how the power of discourse restrains the author and what is said' (Horrocks & Jevtic, 1997:4). In other words, the influence of discourse on the author may prevent the author from expressing certain ideas, or in turn lead to the expression of other ideas. 'The author does

not precede the works; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, chooses and impedes the free circulation of literature' (Horrocks & Jevtic, 1997:99).

2.4.4 The purpose of children's literature

Children's books are often judged according to their use (Hunt, 1991a:8), thus, the purpose of children's literature in western society can be discussed from two perspectives: should children's literature educate or entertain? If one includes children's literature in the same category with general literature, T.S. Eliot's 'three permanent reasons for reading; the acquisition of wisdom, the enjoyment of art, and the pleasure of entertainment' (Heins, 1973a:407) may also be relevant. These reasons for reading may simply be described as education, aesthetic appeal, and entertainment. Children's literature also has several other benefits. Among these are the social and commercial values (Hunt, 1991a:1). Hunt emphasises that because adults write for children 'there is going to be control, and that it is going to involve moral decisions' (Hunt, 1991a:51). One might be tempted to claim that one purpose of children's literature is the normalization of children into society as well as control of children's behaviour by adults who decide on the norm. In terms of commercial value, one merely needs to look at J.K. Rowling and the commercial success of the *Harry Potter* series to appreciate the commercial value of children's literature

Norton (1983) examines the values of literature for children. The first of these, according to Norton, is pleasure; 'there is nothing wrong with turning to a book to escape or to enjoy an adventure' (Norton, 1983:5). Secondly, Norton examines the value of literature as a source of our 'literary heritage' (Norton, 1983:5). This involves the transmission of literature through generations, and originates with oral tales. The transmission of literary heritage may be closely linked to Norton's third value of children's literature: the transmission of cultural heritage. This involves the development of attitudes towards various aspects of cultural and

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ethnic identity. The fourth value of literature, as discussed by Norton, is the value of vicarious experience. Norton believes that literature allows children to place themselves in situations that they may not experience in reality: 'vicarious experiences with the characters in books can help them deal with similar problems; these experiences can also help children understand other people's feelings' (Norton, 1983:5). The acquisition of knowledge and cognitive development is the fifth value discussed by Norton. This is linked to Norton's sixth value, the expansion of the imagination. Lastly, Norton (1983:5) refers to the complete development of the child, including language, cognitive, personality and social development, which is promoted in children's literature.

In the quest for commercial value, social and moral conditioning, teachers, parents, librarians and critics often ignore the needs of the child, which include certain basic needs such as 'the need for security, the need to be loved, [and] the need to achieve' (Sutherland & Arbuthnot, 1991:16) as well as the need to belong, the need to develop trusting relationships and a desire for knowledge. Initially, the needs are very personal, but as the child matures the needs become more broad (Sutherland & Arbuthnot, 1991:17). According to Culler (1997:79), '[t]here is a basic human drive to hear and tell stories. Children very early develop what one might call a basic narrative competence: demanding stories, they know when you are trying to cheat by stopping before reaching the end'. The needs of the child are described according to the discourse of the human sciences and should, therefore, according to Foucault's theory, be questioned.

It is necessary to take note of the role that the literature plays in society and the role it is intended to play. The dominant discourses of society are reflected in the literature and in the expectations that individuals have of that literature. In terms of the purpose of children's literature, Carpenter (1985:1) claims that many adults 'want to feed the children a set of moral examples'. If one looks at books published for children in the past, Carpenter is correct in claiming that adults want to mould children through literature. Contemporary society, however, is far more

liberal and, thus, there is a decrease in the inclusion of traditional moral overtones (and an increasing inclusion of previously taboo subjects) in children's literature. However, 'politically correct' values like eco-awareness, and gender and race equality, are increasingly included.

2.5 CONCLUSION

T.S. Eliot's essay 'Tradition and the individual talent' in which he discusses the different influences on an author's work, notes how the different dominant discourses of society, and thus authors and readers, influence both the production and reception of a text. These dominant discourses, as they influence Enid Blyton's production and reception, are examined in terms of Michel Foucault's discussions on discourse and power, and Gadamer and Jauss's discussions on the horizon of expectation.

According to Foucault, dominant discourses in society establish and maintain power structures in society such as the relations between adults and children, relations which reinforce the segregation of the child from adult society. This, in turn, influences the production and reception of texts for children. Changing views and definitions of the child are reflected in the variety of texts produced for children. In addition, the different discourses surrounding literature have shaped the definitions of and the criteria applied to children's literature and, consequently, the purpose and content of children's literature.

In this chapter some of the values of literature for children are discussed, however, the exploitation of literature for children by adults as a means of normalizing children is also considered. Dominant discourses are reflected in children's literature as acceptable behaviour and similar behaviour is thus encouraged in children. An aspect of this reflection of dominant discourses in literature for children that requires attention is the changes in dominant discourses of society over time, as this in turn leads to changes in the types of

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literature produced and the reception of literature by society. This aspect has been discussed in this chapter in terms of the changing approaches to both children and children's literatures since the Middle Ages. In Chapter Four this aspect is discussed in terms of the changes in the reception of Blyton – caused by changes in dominant discourses – which have contributed to the criticism of Blyton.

As discourse often divides children from adults, in this chapter the importance of taking the needs of the child into account is highlighted. In addition, the examination of the segregation of children in an adult-dominated society emphasises the distance between the adult author and the child reader and the power that the author may have over the reader. This allows the differences in the subtleties of address when the child is the primary audience to be pointed out and leads to a discussion of the differences between literature for adults and literature for children. Jill May's (1995:7;12) claim that even though children's literature is unique it shares characteristics with all literature seemed to be the most satisfactory way of finding a balance between definitions of literature for adults and children. As not all books that are read by children can be defined as children's literature, Sutherland and Arbuthnot's definition of children's literature as 'books that are not only read and enjoyed, but also that have been written for children and that meet high literary and artistic standards' (Sutherland & Arbuthnot, 1991:5) is also applicable and suitable in the context of this study.

The horizons of expectation of those who read Blyton differ significantly; therefore the theoretical framework outlined in this chapter must be applied to Enid Blyton, her critics and her readers. This means that the discourses surrounding Blyton and her horizons of expectation must be examined in terms of the production of her texts (see Chapter Three and Chapter Five). In addition, the discourses and horizons of expectation of her critics and her readers bear scrutiny (see Chapter Four).

CHAPTER THREE

DISCOURSES IN THE LIFE OF ENID BLYTON

She was a child, she thought as a child and she wrote as a child.
Michael Woods (1992:230)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

It could be argued that Enid Blyton's horizons of expectation, like those of her readers, were shaped by the dominant discourses in her life. It is thus possible to demonstrate that the style, content and possible purpose of her books are affected by these discourses. For this reason, it is necessary to look closely at the life of Enid Blyton. It is possible to speculate about how her life influenced the text of her books, as well as her output, popularity and success as a writer.

3.2 SHAPING A HORIZON OF EXPECTATION:

ENID BLYTON'S CHILDHOOD

Enid Mary Blyton was born on 11 August 1897, just outside London. She was the oldest of three children and the only daughter of 'lower middle-class parents' (Watson, 2001:91). From the start, Blyton had a close relationship with her father (Stoney, 1992:16; Baverstock, 2000:3). Thomas Blyton was self-educated and a well-read man. Thanks to his influence, reading was a habit Blyton soon picked up – she began to read widely by the age of ten, after which 'it was rare to see her without a book' (Stoney, 1992:17). The books that Blyton read were bound to have influenced her horizons of expectations, inasmuch as they reflect (and potentially subvert) the discourses of the time in which they were written and read.

According to Baverstock (2000:7), the 'book that [Blyton] loved best as a young child was *The Princess and The Goblin* (1872) by George Macdonald'. She also enjoyed *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), *Coral Island* (1858), *Black Beauty* (1877) and *Little Women* (1868) (Baverstock, 2000:7). Knowles and

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Malmkjaer refer to a survey of popular children's literature carried out by Charles Welsh in 1884 (Knowles & Malmkjaer, 1996:36). In the survey Welsh found that girls cited Charles Dickens, Sir Walter Scott and Charles Kingsley as their favourite adult authors. Charlotte Yonge and Hans Christian Andersen were found to be the girls' favourite children's authors, while *Little women* and *The daisy chain* were their favourite books (Knowles & Malmkjaer, 1996:37). Although this survey was carried out before Blyton's birth it is possible to assume that these authors and books were still popular when she began to read.

Although Blyton does not refer directly to myths and fairy tales in her writing, there is evidence in her classroom retellings [educational texts] of 'borrowings from a wide range of sources: the Bible, Graeco-Roman and Norse myth and legend, Perrault, Grimm, Malory, Spenser, and The One Thousand and One Nights' (Druce, 1992:157). A link between Blyton's fiction and the mythology of old can be found in the parallel between the *Faraway Tree* and the legendary Norse world tree Yggdrasil (Ray, 1982:141). It is plausible to assume that Blyton read these texts and this can be linked to discussions on Blyton's horizons of expectation, as the literature to which she was exposed would have formed part of her horizons.

It is evident from Blyton's choice of reading matter that she read a great variety of texts, her choice including fantasy, humour, adventure and 'realistic' texts. Arguably, these choices can be linked to texts that Blyton wrote, which include a fair amount of fantasy – such as the *Faraway Tree* series and the *Wishing Chair* series – and a number of adventure stories, particularly the *Adventure* series. It is significant that all the books mentioned by Baverstock were published in the late 1800s. This means that the discourses from the mid-1860s up to her own time would have influenced Blyton's horizons of expectation. It was a period of great political, social and religious change. An increase in the entertainment value of children's literature was evident (Norton, 1983:53). 'Realistic' stories, as well as

exciting adventure and empire-building novels were popular (Hunt, 1994:67), and the value of the imagination was reflected in the writing for children at the time.

Together, Blyton and her father explored the countryside around her home, taking great delight in nature and the outdoors. They planted a small garden where she learnt to grow plants from seeds (Baverstock, 2000:3; Greenfield, 1998:2). (Gardening is an activity the children choose to participate in in *The Put-em-rights*.) Blyton's love of nature was maintained throughout her life and is evident in many of her books. Characters in the books by Blyton regularly spend time outdoors, as is seen in *Five go off to camp*, *Five have a wonderful time*, *Five go off in a caravan*, *The mountain of adventure*, *The valley of adventure* and *The secret island*, among others. The activities also vary according to the season: in the *Barney* series the children swim in summer in *The Rubadub mystery*, and enjoy tobogganing, snow-ball fights and ice skating in winter in *The Rat-A-Tat mystery*. In the *Secret Seven* series the children build snowmen in winter (*The Secret Seven*, 20).

They also show an interest in the animal life of the area around their holiday location. In *The castle of adventure*, *The circus of adventure*, *Five have a wonderful time* and in *The Ragamuffin mystery*, the characters are interested in bird-watching. In fact, in all the books in the *Adventure* series the characters show an interest in wildlife. There are also several examples where the characters use their skills in the outdoors – skills such as swimming, rowing or climbing trees – to become involved in or solve the mystery. In *The island of adventure*, the children learn to sail a boat, which in turn allows them to sail to the Isle of Gloom and discover a counterfeiting ring. Similarly, in the *Famous Five* series the children often sail to Kirrin Island. In *Five get into trouble*, Anne climbs a tree to look for the other children and her vantage point allows her to witness Dick's being abducted by villains.

Blyton's mother would not allow her to have a pet of her own and did not share her daughter's love of nature. Gillian Baverstock tells of a stray kitten that Blyton discovered and kept hidden in the garden shed. Blyton was understandably very upset when she came home from school one day to find out that her mother had 'got rid of it' (Baverstock, 2000:4). Blyton projected this love of animals later in life by ensuring that she, and the characters in her books, always had loyal and unusual pets to accompany them on their adventures: Timmy, the dog in the *Famous Five*; Scamper, the dog in the *Secret Seven*; Loony the dog and Miranda the monkey in the *Barney* series; and Kiki, the parrot in the *Adventure* series; and Buster, the dog in the *Five Find-Outers* series, are some of the most memorable pets featured. There are also several incidents where the characters that the children befriend in the books have pet monkeys or similar exotic pets, in particular, Tinker and his pet monkey, Mischief, who feature in both *Five go to Demon's Rocks* and *Five are together again*. Those characters who express a dislike for animals, such as Sooty's father in *Five go to Smuggler's Top*, tend immediately to fall under suspicion from the reader. The role played by animals in Blyton's books is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five (Section 5.3.3.5) of this study.

The relationship between Blyton and her father stood in contrast to a difficult relationship between Blyton and her mother. Theresa Blyton, in keeping with the dominant discourses about the domestic role of women in her time, wanted her daughter to prepare 'for what she considered the only proper future for a girl – marriage, home and children' (Stoney, 1992:19). She wanted her daughter to behave as a proper young woman should, taking an interest in domestic work and the maintenance of the household, tasks that Blyton often rushed through so that she could spend more time pursuing her other interests. This trend is evident in her books, where the children often whisk through their chores as quickly as possible, as Pip does in *The mystery of Holly Lane* (4). Theresa Blyton believed that her husband spoilt their daughter by allowing her to play in the garden or sit around reading. Despite her own dislike for domestic chores, it is perhaps

inevitable that Blyton continues to portray the girls in her books as engaged in domestic tasks, as dominant discourses continued to stress women's roles as homemakers. However, Blyton also presents an alternative discourse in which girls participate in many of the same activities as boys when solving mysteries, such as rowing boats and climbing trees. This subversion of dominant discourses is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

Blyton's relationship with her father and her enjoyment of the outdoors while shunning domestic activities makes it plausible to assume that Blyton was possibly a tomboy. According to both Druce (1992:120) and Stoney (1992:157), the character of George in the *Famous Five* was based on Blyton. This presents evidence of the reflection of her life in her writing. Like Blyton does in her own life, George subverts dominant discourses that reinforce the purely domestic role of women – both George and Blyton are strong, independent females. (In Chapter Four, Section 4.3.2.4 of this study, the character of George is discussed in terms of the criticism of Blyton.)

The home life of the young Enid Blyton was difficult. In 1910, when Enid was thirteen, after many years of tension between her parents, Blyton's father left his wife for another woman (Druce, 1992:9; Greenfield, 1998:3). It is widely believed that it was during this period that Blyton began to write and she often found herself lost in fantasies and thought, in simple stories she wove in her mind, possibly as an escape from the difficult reality of her home life (Stoney, 1992:19,20). She regularly locked herself in her bedroom, creating a safe haven where she could write and dream, away from the unpleasant reality of her home life (Druce, 1992:9; Stoney, 1992:21). The start of this prolific writer's career can clearly be linked to the difficulties of her youth, and to her attempts to escape the results of her parent's troubles.

After her father left, the young Enid Blyton still seldom behaved in a way that pleased her mother. During this period of emotional stress, Theresa Blyton

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attempted to hide the scandal from the community. Even though there was no divorce to shame her, a community in which dominant discourses regarded divorce as unacceptable would easily become suspicious if Thomas Blyton never returned home, and Theresa and her children would have become social outcasts. In Blyton's work too there are examples of children who are forced to hide their parents' shameful secrets, such as Martin, Mr Curton's son in *Five on Kirrin Island again*, who hides the fact that his father is a villain, and Jo in *Five fall into adventure*, whose father is also a villain. Both of these children are portrayed in a positive light, and Jo even features again in *Five have a wonderful time*. Blyton's keeping of her parents' secret could have been a factor in the portrayal of these characters in her books.

Evidence of Blyton's familiarity with disrupted families can be found in her books. However, in an examination of family life from a 21st century perspective, it is possible that current discourses about nuclear families differ from those at the time of writing, making it difficult to determine whether Blyton saw her parents as 'dysfunctional' or not. Certainly, the family unit seldom features (except in *The river of adventure*, and even here the family unit is not conventional, as Mrs Mannering/Cunningham is a remarried widow with two children of her own and two adopted children).

When, on the last page of *The ship of adventure*, Mrs Mannering and Bill decide to get married, it comes as a surprise to the reader as there is no mention of romance earlier in the series. The proposal is in some ways made by the children.

'Well, why can't you and Bill always be with us together?' demanded Lucy-Ann. 'I don't see why you can't *marry* each other – then we'd always have Bill, and you could keep an eye on him to see he doesn't lead us into adventures.'

Bill exploded into an enormous shout of laughter. Mrs Mannering smiled broadly. The others looked at one another.

'I say!' said Phillip eagerly, 'that's a wizard idea of Lucy-Ann's! We'd have a father then – all of us! Gosh, fancy having Bill for a father. Wouldn't the other boy's envy us?'

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Bill stopped laughing and looked soberly round at the four beaming children. Then he looked at Mrs Mannering. He raised his eyebrows enquiringly.

‘Well Allie?’ he said, in a curiously quiet voice. ‘Do *you* think it’s a good idea, too?’

She looked at him, and then smiled round at the eager children. She nodded. ‘Yes – it’s really a very good idea, Bill. I’m surprised we’ve never thought of it before!’

‘That’s settled, then,’ said Bill. ‘I’ll take these four kids on – and you’ll see to it I don’t lead them into anymore adventures, Allie? Is that agreed?’

(*The ship of adventure*, 188)

Furthermore, although there is a hint of irony when Mrs Mannering claims that she and Bill had not thought of marriage before, as it does sound as if Mrs Mannering and Bill are getting married primarily for the sake of the children. In the *Famous Five* series George’s parents feature more than those of Julian, Dick and Anne. However, even though George’s parents are married, they seldom spend time together – Uncle Quentin is usually working on a secret experiment and not to be disturbed.

Although individual parents, usually mothers in a caring role, feature in most of the books, children are often left in the care of employees (such as Joanna in the *Famous Five*) and Miss Pepper, Mrs Lynton’s former governess (in the *Barney* series). As a unit, the family typically features at the beginning and end of the story – parents are called away unexpectedly or go on holiday, and return only in time for the resolution of the story. It could be argued that absentee parents are part of the Blyton blueprint, significant when one takes into account her family situation. This characteristic of Blyton’s writing is discussed further in Chapter Five (Section 5.3.3.6).

After Thomas Blyton left, to prevent embarrassment, Theresa Blyton and her children moved – ‘keeping up appearances’ (Stoney, 1992:20) was very important to Theresa Blyton. Her daughter successfully maintained an ‘air of normality’ (Greenfield, 1998:4) at her English private school. Blyton participated in games and won prizes for some of her work (Greenfield, 1998:5). She was

also placed in leadership positions – Blyton was both head girl and head of games (Carpenter & Prichard, 1984:68). It is possible to imagine a school lifestyle similar to that depicted in the *Malory Towers* and *St Clare's* series. Blyton also ran a small school magazine with two of her friends and together they contributed stories, poems and illustrations to the magazine (Baverstock, 2000:13). Stoney (1992:22) claims that no one at her school 'ever guessed that [Blyton's] father lived away from the family'. Thomas Blyton supported his family, paid for the education of his children and ensured that Theresa and the children had all that they needed. Enid Blyton maintained her relationship with her father and he often went to the theatre or for lunch with his daughter (Baverstock, 2000:12).

3.3 THE YOUNG WRITER: EXPANDING HORIZONS

In line with her father's wishes, at the age of six Enid Blyton began to take an interest in playing the piano. Thomas Blyton wanted her to follow in his sister's footsteps and become a professional concert pianist. In 1915 Blyton began to 'prepare for her entry into the Guildhall School of Music' (Stoney, 1992:28); even though, as she grew up, Blyton had found that she preferred writing to playing the piano. Longing for a break from the endless hours of piano practice, in the summer of 1916 she went on holiday with a friend, Mabel Attenborough. It was on this holiday, while helping at a Sunday school, that Blyton discovered her talent for working with children (Baverstock, 2000:16,17; Stoney, 1992:30,31).

Blyton began training as a teacher in the Froebel method of teaching (Carpenter & Prichard, 1984:68) in September 1916. Her training as a teacher presented her with the opportunity to leave home and she did so, breaking off contact with her mother. According to Druce (1992:10), Blyton did not see her mother after this break was made. Blyton now lived with the family of her friend Mabel Attenborough over weekends and holidays – far away from her mother – and at college doing practical training during the week. Even though the young writer often faced rejection in these early stages, Attenborough encouraged Blyton's

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early attempts at writing (Baverstock, 2000:16). Greenfield (1998:9) recalls Blyton's first recorded published work – 'a sentimental poem entitled "Have You ...?"' published in *Nash's Magazine* in 1917, when she was just twenty years old. Even though the First World War took place during these years (1914-1918), it seemed to have little direct effect on Blyton's life. In Blyton's biography Stoney only mentions the First World War in reference to the fact that when Blyton left home her mother told people that she had joined the Women's Land Army (Stoney, 1992:33).

Enid Blyton received her *Froebel* Teaching Certificate – a method of teaching used at kindergarten level – towards the end of 1919 (Baverstock, 2000:18; <http://www.froebelweb.org/web2010.html>) and she began teaching at a small school for boys in Kent the following year. After teaching in Kent for only a year, Blyton received a great deal of praise for her skills as a teacher from the head of the school. However, she chose to become a governess to a family in Surrey. While Enid was teaching at Surrey, her father died. She did not attend her father's funeral and the children whom she taught during this time do not recall her mentioning her father's passing away (Stoney, 1992:45). Blyton is described by Rudd (2000:172;176) as avoiding things associated with death, and Cullingford (1998:102) believes that she coped with tragedy by pretending it did not exist. This evasion of traumatic events is a feature of her books and is discussed further in Chapter Five.

Blyton remained in Surrey for four years, teaching the children from the family and those of the neighbourhood. She eventually ran a small school of between 12 (Druce, 1992:10; Stoney, 1992:42) and 14 (Baverstock, 2000:19) pupils. Blyton, a very enthusiastic and eager teacher, created opportunities for nature walks and the collection of specimens of plant and animal life, while at the same time ensuring that 'even leisure hours were instructive' (Stoney, 1992:43). This may be linked not only to Blyton's relationship with her father, with whom she explored the countryside and took delight in nature, but also to Blyton's training

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as a teacher in the Froebel method of education (as discussed in Chapter Two, Section 2.3.2) which advocates the value of nature in the lives of children. Blyton's teaching reflects some discourses regarding education and empire-building at the time, with attention being paid to practical learning and interaction with the outdoors. This stands in contrast with earlier, more Puritan discourses, and with the utilitarian approach to rote learning, where lessons were formal and structured. The lessons portrayed in the first two chapters of Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854) are an example of structured lessons featuring rote learning in which children are expected to learn 'nothing but facts' (Dickens, 1989:1). Thus, the influence of educationalists who moved away from formal structured lessons such as Mulcaster, Locke and Rousseau is evident in the teaching of Blyton. Regardless of whether or not she knowingly chose to use the teachings of these educationalists, it is plausible to claim that their discourse filtered through to her via the discourses of education – Froebel in particular – prevalent in her life.

It was during her time in Surrey that Blyton began to write many stories for children, regularly reading the stories that she wrote to her pupils and making adjustments according to their recommendations. It was the ideal environment for a children's writer in which to practise and perfect the skills she needed to write stories for child readers. Enid Blyton's first book, a collection of verse for children called *Child Whispers*, was published in 1922. Enid Blyton was a very busy woman – 'a dynamo of industry' (Greenfield, 1998:11) – who managed to teach, deal with all the administration for her small school by herself, and write stories at the same time. She regularly submitted articles, verses and stories to the *Teacher's World* magazine, an arrangement that developed into a weekly column in the magazine, called 'From My Window', in 1923.

Blyton resigned from her post in Surrey in 1924 after meeting Major Hugh Pollock. After a notable army career, Pollock had joined George Newnes, one of the publishing firms to which Blyton submitted work. Major Pollock was a married man when he and Blyton first met (worth noting especially when one reflects on

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the possible effect of Blyton's father's infidelity on her). However, Druce claims that Major Pollock's 'wife had left him during the war and he had already begun divorce proceedings' (Druce, 1992:11) by the time he and Blyton met. On 28 August 1924 Blyton married Hugh Pollock in a very quiet wedding ceremony. None of the members of Blyton's or Pollock's families were present (Stoney, 1992:64), a further indication of her troubled relationship with her family, and of the dominant discourses which regarded divorce and the remarriage of divorced individuals negatively.

The role of class and discourses about class can also be examined in Blyton's life. Even though as a child she did chores around the house, luxuries (such as piano lessons) and her education (including her training as a teacher), imply academic interests, and that her family would not be considered lower or working class. Watson (2001:91) refers to her family as 'lower middle-class'. Her decision to pursue a career in teaching suggests that her contemporaries would probably have classified her as a member of the middle-class. As a married woman, Blyton had servants of her own, servants whom she hired and dismissed with apparent ease. Greenfield describes Blyton's attitude to her domestic staff as 'brutal' (Greenfield, 1998:23), while Stoney describes her as 'unsympathetic' (Stoney, 1992:89) towards her staff. One could speculate that, in a sense, Blyton moved up the social ladder (and financial ladder) by marrying Major Pollock, at a time when an officer was still considered to be a gentleman. Her books reveal her awareness of class, and it would probably have been difficult for her to distance herself from the classist discourses of her time. This is significant in terms of the criticism of Blyton's portrayal of class (as discussed in Chapter Four, Section 4.3.2.2).

Blyton drew on her surroundings for material for her writing, often observing the wildlife in her garden and discussing this in her column (Stoney, 1992:74,75). Observation of nature also features in her books. In *Five have a wonderful time*, George proudly displays her 'field-glasses' and the children spend time observing

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birds (*Five have a wonderful time*, 87), while, in *Five fall into adventure*, Anne observes the sea anemones in a tidal pool on the beach (*Five fall into adventure*, 29). In *The castle of adventure* Jack camps out in a ruined castle to observe eagles nesting.

Her home, 'Elfin Cottage', featured in Blyton's column 'From My Window', as she told her readers of the home and the garden. The inspiration of her surroundings ensured that by 1926 Enid had written and published two collections of plays, a book of singing games, and eight volumes of practice reading texts. She went on to edit three volumes of *Teacher's Treasury* and became the editor of the magazine *Sunny Stories for Little People* (Druce, 1992:11). Her popularity seemed to increase exponentially, as did her output. In August 1927 her column 'From my window' was replaced with the weekly 'Letter to children'. The 'Letter to children' was extended in September 1929 and became 'Enid Blyton's children's page'.

3.4 BLYTON'S ROLE IN EDUCATION: SHAPING NEW HORIZONS

Blyton's influence on the development of texts used in education was significant and she was regarded as an authority on children's education (Druce, 1992:11) from the 1920s (Rudd, s.a.:2) until about 1945. The reflection of her training as a teacher in the Froebel method of education in her fictional writing is discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Five of this study. Rudd points out that she was 'seen in predominantly educational terms' (Rudd, s.a.:2). According to Barbara Stoney (1992:151), by the mid-1940s,

her letters and articles...appeared regularly in the national press and she was frequently being quoted – both at home and overseas – on anything appertaining to children and their care.

Blyton's role in education can be looked at from two opposing perspectives. On the one hand, Blyton had very little teaching experience in terms of years, only really teaching children during her time in Kent and in Surrey, unless the time spent training as a teacher and the practical experience she gained then is taken

into account. Still, that amounts to only six years of practical teaching experience. There are teachers with many years of experience who claim that they still have much to learn about children. According to Druce (1992:287), Blyton was 'minimally trained'. He also maintains that although Blyton regularly claimed to be an educationalist, in the real sense of the word she was not (Druce, 1992:287). On the other hand, when Blyton was still a very young and inexperienced teacher, she was able to manage a small school successfully on her own – with no one to consult about the lessons or problematic situations. As a governess, she would have been intimately involved in the lives of the children in her care for several years, seeing them on a daily basis and living in the same home. This situation would have provided her with ample opportunity for observation and learning.

Irrespective of the view one takes, Enid Blyton's contribution to the education of children cannot be overlooked. In addition to the practice reading texts and work on *Teacher's Treasury*, Blyton contributed to *Teacher's World* for 23 years (Rudd, s.a.:2) and assisted in the development of school curricula as the editor of *Modern Teaching* – a publication that offered practical suggestions to teachers and covered subjects such as history, geography, English, nature study, art and science (Stoney, 1992:75). Although she selected experts to write on each field, as the editor of *Modern Teaching*, Blyton's name became associated with successful educational books. As editor of *Teacher's Treasury*, Blyton was responsible for all the sections except the section on needlework (Stoney, 1992:74,75). She also published a course of 48 lessons on nature study called *Round the year with Enid Blyton* that covered themes such as weather observation and insect life. The course was primarily practical, teaching children how to make a garden, an aquarium, or a bird feeder (Stoney, 199

3.5 MANIPULATING THE READER'S HORIZON OF EXPECTATION: THE BLYTON PERSONA

In the late 1930s, Blyton turned to writing full-length fictional work (Rudd, s.a.:2). Enid Blyton reportedly spent most of her day writing, not allowing her status as a married woman to affect her output. After breakfast with her husband, Blyton would sit down to write until he arrived home in the evening (Stoney, 1992:79). She wrote using a portable typewriter balanced on a plank across her knees and, according to Greenfield, to keep up the pace at which she published, she must have written an average of between six and ten thousand words a day (Druce, 1992:27; Greenfield, 1998:66,67).

Enid Blyton described the writing process as something similar to a movie being played in her mind as she wrote. She claimed that she drew the story directly from her imagination, typing as quickly as she could to keep up with the action in her mind (Baverstock, 2000:27). Stoney (1992:139) writes that

[Blyton] would know the names of the characters that appeared almost at once, and although she might see them beside an old house or at the seaside, she was never certain at this stage how the story would progress. Once the first sentence had been put to paper however the rest unfolded.

Greenfield also claims that once Blyton had the first sentence of the story, her mind became 'unlocked' and 'the words flowed as fast as she could get them on to the paper' (Greenfield, 1998:66). These descriptions by Stoney and Greenfield link up with Blyton's description of her writing process as she described it in a letter to a psychologist, Dr Peter McKellar. Dr McKellar carried out research on thoughts and imagination and wrote to Blyton enquiring about the process involved in her writing. In her reply, she describes the process as follows:

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

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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; Blyton, in Baverstock, 2000:27)

With this ‘effortless’ (Druce, 1992:24) writing process in mind, as well as Blyton’s ‘energy and determination’ (Druce, 1992:24), it is quite possible to believe that she wrote such a large number of books.

On the other hand, the writing process described by Blyton seems unrealistic, idealised and exaggerated. This idealisation of the writing process is criticised by Druce (1992:287), who claims that although Blyton worked hard, wrote fast and did not fail to meet deadlines, the image of herself that she presented to the public was ‘stereotyped, flattering, and essentially false’ (Druce, 1992:287). Rudd believes that Enid Blyton ‘constructed her own *persona* – for public consumption’ (Rudd, 2000:24; Rudd, s.a.:1). When Hugh Pollock interviewed his wife for *Teacher’s world* he described Blyton as ‘a slim, graceful, childish figure with a head of closely cropped hair framing a face over which smiles and mischief seem to play an endless game’ (Carpenter & Prichard, 1984:69). The publication of this description reinforced the *persona* created by Blyton. Essentially, Blyton excelled at ‘self-promotion’ (Druce, 1992:288).

It is difficult to separate the life of Blyton from a study of her success, because she created a *persona* to fit into the image of a children’s writer (Rudd, 2000:24). The large amount of interest shown by her readers in her life is evidence of the success of (and perhaps the need for) this *persona*. This *persona* is developed in her autobiography, a ‘fictional construct’ (Rudd, 2000:30) that omits reference to her marriage to Hugh Pollock, her miscarriages, and her parents’ troubled marriage. Her autobiography ‘presents a seemingly ideal family unit, erasing all trace of her daughters’ real father’ (Watson, 2001:91). This idealised portrayal of life is not only evident in her autobiography, a ‘cloudless picture of family life [is also] drawn by Blyton in her columns in *Teacher’s World* and *Sunny Stories*’

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(Carpenter & Prichard, 1984:69). Rudd describes Enid Blyton's *persona* as a 'brand name' (Rudd, 2000:30) that she fabricated and presented to the outside world. This brand name was successfully sold to the world as she built the Enid Blyton empire. It remains an open question whether she herself believed in the *persona* she cultivated so carefully.

Blyton is also well remembered for answering most of her correspondence in person – the time after dinner was reserved for this. This correspondence with her readers provided Blyton with a 'foolproof form of market research' (Druce, 1992:32; Watson, 2001:92), as she learnt from her readers exactly what it was that they wanted to read about. Blyton invited her readers to write to her and asked their opinions on various matters, including suggestions on the names of her houses and the books she should write (Druce, 1992:34). In 1929, when she and Hugh Pollock moved, the name of their new home, 'Old Thatch', was decided on after consultation with her readers (Stoney, 1992:82). This consultation may be seen as a subversion of traditional patriarchal discourse that gives adults the power to make decisions. By asking readers for their opinions, Blyton places a certain amount of power in their hands. However, Blyton still makes the final decision and, therefore, she maintains power while giving her readers the false impression that they have power.

In response to the interest in her private life displayed by her readers, Blyton adopted an informal tone in her correspondence with children. This informality reinforced the image that she created of herself as aligned with the child readers. When the Pollock family moved from 'Old Thatch' to 'Green Hedges', Blyton's readers again contributed to the naming of the house. This time her husband was not even involved in the choice of their new home (Stoney, 1992:119; Greenfield, 1998:26) or its name. Once again this subverts traditional power relations. Discourses of the time dictated that men were the decision-makers; however, in this situation the power was taken from Major Pollock. Nevertheless, the vast correspondence and the degree of consultation (real or ostensible) between

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Blyton and her readers may have contributed to her success, and her appeal to children. Her appeal to children has also been attributed to the argument that 'she thought as a child and she wrote as a child' (Woods, 1969 in Greenfield, 1998:63). After all, she was able to communicate with children in a child's own unique way, thus she 'could be relied upon to share a child's vision of the world and, speaking in the child's own language, to confirm it' (Druce, 1992:34).

Regardless of Blyton's success and popularity as a children's writer, Blyton wanted to write an adult novel for some time. In 1932 she sent her novel *The Caravan Goes On* to a literary agent, only to have it returned to her within two weeks (Stoney, 1992:97). No further mention was made of the unsuccessful novel. However, several years later she attempted to write a play for adults – *The Summer Storm* – under a pen name. *The Summer Storm* was also rejected (Greenfield, 1998:45; Stoney, 1992:175). One cannot but wonder about certain contradictions around Blyton's desire to write for adults. Stoney comments that after Blyton's initial experiences with children,

[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.

(Stoney, 1992:31)

This is in line with Druce's claims that Blyton knew early in life that she would write for children. Her 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, even though her unsuccessful attempts at writing for adults are an indication of her

desire to write for adults. Blyton's statement implies that she chose to teach knowing it would provide her with a foundation, and the skills, needed to write for children. It could arguably provide the kind of immersion in a child's world that would allow her to have insight into a child's horizon of expectation. This is in contrast with a comment by Blyton's daughter, Gillian Baverstock, who claims that it was only 'after several years of teaching [that] Enid realised that she wanted to write for children' (Baverstock, 2000:19). In her autobiography, *The Story of my Life*, Blyton wrote: 'I meant to be a writer from the time I could read and write' (Blyton in Druce, 1992:10), she does, however, not specify that she wanted to write for children. Blyton's desire to write for adults can perhaps be linked to the discourses surrounding literature of the time – discourses which marginalised children's literature. There was certainly far more status associated with being an author of adult novels than of books for children. Literary discourses influenced the reception of children's books (which were viewed as inferior to adult books) and consequently authors of children's books were regarded as inferior to those of adult books. Furthermore, literary criticism of children's books was still a new field (see Chapter Two, Section 2.4.2) and lacked the status of established adult fields of study.

3.6 CONFORMING TO THE EXPECTATIONS OF DOMINANT DISCOURSES: ENID BLYTON AS A MOTHER

Despite descriptions of Enid Blyton as a 'mother-figure' (Druce, 1992:34), she experienced difficulty falling pregnant. Even though she was admired and loved by hundreds of her readers, ironically, she lacked a child of her own. Hence, Greenfield believes that she must have felt 'incomplete' (Greenfield, 1998:21). Consulting a gynaecologist, Blyton was told that her uterus was underdeveloped – 'equivalent to that of a young girl aged twelve or thirteen' (Greenfield, 1998:4). Greenfield discusses the possibility that the psychological scars of her childhood had prevented her from reaching physical maturity (Greenfield, 1998:4,5), a theory that is also discussed by Stoney. Stoney admits that the situation may be

a coincidence, but that the 'diagnosis does seem to indicate once again the far-reaching effects upon the thirteen-year-old Enid of her father's departure' (Stoney, 1992:81).

These opinions reflect the discourses of a particular era and, from a contemporary medical and psychological perspective, can be described as limited. The trauma of her parents' separation may have influenced Blyton's development and maturity, however, it is unlikely that the necessary hormone production – responsible for the development of sex organs – would be impeded to such a great extent as to cause long-term developmental problems. Hormone production, and thus development, would continue after the period of trauma had passed. It is more likely that Blyton suffered from a physical problem.

Nevertheless, after hormone injections (Carpenter & Prichard, 1984:69), Blyton did eventually fall pregnant, and Gillian, her first daughter, was born in July 1931. In 1934 Blyton fell pregnant again. However, Blyton and Hugh Pollock were severely disappointed when she miscarried. Early the following year Blyton conceived for a third time (Stoney, 1992:105) and Imogen, Blyton's second child, was born in October 1935.

Rumours often describe Blyton as a 'bad' mother. This criticism of Blyton as a mother is linked to Imogen's memoir, *A Childhood at Green Hedges*, in which Blyton is portrayed as a 'neglectful mother' (Greenfield, 1998:55). It is interesting to note the difference in her output between the time of Gillian's birth and that of Imogen. When Gillian was born Blyton was producing about four books a year, while her output was closer to thirteen books a year when Imogen was born (Greenfield, 1998:56). This means that she may have spent a lot more time with Gillian as a child.

In contrast to Imogen, Gillian describes her mother as 'loving and attentive' (Greenfield, 1998:55). Furthermore, according to Gillian, her mother 'never

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worked at weekends and as little as possible on holiday' (Baverstock, 2000:26), an indication that she did have free time to spend with her family. Stoney points out that soon after Gillian's birth, a nanny was hired to care for the child for most of the day, even sleeping in the nursery at night (Stoney, 1992:96) and that Enid 'normally only spent an hour or so a day with her children' (Stoney, 1992:111;124). Blyton's routine after the birth of both her daughters is described as follows:

Soon after breakfast, if she was at home and not consulting publishers in London, she would give instructions to her cook on the family's meals and then start writing on the verandah overlooking the garden, or in an armchair by the fire.... She had usually written between six and ten thousand words by five o' clock, with only a short break for lunch on a tray.... Then it was time for her children.

(Stoney, 1992:123)

This must also be examined in the light of the discourse of the time. In the 1930s and 1940s it was deemed acceptable for middle- and upper-class parents to leave their children with servants for most of the day. As a governess in Surrey, Blyton would have spent more time with the children in her care than their own parents would have. It is contemporary discourse that dictates that parents need to spend a great deal of time with their children so as to reinforce positive development. This may also be linked to changes in discourse with regard to the acceptability of women going to work. (Even today, reflecting elements of the mother-as-homemaker discourse, working mothers are still blamed for developmental problems in children, as the children are left unattended and may display delinquent behaviour. Subsequently, modern discourses have shifted emphasis to shared parenting, claiming that mothers and fathers should spend more time with their children, a shift that has resulted in criticism of Blyton's depiction of family life.)

3.7 SUBVERTING DOMINANT DISCOURSES: SUCCESS AS A BUSINESSWOMAN

Regardless of whether she was a good mother or not, with two children and an extensive career, Blyton lived a very busy life, writing and publishing more each year – she has even been described as ‘determined to the point of ruthlessness’ (Carpenter & Prichard, 1984:69). In 1937 the magazine *Sunny Stories for Little People* – of which she was editor – was changed to *Enid Blyton’s Sunny Stories*. This was published in book form at a later date. Furthermore, *The adventures of the Wishing-Chair*, initially one of the serialised stories published in the magazine, was published as a book in 1937.

It is also interesting to note the use of her name in many of her titles. This was one of the clever business decisions made by Enid Blyton. Having her name in several of her titles, as well as the prominent display of her characteristic signature on the cover of her books, ensured that the name ‘Enid Blyton’ became familiar in households throughout the Commonwealth and eventually throughout the world. Thus, Blyton was not only a successful writer, but she was also a successful businesswoman and her shrewd business sense contributed to her success as a best-selling author. Blyton ‘had outstanding business acumen and knew how to make the very most out of what talent she had’ (Carpenter & Prichard, 1984:69).

When she was in her fifties Blyton employed an agent for the first time. Before that, Blyton handled all correspondence with publishers and all business decisions personally. She has been described as having a phenomenal memory and was able to recall easily details of correspondence that may have been carried out several months earlier, without having to refer to files or notes. It was possible for Blyton to ‘refer to certain paragraphs of letters she had written six or even twelve months previously [and] she could always remember the terms under which she had signed contracts with editors and publishers’ (Stoney,

1992:145). This can only be described as exceptional, considering that she kept no copies of these letters (Greenfield, 1998:50). Furthermore, Blyton was intimately involved in all the decisions made about her books, including the pictures and colours used on the covers. An example of her involvement in the cover designs of her books is the use of the same train on the original covers of the *Noddy* books, emphasising the idea of a series (Druce, 1992:19). Furthermore, she 'insisted always on wide margins, good line spacing, large, clear print and plenty of pictures' (Stoney, 1992:144).

In 1938 Enid Blyton published her first series book – *The secret island* – which was followed by four more *Secret* books over the next few years. The series books (discussed in Chapter Five) would ultimately prove to be those for which Blyton is most often remembered. Also, the concept of a series assured readers that they would be getting something similar to the last book in the series that they had read. Consequently, if readers enjoyed one book in the series, they would be likely to enjoy the others because they followed the same structure. According to Druce, 'once she had begun a series, it was to become Enid Blyton's unvarying practice to sit down and write a new volume each year' (Druce, 1992:16) ensuring that her readers had a continuous supply of their favourite characters (see Appendix 2). This allowed the readers to develop a horizon of expectation about Blyton's books and may be linked to her use of formula writing techniques.

Series books are of advantage to both the consumer and publisher. On the one hand, the reader knows what to expect and is unlikely to be disappointed (Ray, 1974:139). On the other hand, the publisher knows that new books in the series will contribute to an established market (Ray, 1974:139). Druce (1992:111) also points out the commercial advantages of the series formula: advertising can be prepared in advance as there is a relatively well-defined audience, and the budget is often generous as the book is expected to perform as well as its predecessors did. The commercial success of the series book was reinforced by

the expansion of the children's paperback market (Ray, 1974:148), which introduced more affordable book and, therefore, contributed considerably to book sales, as children could now afford to purchase books with their pocket money.

Each series of books features the same set of main characters. Most of the adventure books do not follow on from each other – and, as discussed in Chapter Five (Section 5.2.1), form a cluster (Druce, 1992:113) – therefore, readers are able to read the books in no particular order. Even though the school books do follow on from each other – forming a sequence (Druce, 1992:112) – each book in the series reaches its own conclusion, therefore the books do not *have* to be read in consecutive order. In this way Blyton catered for readers who might borrow the books from the library, or from friends, and those who might have difficulty in reading the books in consecutive order.

In addition, the development of the various series also ensured that Blyton was able to cater for readers of different ages. As discussed in Chapter One (Section 1.3), the *Secret Seven* series is directed at young children, between eight and nine years, the *Famous Five* is directed at readers between nine and thirteen years, and the *Adventure* series for those between thirteen and fifteen years. This means that as readers grew older they could simply move on to the next Blyton series, rather than move to another author.

3.8 BLYTON DURING AND AFTER THE WAR: CHANGING DISCOURSES

In 1939 Britain went to war again and it became more difficult for writers to publish books. Paper shortages were common and publishing houses were inclined to publish only books that were sure to sell. This situation did not have a particularly negative effect on Blyton's output or level of publication, as she was already a well-established author with 69 titles to her name (Druce, 1992:13). Blyton also had a good relationship with several publishing houses, not limiting her production by working with only one publisher. Notwithstanding the various

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restrictions of the war, the 1940s were the start of Blyton's most prolific period of writing, and by the end of 1945 Enid Blyton had published 167 titles in total (Druce, 1992:15). (In the 1950s 'she was averaging over 50 titles a year! – more than one a week' (Rudd, s.a.:3).)

Blyton did not allow the wartime difficulties to slow her down: she published *Mary Mouse and the Dolls House* using paper off-cuts. In 1940 Blyton published one of her first school series – *The Naughtiest Girl in School* – the popularity of which resulted in the publication of other popular school series such as the *St Clare's* series (the first book published in 1941) and the *Malory Towers* series. *First term at Malory Towers* was published in 1946 – a clear indication of the ongoing popularity of Enid Blyton's stories through and after the war.

Blyton's support of the war effort was reflected in her work and thus in the magazines and publications in which her work was published. In her column she supported the involvement of her readers in the war effort – she encouraged her readers to knit squares which were then sewn together as blankets and later distributed to the Red Cross and other organisations. Blyton also promoted the development of vegetable gardens in place of flowerbeds in the gardens of her readers (Stoney, 1992:126,127). This is significant in terms of the reflection of discourses in literature, as it indicates that Blyton's point of view in fact presented a dominant discourse in itself that influenced the perceptions and behaviour of her readers.

Enid Blyton was a very wealthy and famous woman. In fact, she and Agatha Christie were the two richest women writers of their time (Greenfield, 1998:81). It is understandable that Hugh Pollock may have been uncomfortable with this situation, taking into account the implied conventions of the time – husbands supported the family economically, not wives. Blyton's personal economic success subverted the traditional power relations and discourses about stereotypical gender roles of the time.

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According to Druce, while Blyton became a successful businesswoman, Pollock had become an 'alcoholic' (Druce, 1992:13). Stoney describes Pollock's drinking problem as an attempt to find 'temporary relief' (Stoney, 1992:103) from the horrors he had experienced while in military service during the First World War – the threat of a second war had led to Pollock's becoming increasingly depressed and turning to alcohol as a means of comfort (Stoney, 1992:116). Greenfield believes that the tension Pollock was experiencing – tension that led to his increased consumption of alcohol – was work-related stress (Greenfield, 1998:25). It is also possible to speculate that Blyton's success as a businesswoman may have placed further strain on their marriage. Nevertheless, a drinking problem would have been deemed socially unacceptable and would have placed tension on the Pollocks' marriage. This marital tension was aggravated when, in 1940, Hugh Pollock joined his old regiment against his wife's wishes (Druce, 1992:13). He was posted in London, not far from their home; however, as a result of the physical and emotional distance between the couple, both sought alternative companions. There were rumours of affairs – marital infidelities by both Enid Blyton and Hugh Pollock (Stoney, 1992:132,133).

In the early 1940s Enid Blyton met a surgeon named Kenneth Darrell Waters and, according to Stoney (1992:133), 'from the moment of their meeting, Enid knew that there was now no chance of reconciliation' with her husband. In 1942 Enid Blyton and Hugh Pollock were divorced. Considering her public status, Blyton asked Pollock if her infidelity could remain private and, thus, she would divorce him (Stoney, 1992:133), as both infidelity and divorce were unacceptable in terms of the dominant discourses of the time and would have reflected negatively on Blyton's *persona*. Pollock accepted the arrangement and it was agreed that he would be allowed to see his children regularly (Stoney, 1992:134; Druce, 1992:13). This arrangement did not turn out as planned and after the divorce Gillian and Imogen did not see their father again (Druce, 1992:13; Greenfield, 1998:33). In 1943 Enid Blyton married Kenneth Darrell Waters. Gillian and Imogen's surname was changed to Darrell Waters (Druce, 1992:13; Stoney,

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1992:134; Greenfield, 1998:57). Blyton kept the news of her divorce and subsequent remarriage from her readers. Furthermore, no mention is made of Pollock in her autobiography (Druce, 1992:14). This may have been an attempt by Blyton in part to conform to dominant discourses of time, and in part an attempt to ignore traumatic events as she had done before.

Although Blyton and Darrell Waters both had strong wills, which resulted in several clashes early in their relationship, these clashes were quickly resolved and the couple seemed 'intensely happy' (Greenfield, 1998:35). Darrell Waters insisted on being involved in all things in which he believed he had a part and would not allow Blyton to have her own way all the time. He was also very proud of Blyton, resulting in a mutual feeling of need and trust – he was genuinely interested in her work. Furthermore, they shared interests such as working in the garden (Stoney, 1992:136,137) and playing golf. The marriage seemed ideal and in 1945 Blyton discovered that she was pregnant. The couple were disappointed when she miscarried (Stoney, 1992:138).

In the years during and following the war, Blyton's popularity grew and she increased her output. The first book in the *Mystery* series – *The mystery of the burnt cottage* – was published in 1943 and in 1944 Blyton published *The island of adventure* – the first of eight *Adventure* books published over eleven years. In 1945 she stopped writing her 'Children's Page' for *Teacher's World* magazine. Then, in 1949, after correspondence with Harmsen Van der Beek, a Dutch artist and the illustrator of the *Noddy* books, Blyton published the first book in what was to become one of her most widely criticised series – the *Noddy* series. This year is described as one of her most prolific, with the publication of thirty-three titles (Druce, 1992:17,18), including the first *Secret Seven* book – *The Secret Seven*. This brought the total number of books written by Enid Blyton by 1949 to 240 (Greenfield, 1998:38).

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There was a definite change in the discourse of society after the war and the increase in the quantity and popularity of her books brought about disputes over their quality. The early 1950s mark the start of the large amount of criticism levelled at Enid Blyton (Druce, 1992:35). Initially, this criticism had little effect on her vast popularity and the 'Famous Five Club', started in 1952, had a membership of 220 000 by 1974, with membership increasing at a rate of 6 000 new members per year (Druce, 1992:16,17). In spite of the criticism directed at Blyton in the 1950s, her popularity was unmistakable, as many of her books were translated into various European languages (Baverstock, 2000:25). During this period, Blyton began to prepare *Noddy* scripts for television, as well as *Famous Five* scripts for movies (Baverstock, 2000:25). *Noddy* featured in 'one of the first puppet series to be shown' (Stoney, 1992:164) on British commercial television. Darrell Waters Limited – a company set up by Enid Blyton and Kenneth Darrell Waters – to which all Blyton's existing and future copyrights were assigned (Greenfield, 1998:38) was established in 1950. (The company was changed to Enid Blyton Limited in 1996). In 1952 Enid Blyton left the *Sunny Stories* magazine (Greenfield, 1998:39; Baverstock, 2000:24) to start *The Enid Blyton Magazine*, a fortnightly publication that ran until 1959, consisting of 'virtually all Enid's own work', comprising 'short stories, articles, puzzles and games' (Greenfield, 1998:40).

In the 1950s Blyton still refused to hire a secretary, even though her daily post-bag was overflowing. As a compromise, she 'agreed to use postcards with a printed message that she could sign...to acknowledge letters that did not need a long reply' (Baverstock, 2000:24). She only hired a literary agent – George Greenfield – in 1953 (Greenfield, 1998:39). It was Greenfield's advice that Blyton sought when in 1954 she began to consider the idea of writing a pantomime (Greenfield, 1998:40; Stoney, 1992:165), *Noddy in Toyland*, which premiered during the Christmas holidays of 1954, and 'broke all attendance records during its first season' (Stoney, 1992:167). The pantomime went on to fill theatres for several years after its release (Greenfield, 1998:42). Following the success of

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Noddy in Toyland, Blyton wrote a second play – *The Famous Five* – directed at an older child audience. *The Famous Five* premiered in theatres in the 1955 Christmas season.

When Enid Blyton reached the age of sixty, in 1957, she began to experience what were described as attacks of ‘breathlessness’. Kenneth Darrell Waters rushed her to a cardiologist after the first of these attacks, but the doctor maintained that Blyton had merely suffered from severe indigestion. Darrell Waters told Blyton’s close family and friends that she had suffered a minor heart attack (Greenfield, 1998:47). Greenfield believes that this was an attempt by Kenneth Darrell Waters to get his wife to ‘slow down’ (Greenfield, 1998:47). Stoney argues that perhaps Darrell Waters, a well-renowned surgeon, may justifiably not have agreed with the diagnosis of the cardiologist (Stoney, 1992:177). However, Stoney suggests that Darrell Waters ‘had already noticed certain signs in her behaviour which indicated a breakdown in her health...and sought to delay this in some way by curtailing her activities’ (Stoney, 1992:177).

Blyton’s age and increasing health problems did not severely affect her busy lifestyle; her husband Kenneth was a doctor and she believed herself to be in good hands. By 1959 she did, however, stop the publication of *The Enid Blyton Magazine*, but not for lack of popularity – by this stage 20 million copies of the *Noddy* books had been sold in England alone (Druce, 1992:20). There were noticeable problems with her health and her exceptional memory began to falter (Stoney, 1992:181). The first signs of what may have been Alzheimer’s disease were evident in Enid Blyton in 1960 (Greenfield, 1998:61), yet her condition was kept a secret. Gradually, Blyton became increasingly ill, and Greenfield tells of how she ‘would type out old published stories and, later, confusing them with original scripts send them to [him] to place with a publisher’ (Greenfield, 1998:62). *Five are together again* was the last book to be written by Enid Blyton and it was published in 1963. ‘[S]he was unable write anything after 1963’ (Baverstock, 2000:31). Kenneth Darrell Waters was also a very ill man and after

his death in September 1967 Blyton's health began to decline far more rapidly, 'both physically and mentally' (Stoney, 1992:184). Eventually she was placed in a nursing home and she died of a heart attack in her sleep on 28 November 1968.

3.9 CONCLUSION

Some of the discourses that shaped and surrounded Enid Blyton's life appear to be reflected in her texts. It is clear that there are several examples in her texts that can be linked to events in her life and her own interpretations of those events in terms of the discourses of the time. The most obvious of these is the influence of both her training as a teacher and her father's love of the outdoors on the portrayal of nature in Blyton's books. Furthermore, the great numbers of references to George in the *Famous Five* series as being based on Blyton (Stoney, 1992:157) – a self-portrait (Druce, 1992:120) – are indicative of the correlation between Blyton's life and her writing. In addition, Blyton's troubled family life and her relationship with her parents can also be linked to the portrayal of adults and other aspects of her books. (This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.)

Blyton's life has also been examined in terms of her success in business. She excelled at self-promotion, was involved in the publishing processes of her books and managed to be regarded as influential in educational spheres, regardless of her arguable lack of extensive educational experience (Druce, 1992:287).

Blyton's subversion of traditional female roles in some books is evidence of her rejection of the dominant gender-biased discourse of her generation, as is her own independence as a successful businesswoman. As a child, Blyton's evasion of domestic activities was a subversion of traditional conventions of society at the time, while her divorce from Hugh Pollock definitely opposed acceptable social norms. On the other hand, the *persona* created by Blyton is evidence of her attempts to present an idealised image of herself to the public, and thus an

indication of her desire to make her public image conform to traditional views of wives and mothers.

Her horizon of expectation was influenced by her childhood and the years in which she wrote. These years of her life are significant in terms of the great number of changes that took place in the dominant discourses of society. These include changes that can be linked to the turn of the century, technological development, the First and Second World Wars and increased awareness of human rights and political correctness.

In this chapter the production of the text has been examined in terms of the discourses surrounding Blyton. In the next chapter the reception of Blyton's books, by adults – parents, teachers and critics – and children, is examined.

CHAPTER FOUR

RECEPTION OF ENID BLYTON:

SOCIAL AND LITERARY HORIZONS OF EXPECTATION

With Blyton, that audience was that huge tribe of children, sitting around listening, having their deeds celebrated, while adults are seen as what Kenneth Grahame disparagingly calls 'the Olympians'.

David Rudd (2000:165)

4.1 INTRODUCTION

When one mentions Enid Blyton in adult conversation, someone is bound to bring up the fact that she has been criticised by a multitude of sources, with accusations that include 'racism, chauvinism, [and] anti-feminism' (Greenfield, 1998:72). Blyton wrote for children, but she has been criticised by parents, teachers, librarians and literary critics. Adult discussions about Blyton tend to question whether or not her writing is beneficial for children. Druce (1992:38) cites some of the criticism which argues that Blyton's work reduces everything to a simplistic level, resulting in

undemanding language [that]...does not stretch a reader's vocabulary;...[while] the simplicity of the events and actions in her tales does not stimulate a child's imagination; her moralizing is too facile, and is incorporated into the story in too mechanical a fashion; and...her picture is a false one, because "life is not like that".

The accusations of her alleged simplicity are not the only accusations directed at Blyton. Her

popularity is frequently equated with poor quality and, for some critics, Blyton is far too popular with her readers. Above all, she was too prolific...

(Druce, 1992:38)

The wide range of critics and criticism of Blyton means that she was criticised from both a 'literary perspective' and a 'socially concerned' one (Rudd, s.a.:4), by 'book people...primarily concerned with books [as well as] child people...primarily concerned with children' (Townsend, 1990:62). This chapter focuses on the reception of Enid Blyton by adults and children and the reasons for criticism and

popularity of Blyton. Both literary and social critics are taken into account, in view of the changing discourses that surround the writing of Blyton and the reception of her texts, as are the discrepancies in the reception of Blyton by adults and children.

Though Blyton has been criticised by both literary and social critics, the 'viewpoints of psychologists, sociologists, and educationalists of various descriptions have rather little in common with each other or with those whose approach is mainly literary' (Townsend, 1990:59). Druce (1992:37) points out Sheila Ray's observation that social and literary critics often contradict each other when they examine aspects of Blyton's work. In an example that illustrates such contradictions, Rudd (2000:46) points out that Bernstein claims that Blyton's language is 'characteristic of the working-class', while Dixon claims that it is that of the middle class.

The debate between literary and educational views of children's literature is an ongoing one (Watson, 2000a:3) and can be linked to the historical debate about the benefits of instruction and amusement in literature for children. In the past, children's books were 'heavily didactic...designed to mould children intellectually or politically. Generally it has been assumed that children's books now represent – or should represent – freedom of thought' (Hunt, 1991a:28). However, in practice, despite this shift in the discourses of literary criticism, children's books continue 'to be used for practical purposes such as education or socialisation' (Hunt, 1991a:53), and inevitably reinforce the dominant discourses.

At the height of her career, Blyton 'defined' (Watson, 2000a:7) children's literature. Both children and adults regarded Blyton with much respect in the 1930s and 1940s. Blyton was read almost exclusively by children and she has been referred to as 'a marker of childhood' (Rudd, 2000:200). Many children measured their growth by her series books, growing towards new characters and books directed at older children. After the Second World War there was a change

in discourses. Although Blyton remained popular with children, some adults began to view her work with distaste. Druce (1992:36) refers to Geoffrey Trease's remarks describing a 'lack of enthusiasm for Blyton's books' among adult critics in 1948. However, Rudd (2000:109) believes that it was only 'in the sixties that social criticism of Blyton's books began to be heard'.

4.2 LITERARY CRITICISM

As pointed out in Chapter Two (Section 2.4), literary critics accord a text value according to the criteria set out by literary discourses. Children, who have had relatively little exposure to literary discourses as a result of their limited life experience, are unlikely to include literary criteria in their horizons of expectation. On the other hand, adults who have had exposure to literary discourse will include these criteria in their horizons. This highlights the discrepancy between the opinions of adults and children, especially in the reception of Blyton.

In 1923 Blyton's poems were included in a collection including works by critically acclaimed authors such as Walter de la Mare and Rudyard Kipling (Druce, 1992:31). Blyton's popular *Adventure* series won an award in America (Rudd, s.a.:2;3) in 1947 (Stoney, 1992:141). Nevertheless, criticism of Blyton's literary quality became increasingly ferocious in the 1950s. However, Hunt points out that, in general, the children's books that are regarded as literary, or 'have been awarded the highest prizes, are most likely to remain unread by children; the others, like Enid Blyton or Roald Dahl or Judy Blume, are the most popular' (Hunt, 1994:6).

4.2.1 Reasons for literary criticism of Blyton

Enid Blyton was criticised, and allegedly banned, for various reasons, including the fact that the simple events and simple language do not stretch the reader's imagination and vocabulary, the fact that

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the moral concepts are too neatly encapsulated, that life is not like this and because the books are too popular.

(Ray, 1982:81)

'[Critics also] disliked her style with its limited vocabulary' (Stoney, 1992:169), and Druce includes her 'tendency to reduce everything to a simplistic level' (Druce, 1992:38) among objections made by critics.

In this study different aspects of Blyton's writing are discussed in terms of the literary criticism of her work. These aspects include the following: simplistic language and style; predictable plots and events; poor characterisation; few challenges to the imagination and intellect of the reader; the role of Blyton's literature as escapist literature; and the quantity of the literature produced by Blyton.

4.2.1.1 *Simple language and style*

Literary critics condemn Blyton for her use of simple language and an impoverished vocabulary. Blyton is also accused of using too much dialogue in her texts. The supposed lack of stimulating language can be linked to the belief that her books do not assist children in the development of language skills. This contradicts claims that Blyton's books are instrumental in the development of reading skills (Ray, 1982:48,98; Greenfield, 1998:100). Wall defends Blyton, claiming that 'her vocabulary, though simple and too often repetitive, is not patronisingly limited. Unsubtle and unstimulating though it may be, Blyton's prose is direct and practical, neither cliché-ridden nor pretentious' (Wall, 1991:190). Rudd (2000:47) comments on the 'predictability' of Blyton's vocabulary, arguing that she repeatedly uses the same words. Blyton's characters tend to devour 'lashings' of their favourite food, while the children refer to both villains and each other as 'idiots', and 'fatheads'.

Literary critics are also firm in their criticism of Blyton's style. There are some who believe that, although Blyton addresses a child audience, this audience

needs to be challenged and, thus, the language used in the text should encourage the audience to expand and develop their vocabulary. Critics claim that Blyton's texts 'did not exercise sufficiently the minds of their young readers' (Greenfield, 1998:44). However, according to Rudd, this is 'just how children do talk' (Rudd, 2000:46).

The lack of figurative language in her work is also a point of criticism. However, on a closer examination of the texts one does encounter figurative (albeit clichéd) language. In the *Secret Seven* figurative language is used when the children clear out the shed for a Secret Seven meeting:

"Oh, there'll be seven of us," said Peter. "Many hands make light work, you know."
"You be careful that too many cooks don't spoil the broth," said the man.

(*Secret Seven fireworks*, 11)

The use of figurative language is also evident in *Five on Kirrin Island again* when, in search of Uncle Quentin, Julian points out that 'If Mahomet won't come to the mountain, then the mountain must go to Mahomet' (32). When George thinks that Dick is overreacting about something, she claims that he is 'making a mountain out of a molehill' (*Five on Kirrin Island again*, 63). In *Five fall into adventure* the 'red poppies danced along the way' (9) and in *Five go off to camp*, Julian is woken by the sun putting its 'warm fingers in at his tent opening' (25) while in *Five go to Smuggler's Top* the 'rope ladder was shaken down the hole...like an uncoiling snake' (59). Nevertheless, it could be argued that a lack of originality in Blyton's figurative language is evident when earlier in the same story carpets that are lifted by the wind are described as having 'snakes wriggling underneath them' (*Five go to Smuggler's Top*, 11).

Dixon (in Rudd, 2000:48) criticises the fact that the sea, in Blyton's stories, repeatedly 'shone as blue as cornflowers' (as it does in *Five have a wonderful time*, 59, and *Five fall into adventure*, 9), yet this simile (simple though it may be) is evidence of the figurative language which Blyton's texts allegedly lack. Blyton uses descriptive language to refer to a storm as 'powerful and most

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majestic...sweeping over the hills and sea, rumbling all around, and tearing the sky in half with flashes of lightning' (*Five go down to the sea*, 69-70). Hence, even though it might be clichéd, on close inspection, there is evidence of descriptive and figurative language in Blyton's work.

4.2.1.2 *Predictable plot and events*

Blyton is also accused of making the events in her stories too elementary. Ray (1982:43) refers to a librarian who did not think it necessary to stock all of Blyton's books because the librarian felt that Blyton 'used a certain number of basic plots and...that the library did not need to have every variation of the theme'. The idea of a variation on a theme is supported by Druce's claim that the '*Famous Five* and *Secret Seven* series closely resemble one another in terms of content and style' (Druce, 1992:18).

According to Ray (1982:201), Blyton's 'plots are well constructed and undoubtedly exciting, but...to an adult reader, they are often incredible', therefore an adult reader might find grounds for criticism of Blyton. However, Tucker (in Rudd, 2000:52) believes that even though Blyton's endings are 'always predictable, the details in between are not, and for a time can keep even an older reader guessing'. The formulaic structure of Blyton's plots is one of the techniques used by Blyton that holds a certain appeal for children, and is discussed further in Chapter Five (Section 5.3.3) of this study.

4.2.1.3 *Stereotypical characters*

Although, like the plot, Blyton's characters are examined further in Chapter Five, in this chapter the characters are examined in terms of the criticism directed at them. Blyton is accused of creating insignificant and 'superficial' (Ray, 1982:56) characters. There are a number of 'stock characters' (Rudd, 2000:195), like parents, who fill in the background and are not essential to the story. 'Adult

characters are rather stereotyped' (Ray, 1982:162) – they usually play the role of helpful farmers and their wives, shop assistants, teachers, policemen and servants, as well as typical villains, who often have rough features and a scar across their cheek.

These accusations of stereotyped characters also refer to protagonists such as George, supposedly a stereotypical tomboy, Anne, a stereotypical girl, and other characters who fulfil the role of leader, such as Julian in the *Famous Five*. In the *Secret Seven* the characters are very simple and the 'seven children are almost indistinguishable from one another' (Ray, 1982:171). This interchangeable nature of the characters suggests a lack of character development. In the *Five Find-Outers* series, Fatty and Bets are the only characters who seem to stand out, therefore the only characters who show evidence of character development.

One of the most famous pieces of criticism of Blyton was voiced by Colin Welsh in 1958 when he described *Noddy* as 'the most egocentric, joyless, snivelling and pious anti-hero in the history of British fiction' (Welsh, in Stoney, 1992:170; Greenfield, 1998:44). Furthermore, Welsh claimed that if 'Noddy is "like the children themselves" [*Enid's own description*] it is the most unpleasant child that he most resembles' (Welsh, in Stoney, 1992:170, Welsh's insertion).

In defence of Blyton, it may be argued that in traditional folk tales stereotypical characters are used to perform actions that lead to a moral conclusion and 'folklore plays a most important role in children's literature' (Singer, 1994:151). It may be argued that Blyton's characters are similar to those in folk tales as Blyton's characters seldom need further development, 'what their characteristics beyond this might be are not relevant to the story' (Rudd, 2000:51). Although simple, they are good or bad (Ray, 1982:201), leaving little opportunity for the child reader to become confused as to the moral implications of the story. (Folk tales stem from an oral tradition and aspects of Blyton's work can be related to

the oral tradition, as discussed when her techniques are more closely examined in Chapter Five, Section 5.3).

Blyton also successfully manipulates some of the stereotypes in her stories and there are incidents where the character that the reader is led to believe is the villain ultimately turns out to be innocent. This use of a distractor, or a false suspect, is common in detective fiction. In *Five go to Smuggler's Top* the children are particularly suspicious of Sooty's stepfather. However, Mr Lenoir, a suspicious and grumpy man, is found to be completely innocent. In *The mystery of the burnt cottage* the children have four suspects (87), yet the character who turns out to be the villain is the respectable Mr Hick, who has set fire to his own cottage. The motive of the characters is also used to manipulate stereotypes, as is evident in *Puzzle for the Secret Seven* (89) in which the father steals a violin for his blind son Benny after their shack burns down and the boy loses his banjo.

Although many criticise Blyton for her poor characterisation, there are several incidents where the protagonists show evidence of basic character growth. This occurs when the children learn from their mistakes through events in the stories. In the first *Famous Five* book, *Five on a treasure island*, Anne almost reveals that George keeps Timmy as a pet against her parents' wishes, resulting in tension between Anne and George. Similar situations always result in Anne's being severely reprimanded by the other children. In later books Anne progressively makes fewer mistakes of this kind. George is described as 'a difficult child' who regularly sulks or loses her temper in *Five on a treasure island*, the first of the Five's adventures. In later books she is still temperamental, but she shows greater restraint, as well as remorse, and she apologises for her behaviour. In *Five on Kirrin Island again* even though 'George was in a very bad temper', she 'tried to respond to Dick's friendliness' (87). The development of George's character seems intentional on the part of Blyton; however, whether the development of Anne is intentional on the part of Blyton cannot be determined conclusively. A similar case can be made for Dinah in the *Adventure* series. She

is also hot-tempered, dislikes animals, but learns to tolerate her brother and his bizarre collection of pets.

In particular, Blyton's school series show more evidence of character growth than the adventure books. In *Second form at Malory Towers*, Daphne admits to stealing from the other girls, yet her heroic behaviour in risking her life for Mary-Lou allows the other girls to see her true integrity and leads them to show support for her. Daphne learns to be herself and in the final chapter she 'smiled for the first time, and this time it was a real smile, a sincere one, not one turned on for the sake of being charming' (165). Zerelda, the pretentious American girl in *Third year at Malory Towers*, finds herself enjoying boisterous childish behaviour towards the end of the story, criticising herself for being an 'idiot' (162), even though 'a week ago she would have turned her nose up at such rowdiness' (161). We are even told that she tied 'her hair back firmly', in contrast with the description of her in the opening chapter as having styled hair 'with curls cascading over her shoulders' (5). In *Last term at Malory Towers*, Amanda – a particularly good sportswoman – is not only ruthless in her coaching of fellow pupil June, but also reckless and overconfident about her own abilities. When she swims out to sea she is swept onto the rocks, only to be rescued by June. Amanda learns from her mistakes, and is not only apologetic and humbled, but encourages June to succeed (147).

Similarly, in *The O'Sullivan twins*, after it is discovered that Margery has been expelled from many other schools, rude and sullen Margery is immediately and falsely accused of playing a number of nasty tricks on Pat. In this case both Margery and Erica, the actual culprit, present evidence of strong character. Margery remains quiet about her innocence and risks her life for Erica, while Erica eventually admits guilt (116) after she is rescued from a fire by Margery. Even though the events in *Claudine at St Clare's* are not as dramatic, there is still evidence of growth as wealthy and spoilt Angela Favourleigh tearfully promises

to try to be nicer to her fellow students (155) towards the end of the book, after having a number of hurtful things to say to others.

4.2.1.4 *Lack of imagination and intellect*

As a consequence of her use of simple language and plots, Blyton is also accused of not challenging the reader intellectually. This may be a disadvantage, as all events in childhood (including reading) provide opportunities for learning and, therefore, cognitive development by reading challenging texts should be encouraged. Blyton's books allegedly do not challenge and encourage the development of the imagination of the child reader: 'Little imaginative effort is needed' (Wall, 1991:206). The villain is supposedly obvious and the reader is often able to solve the mystery before the characters do. However, if the accusations that the reader is able to solve the mystery are true, it means that the reader becomes involved in the text – a technique used by Blyton – and, therefore, a child reader might be attracted to Blyton's texts because he/she feels involved in the story. This appeals to the need of the young child to have a sense of belonging.

In a discussion of the function of stories, Culler (1997:87) refers to Aristotle's belief that stories give pleasure. Whether this pleasure is the joy of escape into a fictional world, the artistic pleasure of reading a well-constructed text, or intellectual stimulation and satisfaction of knowledge offered by an academic text (as discussed in Chapter Two, Section 2.4) may be debated. Townsend (1990:60) emphasises that, above all, literature offers 'enjoyment not only in the shallow sense of easy pleasure' but also in the skill used in the creation of art and in the appeal to the imagination of the reader. Townsend also highlights the

acceptance of literary experience as having value in itself for the general enrichment of life, over and above any virtue that may be claimed for it as a means to a non-literary end.

(Townsend, 1990:59)

A reader chooses to read a text because this text offers him/her some pleasure and enjoyment. Lukens (1995:xi) claims that '[c]hildren, like adults, read to explore the world, to escape the confining present, to discover themselves, to become someone else. '[L]iterature for children can and should provide the same enjoyment and understanding as does literature for adults' (Lukens, 1995:7). She adds:

By reading for pleasure the child reader may develop an enjoyment of reading, a good foundation for the development of intellectual and cognitive skills in other areas of reading.

(Lukens, 1995:7)

4.2.1.5 *Escapism and entertainment*

Blyton was criticised for writing 'light escapist literature' literature – however, Blyton 'undoubtedly entertained the people she meant to entertain' (Ray, 1982:56). Historically, children's literature was used primarily for education, yet, when Blyton reached the peak of her career, the value of children's literature as 'legitimate entertainment' (Wall, 1991:42) was already firmly established. Changes in discourse in the late 1800s led to an increase in the amusement and entertainment value of children's literature. This makes the criticism of her entertainment value rather ironic as she can be described as conforming to dominant discourses of the time when she wrote.

An advantage of a lack of intellectual challenge is that readers are able to relax and escape by reading 'light escapist literature' (Ray, 1982:38). Lukens (1995:1) believes that 'our first motive for reading a novel or a poem is personal pleasure'. Ray makes the point that 'children need Blyton for the same reasons that adults read Agatha Christie when they want to dip into something well ordered and predictable' (Ray, 1982:103).

Much children's fiction has been described as 'rubbish' by literary critics. Ray refers to a librarian who claimed that 'Enid Blyton was "rubbish"' (Ray, 1982:54). Dickinson (1973:101) defines 'rubbish' as 'all forms of reading matter which

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contain to the adult eye no visible value, either aesthetic or educational'. This can be linked to a discussion by Watson, who draws attention to the fact that, although there is a contemporary tendency to view Blyton in a favourable light, there was a time when her books were regarded as 'little better than *rubbish*' (Watson, 2000a:4). Watson further discusses the concept of 'rubbish' in relation to children's literature by drawing attention to the fact that 'rubbish' can be looked at from several perspectives. It is described by some as 'bad writing', and by others as 'mostly harmless'. There are those who believe that 'you cannot appreciate good writing if you have no experience of bad', while others refer to 'rubbish' as 'popular fiction' and focus on the value of such literature in 'transitional reading, possibly leading later to a developing interest in more nourishing literature' (Watson, 2000a:4). On the other hand, there are those, like Singer (1994:150), who believe that child readers are discerning and able to discriminate. Thus children choose what they read, selecting light reading when they want to escape (Watson, 2000a:4).

In 'A defence of rubbish' (1973), Dickinson makes six points that are similar to those of Watson. Firstly, Dickinson believes that children should be able to access all parts of culture, good and bad, and thereby their lives will be 'enriched' (Dickinson, 1973:101). With this in mind Dickinson's second point is that the child should share and feel part of this culture, developing a sense of belonging even if 'the group interest [is] mostly rubbish'. Thirdly, children who are presented with a variety of samples will be able to 'learn the art of comparison, and subconsciously acquire critical standards' – thus, children may learn to distinguish between good and bad. Fourthly, Dickinson emphasises the child's need for security and the fact that predictable, simple texts provide this. Fifthly, he claims that it is also important to include a certain amount of variety in a child's scope of reading and 'rubbish' successfully provides this. Dickinson's sixth and final point is that that which is often described as 'rubbish' by adults may have some value for the child reader that is overlooked by a more mature reader (Dickinson, 1973:101-103). In other words, a child may derive pleasure, and

even learning, from a text that is described as ‘rubbish’ by an adult. Although there are those who view Blyton’s books as ‘rubbish’ there are advantages to allowing a child to read ‘rubbish’ and what adults regard as rubbish is not necessarily viewed as such by children.

4.2.1.6 *Quality versus quantity*

Blyton has even been criticised for writing too much. According to Anthony Kamm, Blyton’s editor at Brockhampton Press, ‘if Enid Blyton had written only fifty books instead of many hundreds, she would probably have been hailed as the educationalist which at heart she certainly is’ (Kamm, in Druce, 1992:35).

If one looks at her writing process, as discussed in Chapter Three (Section 3.5), it is easier to believe that she wrote such a great number of books. Nevertheless, Blyton’s great output ‘gave rise to the rumour that “Enid Blyton” was in fact a team of writers tapping away at their respective keyboards’ (Greenfield, 1998:45) and ‘queries about whether she wrote all the stories herself’ (Rudd, 2000:66). Welsh claimed that considering the pace at which Blyton wrote, ‘it is astonishing that her works make as much sense as they do’ (Welsh, in Druce, 1992:28).

It may be argued that children lack the knowledge and ability to judge what good literature is and, therefore, they are not able to choose literature that is ‘better’ than Blyton. However, this belief seems to categorise children as limited in their ability to reason and think and reflects Foucault’s ideas on the classification of individuals. Surveys have proven that Blyton’s readers are ‘discerning’ (Rudd, s.a.:7) and are able to recognise both fake ‘Blyton’ books – such as *The five in fancy dress* (1993), and *The Famous Five go on television* (1981) both by Claude Voilier – and contemporary changes made to Blyton’s books. Thus, a production line of writers churning out books with Enid Blyton’s name on the cover seems unlikely.

4.2.2 Changes in discourse: responses to literary criticism of Blyton

Druce argues that many criticisms of Blyton are 'not clearly articulated by those making them' (Druce, 1992:37). Rudd points out the irony that 'there seems to be a certain hypocrisy in critics' complaining about Blyton's lack of research in writing her stories, when they also omit this practice' (Rudd, 2000:6). Rudd makes seven points against the critics of Blyton. Firstly, Rudd accuses early critics of contradictory criticism – they only seem to have the anti-Blyton sentiment in common. Secondly, the different constructions or *personae* of Blyton are not taken into account by critics. Thirdly, Rudd points out that some faults Blyton is accused of are found in the writing of her critics. Fourthly, he criticises the lack of theoretical approaches used by critics. Fifthly, he believes that critics misread Blyton and, sixthly, that, because her work falls into the category of popular literature, it is often approached incorrectly. Finally, Rudd claims that the sensory appeal of her stories is overlooked by critics (Rudd, 2000:192-193).

If one chooses to look at Blyton from a purely literary perspective, it is possible to see the reasons for accusations of a poor literary style. The language is simple and direct. However, one must remember that when Blyton wrote and published books for children 'there was little activity in the field of criticism of children's books' (Ray, 1982:23), thus she wrote for her audience and paid little attention to literary critics. Blyton never claimed to be a literary writer (Rudd, 2000:46) and, therefore, it may be unfair of critics to judge her by literary standards. Greenfield (1998:75) believes that to

apply the strict rules of literary criticism to Enid Blyton's writing would be both unfair and absurd. Her forte was telling stories and her technique was adapted for that purpose. Her sentences tend to be simple and straightforward,...There are few adjectives...[and] [m]uch of the story development takes place through dialogue.

Blyton was severely criticised for her language and the fact that her simple style 'may make a child a lazy reader' (Ray, 1982:204). Wall points out that 'critics of fiction for children are concerned primarily with quality and suitability. But, lack of

understanding of the central importance of the narrator-narratee relationships in such fiction has led to uncertainties and misjudgements' (Wall, 1991:203). Blyton was 'always very aware of her child audience' (Wall, 1991:190). Often literary critics appear to ignore the audience when they examine children's literature. Yet, as discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.4.2), the one thing that makes children's literature different to other literature is the audience to whom it is addressed. This means that the approach of the author of children's books, the vocabulary and language used in the books, may need to be on a more 'simple' level than that of 'adult' literature because of the inexperienced child audience.

It is evident that Blyton's reputation has 'changed substantially' (Rudd, s.a.:5), both during her lifetime and after her death. The negative 'attitude [towards Blyton] is changing now that adults who loved her work when they were children are gaining positions of influence' (Wall, 1991:189). Rudd refers to the recent change in attitude towards Blyton as a 'new tolerance' (Rudd, 2000:34; Rudd, s.a.:4). This presents evidence of changes in the dominant discourse of society, and subsequent changes in the horizons of expectation of adults and children. 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). Ray noticed this in 1982, and claimed that Blyton's work might even enjoy 'classic status' (Ray, 1982:207) among future generations. In 1997, Anne Fine (in Greenfield, 1998:85) commented:

Enid Blyton should be saluted for her contribution to children's literacy by hooking millions of us on reading.

In this study the literary criticism of Blyton has been examined in terms of the reasons for the literary criticism, such as her use of language and literary devices such as plot development and characterisation. Social criticism is concerned with what is viewed as acceptable by society and the discussion of social criticism of Blyton includes a discussion of those who examined Blyton from a social perspective, such as librarians, teachers and parents. Furthermore, the reasons for social criticism – including racism, sexism and classism – are discussed in

view of Foucault's theories on dominant discourses, and Jauss's concept of horizons of expectation.

4.3 SOCIAL CRITICISM

As mentioned earlier, Blyton has also been criticised from a social perspective. While literary criticism focuses on her meeting the requirements of literary criteria as defined by literary discourse, social criticism examines her compliance with dominant social discourses in terms of culture, education and socialisation. As the distance between the time of writing and the reception of the texts by successive new generations of readers increases, problems of diachronic oppositions between the reader's horizons of expectation and Blyton's may increasingly arise.

'In terms of educational value, children's literature has much to contribute to the acquisition of cultural values' (Hunt, 1991a:19). One must also remember that '[c]hildren's books are not only used as a way of teaching the dominant culture, but as the basis for a huge range of educational projects' (Hunt, 1994:173). In the 1940s the dominant discourses contributed to Blyton's being regarded as an influential figure in the education of children (playing a role in normalization) and, therefore, her books were regarded in a positive manner. Yet, changes in discourse over the years have led to Blyton's being condemned by critics in the 1960s and 1970s, while further changes have led to greater tolerance and acceptance of Blyton by contemporary society.

In some ways, the changes in discourse have been beneficial to Blyton because she appears to market 'old-fashioned virtues' (Greenfield, 1998:82) which are in line with discourses that emphasise morality, family values, honesty, obedience and respect for one's elders. However, in accordance with candid and frank discourses in contemporary society, much modern children's literature encourages independence in children and the questioning of authority.

On the other hand, Ray draws attention to the fact that Blyton was not criticised 'on the grounds of bad language and unsuitable topics' (Ray, 1982:59) – in other words, none of her characters swear or curse. Formerly taboo topics that feature in contemporary children's literature, such as sex, divorce and abuse are, for the most part, left unexplored by Blyton. On the other hand, this has led to criticism of Blyton for her lack of realism.

Blyton is also old-fashioned in terms of the lack of politically correct behaviour in her stories and this is an aspect for which she has been severely criticised. She is criticised for creating child characters who

displayed petty, spiteful, vindictive – even cruel – behaviour towards their adversaries, who were usually of a different nationality or social background to her predominantly middle-class English heroes or heroines.

(Stoney, 1992:169)

However, before the different reasons for social criticism of Blyton are discussed, those who were most instrumental in the social criticism of Blyton – librarians, teachers and parents – need to be discussed briefly.

4.3.1 Social critics: librarians, teachers and parents

In the 1950s librarians were outspoken in their criticism of Blyton and were said to be instrumental in the supposed 'banning' of Blyton's books. Although it was widely believed that Blyton's books were banned, Druce draws attention to the fact that this ban was 'non-existent' (Druce, 1992:37). Ray (1982:57) points out that '[n]owhere was there a total "ban" on her books'. According to Rudd (2000:34), 'very few authorities actually banned Blyton'. Nevertheless, Stoney refers to 'the banning of Enid's books by libraries' (Stoney, 1992:170) and the fact that libraries did withdraw several of Blyton's books (Stoney, 1992:172). Some libraries claimed that 'Enid Blyton's great output made it necessary to be selective [because]...she wrote for such a wide age range...and the books flooded the market' (Ray, 1982:45).

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Ray tries to explain the criticism of Blyton by librarians by drawing attention to the limited guidance provided for librarians during the mid-1900s (Ray, 1982:24). Librarians were often 'self taught' (Ray, 1982:34) and 'lacked, both in their initial training and through post-qualification opportunities, external guidance about the standards to be applied to book selection...with few opportunities for specialist training in children's literature' (Ray, 1982:42).

Because the number of her books available in libraries was limited, there was an increase in the number of Blyton's books purchased (Rudd, 2000:35). Many parents protested 'that they had to buy Enid Blyton's books for their children because they could not be borrowed from the local library' (Ray, 1982:80). The fact that parents bought Blyton's books is evidence that not all parents objected to Blyton. Most parents 'try to encourage children to read what are thought to be good books' (Ray, 1982:49), but many parents are happy to see their children read Blyton's books. Some parents are even 'grateful to her for giving their children the reading habit' (Ray, 1982:99). Therefore, it is possible to deduce that social criticism of Blyton did not have such a great effect on parents, who continued to purchase her books.

According to a survey carried out in 1974 by Michael Woods (Ray, 1982:82;98), teachers 'in general have a favourable view of Blyton'. Although Blyton's books are simple, they are instrumental in encouraging children to read and teachers seem to believe that this is more important than her popularity or style – 'as long as children are reading, it does not matter much what they read' (Ray, 1982:98). Thus, Blyton is seen as 'useful material on which children can practice their reading skills' (Ray, 1982:48;98).

It is evident that much criticism of Blyton is in contrast with several pedagogic experts who believe that her writing holds many benefits for children who are learning to read, especially those who struggle to read. 'Reading is a basic skill for living in today's modern world' (May, 1995:38), yet, in contemporary society,

surrounded by television and computers, functional illiteracy rates are particularly high. Any opportunity to encourage children to read should not be overlooked. There is an increase in the number of contemporary teachers who are taking note of the advantages of the direct and uncomplicated style of Blyton's writing. This means that once again, more teachers 'are beginning to recommend her as an author who will encourage pupils to read – and go on reading' (Greenfield, 1998:100).

For this reason, it is possible to claim that Blyton is influential in the development of literacy in society and a 'useful way of introducing children to the written word' (Ray, 1982:78). Brian Doyle describes Blyton's books as 'a good jumping off place to get children into the all important reading habit' (Doyle, in Ray, 1982:65), while Ray suggests that Blyton's books 'provide useful reading experiences for children whose reading skills are relatively undeveloped' (Ray, 1982:151). Nigella Lawson remarks that many 'adults were scathing about Blyton's lack of stylistic complexity, but this book [*The naughtiest girl in the school*] taught me how deeply enjoyable reading is, and that's what counts, that's what leads one to read more and – it has to be said – better books. It doesn't matter how facile the stories; if as a child you find a book that ignites the imagination, the whole of your life is enriched' (Lawson, 2003:89). Blyton's books also appeal to children of a young age, 'the years that span the period during which reading skills are developed' (Wall, 1991:189), thus, her books would be ideal as they are enthusiastically read by children at a time when they should be practising this skill. As Ray points out:

Even her sternest critics admit that Enid Blyton provides children with easy and enjoyable reading material at a time when they need plenty of practice in order to become fluent readers: by her keenest defenders, this is seen as the main justification for her work.

(Ray, 1982:203)

4.3.2 Reasons for social criticism of Enid Blyton

Regardless of the benefits of Blyton's writing, in terms of encouraging and developing literacy in society, she was criticised extensively from various social

perspectives. In this study, social criticism of Blyton is examined in terms of changing discourses, in relation to her alleged portrayal of racism, classism and ethnocentrism, sexism, encouraging role-play, a lack of reality, and a moralising tone.

4.3.2.1 *Racism*

The most common reason raised for criticising Blyton is her alleged portrayal of racist stereotypes. Much of the criticism of Blyton's racist stereotypes is linked to the portrayal of the golliwogg character in her Noddy books. Blyton denied the racist connotations 'saying that she had written far more good golliwoggs into her stories than bad' (Stoney, 1997:171):

...golliwoggs 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)

In addition, Enid Blyton was not the first writer to use the golliwogg character (Hunt, 1994:71). Yet, changing discourses dubbed her portrayal of golliwoggs racist: the earlier uses of the golliwogg character were not condemned as aggressively as the portrayal of the golliwogg character in Blyton's work.

The references by critics to the portrayal of golliwoggs as criminals in Blyton's books stem mainly from an incident in *Here comes Noddy again!* when Noddy's car is stolen by the golliwogg characters. In a defence of the portrayal of the golliwogg in Blyton's work, one may look at the fact that there are more situations where other characters commit criminal acts, than there are situations where the golliwoggs commit crimes. As Rudd points out, in another story the bears steal Noddy's car, while overall 'goblins and monkeys are persistent villains...[and] golliwoggs still score better than bears' (Rudd, 2000:145). Thus, golliwoggs are not the only villainous characters in Blyton's books. 'The golliwogg is frequently mischievous, but never an evil character' (Rudd, 2000:138).

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It can be said that the golliwogg characters are unconsciously portrayed and essentially innocent with little or no effect on the child reader who may not necessarily associate the golliwogg with black people. However, this defence has been opposed by those who claim that the effect of these portrayals is irrelevant (Rudd, 2000:132), the racism is clear, 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).

Rudd (2000:133) points out, racism was 'rife' in the years when Blyton lived and wrote and it is important to note that Blyton was part of a society where racism was deemed acceptable in terms of the dominant discourses. Furthermore, she was not the only writer who portrayed these views (Rudd, 2000: 134). In 1939 Agatha Christie, an equally successful British woman writer of the same era as Blyton, entitled one of her crime novels *Ten Little Niggers* – a title that would be wholly unacceptable in contemporary society. This does not mean that one should condone the racist attitudes in Blyton's books but rather realise that the context and discourse of the time in which she wrote should to be taken into account with a view towards a greater understanding of Blyton. The question of whether Blyton merely reflected the discourses of her time in her writing, or if she actually created discourses is relevant here. However, evidence of similar racial discrimination at the time when Blyton wrote, such as those of Agatha Christie, implies that racism was a dominant discourse of the society reflected by Blyton, and not a discourse created by Blyton.

The accusation of racism extends into Blyton's other books, particularly the series books, and can be linked to accusations of classism, xenophobia and ethnocentrism.

4.3.2.2 *Classism*

It is necessary to take note of the context – the discourses and horizons – which influenced Blyton's writing. The first contextual factor taken into account is that Blyton grew up in the United Kingdom during the Edwardian era, a period when class distinctions were evident in the dominant discourses and a part of daily life (Ray, 2000:36). Therefore, it would only be natural (although not necessarily right from a contemporary discourse's perspective) for her to portray these class distinctions in her writing. Blyton's horizon of expectations was shaped by the dominant discourses of the society in which she grew up, and these discourses are reflected in the stories that she wrote. Greenfield describes Blyton as a 'child of her times' (Greenfield, 1998:74), an idea that can be linked to Ray (1982:11) who believes that Blyton is a 'product of the period in which she lived and wrote'.

Blyton is also accused of encouraging 'good manners' (Shavit, 1985:319), 'proper respect for the upper middle classes' (Greenfield, 1998:73) and portraying 'middle class children whose values the text does not violate, but rather accepts and even reinforces' (Shavit, 1985:318). Today this may seem unsuitable or inappropriate; however, Blyton was reinforcing the acceptable norms and 'values of the middle class prevalent in the 1930s' (Ray, 1982:201), expected by society at the time of writing. In terms of Foucault's theory, one could argue that Blyton assisted in the normalization of her readers into the middle-class norm by reinforcing middle-class values through their reflection in her work.

Whether these class distinctions are portrayed consciously or unconsciously in the stories cannot be answered as one cannot see into the mind of the author. Yet, the mere portrayal of different classes is not sufficient grounds for accusations of classism – these accusations stem from the apparent portrayal of lower class characters as villains. Druce claims that the 'criminals [are] identifiable, as are all unregenerate members of the working class, by their long hair and unwashed smell' (Druce, 1992:42). This is contradicted by Rudd who

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refers to the fact that in the *Famous Five* series 'eight of the 21 books have working-class villains while ten are middle class' (Rudd, 2000:94). There are also several lower class characters who befriend and assist the characters in their adventures and mysteries. There are many working class characters who are 'perfectly normal and acceptable' (Rudd, 2000:94), and in some of the series there are middle class characters whose behaviour is criticised, or who turn out to be villains.

In *The mystery of the burnt cottage* Mr Hick, a respectable man, turns out to be the villain, while the poor, lower class tramp is innocent. Mr Roland, the tutor in *Five go adventuring again*, would, as an educated man, have been viewed as a upright member of society; however, he is discovered to be the villain in the story. In the *Malory Towers* series, pretentious, middle class Gwendoline is portrayed in a negative light, as is the wealthy, Honourable Angela Favourleigh in the *St Clare's* series. In *The castle of adventure* the children befriend Tassie, a dirty 'wild girl' (23) who cannot read or write. When Tassie rescues the children she proves her good character.

In *Puzzle for the Secret Seven* the children, and Peter and Janet's mother, physically clean the caravan which they offer to the Bolan family as a temporary home after their shack burns down (32). Thus, Blyton subverts stereotypical class roles by having the middle class children (and their mother) participate in domestic activities that a lower class cleaner might perform. In addition, they are performing these activities for a family of a lower class than that of the children. Alternately, it is possible to argue that taking pity on the lower classes reinforces the power that the upper classes have over those in need.

The circus also plays a role in Blyton's portrayal of different classes. Barney, a homeless orphan who regularly takes odd jobs in circuses and features in the *Barney* series, is portrayed as a honourable working class friend to the middle class children, until the discovery of his father at the end of *The Rubadub*

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mystery. The children are assisted by members of a circus in *The circus of adventure*, and this leads to them taking on disguises as members of the circus and participating in circus activities. Similarly, in *Five have a wonderful time* the children befriend people from a fair, while in *Five go off in a caravan* the children have an exciting adventure with Nobby, a circus boy (although there are a number of villains associated with Nobby's circus, such as Tiger Dan and Lou). This is significant as the children view the members of the circus in a positive light and often express amazement and wonder at their lives, however, these characters would have been members of a lower class to that of the children.

Blyton challenges the social order in her books when the middle class children are compared to those of the lower or working classes. The children join the circus, befriend those described as ragamuffins and live as homeless or parentless wild children (as in *Five run away together*). Unacceptable behaviour by middle class characters is counteracted by honourable behaviour by working class characters. Yet Shavit (1985:319) claims that the text stresses the 'inferior status' of the lower classes in 'unflattering' descriptions. The character of Joe in *Five fall into adventure* is described as a 'dirty little ragamuffin' (19) and is punched by Dick (who is under the false impression that Jo is a boy, making it acceptable for Dick to punch him). Yan, the shepherd's grandson in *Five go down to the sea* is referred to in 'disgust' by Julian as an 'idiot' (34), in fact the children are simply nasty to him, yet when he rescues them from a cave in which they are locked by the villains he, in true Blyton tradition, proves his importance.

4.3.2.3 *Xenophobia and ethnocentrism*

The second contextual factor that needs to be taken into account – other than the Edwardian society in which Blyton grew up – is the time period during which Blyton wrote. The period when she wrote includes a time of British dominance in the world, and the years before, during and after the Second World War. This is reflected in Blyton's books as they were filled with themes that were sure to

'boost morale' (Ray, 1982:160) and encourage patriotic attitudes and national pride. In *The Rubadub mystery* references are made to a secret submarine base (25), while throughout the *Famous Five* series references are made to Uncle Quentin's important secret work. These ideas would have reflected the dominant discourses in England at the time. The empire building novels of the late 19th century may have influenced the writing of Blyton, in addition to the dominant discourse of the war years which encouraged a patriotic attitude and a suspicion of things foreign. Although this may seem unnecessary today, it was 'entirely appropriate in writing for children in 1940-1' (Ray, 1982:159).

Although Blyton used foreign settings for some of her stories, like *The river of adventure*, which is set 'some way from the borders of Syria' (23), she only left Britain twice: once in 1930 for a cruise around the Mediterranean with her first husband Hugh Pollock, and then 18 years later for a trip to America. After her first trip Blyton wrote that she would 'always love England best' (Stoney, 1992:92), however, it is possible to see a reflection of this trip in *The ship of adventure* where the children spend a holiday on a cruise ship. Stoney highlights the fact that Blyton's 'insular attitude [was] by no means uncommon in England at that time' (Stoney, 1992:92) – evidence of the influence of the dominant discourses of the time on Blyton.

The characters portrayed in Blyton's school stories are from a variety of backgrounds and countries; and Blyton uses the school situation to point out good and bad qualities of characters from all walks of life. In *Claudine at St Clare's* readers are introduced to Claudine, the French mistress's niece, as well as the wealthy and snobbish Honourable Angela Favourleigh, and Eileen Paterson, the Matron's daughter. In addition, there is Carlotta, the wild daughter of a circus-rider mother and a gentleman father. Even though these characters are from different backgrounds they interact at the same level in the school environment. In addition, British characters often display poor character traits,

such as Gwendoline in the *Malory Towers* series, and Angela Favourleigh in the *St Clare's* series.

Blyton also introduces a number of foreign characters in the school series. Suzanne in *Last term at Malory Towers* is much like the character of Claudine in the *St Clare's* series as she is also the French mistress's niece. When readers are introduced to Zerelda in *Third year at Malory Towers*, the fact that she is an American is highlighted by references to her accent: she drawls when she speaks (5) and everything is 'wunnerful'

'I think England's just wunnerful,' said Zerelda for the sixth time. 'I think your little fields are wunnerful, and your little old houses too. I think English people are wunnerful too.'
'Wunnerful, isn't she?' said Alicia under her breath to Darrell.
'Just wunnerful.'

(*Third year at Malory Towers*, 19)

Although it is clear that Alicia is mocking Zerelda's accent the American girl does not have any particularly negative character traits and the other girls soon befriend her. Even though Zerelda's tendency to wear make-up and show concern about her hair and nails is criticised, it is not her nationality that is brought into focus, but rather the fact that she is 'missing all the nicest years of [her] life' – her youth. It can be said that Blyton is encouraging her readers to enjoy their childhood. According to Egoff (1980:191), Blyton maintains the boundaries between the world of adults and the world of children: 'children who aped the dress and manners of adults were guilty of presumption and affectation. In seeking, prematurely, to leave childhood behind, they seemed to denigrate and betray their fellows and therefore lose their respect'.

Other characters who contribute to an air of multiculturalism are the French mistresses, the 'Mam'zelles'. In the *St Clare's* series there is one French teacher, while in *Malory Towers* there are two. The portrayal of the 'Mam'zelles' is not always favourable, especially when compared to the portrayal of the very English headmistress; however, these characters are some of Blyton's most memorable.

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In the writing of Blyton even though there are incidents where the villains are foreign, this can be contrasted with several incidents where the children befriend foreigners. Although Blyton clearly points out the unique characteristics of foreigners – their accents and hairstyles – in what must be described as a patronising manner, not all foreigners are evil or villainous. Rudd points out that only four of the 21 *Famous Five* books ‘feature vaguely foreign-sounding villains’ (Rudd, 2000:94). In *The circus of adventure* the children meet Gustavus whose accent, like that of Zerelda in *Third year at Malory Towers*, is exaggerated by Blyton –

‘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.’

(*The circus of adventure*, 16-17)

In addition to his unusual accent, Blyton points out the Gustavus bows very low when greeting people and kisses them on the hand, something that the children find very unusual. Yet, after the children’s initial discomfort with the unfamiliar, ‘Gussy’ becomes a firm friend of the children and shares their adventure regardless of his differences.

These foreign characters all form part of the life and variety portrayed in Blyton’s series. One may accuse Blyton of being patriotic and of promoting British values, however, it is difficult to accuse her of being racist and classist when one looks at the variety of situations in which foreign or lower class characters are portrayed positively.

4.3.2.4 Sexism

Dixon accuses Blyton of not only ‘promulgating race and class stereotypes’, but also of the portrayal of stereotypes evident in the ‘choice of a male as leader of any group of children – Julian in the *Famous Five*, Jack and Phillip in the *Adventure* series, and Fatty in the *Five Find-Outers* – and in the relegation of mothers to the role of home-makers and suppliers of meals, who leave every

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major decision to “Daddy” (Druce, 1992:43). In *The Rat-A-Tat mystery* Mrs Lynton tells Diana to ‘ask Daddy’ (206) if Barney may come to stay for the holidays, while in *Five Find-Outers* series, Pip and Bets’s father is clearly the decision-maker in the family, forbidding the children from trying to solve mysteries in *The mystery of the hidden house* (20). In *Five go off in a caravan* ‘daddy says’ that the children may go on a caravan holiday (19). George’s father also exercises control in their household as she is forced to restrain her temper when her father emphasises that ‘George will do exactly as she’s told...If she doesn’t, I shall deal with her’ (*Five on a treasure island*, 21). Greenfield claims that the ‘gangs who carried out the adventures were dominated by boys and tomboyish girls’ (Greenfield, 1998:73). In other words, Blyton is criticised for her portrayal of sexist attitudes that reinforce gender stereotypes.

In Blyton’s stories there are several instances where the female characters stay behind while the male characters confront the villain and essentially are involved in the ‘dangerous’ climax of the story. When the children attempt to save the Faraway tree from evil Trolls in the *Folk of the Faraway Tree* (535), everyone ‘but the three girls and Silky crept down the hole’. The girls stay behind because it is too dangerous for them to go along. In *The castle of adventure* Bill sends Lucy-Anne, Dinah and Tassie to wait at Spring Cottage while he and the boys capture the villains (160). In *The river of adventure* Bill reprimands the boys for not sending the girls away for help when the boys become involved in a brawl (52).

Another example of this exclusion of female characters from dangerous situations can be found in *Five go off to camp* when the boys repeatedly prevent George from joining them on excursions to the dangerous railway yard, and in *Five go down to the sea* the girls stay behind as the boys go with Mr Penruthlan to capture the villains (172). The fragility of females is reinforced by the fact that male characters are expected to show strength, as is evident in the ‘disgust’ that the children show at Lucian’s tears and self-pity in *The ship of adventure* (82). In *The Secret Seven* the girls are told that they ‘can’t come’ (64) when the boys

sneak out at night, a trend that is repeated in *Good old Secret Seven* when the boys snoop around the castle at night, “But no girls,” said Peter, firmly, seeing that Janet was about to speak. “NO GIRLS.” (69).

The accusations of sexism stem from the portrayal of female characters who are often involved in stereotypical female domestic roles, such as cooking and cleaning, while the male characters fit into typical male stereotypes as protectors and physically more powerful figures. This is applicable to both adult and child characters – mothers are usually found in the kitchen while men are either away at work, or they fill the roles of policemen or villains. In the *Famous Five* series, Anne reinforces traditional gender roles. She openly admits to being scared in most situations and enjoys domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning. Readers are repeatedly told that Anne enjoys playing at ‘houses’ (*Five run away together*, 110) and feels pride when she is praised for success in chores such as ‘housekeeping’ (*Five go off in a caravan*, 39). Men are, however, also more likely to be found in the roles of villains. Situations that emphasise the traditional stereotypical gender-biased role of women are obvious when one is looking for them (in *Five go off to camp* both George and Anne do the washing up (52)), but at the same time, on close inspection there are also situations of independent female behaviour in the mystery and adventure books.

Traditional gender ideals are questioned and several female characters rebel against traditional gender roles, yet the criticism of Blyton with regard to gender stereotypes often centres on the character of George – or Georgina – in the *Famous Five*. George is referred to by Blyton as being ‘as good as’ (Rudd, 2000:111) a boy, but not one, and thus inferior, even ‘other’. On the other hand, it is possible to claim that although George is not a boy, she is capable in various situations where boys would traditionally be ‘better’ than girls would and readers are regularly reminded of George’s skill in swimming and rowing her boat to Kirrin Island – ‘the girl cleverly worked her boat in and out of the rocks’ (*Five on a treasure island*, 51), while in *Five run away together* ‘the others watched in

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admiration as the girl guided the boat skilfully in and out of the hidden rocks' (85). Julian points out that George is 'as good as a boy any day!' (*Five are together again*, 66). Thus, Blyton emphasises the fact that George breaks the gender rules expected of women at the time of writing.

George is independent and in *Five run away together* she is instrumental in planning the children's escape, remembering to pack food, water and all the essentials,

'I've got my little stove for boiling water on, or heating up anything,' whispered George. 'It's in the boat. That's what I bought the methylated spirit for, of course.... And matches for lighting it...'

(*Five run away together*, 78)

Similarly, in *Five are together again*, George, with the help of Timmy, pushes the villains into the sea and sets their boat adrift, and 'Julian was sure he would never have thought of doing such daring things himself!' (*Five are together again*, (174).

Even girls of the lower classes show independence. In *Five fall into adventure* the children meet Ragamuffin Jo, a dirty little girl, who like George, not only has a boy's name but is also mistaken for one. Although the Five are hesitant to befriend Jo, she is essential to the story and helps them to rescue George. Like Jo, Tassie in *The castle of adventure* demonstrates bravery and initiative; she goes in search of the children trapped in the castle even though she cannot read their note asking for help. However, it is possible to ask if George is only a token boy – a girl who wants to be a boy – or a girl who can succeed in a man's world, and thus a subversion of traditional gender roles.

In the *Secret Seven* series, although there is little evidence of independent female behaviour, and even though the girls are excluded from some activities, girls do participate in strenuous activities with the boys. In *Well done Secret Seven* the girls assist the boys in building a tree house, while in *Look out Secret Seven* the girls keep watch with the boys in Bramley Woods at night.

In the school stories there are several examples of strong independent female characters. Even though there are few male characters in the *Malory Towers* and *St Clare's* series (after all they are girls' schools), there are several dominant female characters. Schoolgirls participate in outdoor activities and sport, as well as domestic activities such as needlepoint; yet girls who excel at sporting activities are admired (*The O'Sullivan twins*, 15). Characters similar to George in the *Famous Five* can be found in Blyton's other series. In the *Malory Towers* series there is Bill – Wilhelmina – a tomboy who is crazy about horses and in the *St Clare's* series there is Bobby – Roberta – who 'was very like a boy in her ways' (*Claudine at St Clare's*, 2). Those characters who prefer the more traditional female tasks are teased, while athletic skill is praised, subverting the traditional discourse of society which claims that girls should focus on domestic activities. This can be linked to, and reflects Blyton's dislike for domestic and household activities, as discussed in Chapter Three (Section 3.2). However, Blyton also shows acceptance of different personalities and choices. To the amusement of the other girls, Claudine, in the *St Clare's* series, is regularly disobedient so that she may be punished and forced to stay inside instead of playing games outdoors.

'She wants to have a real excuse for getting out of games! We all know we have to give up games if we have mending to do – and Claudine has made Matron give her a punishment that will get her out of games, and give her something to do that she really likes!'

(*The O'Sullivan twins*, 27)

Yet her desire to participate in traditionally 'feminine' activities does not result in Claudine's being ostracised by the other characters.

One might be tempted to argue that the independent behaviour among the women in the school series is only because there are so few male characters, and if there were men then stereotypical gender roles would once again be emphasised. However, in the *Naughtiest Girl* series Blyton portrays a co-educational boarding school, 'a school for boys and girls together' (*The Naughtiest Girl again*, 8), breaking away from conventional boarding school

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stories and becoming somewhat of a 'pioneer' (Ray, 1982:197). Furthermore, two women run the school, reinforcing the self-reliance and independence of women and subverting traditionally dominant gender discourse. Similarly, Miss Greyling in the *Malory Towers* series and Miss Theobald in the *St Clare's* series are also examples of independent women, and thus examples of the subversion of traditional patriarchal discourses. Furthermore, Ray points out that, in the *Malory Towers* series Blyton showed that she was aware of changes in discourse of society 'which made it more likely that girls would go on to higher education and enjoy satisfying careers' (Ray, in Baverstock, 2000:44) – in *Last term at Malory Towers* Darrell goes off to college (168) after school.

Blyton is not only criticised for the portrayal of traditional gender stereotypes but also the portrayal of typical stereotypes – tomboys – that attempt to break away from traditional gender roles. The contradiction between these points of criticism is clear and makes it difficult to know which representation of female characters would be acceptable in the eyes of the critics. Even though Blyton is criticised for the portrayal of stereotypical tomboys, George is not the only famous literary tomboy. Louisa May Alcott's character Jo, in *Little Women*, is well-known for subverting the dominant discourses of the time of writing, and the novel is referred to as one of Blyton's favourites (Baverstock, 2000:7; Stoney, 1992:18). It is possible to speculate that the character of George was influenced by Jo in *Little Women*. Moreover, a character named Jo features twice in the Famous Five's adventures: in *Five fall into adventure* and *Five have a wonderful time*. George is a name that crops up in other popular children's literature – Nancy Drew's tomboy friend is also named George.

Blyton grew up in a patriarchal society at a time when independent women were looked upon unfavourably. Blyton's mother wanted to raise her daughter in line with the dominant discourse of the time, with the skills to 'manage a home and family' (Baverstock, 2000:9). Blyton's mother did her utmost to keep up appropriate appearances (Stoney, 1992:20) after Blyton's father left and Blyton

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was forbidden to discuss the matter of her parent's separation with anyone (Baverstock, 2000:12). Further evidence of the strict norms of the time and the influence of dominant discourse of Blyton's mother lies in the fact that when Blyton left home her mother told all who asked that she had joined the Women's Land Army (Stoney, 1991:33). This was an acceptable reason for an unmarried woman to leave home in the early 20th century.

Blyton's own life is an indication of her disconnection with the traditional female behaviour of her generation. As a child she disliked domestic activity, preferring to spend time outdoors with her father (Rudd, 2000:111; Stoney, 1992:19) rather than in the home with her mother. Blyton was a very successful career woman, probably earning far more than her husband – she was a woman of independent means in a patriarchal society. Furthermore, Blyton divorced her first husband at a time when divorce was still uncommon and even considered scandalous. Thus, one may say that Blyton broke with convention in her personal life and subverted the dominant discourses of the time. For this reason, although she never openly fought for women's rights, Blyton might be described as a feminist.

If one looks for evidence of racism or sexism in Blyton's books one is likely to find it. However, one cannot accuse her of racism or sexism without taking note of the fact that there are several opportunities where these accusations may be proven wrong. Essentially, Blyton seems to portray a somewhat liberated version of the society in which she lived, portraying the gender roles of the time, yet providing independent female characters. This is ironic because Blyton was also criticised for an unrealistic portrayal of life, yet the gender roles she portrayed were realistic for the time in which she wrote. Rudd goes so far as to claim that Blyton challenges the traditional framework – the dominant discourse – of society (Rudd, 2000:97).

4.3.2.5 *Setting a poor example*

The many children who emulated the events portrayed in her books can be related to the vast popularity of Blyton. Rudd points out that many readers enjoyed Blyton's books late at night while hidden under the blankets with a torch, and other readers held their own midnight feasts (Rudd, 2000:105) reminiscent of those in the *Malory Towers* and *St Clare's* series. The stories become personal as readers revisit their 'favourite moments' (Rudd, 2000:195) and the books develop into material for 'imaginative play' (Watson, 2001:92) as well as reading. Her works were used as 'springboards for children's games, for role-playing activities, for personal fantasies [and] for writing stories' (Rudd, s.a.:6). There are readers who formed their own clubs like those featured in the *Famous Five* and *Secret Seven* series, and even those who demanded to be sent to boarding school after reading Blyton's school stories. Furthermore, books that are actually games, like *The Famous Five and You run away*, published in 1987 and based on Blyton's *Famous Five* series encourage the imitation of events in her books.

Acting out of fantasy is regarded as a normal behavioural characteristic of childhood and is linked to early childhood and the desire of the child to imitate others during this developmental stage. The desire to belong to a peer group can be linked to developments during middle childhood and the increased influence of peers during this stage. A possible reason for Blyton's appeal to children is that she presents 'characters with whom the reader is encouraged to empathize and whose behaviour is admired' (Druce, 1992:298). This may be one reason why adults and children react so differently to Blyton's books – adults have passed the developmental stages in which they identify with fictional characters and act out the events of stories, yet Blyton's books stimulate this behaviour in children and satisfy the needs of the child. This role-play and identification with characters is also evidence of the escape from reality (discussed earlier in this chapter) offered by Blyton in her books. Furthermore, reading becomes play when children revisit

their favourite moments (Rudd, 2000:195). This can be linked to Blyton's training as a teacher and is discussed in terms of her techniques in Chapter Five.

In Blyton's books some of the child characters can be described as arrogant and dishonest and this may present a problem when examined in view of the imitation of events in her books. Children are frequently rude and disrespectful to adults who conveniently turn out to be the villain of the story, even though the children are usually polite to parents and those who assist them in solving the mystery. In *Five go adventuring again*, George's sulky and rude behaviour towards their tutor, Mr Roland, is even justified when he is discovered to be the villain. Similarly, in *The island of adventure*, the children are not only rude to Joe, but they even 'borrow' his boat without permission when he goes to town. In *Five get into trouble* Julian tells one of the villains 'I don't take orders from you whoever you are...You hold your tongue – or else be civil' (117). In a similar tone Sooty, a friend of the children, threatens his 'stepfather's man', telling him to look after himself – 'Any more snooping about, and you'll find yourself tied up again' (*Five go to Smuggler's Top*, 104).

Although they do not lie directly, the children neglect to mention details that would result in their punishment. In *Five run away together* the children deceive the Sticks – the people who are employed to care for the children when George's mother falls ill and is taken to hospital.

'I think we won't tell them anything,' said Julian, at last. 'I don't particularly want to tell them deliberate lies, and I am certainly not going to tell them the truth. I know what we'll do – there is a train that leaves the station at about eight o'clock, which would be the one we'd catch if we were going back to our own home. We'll find a timetable, leave it open on the dining-room table, as if we'd been looking up a train, and then we will set off across the moor at the back of the house, as if we were going to the station.'

(*Five run away together*, 80)

The children hide on Kirrin Island, where the adventure reaches its climax, until they are able to return home. In *Five go to Smuggler's Top* they disobey a direct instruction not to take Timmy with them to Smuggler's Top.

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They further deceive adult characters in the stories by making use of disguises. In the *Five Find-Outers* series Fatty regularly dons disguises to deceive adult characters, in particular Mr Goon the policeman, for example, by dressing up as an old lady and reading his fortune in *The mystery of Holly Lane*. In *The Secret Seven* the boys disguise themselves as snowmen (63).

In addition the children often pretend to be asleep so as to slip out in the middle of the night. In *The mystery of the hidden house*, the children befriend Ern and are instrumental in his sneaking out of the house. 'Ern, as a matter of fact was wide awake, listening to the church clock striking the half-hours. He shivered with excitement in his warm bed...About two minutes after Mr Goon had gone from the house Ern got up' (47). In *The Ring o' Bells mystery*, the children decide to meet Barney at ten o'clock at night (207). In both *Five on Kirrin Island again*, and in *Five are together again*, George sneaks out and rows to Kirrin Island alone at night (*Five on Kirrin Island again*, 129-130; *Five are together again*, 156-163). In the same way, Dick and Julian slip off to look for spook trains late at night (92) in *Five go off to camp*. Even in the *Secret Seven*, which is for younger child readers than the *Famous Five*, the children deceive others and slip out at night: 'It wasn't until eleven o'clock that Colin felt it was safe to slip out of the house' (*Well done Secret Seven*, 40).

4.3.2.6 Lack of realism

Another aspect for which Blyton was criticised is the portrayal of an unrealistic picture of life. However, as with most of the criticism of Blyton, there are arguments both for and against this aspect. Wall (1991:189) summarises this debate clearly, claiming that

Blyton gives [children] an unashamedly make-believe world in which the children are supreme, in which dangers and problems exist merely for them overcome. Parents and adults are there, and help when invited to do so, but they seldom act as constraints. That they give children unrealistic and unbelievable freedom of action annoys many critics.

(Wall, 1991:189)

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Children interviewed by Rudd 'most frequently...mentioned the freedom that the Five had to roam the country' (Rudd, 2000:93). However, according to Nicholas Tucker, 'the unrealistic plots are heroic daydreams that children find flattering' (Tucker, in Greenfield, 1998:85). Rudd presents a transcript of a 12-year-old girl joking about this freedom with her friends:

Valerie: I said, 'Mum, can us, me and my cousins and Cindy (that's my dog) go – hire some caravans and go off like the Famous Five do? [laughter] She says, 'No way!'

Daisy: [posh accent] 'Oh yes, dear, of course.' [more laughter]
(Rudd, 2000:93)

This suggests that child readers are able to distinguish between what is real and what is not.

The unrealistic portrayal of life in her books is a point that emphasises the fact that Blyton's books were written in the early 20th century when it was not necessarily as dangerous to sneak out at night as it is today. However, even in the early and mid-1900s it was still dangerous for children to run around in the middle of the night without the knowledge of their parents. Of course, sneaking out is an aspect of childhood that is enjoyed by most children and there are many adults who have fond memories of doing so, but it should not be encouraged. Blyton's characters seldom run into serious trouble and when they do help is always close at hand. This is not true in contemporary society where news bulletins often tell of children who have become victims of crime. In reality villains are not as easily overpowered as they are in fiction.

On the other hand, Wall (1991:190) believes that Blyton's stories point out the fact that children are not helpless creatures as society often believes and discourses reinforce. Thus Blyton subverts dominant discourses by pointing out that 'children can cope by themselves...[and] it is not only what children wish to do, but what they must ultimately learn to do'. In addition, the night-time adventures are often necessary for the success of the plot.

Furthermore, if one chooses to place Blyton in the category of escapist fiction, then an unrealistic portrayal of life is part of the genre. Carpenter claims that, in literature, children want to ‘encounter people who can fly, geese that lay golden eggs, frogs that turn into princes, [and] spaceships piloted by children’ (Carpenter, 1985:1). The idea of enjoyment of unrealistic literature can be linked to Blyton’s belief that children’s authors should not deal with ‘murders, rapes, violence, blood, torture and ghosts – these things did not belong to the children’s world’ (Stoney, 1992:153). Instead, Blyton believed that books for children should contain ‘first-rate stories, plenty of action, humour and well-defined characters – with animals as their friends’ (Stoney, 1992:153). Greenfield refers to a

solidity about the Enid Blyton fictional world that young people in our insecure age must find appealing. The sun shines continually, families stick together, there is no real cruelty or savage behaviour, crimes are either petty or smartly suppressed by the forces of law, aided, of course, by the boy and girl characters.

(Greenfield, 1998:84;85)

In fact, the unreality of Blyton’s setting can be contrasted with accusations of sexism. It is ironic that Blyton was criticised for the portrayal of an unrealistic setting, while at the same time she was realistic in her portrayal of gender stereotypes for the time in which she wrote. Therefore, although Blyton’s books are in some respects unrealistic, they are not unbelievable as they do contain elements that would be familiar to the child reader.

4.3.2.7 *Moralising tone and intrusive narrator*

The freedom given to the children in her books and the social criticism that she encourages children to sneak out and misbehave, can be contrasted with the moralising tone and use of authorial intervention for which Blyton has been criticised. There is evidence of a moralising tone when Blyton portrays behaviour that can be described as morally correct. In *Look out Secret Seven* the children are determined to find the General’s stolen medals so that the General, who is not very wealthy, does not have to pay the reward of fifty pounds that he has

promised. Similarly, in *Puzzle for the Secret Seven* the children are instrumental in finding a new home for the Bolan family after their home burns down. Evidence of a moralising tone is also found in didactic elements in her books. In *The mystery of the secret room* one chapter is even entitled ‘Two Thrilling Lessons’ and the characters, and the readers indirectly, learn how to make invisible ink from orange and lemon juice (14), and how to get out of a locked room if the key is in the other side of the door (18).

Evidence of an intrusive narrator, the idea that Blyton ‘speaks’ to her readers, ‘intrudes and comments on the action’ (Rudd, s.a.:10), is most often clear at the end of the stories. This is achieved through repeated use of the pronoun ‘we’, including both the reader and herself in the reference, and is evident at the end of *The mystery of Holly Lane* (179), and *Five run away together* (184). The pronoun ‘us’ is also used ‘Goodbye Scamper! Give the Secret Seven a lick from us when you next see them!’ (*Secret Seven fireworks*, 96). It is significant that both the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’ include the author in a group with the readers. Although she has been criticised for addressing the reader, it is yet another example of the way in which she includes the reader in the story, thereby allowing the reader to participate in the events of the story. As mentioned earlier, this inclusion allows the reader to feel a sense of belonging and is one of the techniques used by Blyton and is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five (Section 5.3.3).

Blyton adopts a moral tone and clearly praises morally sound behaviour and condemns immoral behaviour. In Blyton’s stories there is a ‘high moral purpose’ (Greenfield, 1998:77) and the distinction between good and bad is achieved by the resultant events in the stories when those characters who are bad are caught and punished. Furthermore, in the books directed at younger readers, such as the *Noddy* books and the *Faraway Tree* series, naughty characters are regularly punished ‘with a caning or a spanking’ (Druce, 1992:43). In both *The Enchanted Wood* and *The Folk of the Faraway Tree*, the children find themselves in Dame Slap’s school, where slaps and smacks are not uncommon. The use of corporal

punishment, which she appears to endorse, has led to contemporary criticism of Blyton (Druce, 1992:43) as contemporary discourse does not condone the use of corporal punishment. Yet, according to child readers 'there's worse things than getting spanked. People get shot and things, in a lot of the [modern] books' (Rudd, 2000:75). In cartoons 'little animals are getting anvils dropped on their heads and being blown-up. I mean a slap compared to that' (Rudd, 2000:75).

4.4 THE POPULARITY OF THE STORYTELLER

Earlier arguments about role-play and Blyton's inclusion of the reader in the text point to another reason for criticism of Blyton: she was accused of having too much influence over her readers; in essence she was just too popular. 'Massive popularity is frequently equated with poor quality and, for some critics, Blyton is far too popular with her readers' (Druce, 1992:38). It is important not to overlook the fact that 'despite the critics, Enid Blyton's popularity amongst children continued' (Ray, 1982:69). In other words, Blyton's child readers ignored the dominant discourses that view Blyton in an unfavourable light.

4.4.1 Addiction

Some critics also believe that readers may read Blyton's books only, hence becoming 'addicted to Blyton' (Rudd, 2000:58). However, not all children like Blyton and 'those that do tend to be selective, liking certain series and not others' (Rudd, 2000:194). Furthermore, it can be argued that children are not influenced by what society and 'big names' and 'advertising' promote, but instead rely on their 'own taste' (Singer, 1994:150) – that children are not as susceptible to the influence of dominant discourses as adults are. Nevertheless, Blyton's books were described as 'addictive' (Ray, 1982:84) by critics.

This addiction to her books can be seen in a positive light and Blyton's books can be described as stories that the reader cannot put down. This means that her

books are engrossing, exciting, absorbing and captivating for the child reader – an indication of Blyton’s success and popularity as an author. However, the term ‘addictive’ carries many negative connotations and when, in 1967, *Where* magazine asked parents: ‘Are your children addicted to Enid Blyton and what, if anything, do you do about it?’ (Ray, 1982:84; Rudd, s.a.:3), it became cause for concern among parents. However, in view of the problems experienced by contemporary parents and the multitude of articles in current magazines that discuss far more serious addiction problems faced by today’s children, the question in *Where* magazine can be amusing. In contemporary society, parents can relate the debate about Blyton’s books being detrimental for children to accusations that the depiction of magic and the supernatural in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series encourages Satanism.

Perhaps the use of the word ‘addiction’ is problematic. As Druce clearly explains, the problem ‘was of how to break children of the habit of reading Blyton to the exclusion of everything else’ (Druce, 1992:40). There was a fear ‘that children might grow up on an exclusive diet of Blyton’ (Watson, 2001:92). In 1967 – during the height of the criticism of Blyton – this was a relevant question. It was believed that by reading only Blyton, a child’s ‘potential appreciation of good reading would have been fatally damaged’ (Druce, 1992:40). This may be linked to accusations that children who read Blyton will inevitably read ‘non-quality fiction’ (Rudd, 2000:54) as adults. However, Rudd refers to the fact that several successful adults read Blyton’s books without detrimental results (Rudd, 2000:55). This is in line with comments by Ray who claims that it ‘certainly appears that children can read Enid Blyton and still achieve academic success’ (Ray, 1982:91).

4.4.2 Popular literature

Rudd (2000:193) believes that Blyton’s work falls into the category of popular literature. Shavit (1985:315) also places Blyton in this category of children’s literature. There is evidence of her popularity in a survey carried out in West

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Yorkshire where it was found that Enid Blyton was the most popular author, although she was more popular among girls than boys (Ray, 1982:70) – she regularly topped popularity polls (Rudd, s.a.:3). In *The Blyton Phenomenon*, Ray mentions several similar surveys which also found Blyton to be the most popular author among young girls (Ray, 1982:71-75). Blyton can definitely be described as a popular author, and she was ‘the only children’s author to be included in the *Sunday Times* series “The Thousand Makers of the Twentieth Century”, published in the mid-1960s’ (Ray, 1982:65) – evidence of the idea that she was instrumental in shaping discourses of the 20th century. When Hunt carried out a survey of British university students, he found that ‘*The Magic Faraway Tree* was by far the best-remembered book of their childhoods’ (Hunt, 1994:116).

It is clear from an examination of the criticism of Blyton that ‘the only thing that none dispute is her ability to relate a story’ (Rudd, 2000:155). The acceptance ‘of Blyton as a story-teller and author of popular literature is a fact which critics of children’s literature must take into account’ (Wall, 191:193). Furthermore, it should be noted that many other popular authors, including Roald Dahl and Walt Disney, were also criticised by literary critics. ‘It is true that Blyton specialised in trite formula fiction; it must nevertheless be admitted that she was a most competent storyteller. Children need stories’ (Wall, 1991:190). ‘As a teller of tales she has much to offer children’ (Wall, 1991:189) and Ray refers to the fact that ‘Enid Blyton’s main concern was to tell a good story’ (Ray, in Baverstock, 2000:37).

Regardless of whether Blyton appeals to critics or not, by 1945, ‘as far as the children were concerned, Enid Blyton had already established herself as a favourite author’ (Ray, 1982:30;69). Druce believes that ‘what is important here is that, however seriously some parents and critics may have taken [the accusations of social and political bias], they seem to have had little effect on Enid Blyton’s sales, or her popularity with children’ (Druce, 1992:44). According to Greenfield, Blyton said that ‘so long as one child tells me that my work brings

him pleasure, just so long I shall go on writing' (Greenfield, 1998:15). In other words it was the children for whom she wrote and thus it is by the children that she should be judged. For Blyton 'adult approval...was of less significance' (Wall, 1991:118).

Perhaps Blyton's popularity among children can be linked to the fact that 'she really loved children and understood instinctively what would interest them' (Hodder-Williams, in Ray, 1982:28). Blyton's popularity may be a result of the fact that she 'bridged the gap between adult teller and child reader in a new way' (Wall, 1991:191) by allowing characters to display childish behaviour and attitudes. However, it is the portrayal of these attitudes that many critics found 'deplorable' (Wall, 1991:191). This contrast between adults and children may have to do with the child audience's being so clearly addressed by Blyton, or perhaps with Blyton's ability to reach the child at the child's level. Chambers claims that 'if literature for children is to have any meaning at all it must primarily be concerned with the nature of childhood' (Chambers, 1990:98), thus, it follows that it should appeal to children, not adults.

4.4.3 Imposing contemporary discourses on Blyton

Following the severe criticism of Blyton, much of her work has been adapted and elements for which she was criticised have been removed. Rudd believes that 'What they are removing, often, is the very elements that make Blyton successful, which are elements she shares with and older, oral tradition – one that is often less concerned with fashionable notions of being "p.c"' (Rudd, s.a.:9). Furthermore, there is a danger of 'weakening the power of Blyton's stories by taking away the very elements that give them their distinctive voice' (Rudd, 2000:202). As Rudd points out, by, for example, removing the gender stereotypes, 'George's fierce individualism has lost some of its edge' (Rudd, 2000:202).

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Furthermore, in light of the changes in dominant discourses and the acceptance of previously taboo issues in children's media by contemporary society, it is possible to ask whether it is necessary to make changes to Blyton. In other words, do the aspects of her writing for which she was criticised – the alleged racism, sexism and simple language and style – have a negative impact on her readers? On the one hand, assuming that these aspects of her work may have a negative effect on the children reading her books, removing these aspects from her work eliminates the child's power of choice and reasoning. It takes the child for granted by assuming that children need to be censored by adults and are incapable of regulating their own behaviour. This reflects back to the theories of Michel Foucault discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.2), as it places power in the hands of the adults. On the other hand, according to other contemporary discourses, the inclusion of attitudes that depict racism and sexism as acceptable is regarded as wrong and hence should be excluded regardless of the effect on the reader.

By making changes to Blyton, contemporary society is in fact enforcing contemporary discourses on books that were written in light of a different discourse. This means that, by making changes according to the dominant contemporary discourses, the context of the text in terms of both the author and the time of writing cannot be taken into account when examining a text. This is significant when viewed in terms of T.S. Eliot's discussion on the influence of a poet's predecessors on a poet's work. Eliot believes that when a new work of art is created, it simultaneously influences, and is influenced by 'all the works of art which preceded it' (Eliot, [1919] 1988:191). Changes to a text would negate these interactive and reciprocal influences. In other words, changes to Blyton's texts would remove the influence of Blyton's horizons of expectation on her writing, the discourses of texts which preceded Blyton, and the discourse of texts which followed Blyton, before changes were made to her work.

Another argument against making changes to Blyton's work is Margery Fisher's belief that critics should not dictate what authors should write. She maintains:

In whatever idiom or language an author writes, he must make his own choice. We have no right to suggest that he should come down on one side of the social fence or the other – more broadly, if we make him feel he is under any obligation to conform to rules other than literary rules.... Should we suggest to writers – and this inevitably seems the next step – that they should write to certain specifications of length and style, that they should be aware of convention, that they should deal with problems (it may be of sexual deviation or race hostility or drug addiction) in terms that are basically optimistic and unshocking?

(Fisher, 1980:8)

In other words, it is the responsibility of the author to decide what to write. Critics may disagree with the author's choice, however, they cannot compel the author to conform. By making changes to Blyton's work, critics are enforcing their discourses on her work, forcing her stories to conform to social rules, 'rules other than literary rules' (Fisher, 1980:8).

4.5 CONCLUSION

4.5.1 Education versus entertainment

Ray points out that there is a definite 'lack of agreement about the way in which children's books should be judged' (Ray, 1982:127). When one looks at criticism of Blyton it is necessary to take the purpose of her stories into account. The purpose of Blyton's books in particular can be linked to the purpose of children's books in general. This means taking into account the educational, aesthetic and entertainment value of literature. Firstly, do her stories serve a didactic function in terms of the development and expansion of language skills, or are the stories intended to assist learners in the development of reading skills and encourage literacy? Secondly, do Blyton's books hold an aesthetic appeal for children in terms of their artistic value? Thirdly, one might also ask if Blyton's stories are stories that entertain the reader, popular stories that present the reader with an

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escape from reality for the duration of the story. The idea that Blyton's stories entertain the child reader is the most predominant as some believe that Blyton is instrumental in starting children 'on the path of reading for pleasure' (Greenfield, 1998:100). Evidence of this lies in the fact that she is so popular with her audience – they must enjoy reading her books.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the dominant discourses of society promote the protection of children – who are usually referred to as helpless and innocent by dominant discourse – by dictating what they may be exposed to. It is ultimately adults who decide what children should read. The majority of educational and social critics are concerned with the protection of child readers (Druce, 1992:290). Wall (1991:233) believes that what adults enjoy, and what adults consider as best 'might not always in fact be best *for children*'. There is the ongoing debate between those who believe children should be protected and those who believe that texts should be open – 'what should we include and what exclude?' (Hunt, 1991a:33). The desire for moral implications in texts for children may be linked to 'tension between what is "good" in the exploded abstract, what is good for the child socially, intellectually, and educationally, and what we, really, honestly think is a good book' (Hunt, 1991a:15). The discussion on what is best for children can also be linked to the much larger issue of censorship (Shavit, 1985:315) of children's literature, as well as the normalising purpose of children's literature and the reflection, or creation, of the dominant adult discourses in children's literature.

4.5.2 Adults versus children

'Children's literature, like any literature, bears examining from the viewpoint of adult readers. Even its child directed projects reflect the adult writer's intentions and satisfy adult readers' notions about children's tastes and needs, as well as fulfilling the needs of adult societies to which children belong'.

(Gilead, 1992:80)

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Adults usually apply 'adult cultural concepts to children's books; not only are they inappropriate to children's books, but more importantly, they are the standards of a very narrow, culturally dominant group' (Hunt, 1991b:11). Adults examine children's books through adult discourses, with adult horizons of expectation, without always taking into account a child's discourses or a child's horizons of expectation. Therefore, the difference in reception of Blyton by adults and children is significant as 'her phenomenal success with children has been offset by the distaste expressed for her work by many educated adults – though this attitude is changing' (Wall, 1991:198).

The discrepancy between what adults believe children should read and what children choose to read emphasises the difference in the effect of discourse on adults and children. Singer (1994:150) points out that adults are 'hypnotised by big names, exaggerated quotes, and high-pressure advertising' and 'professors...try to convince their students that only writers who require elaborate commentaries and countless footnotes are the true creative geniuses of our time. But children do not succumb to this belief'. In other words children are not as easily affected by the dominant discourses of society. The greater life experience of adults means that they have had greater exposure to the dominant discourses and the discourses have shaped their horizon of expectation. Children, on the other hand, have had less exposure to the dominant discourses and are, therefore, less likely to be strongly influenced by it. This debate is taken up by Watson, who condemns the concept of the classic, because 'it encourages selective histories, omitting 95 per cent of what children actually read' (Watson, 2000a:4).

Townsend (Hunt, 1990:70) points out that:

the best children's books are infinitely readable; the child can come back to them at increasing ages and, even as a grownup, still find new sources of enjoyment. Some books, a few books, need never be grown away from; they can always be shared with children and the child within.

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One can apply this to Blyton and argue that children outgrow her books, thus her books could not be described as 'the best'. Yet, in preparation for this dissertation I spoke to many adults with fond memories of Blyton, as well as those who admitted to occasionally reading and enjoying her books as adults, especially when experiencing them again with their own children. It cannot be denied that when reading Blyton again as an adult one experiences a certain disappointment – it is not as exciting as it was when we were children, but perhaps that is part of Blyton's magic. Her books are especially for children and it does not matter if adults do not like them as long as children do. If one measures success in terms of survival and longevity then Blyton can only be described as successful, despite the numerous attempts that have been made to discredit her. She is seen as 'a strangely innocuous figure, standing, if anything, for an age of innocence, and, in the fears over morality and illiteracy, to represent a possible answer' (Rudd, s.a.:4).

CHAPTER FIVE

BLYTON'S TECHNIQUES: SHAPING DISCOURSES

Yet no one has written more positively and single-mindedly to and for children.
Barbara Wall (1991:193)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in Chapter Three of this study, it seems inevitable that Enid Blyton's horizons of expectation and the dominant patriarchal, gender-biased and other discourses of the times in which she lived and that reflect the structure of the society in which she lived affected the production of her texts. As dominant discourses influence the manner in which people speak and what they speak about (Rudd, 2000:11), one could argue that such discourses would also be reflected or subverted in the techniques Blyton selected and developed – in her creation of texts as well as in the genres and techniques she adopted to appeal to children.

This chapter investigates whether Blyton created, contributed to or subverted dominant discourses. Thus, the genres, techniques and settings used by Blyton are examined as significant features of her popularity. In addition, the influence of psychological and educational discourses, in particular the theories of Friedrich Froebel, on Blyton's writing are examined in terms of her reflection of these theories in her writing. These theories are significant as they could influence the horizons of expectation of adult and child readers. Finally, adaptations that have been made by others Blyton's texts in line with the ideals of dominant contemporary discourses are also examined.

5.2 BLYTON'S CHOICE OF GENRE

It is possible to separate Blyton's books into a variety of genres. According to Lukens (1995:11), a genre is a 'kind or type of literature in which the members share a common set of characteristics'. The genres used by Blyton are

significant in terms of their appeal to children and can be linked to the development of children and the changing needs of children of various ages.

5.2.1 Series books: sequences and clusters

Following the success of her first full-length children's adventure story – *The Secret Island* – in 1938, Enid had written a second book involving the same characters...and this proved as popular as its predecessor. She had by this time realised from her readers' letters that these fast-moving, exciting tales, woven around familiar characters with whom the children could identify, had a far wider appeal than she first supposed and she set about writing other full-length stories on similar lines. These proved so successful that each developed into a series, whose followers were soon demanding that she should produce annually fresh "adventures" or "mysteries".

(Stoney, 1992:155)

The stories or 'exciting tales' that follow similar story lines and feature familiar characters can be referred to as series books and the focus in this chapter is primarily on Blyton's series books. Hence, it is of interest to discuss the different types of series books. Ray (1930:139) refers to two categories of series books: books written by different authors but linked by a 'common purpose'; and books (usually written by one author) that are 'about the same character or group of characters'. In terms of the classification of series books by Ray, Blyton's books fit into the second category and thus this category is relevant to the discussion in this chapter.

As conceived by Blyton, the series is a set of adventures or of experiences at school 'with each book centred upon a recurrent cast of characters' (Druce, 1992:111). Like Ray, Druce also divides series books into two categories. Firstly, there are books that form a 'sequence' (Druce, 1992:112) and follow on after each other as sequels. These books take into account the passing of time. Characters grow, both in age and in maturity, and they remember their past, as depicted in earlier books (Druce, 1992:113). Blyton's school series fit into this category, as they show the physical and psychological growth of characters over

a period of years spent at school. In the *Malory Towers* series, for example, Irene manages to forget her health certificate at home at the beginning of the term in most of the series, and this standing occurrence is referred to with amusement in *Last term at Malory Towers* (9), when Irene jokes with Matron about regularly forgetting her certificate (this time she has remembered it). Events each year have an effect on the relationships between friends and enemies. In the same way, when new characters are introduced they often recur in the following books. In addition, learning experiences affect the behaviour of the characters and influence actions in later books. These learning experiences are discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.2.1.3).

Secondly, according to Druce (1992:112), there are series where the books are individual stories, but there are 'recurrent protagonists, identical settings, or plots which repeat a familiar formula' and the books have 'no chronological relationship' – they are, in a sense, 'timeless' (Druce, 1992:114). Druce refers to these as a 'cluster' (Druce, 1992:113). The adventure and mystery books written by Blyton fit into this category. When new characters are introduced in the adventure books they seldom feature in the subsequent books (except for Jo, in *Five fall into Adventure* and *Five have a wonderful time*, and Tinker, in *Five go to Demon's Rocks* and *Five are together again*). Events that took place in previous books may be briefly referred to but do not significantly affect the behaviour of the characters. Even though in the adventure books references are made to the fact that the children have grown, 'they were all a year older and a year bigger', as in *Five run away together* (10) – there is little evidence of increased maturity of the characters in the books (Druce, 1992:115). The characters do not age or mature much in a physical or psychological way (see Chapter Four, Section 4.2.1.3), as they do in the school series. Events that took place in previous books in the series are seldom referred to and, when they are, they have little or no bearing on the later books. Hence, there is little chronological relationship between the books and there is no need to read them in order. As Blyton's books

fit into both the sequence and cluster categories, both categories are relevant to discussions in this chapter.

It could be argued that Blyton was aware of the discourses surrounding child psychology and thus wrote in a way that would appeal to children of certain ages. As mentioned in Chapter Two, younger children – those of about six and younger – are alleged to enjoy more fantastic elements. After the age of six, both boys and girls begin to show interest in more realistic stories, in a movement away from fantasy (Ray, 1982:113). Blyton's adventure and mystery stories are not strictly fantasy and thus would appeal to children between six and about thirteen. It is interesting to note that Blyton wrote books for all stages of childhood. The *Noddy* books, which are directed at a very young audience, are unrealistic in that they portray talking toys. *The Faraway Tree* and the *Magical Adventures of the Wishing Chair* are both directed at younger children and both contain a strong element of fantasy. By contrast, the adventure, mystery and school stories are directed at an older audience, between nine and thirteen years (Druce, 1992:18), and are more realistic. This suggests that it is plausible to claim that Blyton was aware of the preferences of children of different ages.

According to Ray (1982:16), 'Enid Blyton's holiday adventure, mystery and school stories are probably her most popular books'. These genres are significant in terms of their popularity among children at the time when Blyton wrote. In addition to her school and adventure books, the genres of fantasy and reality fiction for children are also examined, as her books can also be placed into these genres. Most genre categorisations overlap (Lukens, 1995:12) – an adventure book may also be described as fantasy, while a school story may have characteristics which allow it to be referred to as realistic.

In this study Blyton's series books are discussed with reference to several genres of children's literature, including school stories, adventure and mystery stories, realistic fiction and fantasy stories.

5.2.2 School stories

As mentioned earlier, at the time when Blyton wrote, school stories were popular among girls (Ray, 1982:195). Blyton uses the 'basic formula of a boarding school as a world in which children and young people are important and where the drama arises from incidents and conflicts which might seem insignificant in the world outside' (Ray, 1982:197). Although the 'school story as a genre has never had a high literary reputation' (Ray, 1982:195), according to Ray (1982:200), 'Blyton's school stories lack the sentimentality and snobbishness of earlier school stories by other authors...they rank high amongst the best of Enid Blyton's work'.

Ray (1973:83) refers to the setting of the school story as a microcosm that focuses on everyday incidents that occur in school life with many incidents revolving around the relationships between characters, and sporting events. Often characters overcome a personal obstacle. Events which may be regarded as quite trivial by adults – such as midnight feasts, a trip to the swimming pool, sporting events, visits by parents and practical jokes – would be important to school children and are emphasised. This is achieved by devoting entire chapters to these events: 'The great midnight feast' (*The twins at St Clare's*), 'Midnight Feast' (*Upper fourth at Malory Towers*), 'An exciting match' (*The O'Sullivan twins*), 'Half-term at last' (*First term at Malory Towers; Claudine at St Clare's*), 'Janet and the "stink balls"' (*Claudine at St Clare's*), 'An interesting morning' (*Upper fourth at Malory Towers*), 'On the tennis court and in the pool' (*Last term at Malory Towers*).

In terms of the individual books in the school series, the duration of the story is usually limited to a short period such as a term or a year. This brief period forms a continuum in which single events have a large impact. Hence, the school stories show the greatest evidence of character growth in the protagonists because events in this microcosm have a considerable impact on the characters'

lives, as discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.2.1.3). In *Last term at Malory Towers* for example, Amanda's over-confident attitude diminishes and she learns to encourage others in a more constructive way after she almost drowns. Similarly, in *Claudine at St Clare's*, after she is confronted by the other girls and reprimanded for her nasty behaviour (142-143), Angela Favourleigh reforms into a nicer person (167). In both these examples one event has a great impact on the lives of the characters and brings about substantial changes in their behaviour.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Blyton's school stories fit into Druce's (1992:112) 'sequence' category in which there is growth and maturity over time, and characters change and grow in maturity through the different books in the series. In the *Malory Towers* series, Gwen is renowned for her tearful goodbyes when her parents drop her off at school, yet in *Last term at Malory Towers* Gwen attempts a more dignified farewell to her parents. This provides evidence of her increased maturity and growth through the series. In *The O' Sullivan twins*, Pat remarks to her sister Isabel that she hopes their cousin Alison 'won't be as stuck up as we were' (2) during their previous year at school.

5.2.3 Mystery and adventure: Blyton's camping and tramping stories

Much children's literature of the 1930s and 1940s was set in the countryside and filled with physical outdoor activities 'mostly devoted to the excitements of hiking, exploring, boating, map reading and the practicalities of camping' (Watson, 2000b:64). Watson refers to these as 'camping and tramping narratives' (Watson, 2000b:64) and although Blyton's books are commonly termed adventure or mystery stories, it can be said that they fit into this category as well, because the child characters spend a great deal of time tramping around the countryside and camping in caves (*Five run away together*, *The valley of adventure*), tents (*Five go off to camp*) and caravans (*Five go off in a caravan*; *Five have a wonderful time*, *The circus of adventure*). (In 1907 Robert Baden-

Powell devoted his time to developing the Scout movement (Elliott, Goldstein & Upshall, 1992:98) which, after the publication of *Scouting for boys* in 1908 (Bristow, 1991:171), rapidly spread throughout the world. It is possible to see a correlation between the interest in children's stories set in the outdoors and the Scout movement.)

Blyton's camping and tramping stories can be divided into two categories: typical adventure stories and mystery stories.

In the typical adventure story – such as the *Adventure Series* – the focus is usually on an exciting event that takes place in the countryside, such as the Welsh mountains (*The mountain of adventure*), or at the coast (*The island of adventure* and *The sea of adventure*). Following its publication in 1719, *Robinson Crusoe* had established a trend that significantly affected children's literature (see Chapter Two, Section 2.3.1). Many adventure stories that followed the successful *Robinson Crusoe* contain similar elements, such as survival, rescue and living off the land (Ray, 1973:47). Books with a survival theme, where children are responsible for looking after themselves, often reflect childhood fantasies of independence and self-sufficiency. These elements are also evident in Blyton's books. In Blyton's first adventure series book, *The secret island*, 'the children manage to build a willow house, they are preoccupied with the acquisition of food, they overhear flattering remarks about themselves' (Ray, 1982:154). The survival of the children on the island and the practical tasks they carry out are both possible and believable, the girls store their food in a cool and dry shallow cave (29-30), while the boys find a stream of fresh water close by (30). Furthermore, the house they build from growing willow trees is in a 'thicket of willows' and 'No one would ever guess there was a house just here' (31). In addition, Jack catches rabbits so that the children have meat to eat (50), and the children bring six hens (44), and a cow (55) to the island so that they have milk and eggs. They are also practical in the care of the animals, ensuring that the cow is milked regularly and that the chickens are kept in an enclosure. However,

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as ‘the children’s parents buy the island for them at the end of the story’ (Ray, 1982:154), there is a definite conflict between wish fulfilment and reality in the story. The purchase of the island by the children’s parents is, on the whole, improbable.

In *The valley of adventure*, the children find themselves in an unknown valley without supplies such as food and water. Even though they steal some tins of food from the villains, the children still need to find shelter and water. In *Five go to Mystery Moor* Timmy solves the dilemma of finding fresh water by finding water for the children so that they might camp close to water (113). In fact, the practical importance of camping close to fresh water in a sheltered place is emphasised in many of Blyton’s books where the children go camping,

...they all agreed it was just the right place to camp for the night. A spring gushed out beside the small wooded patch, as cold as ice. The trees sheltered the campers from the night-wind...The donkeys were to be tied to the trees so that they would not wander in the night.

(*The mountain of adventure*, 48)

Like *Robinson Crusoe*, another development in children’s adventure literature is Arthur Ransome’s ‘formula for holiday adventure stories which is still not exhausted’ (Wall, 1991:31-32). Arthur Ransome set the fashion for holiday adventure stories with *Swallows and Amazons* (1930). It is characteristic of holiday adventure stories like those by Blyton and Ransome that the children ‘appear to have no existence between the beginning of term and the end of it, unless, of course, they have mumps or, better still, are in quarantine and can therefore be away from school with a clear conscience’ (Ray, 1973:46,47). According to Druce, ‘it is in the nature of formula, part of the contract with her readers, that they should suspend their disbelief in Blyton’s timeless passing of time during a succession of school holidays’ (Druce, 1992:114). Rudd refers to markers used by Blyton that reinforce the fantasy world – the ‘mythic time’ period in which the stories are set. One of these markers is the fact that the stories are set when the children are on holiday. Blyton manipulates ‘time and location’ (Shavit, 1985:327) to ensure that the adventure and mystery usually takes place

during the holidays. These are techniques used by Blyton to create a world of children.

Throughout this chapter the need for a balance in children's literature is discussed. The most obvious aspect of this balance is that adventure stories for children need to balance entertainment and reality (Fisher, 1985:279) – there must be a balance between adventure, or danger, and safety (Cullingford, 1998:99). The element of safety is achieved through the fact that there is 'always a way out and a happy ending' (Cullingford, 1998:99); there is 'never any sense of real threat' (Cullingford, 1998:99). Cullingford (1998:99) refers to this element of safety as a 'psychological balance' between security and fantasy. In Blyton's books this element of safety is very strong; there are no direct references to real events taking place at the time of writing such as the Second World War. Although the war is alluded to indirectly through references to secret research – such as those of Uncle Quentin – actual events are excluded, creating a 'fantasy world complete in itself' (Cullingford, 1998:99).

The author of adventure books for children must find a balance between the characteristics of danger and violence conventionally depicted in adventure stories for adults, and the fact that it is children who solve the mystery, without creating an unconvincing environment in which children exceed their capabilities (Fisher, 1985:273). The portrayal of adults is related to the reality of the environment depicted in the children's adventure books, while it can also be linked to the element of security (as discussed above) in adventure books for children. Even though adults do not dominate the story, they provide a background of security as their presence means that, if necessary, the children may call on them for assistance.

Traditional adventure stories (from the second half of the 19th century) 'were concerned not with children in the domestic world, not in the world of fantasy, but with the preparation of a stereotypic adolescent "British Boy" to take his place in

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the world of action' (Wall, 1991:66). This once again reinforces the dominant discourses of the time and can be linked to the popularity of empire-building novels in the late 19th century and early 20th century (roughly between 1860 and 1920 (Bristow, 1991:2)), and the dominance of the British Empire where the 'world of action' would include the invasion of territories. These adventure stories remained popular in the beginning of the 20th century and may be described as a dominant discourse in themselves. (Changes in dominant discourse mean that colonialism is scorned today, while in the early 20th century the Imperialist pursuit of colonies was a more acceptable practice.) Thus it is likely that this dominant empire-building discourse influenced the writing of Blyton.

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 stories (Ballantyne, Rider Haggard, Buchan, Arthur Ransome) have not questioned the assumptions underlying their subject matter, offering to their young readers generally accepted social values.

(Fisher, 1985:279)

The establishment view, which is shaped by the dominant discourses of the time and reinforced by dominant institutions, such as schools and the church, influences the social attitudes of the members of the community.

In the time when Blyton wrote, the dominant discourses also reinforced patriarchal and gender-biased views. As discussed in Chapter Two, the child was regarded as separate – other – in a world of adult dominance. Such well-established views, as Fisher (1985:279) points out, 'went unchallenged' for a number of years. Furthermore, these views were constantly reinforced through their reflection in writing. Thus, the accepted values at the time of writing are evident in the writing.

The second type of camping and tramping story is the mystery story – such as the *Five Find-Outers* series – where the child characters are involved in solving a

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crime: 'the main characters, preferably children of their own age, outwit a gang of criminals after some successful detective work' (Ray, 1973:53). The obvious disadvantage of this type of story for children is the possible lack of credibility. Again, this refers to the balance between reality and entertainment in books for children – although is it possible for children to outwit criminals and solve a crime committed by adults, it is unlikely. Children are restricted in their 'lack of resources, physical strength, knowledge and experience' (Ray, 1982:171). Writers are often 'criticised for an unrealistic approach to adventure stories' (Ray, 1973:54) in which children outwit adult villains. However, as children beat adults to solve the crime, the child readers are able to identify with the child protagonists. This can be linked to certain wish-fulfilment desires of children to outwit adults and can therefore be linked to the popularity among children of books in which children solve crimes.

One way of overcoming the problem of the improbable situation of children's solving a crime committed by adults is to allow the children to solve the crime by accident (Ray, 1970:53) as a result of their everyday activities (Ray, 1970:54). In Blyton's books this is usually the case: the children are often on holiday when they encounter suspicious characters (in *Five go off in a caravan* the children meet Lou and Tiger Dan – the villains – because they happen to be camping in the same area) or 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. In *The castle of adventure* the children encounter villains hiding in a ruined castle where Jack and the other children are observing eagles nesting.

Similarly, the practicalities of solving a mystery or crime can add credibility to a story. Mystery stories – also referred to as detective stories – 'show children playing at being detectives and the events rely heavily on the collection of clues and some exercise of the powers of observation and deduction' (Ray, 1982:171). This allows for the inclusion of didactic elements in the stories by stressing the observation of detail. As Fatty explains in *The mystery of the hidden house*,

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“[K]eep this page for clues. Write the word down – Clues.”

“Clues,” said Ern, solemnly, and wrote it down. The word “Suspects” came next. “Coo” said Ern, “do we have suspects too? What are they?”

“People who *might* be mixed up in the mystery,” said Fatty. “You make a whole list of them, inquire into their goings-on, and then cross them off one by one when you find out they’re all right.”

(*The mystery of the hidden house*, 37)

Fatty in the *Five Find Outers* series can be compared to Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot or Miss Marple. In *The Mystery of the burnt cottage* the children ‘look for clues, assemble a list of suspects and gradually eliminate them’ (Ray, 1982:173). In *The Mystery of the burnt cottage* the children also collect evidence, discovering trampled nettles where someone stood in a ditch outside the cottage (22), ‘a bit of grey flannel, caught on a thorn’ (24), and a footprint (26) which they copy and attempt to match to one of their suspects (54). This is a process similar to that which an adult detective might use and, therefore, the success of the children in solving the crime becomes more believable and realistic. As a result of this realistic element, the *Five Find-Outers* series is closer to what Ray describes as the ‘classic detective story’ (Ray, 1982:173).

The categories of typical adventure stories and mystery stories overlap to a great extent. In the *Adventure* series the children solve crimes, and, in the *Famous Five* the children refer to their experiences as ‘adventures’. Thus, the generic term ‘adventure stories’ is used to describe both adventure and mystery stories in which crimes and mysteries are solved.

According to Sheila Ray (1970:46),

all adventure stories have certain features in common. The emphasis is on plot; the characters have an object which is clearly stated in the opening chapters and the story ends when this object has been successfully achieved. There must be plenty of movement and incident in the unfolding of the story and there must be an element of suspense – is the object going to be successfully achieved or not?

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Margery Fisher claims that ‘the adventure story is essentially romantic, in that it deals with unusual, surprising, exciting events outside the predictable course of normal life’ (Fisher, 1985:273). Normal life forms a ‘realistic background for unlikely events’ (Fisher, 1985:273). In Blyton’s adventure books several unlikely events occur against a very ordinary background. There is an amalgamation of everyday events – such as meals and household chores by the children – and unusual events – such as interaction between smugglers, villains and thieves and the children. As mentioned earlier, the children often become involved in mysterious activities by accident. In addition, the children often have to attend to everyday activities, such as going to bed on time and washing dishes after a meal.

On the whole, Blyton’s adventure books fall into Druce’s (1992:113) ‘cluster’ category, as there is little chronological relationship between the stories in each series. Like the school series, the individual adventure books are individual stories, but what separates the ‘cluster’ of the adventure books from the ‘sequence’ of the school books is the fact that the children in the adventure books do not grow or age notably.

Blyton’s *Adventure* series can be discussed as a combination of the ‘cluster’ and ‘sequence’ categories. The books form a ‘cluster’ and can be read independently, without having read earlier books in the series. In other words, the chronological order of the books does not hamper understanding of individual plots. However, the relationship between the children, Mrs Mannering and Bill Cunningham, in the *Adventure* series, develops over time and provides evidence of a ‘sequence’ of events that runs through all the books. Further evidence of the chronological ‘sequence’ of these books lies in the fact that the sixth book, *The ship of adventure*, ends with a discussion of marriage between Bill and Mrs Mannering and that in the eighth and final book, *The river of adventure*, Bill and Mrs Mannering are married. The *Adventure* series fits into the cluster category as there is little build-up to the marriage proposal or evidence of an affair

between Bill and Mrs Mannering, thus limiting the chronological growth which is an element of the sequence category.

While there is a clear difference between the genres of school and adventure stories, finding a clear distinction between fantasy and reality is more difficult. The writing of Blyton is usually set in idealised and unrealistic worlds. The stories are an untrue portrayal of life in which the children are never seriously hurt and there is always a happy ending.

5.2.4 Realistic fiction

Realistic books portray real events and subjects. 'Death is shown as a part of life in an increasing number of books' (Sutherland & Arbuthnot, 1991:349) for children. Although many realistic fiction books for children – such as those by Judy Blume, Aidan Chambers and Robert Cormier, among others – deal with controversial topics, it is important to point out that there are also many realistic novels 'that do not deal with controversial issues or problems' (Sutherland & Arbuthnot, 1991:370). Norton (1983:371) includes 'solving mysteries' in her list of topics covered by realistic children's fiction. There is, however, a clash between definitions of realism where it is realistic in terms of not portraying the fantastic or magical, and ideas of realism which include 'the use of frank language and in the treatment of hitherto taboo subjects' (Sutherland & Arbuthnot, 1991:344).

According to Rudd (2000:172,176), Blyton had a strong aversion to death. She did not attend the funeral of either of her parents and never mentioned the death of her beloved dog Bobs in her writing. Blyton believed that children should be protected from reality, 'home-truths', and that childhood was 'a site of innocence' (Rudd, 2000:178). Blyton's belief that children need to be protected from reality is an indication of her corroboration of the still dominant Romantic discourse and views of children as innocent and in need of protection (see Chapter Two, Section 2.3).

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Realistic fiction is set in the real world, so authors must adhere to the rules of the real world: a world where, among other things, you cannot fly, you cannot perform magic and animals do not speak. According to Sutherland and Arbuthnot (1991:344), realistic stories are 'always plausible or possible',

everything that happens *could* happen. Sometimes that adventure of the hero or heroine may seem rather improbable but still merit the classification of realistic because they are possible.

Lukens believes that realism 'means that a story is possible, although not necessarily probable. Effect follows cause without the intervention of the magical or supernatural' (Lukens, 1995:12).

Blyton's adventure and school books are set in a real world without the intervention of the supernatural, where events – although not likely – are possible. As Blyton does not deal with sensitive subjects her books could be described as realistic books that 'do not deal with controversial issues'. Furthermore, Norton's (1983:371) inclusion of solving mysteries as a characteristic of realistic fiction means that many of Blyton's books would fall into the category of realistic fiction as they portray mysteries.

However, according to Cullingford (1998:102), on a personal level, Blyton used her books as 'an alternative to the real world'. Thus, she was driven by the 'desire to ignore, indeed escape from, terrible events. The way she coped with tragedy was to pretend that it didn't exist' (Cullingford, 1998:102). This may be linked to Blyton's traumatic childhood and her relationship with her parents, discussed in Chapter Three (Section 3.2). The domestic bliss that she created in her portrayal of her *persona*, and the portrayal of her life, was fictionalised and far removed from the reality of her marital problems. The world that she created 'was complete in itself, and separate' from reality (Cullingford, 1998:102).

5.2.5 Fantasy

In the writing of Enid Blyton there are several fantastical occurrences and characters. This allows one to ask if the writing of Enid Blyton can be described as fantasy. According to literary discourse, the 'special quality of fantasy is that it concerns things that cannot really happen or that it is about people or creatures who do not exist, yet within the framework of each story there is a self-contained logic, a wholeness of conception that has its own reality' (Sutherland & Arbuthnot, 1991:247). Fantasy takes place in an environment that is 'conducive to magic' (Norton, 1983:529) and, according to Coleridge, and adapted by Lukens, we must 'willingly suspend disbelief' when reading fantasy (Lukens, in Norton, 1983:529).

Characteristics of fantasy include a distinction between a primary and secondary world – in other words, the real world and a world in which magical and supernatural happenings take place, and the practice of magic. Furthermore, the environment in which fantasy takes place must be believable and consistent, and, although characters may not be human, they must be believable.

Authors of fantasy often succeed in creating believable characters by initially placing the characters 'in the real world before they enter the world of fantasy' (Norton, 1983:260). In Blyton's books, like those of C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* series, the children journey to a secondary world after initially being placed in the real world. Fantasy in which there is a secondary world is evident in series such as *The Faraway Tree* series and the *Magical Adventures of the Wishing Chair*. In both these series the human characters move from the real primary world into a secondary world. In *The Faraway Tree* series, which combines 'the everyday world with a cosy fantasy realm' (Watson, 2001:91), the children jump over a ditch, leave the real world and enter a forest filled with unreal characters such as elves and faeries: 'A narrow ditch separated the wood from the overgrown lane' (*The Enchanted Wood*, 8-9):

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“Come on! Over the ditch we go – and into the Enchanted Wood!”

One by one the children jumped over the narrow ditch.

(*The Enchanted Wood*, 12)

However, when they leave the forest they return to the realistic world inhabited by conventional human characters. (There are a few occasions when fantastic characters enter the real world: the red squirrel comes knocking at their door to deliver a note from Moon-Face in *The folk of the Faraway Tree* (450), and the Saucepan Man even meets the children’s mother in *The Enchanted Wood* (90).) In *The adventures of the wishing chair* the children journey between the primary and secondary worlds on a magical chair: ‘The chair rose in the air, flapping its wings strongly, and made for the door. Out it went and rose high into the air at once’ (*The adventures of the wishing chair*, 13), eventually depositing the children on the roof of a giant’s castle.

In terms of a world in which magical and supernatural happenings take place, Blyton’s books may also be referred to as fantasy as many ‘creatures of fantasy, elves, faeries, gnomes and giants, are to be found in many of Blyton’s short stories’ (Ray, 1982:140) as well as in the *Faraway Tree* series and the *Magical adventures of the wishing chair*.

Even though the *Faraway Tree* series is one of the most fantastic of Blyton’s works, it is easy for children to relate to the idea of people living in a tree – there are many children who have dreamed of a tree house, and climbing trees in the garden or park is something that many children have experienced. Therefore, the *Faraway Tree* series provides children with material for play and stimulation of the imagination and fantastic. This may be the reason why the ‘stories about the Faraway Tree are amongst Enid Blyton’s most highly praised work’ (Ray, 1982:140).

According to Norton (1983:258), some authors of fantasy create a new world, while others ‘may not create new worlds, but they may change their characters

so they have unusual experiences in the real world', in other words 'characters depart from what we know to be possible in our world'. May (1995:88) describes the world in which books with a fantastic setting are set as a type of *utopia*; 'a world where they can enjoy the adventures of the main characters without worrying about the consequences'. This can be linked to the Arcadian setting of Blyton's books, explored later in this chapter.

In relation to this utopia – the ideal world – Lukens (1995:19) refers to a sub-genre of fantasy, 'fantastic stories', in which stories are realistic in most details but still require the reader to willingly suspend disbelief. Thus realistic books, in which improbable events take place, and in which the reader must suspend disbelief, are fundamentally fantastic. This definition of fantastic stories (those which are realistic but require the suspension of disbelief) can be applied to Blyton's adventure books because the improbable motif is evident throughout her books: 'if her criminals are armed with revolvers, as they regularly are in the *Adventure* series, they rarely fire them and when they do so can be relied upon to miss' (Druce, 1992:122).

The preposterous and improbable events have been a point of criticism of Blyton, yet these things appeal to Blyton's child audience. For the purposes of this study, Blyton's adventure books are described as unrealistic, rather than fantastic, as the term 'fantastic' would allow for the inclusion of magic and the supernatural. This unreality refers to events and situations, portrayed in Blyton's books, in which ordinary children are unlikely to find themselves even though the stories may be set against a 'recognisable domestic background' (Ray, 1982:114).

5.3 TECHNIQUES

Blyton was criticised for many of her stylistic techniques, however, these techniques contributed to her popularity. In the previous chapter these techniques are briefly referred to in light of their criticism by both literary and

social critics. The techniques that may appeal to children – such as simplicity and predictability – are the things for which Blyton was most often criticised by adults. In this chapter these techniques are examined and illustrated by means of examples from her writing. Formula writing and the oral tradition are briefly discussed, as aspects of both can be found in Blyton's writing.

5.3.1 Formula writing

Series books that follow a certain pattern, like Blyton's, are often classified as formula fiction (Lukens, 1995:16). Hence, it is possible to discuss Blyton's books in terms of formula writing. Mystery books like those written by Blyton are a common type of formula story and usually involve a crime, the investigation of the crime and the resolution of the crime. Agatha Christie is a popular crime author whose work may be said to fit into the category of adult formula fiction and Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys are popular forms of children's mystery formula fiction. Lukens points out a number of qualities that make formula fiction appealing – it is

easy to read and understand, it moves quickly with little description and much dialogue, and it comes to satisfying conclusions. Although these novels may present little challenge, their sameness provides comfort and their predictability is reassuring to young readers.

(Lukens, 1995:16-17)

Some of the qualities that contribute to the appeal of formula writing are found in Blyton's writing and discussed in this chapter. These include her simple language and style (easy to read), the pace of her stories (moves quickly), the satisfying conclusions reached by her plot, and the predictable pattern of her stories. However, as only certain characteristic aspects of Blyton's writing are discussed in relation to formula writing, this study refers to Blyton's techniques rather than her formula.

5.3.2 The oral tradition

It is necessary to examine Blyton in relation to the oral tradition, as children's literature 'is often traced back to oral folklore' (May, 1995:92). In fact, Singer believes that 'children's literature is...rooted in folklore' (Singer, 1994:152), and this foundation ensures that literature does not 'decline and wither away' (Singer, 1994:152). Therefore, the origin and basis of much literature is in folklore. Folklore and the oral tradition create a horizon of expectation as the author and reader are influenced by earlier literature and discourses.

It has been argued by Rudd (s.a.:9) that 'the elements that make Blyton successful...are elements she shares with an older, oral tradition'. Wall also believes that 'Writers for children are always inevitably much closer to oral tellers than are writers for adults' (Wall, 1991:204), while Watson (2001:92) believes Blyton is best seen in terms of a 'storyteller in the oral tradition'. Hunt points out that it is possible to argue that children belong to a primarily oral culture (Hunt, 1991a:75), which means 'that they may well have different modes of thinking, different story shapes' (Hunt, 1991a:58). Thus, 'the oral tradition seems a more apposite way of talking about Blyton's writing.... It shows not only how she composed, but how her readers were likely to receive her compositions' (Rudd, 2000:167).

Some of the aspects of the oral tradition are that it 'closely binds teller and audience' – 'the audience feels very much a part of the action', and 'it extols the deeds of that audience, or its representatives' (Rudd, 2000:169). The language used is usually simple, straightforward language (Rudd, 2000:160). In addition, 'it strives to create a sense of a story happening here and now' (Rudd, 2000:164-165). Oral tales also focus on action more than on character (Rudd, 2000:159) and 'there is a tendency to rely on traditional figures, whether archetypal or stereotypical'. Like fairy tales or myths, in Blyton's books the 'actors are few, their roles and relationships are fixed and familiar' (Druce, 1992:149). In addition,

oral tales are often described as sensory in nature, appealing to the senses of the reader and thus allowing the reader to visualise, hear, smell, see and feel the things described in the tales. These characteristics of the oral tradition are discussed in this chapter in relation to Blyton's work.

5.3.3 Blyton's techniques

Blyton's techniques are examined from the perspectives of both the techniques of formula writing, and the oral tradition. As is clear from the above description, many characteristics of these varieties of literature overlap. Therefore, each aspect will be discussed in terms of the way Blyton incorporates the characteristics of formula fiction and the oral tradition into her techniques. The characteristics of Blyton's techniques discussed in this chapter include her fast-paced plot – in terms of structure and predictable pattern – and the manipulation of the pace of her stories, the use of familiar characters, the unity of children portrayed, and the role of adults. In addition, the point of view presented in Blyton's books, her use of simple language, and the role played by sensory appeal in her books are also examined.

5.3.3.1 Exciting tales

'Plot is the sequence of events showing characters in action' (Lukens, 1995:63). The plot is important, as when a child is asked to relate a favourite story, 'usually the story's plot or plan of action is retold' (Norton, 1983:78). 'In children's fiction, plot is essential and must be unfolded in a way which attracts and holds the reader's interest' (Ray, 1982:128). 'The opening paragraphs must capture the reader's attention immediately' (Ray, 1982:121). Hence, the characteristic of a book that is of the most significance for children is usually the plot. 'Children want a book to have a good plot: a good story means action, excitement, some suspense, and enough conflict to develop interest' (Norton, 1983:78).

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'The author who appeals to children must not only use simple language but must tell the story in a straightforward way' (Ray, 1982:121). According to Norton, a story should have the following structure: 'a good beginning...[that] introduces the action' and characters; 'a good middle section that develops the conflict'; 'a recognisable climax and an appropriate ending' (Norton, 1983:79), after all, 'the young reader demands a real story, with a beginning, a middle, and an end' (Singer, 1994:150). In Blyton's series books there is a clear beginning, middle and end. Blyton always tells the story in chronological order. The appeal of chronological order for child readers can be linked to references about child development in Chapter Two (Section 2.3.2), as chronological order is easier for young children to understand. Furthermore, 'chronological order is the most common way to develop events' (Norton, 1983:79).

As mentioned, Blyton's books all begin in a similar way with the introduction of the characters. The introduction also serves to set the parameters of the stories. Events in the stories only take place within these parameters – the parameter of the school term in the school stories and the parameter of the holiday in the adventure books. In both series the introduction is short so as to quickly move into the action and thus maintain the attention of the reader. The maintenance of the reader's attention is also ensured by hints of what is to come (Greenfield, 1998:75) as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Once the reader reaches the middle of the book it is essential that his/her interest be held until the end. The pre-emptive references to the coming mystery in her books – promise of excitement – serve to encourage children to maintain interest in the stories. In the school stories conflict develops between the characters during the terms as they work towards the goal of academic or sporting success at the end of the term.

When discussing the ending of Blyton's books it is important to note that closure is an essential feature of children's stories as closure plays an important role in

the psychological development of the child. The climax and resolution/denouement are very important to create closure in children's books – and one 'is virtually certain to reach a happy ending in an Enid Blyton story' (Greenfield, 1998:79). 'There is always a happy ending. Goodness is rewarded and naughtiness punished' (Greenfield, 1998:83). The mystery is always successfully solved after a climax in which the children escape unharmed. In the school stories the climax often includes a sporting event, a play, the exams, or an exciting event, yet at the end of the story conflict is successfully resolved and the year always ends on a positive note.

In Blyton's books, no one is ever seriously hurt – Thunder the horse survives (*Third year at Malory Towers*, 128) – and the children do not have to leave their holiday until the mystery reaches a successful resolution. In the end, they 'solve the problem' and are 'praised' (Druce, 1992:123). Ray points out that one of the qualities of Blyton's books is 'security' (Ray, 1982:15). The predictable pattern of a happy ending without serious injuries to the children, or their pets, as well as a successful resolution of the mystery, means that children are secure in their enjoyment of the dangerous elements of the story because they are confident that good will triumph in the end.

According to Druce, Blyton made few changes from book to book, and her formula circled 'endlessly over three or four basic plots' (Druce, 1992:112). Blyton's plots have been described as mechanical (Ray, 1982:54) and weak (Ray, 1982:60) by critics, yet, in contradiction, Ray believes that Blyton's popularity is related to her 'skill in creating exciting plots and interesting characters' (Ray, in Baverstock, 2000:34). 'Her plots are well constructed and undoubtedly exciting, but the simplicity of her writing and of the characterisation lays them open to criticism because, to an adult reader, they are often incredible' (Ray, 1982:201).

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The predictable pattern used by Blyton is characteristic of formula fiction: 'Secrets, then, are safely contained: crooks are caught and treasure recovered, often with a reward attached.... All is summarily dealt with, and, most importantly, logically explained' (Rudd, 2000:187). One of the characteristics of Blyton's adventure series is the repetitive portrayal of children in the same way: 'a group of children of well-to-do families are involved (mostly during their vacation) in some adventure or mystery which they manage to solve without adult help. Only towards the end of the story do they bring it to the attention of their parents or the police (or both), at which time they are highly praised by them. Deviations from this structure are slight and insignificant' (Shavit, 1985:318). Ray describes Blyton's pattern as 'a mixed group of boys and girls (parents and other adults were invariably moved to the fringe of the action) and the events took place during the course of one holiday, given shape by the regional setting and by an interest in a hobby or sport such as birdwatching or sailing, or an adventure involving the finding of treasure or the tracking down of criminals' (Ray, 1982:152). In the *Secret Seven*, each story

begins in the same way: the children are bored, and it's high time they had a secret meeting; the current password must be remembered (and here is a chance for the conversant reader to score over forgetful members of the Seven), and in nine of the fifteen stories Susie's attempts to break into the meeting must be frustrated. Something "queer" is reported or children stumble across it in the course of their play.

(Druce, 1992:123)

One aspect of the plot as used by Blyton is the role played by convenience and coincidence in her pattern. The adventurous occurrences are often the result of 'convenient' situations. Even in Blyton's ideal world we cannot help but wonder how the same children always manage to land in such remarkable situations, and make such fascinating discoveries. However, 'reliance on coincidence to resolve conflict weakens plot' (Lukens, 1995:85). In Blyton's books events 'happen at just the right moment; people are rescued from outrageous disasters; villains are defeated and heroes rewarded' (May, 1995:90). Children are able to

enjoy adventures without worrying about the consequences, because there is always a happy ending.

According to Rudd (2000:157), many oral tellers retell different versions of the same story, using the same basic characters or plot, but placing emphasis on different elements depending on the audience. Rudd believes that Blyton did just this, 'reworking material for different age groups, different markets, and different word-length requirements' (Rudd, 2000:157).

Linking back to the need for balance in children's literature, Rudd (2000:188) points out the need for a balance between the security offered by the predictable formula and the escape that the books offer the child reader. The repetition of the pattern is very successful in its appeal to children. As Ray (1982:120) points out, children 'like the familiar' and a predictable pattern offers this: there is a certain sense of security offered by the repetitive pattern, as there is no threat to the child reader of the unfamiliar, or the unknown. Through the predictable pattern, Blyton creates an 'orderly world with rules and regulations which, once understood and accepted, provides a comfortable – and comforting – background' (Greenfield, 1998:83). Also, if 'a young reader has read and enjoyed a couple of Famous Five books, the fact that there are seventeen others waiting...is reassuring' (Greenfield, 1988:84). Furthermore, the child reader feels a sense of pride in his/her ability to predict the events, and even solve the mystery. Thus, the reader is flattered and complimented by the predictability of the text. Therefore, even though adults find the predictable plot boring and stale, the predictability offers children rewards. A predictable structure and plot is a characteristic of formula writing. The repetition of the style of the different books in each series creates a set of expectations in the reader. The child reader knows what to expect from the different books in the series, and from other books in different series by Blyton, and thus will not be disappointed.

5.3.3.2 *Fast-moving tales*

Plot is also used to manipulate the pace of Blyton's series stories – the speed at which the events take place determines the pace of the story. In children's books it is important to maintain the attention of the reader, as, generally, children are easily distracted, thus 'the story must move briskly and there must be plenty of action' (Ray, 1982:122). This means that pace is an important factor in the reception of a book by a child reader. Books for children with a fast pace provide the child reader with little opportunity to become bored with the events played out in the story.

Lukens (1995:75) refers to the technique of an 'exciting chapter ending that makes it difficult to lay the book aside' as a 'cliff-hanger'. This technique is common in mystery books and can be found in other children's books like Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys. Blyton also uses this in her stories. In *Five go down to the sea*, Chapter Eighteen ends with Julian's solving the mystery:

"Mr Penruthlan, why does the Gov'nor always have someone in charge of Clopper's head?" he said. "Maybe he hides something precious there, something he doesn't want anyone to find! Quick, let's go see!"

(*Five go down to the sea*, 179)

But the readers have to turn to the next chapter to find out what is hidden there. Similarly, in *Five go adventuring again*, Chapter Three ends with a cry of surprise as George cries 'Look! Mrs Sanders, come and look!' (37). As the following chapter is titled 'An exciting discovery' the reader is encouraged to read further to find out more about the discovery. Chapter headings, and books titles, contain promise of excitement (Cullingford, 1998:103), while the reader is constantly reminded that 'something is going to happen' (Cullingford, 1998:104). *Five go adventuring again* and *Five fall into adventure* are examples of titles that guarantee the reader an exciting story. In the *Adventure* series the word 'adventure' is in all of the titles, while in the *Five Find-Outers* the word 'mystery' is in all of the titles, ensuring the reader that the story contains a mystery. Thus, one of the most effective characteristics of Blyton's writing is the way in which

she successfully catches and thereafter maintains the interest of her readers in her books.

Blyton also uses this technique in her school series. In *The O'Sullivan twins*, Chapter Four ends with Erica's threatening to spoil Tessie's party, and the following chapter is entitled 'What happened at the party'. This encourages the reader to turn to the next chapter to find out whether or not Erica is successful, and the consequences of her success or failure. Similarly, Chapter Ten of *Second form at Malory Towers* closes with Alicia whispering excitedly 'Watch out for fireworks!' (75), motivating the reader to read the next chapter: 'A shock for the second form'. When Thunder, Bill's horse in *Third year at Malory Towers*, develops colic in the middle of a rainy night, Darrell races off to find help: 'Bill! Stay here and I'll get help somehow. Don't worry. I'll be back as soon as I can!' (120). The reader only finds out whether or not Thunder survives (which of course he does, in true Blyton tradition) by turning to the following chapter.

Linked to the characteristic of moving quickly is the fact that many of Blyton's stories (like those of Charles Dickens) initially appeared as serials in magazines (Ray, 1982:123). 'Her wish to encourage children to buy the next issue of the magazine meant that each episode of the serial story had to finish at an exciting point – what would happen next' (Ray, in Baverstock: 2000:34). The pre-emptive references to the coming mystery in her books – the promise of excitement – also serve to encourage children to maintain interest in the story. The stories begin with hints of what is to come, creating an 'irresistible lead-in' (Greenfield, 1998:75). The secret of Blyton's technique could simply be encouraging her readers to turn over the page and keep reading (Greenfield, 1998:76). In *The valley of adventure* Jack believes that there is something mysterious happening in the valley, but goes on to say 'I don't think we'll make this an adventure after all' (31). However, Blyton promises excitement to her readers by pointing out that 'an adventure it was – and they were only at the beginning of it, too' (31). Blyton

also promises excitement through comments made by the characters, reminding the reader to keep the possibility of a mystery in mind:

“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,”

(*Five have a wonderful time*, 22)

Linked to the role played by the pace of Blyton’s stories, and the emphasis placed on action. Blyton successfully creates ‘a sense of a story happening here and now’ (Rudd, 2000:164-165) – a characteristic of the oral tradition. Blyton is successful because she ‘never permits her narrative to stand still, never loses sight of the fact that she is unfolding a tale’ (Druce, 1992:201). She outlines

her characters, and settings in a few bold strokes, and concentrating on plots which rely on speed, excitement and mystery, Blyton catered for those readers who read to know what happens next. Her narrators speak easily and directly, supremely – and justly – confident that they know how to catch and hold the attention of child readers.

(Wall, 1991:205)

Blyton succeeds in keeping her stories moving. She effectively manages to catch

their attention right away and hold it through action and more action. She set a scene quickly and then with her short paragraphs and stripped-down sentences kept characters on the move. There were no pauses for detailed descriptions of the scenery or subtle characterisation.

(Greenfield, 1988:84)

Wall believes that ‘in spite of the fact that she lacks substance, she adroitly draws her child readers into her fictional world’ (Wall, 1991:205).

5.3.3.3 *Familiar characters*

Other than the plot, characterisation is an important aspect of any story. According to Lukens (1995:40), character development means showing the character ‘with the complexity of a human being’, and the more important the character, ‘the greater is our need to know the complexity of the character’s

personality'. In children's books there should be characters who 'seem lifelike and develop throughout the story', and those who are most often remembered 'usually have several sides to their characters' (Norton, 1983:84). This is an aspect of Blyton's writing that is discussed in Chapter Four in terms of her criticism. However, in oral tales action plays a much greater role than character, thus it can be expected that character development would be minimal, and 'there is a tendency to rely on traditional figures, whether archetypical or stereotypical' (Rudd, 2000:159). Like fairy tales or myths, in Blyton's books the 'actors are few, their roles and relationships are fixed and familiar' (Druce, 1992:149).

The advantage of Blyton's characters is that they are a simple blueprint, 'uncomplicated by conflicting character traits of reality' (Druce, 1992:121). The characters in the stories represent a 'personality type' (May, 1995:90). Each child has a specific function or role or task, which also serves to highlight the individual in the group (Cullingford, 1998:104): for example, in the *Famous Five* Anne is the gentle 'girly' character, while George is a tomboy. Julian is the eldest and the leader of the group, while Dick does not seem to play a significant role other than providing another male, and thus an equal number of male and female characters. Similarly in the school series there are stock characters who fill the roles of leaders, those characters with whom the protagonists regularly clash, tomboy characters and troublemakers.

The nature of the 'cluster' category of formula hampers the development of characterisation (Druce, 1992:114). In the 'cluster' category chronological references are limited, and often not present at all. This means that character development through the series would be limited by the lack of reference to earlier books and earlier developments. The adventure books written by Blyton fit into the 'cluster' category, and therefore and it goes without saying that character development would be limited.

On the other hand, there is a certain amount of character development in the school series, as discussed in Chapter Four. The school books fit into the 'sequence' category in which there is greater scope for character development because the development and growth of the characters can be explored throughout the series and illustrated from book to book.

In Blyton's series 'the central characters are usually children' (Ray, 1982:128), the representatives of her child audience, and she 'extols the deeds of that audience' (Rudd, 2000:169). Like Arthur Ransome, Blyton included girls as protagonists, while adults remain in the background (Ray, 1970:57). She 'provides a group of four or five children, of both sexes and ranging from seven- to fourteen-years-old so that it is easy for the reader to find a character with whom to identify' (Ray, 1982:115). Blyton successfully created adventure and mystery stories that appealed to both boys and girls by portraying male and female characters (Ray, 1982:18). (According to dominant discourses on the developmental stages of children, during the first few years of middle childhood male and female children do not ordinarily play together. Thus Blyton's stories contradict these dominant theories. However, as Blyton's stories take place during the children's holidays, and the children in the stories are often related, it would not be too unusual for these children to play together.)

Critics have described Blyton's characters as 'static' (Ray, 1982:61) and stereotypical. In other words, her characters lack the development and depth which Norton (1983:84) believes they should have. Yet, if one relates Blyton to the oral tradition, then the complexity of the character's personality does not play as significant a role as it would in a book that focused on human nature.

In the *Five Find-Outers* series, even though the characters are 'clearly distinguished', Larry, Pip and Daisy are 'interchangeable' (Ray, 1982:173). Bets and Fatty stand out as individuals the most. Bets stands out because she is the

youngest and distinctive from the other characters because of her age. When the other children all have tasks in the investigation Bets is often left out,

“What about *me*?” said Bets, in dismay. “Aren’t I to do anything? I’m a Find-Outer too.”

“There’s nothing you can do,” said Larry.

Bets looked very miserable. Fatty was sorry for her. “We shan’t want Buster with us,” he said. “Do you think you could take him over the fields? He just loves a good rabbit walk.”

(*The mystery of the burnt cottage*, 33)

Yet it is Bets who makes the most significant discovery and finds one of the children’s suspects (*The mystery of the burnt cottage*, 50). This emphasises the importance of her role in the series and causes her to be more noticeable. On the other hand, Fatty stands out because he is the leader in the group. Fatty usually makes decisions in terms of how the investigation will be carried out, and even teaches the other children how to go about the investigation. In the above example Fatty takes control by suggesting that Bets go for a walk with Buster.

The character of a leader can be seen in Fatty, in the *Five Find Outers* – as discussed earlier – and Julian, in the *Famous Five*. On the other hand, in the *Barney* series it is difficult to describe Barney as a leader in the same way as Julian or Fatty, as Barney’s social status as a poor orphan seems to remove some of his power. In *The Rubadub mystery* he has to work and cannot spend as much time with the other children solving the mystery, while in *The Ring O’ Bells mystery* he first has to hitch a ride to Ring O’ Bells Village before he can join the other children, however, the character with whom he gets a lift turns out to be involved in the mystery (107). This emphasises the importance of the character of Barney, as his need to hitch a ride is significant to the story as a whole. In the *Adventure* series Jack and Phillip can both be described as a leader. From these examples it is clear that a male child is usually the eldest (Rudd, 2000:184) and that this child usually plays the role of leader.

In contrast with strong male leaders it is usually the youngest female child who fills the role of the ‘weak’ characters, Anne in the *Famous Five*, Lucy-Ann in the

Adventure series and Bets in the *Five Find-Outers* can be described as physically small or weak and have a gentle nature. This can be viewed as a reinforcement of dominant discourses that place women in inferior roles. Hence, it is possible that Blyton is reinforcing gender-biased discourses by portraying leaders as males and 'weak' characters as young females.

David Rudd (2000:100) describes Anne in the *Famous Five* as 'dependent'. In the *Famous Five* Anne's place as the youngest and smallest character is emphasised by references to Anne as 'baby' (*Five on Kirrin Island again*, 64; *Five run away together*, 26). In *Five on a treasure island* Anne sits 'on her aunt's knee' (160), like a young child would. Although she is excluded from the exciting events she does not hesitate to voice her fears, both in her actions – 'Anne slipped her hand into Dick's. She felt scared' (*Five on a treasure island*, 117) – and in words, "'I felt pretty scary too..." said Anne' (*Five go off to camp*, 74).

Like Anne, Lucy-Ann in the *Adventure* series also shows fear. In *The castle of adventure*, 'Lucy-Ann didn't like the idea of climbing the cliff and sliding across a dangerous branch that might slip' (38), and is helped across by Jack (66). In the same way, in *The mountain of adventure* Lucy-Ann is afraid of 'slipping and falling' (71). Yet, in a subversion of dominant gender-biased discourses, Blyton shows that even small and young characters can be brave when Lucy-Ann comes to Phillip's rescue when he appears to have been attacked by wolves: "'Phillip! We're coming! Are you hurt?" cried valiant little Lucy-Ann, picking up a stick' (78).

In the *Five Find-Outers*, Bets is too young to attend boarding school like the other children (*The mystery of the secret room*, 1). Pip describes Bets as his 'baby sister' (*The mystery of the burnt cottage*, 13), she is 'a small girl of about eight' (*The mystery of the burnt cottage*, 2). Yet, as Fatty points out 'She's only little, but she might be some use' (*The mystery of the burnt cottage*, 14). In the

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Secret Seven the boys are protective over the girls when they are captured by a villain and his dog in Bramley Woods late at night: “‘We better all get close together,’ said Colin. ‘Look – you girls get in the middle and we boys will sit round you. That will keep the wind off a little’” (*Look out Secret Seven*, 73).

This argument can be referred back to Chapter Four (Section 4.3.2.4) and the discussion on the portrayal of sexism in Blyton’s writing, as the dependent characters are girls. It can however be argued that Blyton merely portrayed the gender roles of the time in which she wrote, or that she essentially portrayed a realistic representation of gender roles in which men are often physically more powerful than women and therefore play a protective role over women.

In the adventure books there is often conflict with one or more adult villain; however this would be inappropriate in a school story. Teachers, the adult characters portrayed in the school series, seldom fill the role of villain. Thus, in the school stories the role of the villain is often filled by one of the children attending school with the other characters. However, Blyton uses the portrayal of nasty characters to portray character growth, as these characters usually realise the flaws in their actions and change for the better. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the school series fit into Druce’s sequence category in which character growth is a characteristic. This character growth is explored in Chapter Four (Section 4.2.1.3).

The great variety of child characters portrayed in Blyton’s books allows for the reader to identify with the character. Thus, according to Blyton ‘it doesn’t matter what type of child is reading the book – he or she will identify himself with one or other character’ (Blyton, in Druce, 1992:121). ‘In Blyton’s adventure stories the role of Hero/Heroine is shared among a group of child protagonists who...may act in unison or as individuals’ (Druce, 1992:146). This further reinforces the opportunity for the reader to identify with the characters in the story and thus with the hero/heroine. This may reinforce positive feelings in the child reader that he

or she too may be a hero. In effect this may further encourage the reader to read more of Blyton's books and thus it can be described as a characteristic of Blyton's writing that contributed to her success.

By displaying children with different personality types Blyton accomplished two things. Firstly, the variety of personality types reading her books would have different characters to relate to. Secondly, in reality people have different personalities, thus Blyton portrayed a more realistic picture of life (ironic when discussed in relation to the unreality of her books). This contributed to Blyton's appeal to a variety of children by allowing them to relate to the different personalities portrayed in the books.

5.3.3.4 *Empowering girls*

As there are a great number of characters in Blyton's books, only a few aspects of selected characters are discussed in this chapter. This includes an examination of power relations portrayed in Blyton's books, the use of characters in a didactic manner to provide the reader with information, the complexity of the character of George in the *Famous Five*, the manipulation of dominant discourses by Blyton – in terms of both the reflection and subversion of discourses.

In Blyton's work some characters are used to dramatise power relations. As discussed earlier, in the *Famous Five*, Anne's dependant and gentle nature often gives the impression of weakness, as she is not a dominant leader. Anne can be explored in terms of Foucault's theory on power, which reveals unexpected aspects of her character. On the one hand, the portrayal of Anne reinforces traditional power discourses, as Anne often fills the role of mock-parent among the *Famous Five*, hence there is power in her role, as there is traditionally power in the role of the parent: "Come along!" she called in a voice just like her mother's' (*Five go off in a caravan*, 40). According to Rudd (2000:15), 'Anne

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draws on her domestic role to enhance her power'. Furthermore, Anne is essential to the *Famous Five* as, by reminding the characters of domesticity and home, she signifies the 'security of home' (Rudd, 2000:100). Her presence is comforting to the reader as it offers protection. It provides balance by breaking away from the excitement of the adventure. On the other hand, by placing parental power in the hands of the youngest character, Blyton subverts traditional discourses. When referring to Anne, their mother points out that 'it's a good thing that one of you is sensible!' (*Five go off in a caravan*, 26). Therefore, even though Julian, the eldest character, acts like a parent and tells the other children what to do, Anne also holds a certain amount of power.

Blyton also uses the Bets character, in the *Five Find-Outers*, to provide the reader with information, but by 'explaining' things to Bets Blyton succeeds in not making the reader feel like he/she is being spoken to as a child, or being taught. If the reader does not need the explanation, he/she may feel a sense of pride and pleasure at knowing something that one of the characters – Bets – does not. In *The mystery of the burnt cottage* (18) Larry explains to Bets what clues are, thereby indirectly informing a reader who might not know. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, when Bets is left to take Buster for a walk in *The mystery of the burnt cottage*, she inadvertently discovers one of the pieces of the mystery. Thus, in a way Bets serves as a catalyst, moving events in the story forward and reminding younger readers that they too can play an important role.

The character of George is discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.3.2.4) in terms of the criticism of Blyton in the portrayal of alleged sexist attitudes, and in terms of character development. George is the most 'complex' of Blyton's characters (Druce, 1992:120). Even though her name is Georgina she insists on being called George: 'I'm not Georgina' (*Five on a treasure island*, 18) and derives great pleasure from cases of mistaken identity in which she is referred to as a boy:

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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.

(*Five on Kirrin Island again*, 60)

Her tomboy nature may allow George to appeal to both male and female readers as the tomboy could fit in with the male characters, thus appealing to male readers, yet the rebellious tomboy would appeal to similarly rebellious female readers. In addition, George shows evidence of character growth. She accepts her cousins as friends after initially ignoring them in *Five on a treasure island*. Similarly she learns to accept both Jo, in *Five fall into adventure*, and Henry, in *Five go to Mystery Moor*, even though their tomboyish nature, which mirrors her own, threatens George's distinctiveness and individuality. According to Ray (1982:162), George develops and 'becomes a rather more pleasant person'.

Her appearance, gruff behaviour and activities (such as swimming and rowing her boat better than the male characters) reinforce her tomboy nature, in contrast with the 'girly' way in which she loses her temper and sulks. In fact, this is pointed out in *Five go to Mystery Moor*: 'To think that George would behave like a sulky little girl' (51). Even though George often displays deplorable behaviour and sulks, she is a dominant character in the series.

This is similar to Dinah in the *Adventure* series, who often sulks because she is scared of the unusual animals that her brother Phillip collects; however, Dinah is not a dominant character in the *Adventure* series. In addition, in the *Adventure* series Dinah contrasts with the other characters in the fact that she does not like animals. Thus, Blyton presents the reader who is not interested in all animals – especially not insects, rodents and reptiles – with a character with whom such a reader can relate.

The subversion of traditional dominant discourses by Blyton through the portrayal of George is also discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.3.2.4). However, during the war years women were called on to 'step outside traditional

gender roles' (Rudd, 2000:112). Furthermore, in the early 1900s the Girl Guide movement, which followed Baden Powell's Boy Scout movement, reinforced the idea of independent and self-sufficient women. Therefore, the character of George may in fact reflect of some dominant discourses about the changing role of women at the time of writing.

5.3.3.5 *Feathered and furry friends: pets and animals*

In addition to the child protagonists, animals play an important role in Blyton's stories. Each series of adventure books has a characteristic animal that participates in the adventures of the children and often serves as a catalyst for action in the stories. Animals that leap to mind are Timmy in the *Famous Five*, Kiki in the *Adventure* series, Miranda and Loony in the *Barney* series, Buster in the *Five Find-Outers* and Scamper in the *Secret Seven*. Timmy 'plays a part in the plot' (Ray, 1982:163), shows an 'almost human understanding and converses in a series of barks which are interpreted for the reader by one or other of the children' (Ray, 1982:163).

The *Adventure* series in particular places a great deal of emphasis on nature. In *The Castle of Adventure* Philip befriends Button, a fox cub, while Jack camps out in a tumble-down castle to watch eagles nesting. Similarly, in *The mountain of adventure* Phillip makes friends with a goat named Snowy. Moreover, he usually has a number of rats, mice, and worms residing in his pockets. The exploration of nature and the outdoors can be referred to in terms of Froebel's focus on the importance of nature in the life of the child, especially considering Blyton's training in the Froebel method of teaching. In addition, Blyton's father also enjoyed spending time outdoors; hence the depiction of nature in Blyton's books can also be linked to her relationship with her father. Phillip's friendship with unusual pets also creates a 'mini-plot' in the *Adventure* series. When the children are separated in *The mountain of adventure*, Snowy, the goat befriended by Phillip, carries notes between Phillip and the other children. Similarly, Button, in

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The castle of adventure, shows Tassie how to enter the castle through a small tunnel under the castle walls (134). Therefore, the animals play a role in solving the mystery.

In the adventure stories dogs and animals often disapprove of villains before the children, or even the adults realise the truth. This pattern is reinforced in *Five go down to the sea* when Timmy befriends Yan, the shepherd's grandson, in contrast with the children who dislike Yan from the start. However, the children are proven wrong when Yan comes to their rescue. In *Five go adventuring again* the children have a tutor, Mr Roland, for the holidays, turns out to be the villain of the story, yet initially only Timmy dislikes the tutor, and George is reprimanded for believing her pet.

In the *Malory Towers* and *St Clare's* series the girls are not allowed to keep pets, however, Blyton finds several opportunities to include animals in the stories. Bill, in *Third year at Malory Towers*, ensures that her beloved horse, Thunder, may be stabled close to her. To Bill 'Thunder takes the place of a friend' (*Third year at Malory Towers*, 164). In the *Famous Five*, George even takes Timmy to school with her: 'She took him to school with her each term, for she and Anne went to a boarding-school that allowed pets' (*Five go to Smuggler's Top*, 9).

5.3.3.6 *The peripheral role of adults*

'Popular literature for children tends to ignore adults' (Shavit, 1985:316-317) and 'offers a world which excludes adults' (Shavit, 1985:316). By excluding adults from the stories Blyton ignores the adults and gives up the need for the child to court the approval of the adult. By placing the focus of the books on the activities of the children, Blyton creates a children's world.

One of the most unmistakable characteristics of children's books is that they are usually about children. Most importantly, adults do not share the adventures of

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the children. In the adventure books – those books most prolific in the post Second World War period – few adults shared the ‘play and concerns’ of the children (Egoff, 1980:191) and adults moved on the ‘periphery’ of the adventures, although adults are always there to ‘offer support’ (Egoff, 1980:192). Therefore, the minor role of adults has a significant impact on the child reader as it reinforces the subversion of traditional power relations between adults and children by placing power in the hands of the children: ‘the children do not consult adults’ (Ray, 1982:163).

According to Watson (2001:92), Blyton is guilty of ‘ageism’ as she ‘empowers her child characters at the expense of adults’. In ‘Blyton’s adventures children are in control’ (Cullingford, 1998:103) and solve ‘their own problems’ (Watson, 2001:92), while the adults are necessary to make the world more believable – there could not be a world without adults. Adults occasionally interfere, reminding the children of chores that need to be done and thus returning them to reality, but they usually fade into the background, providing food and help when necessary. In the *Secret Seven* series Janet and Peter’s parents provide food for the children’s meetings, and are allowed into the clubhouse, even though they do not know the password: “I don’t know the password!” she [Peter’s mother] said. “But please let me in. If I say “Lemonade and biscuits!” will that do?” (*Secret Seven fireworks*, 20). However, in Blyton’s books the children are given the ‘time and space to be intrepid and resourceful’ (Cullingford, 1998:106). ‘They are independent’ (Cullingford, 1998:106). Children seek the approval of adults and thus the adults also play a role in providing children with this as at the end of the books children are praised.

A characteristic of Blyton’s style is that Blyton uses a number of devices to create a world without parents and thus remove adults from the action. This means that in Blyton’s books ‘parents are “heard but not seen”; [or] parents are replaced by substitutes’ (Shavit, 1985:320).

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In the *Famous Five* when the children go off camping on their own Timmy plays an essential role, as the reader is often told that Timmy can protect the children, thus there is no need for an adult: 'if we want looking after, Timmy can do that' (*Five go off in a caravan*, 16). Julian is essentially the adult of the group in the *Famous Five*. In *Five are together again* Julian assures Aunt Fanny: 'I'll look after everyone and keep them in order' (21). In *Five get into trouble* Aunt Fanny says that 'Julian can be put in charge' (13). Rudd (2000:98) believes that this explains the 'ambivalence' that many readers feel towards Julian because he is distanced from the readers (Rudd, 2000:99). However, many female readers admit to having a crush on Julian (Rudd, 2000:99). Thus, both Timmy and Julian are in *loco parentis* and adults are not necessary.

In Blyton's books parents are often sent away and substituted with a variety of characters. In the school series parents are substituted by teachers. Miss Greyling in the *Malory Towers* series and Miss Theobald in the *St Clare's* series, the head mistresses of the schools, are powerful matriarchal female figures. These characters provide security and stability as adults to whom the girls can turn in times of trouble, and who will provide advice and fair judgement when needed. Miss Greyling and Miss Theobald balance fairness, kindness and strictness, essentially providing the girls with an ideal role model.

In addition to the head mistresses, the Mam'zelles, the French mistresses, also serve as entertaining female characters. Although the girls often tease them, and the differences between French and English schools are highlighted ('Mam'zelle would never have dared to behave in such a free and easy way at her school in France' (*The O'Sullivan twins*, 42)), the Mam'zelles are memorable adult characters, with humorous antics, strange accents and quick tempers. Their more scatterbrained and erratic nature contrasts with the stability of the headmistresses, however the lack of control they have over the girls at the school provides the characters with a certain amount of freedom and opportunities to engage in activities of their own choice. Although the portrayal of

the Mam'zelles can also be linked to the criticism of Blyton for ethnocentrism and xenophobia discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.3.2.3), the Mam'zelles are portrayed in a positive light, despite their eccentricities. Therefore, it is possible to claim that the Mam'zelles present evidence to refute accusations of xenophobia.

In the adventure books the children are also provided with a number of substitute parents. Substitutes play the role of both villains and supportive adults. Miss Pepper features in the *Barney* series, while Joanna often looks after the children in *Five fall into adventure*, however these are both peripheral roles and they do not become involved in the mystery with the children. In the different series the children are fond of both Mrs Pepper and Joanna. On the other hand, Barney's false father in *The Rub-a-Dub Mystery* and the Sticks in *Five run away together* are presented as villains who are false substitutes.

Fathers and men are often absent, hidden behind newspapers or in the study or away at work. Uncle Quentin in the *Famous Five* is very similar to Uncle Jocelyn in *The sea of adventure*. Both men disappear into their studies for most of the story and, other than restricting the activities of the children by causing them to keep quiet; they are seldom actually involved in the adventures of the children. Uncle Quentin does play an important role in the stories because it is often his secret scientific work that is threatened by the villains who are defeated by the children, as in *Five go adventuring again*. He is even rescued by the children in *Five go to Smuggler's Top*. Similarly, Uncle Jocelyn's interest in maps provides the children with a map of the secret passages in *The sea of adventure*.

Absentee fathers in Blyton's books can be linked to Blyton's relationship with her own father, as considered in Chapter Three (Section 3.2). This would have had a great impact on Blyton as a young girl and it is possible to see a correlation between the number of absentee men in Blyton's books and her own absentee father.

Bill, in the *Adventure* series, and Inspector Jenks in the *Five Find-Outers*, are examples of strong male characters, however, they seldom feature in the activities of the children until the climax of the story. Lower class Mr Goon (Ray, 1982:174,176) in the *Five Find-Outers* series is an example of a weak male character, however, this is in contrast with the authoritative Inspector Jenks who usually arrives towards the end of the story to lock up the villains and praise the children. Except for Mrs Stick, in *Five run away together*, the villains in Blyton's stories are usually men. In *Five get into trouble* the woman who works in the villain's house is good and aligns herself with the children by providing them with food.

The female characters in Blyton's books may be described as 'ideal' mothers – stereotypical mother figures who cook, clean and worry. Mrs Mannering is described as 'everything a mother should be' (*The island of adventure*, 188). In *Five go off in a caravan* the farmer's wife is 'a fat, round-cheeked old woman, whose eyes twinkled with good humour. She made them very welcome, 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' (67). Similarly, in *Five go to Billycock Hill*, Toby's mother is 'a plump and jolly woman' (29) who provides the children with tea of a 'large ham...crusty loaves of new bread...Crisp lettuces...an enormous cake, and beside it a dish of scones. Great slabs of butter and jugs of creamy milk were there, too, with honey and home-made jam' (30). They shoo the children out of the kitchen when it is not time for meals (*Five fall into adventure*, 20), provide 'lashings' of food and bath the dirty children (*Five fall into adventure*, 74; *The castle of adventure*, 26). The clichéd characterisation of the mother figures in Blyton's books can be examined in relation to Blyton's poor relationship with her mother, as discussed in Chapter Three (Section 3.2).

5.3.3.7 *Unity of children*

'Many children like to feel like they are part of a gang or group' (Ray, 1970:53). This is a characteristic of middle childhood (Van Niekerk, 2000:24) and is discussed in Chapter Two, Section 2.3.2. In Blyton's books the desire to feel part of a group is evident as there is a sense of community, belonging and solidarity (Rudd, 2000:199).

Cullingford (1998:107) points out that in reality children often face rejection and are excluded from group activities, yet this does not occur in Blyton's adventure books. This is comforting for the reader, especially in relation to the inclusion of the reader in her books. The adventures involve all of the children. Although the children may be away from home, their unity offers them security (Rudd, 2000:184).

An aspect of Blyton's writing that offers the child reader security is the unity and cohesion of the child characters. Even though there are arguments, particularly those between Dinah and Phillip in the *Adventure* series, and between George and the other children in the *Famous Five*, 'the overall cohesion and consistency of the group is never challenged' (Cullingford, 1998:107). The children are secure in their belonging to the group and their security within the group is never threatened. When George attempts to run away, in *Five run away together*, the other children do not hesitate to join her – in fact they will not allow her to go without them.

In the *Barney* series the mystery never gains momentum until the arrival of Barney and Miranda, and similarly in the *Five Find-Outers*, Fatty's arrival home from school signals the beginning of events. *Five have a wonderful time* begins with George ill at home, yet she soon joins the other children, and in *Five go to Mystery Moor* the boys join the girls at the farm where they are spending the holiday, ensuring that all of the children are together to solve the mystery. This

unity is further reinforced in the Adventure series when, after they marry, Bill and Mrs Mannering adopt Jack and Lucy-Ann, ensuring that they are not separated from Phillip and Dinah.

The unity is reinforced by the way in which the children speak to each other – the casual rapport that they have and their physical closeness – they often share beds and rest against each other. Rudd (2000:101) refers to this as a 'bonding through touch'. In the *Famous Five* the children spend time lying in the garden together (*Five go off in a caravan*, 7) and when they go camping they often share sleeping areas: in *The valley of adventure* they share a 'cosy-looking bed spread on the grass under a big birch tree' (41), while in *Five go to Billycock Hill* the children share a bed of close set heather (41). In *The castle of adventure* the children walk around the castle 'linking arms with each other' (116). In addition, the children participate in communal activities, such as eating, swimming, and building a shelter. Even though Anne is teased because she pays attention to the finishing touches of the home, 'homebuilding is generally a communal activity' (Rudd, 2000:185). In *Five run away together*, even though Anne arranges their things in the cave, all of the children help to unload the boat (103), and Dick collects heather for their beds (112). Similarly, in *The secret island* all of the children help to build the willow tree house and participate in communal activities such as making breakfast and washing up (35).

Furthermore, the group to which the children belong is an exclusive group. Rudd (2000:101) believes that their strength and 'power lies in their solidarity' and unity, thus their cohesion contributes to the subversion of traditional dominant discourses. The 'celebration of the in-group – the children – must be at the expense of an out-group: the adults' (Rudd, 2000:169), which leads to the 'empowerment of children against adults' (Rudd, 2000:102). 'Membership of the group is all important and outsiders are not welcome' (Cullingford, 1998:106). The unity of the children, and the separation of the adult and child worlds, further

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serves to include the reader in the story. As a child, the reader is part of this unit and feels part of the group.

When the Five go camping without Henry we are reminded of the exclusivity of the group: 'All the same it is fine to be on our own, just the Famous Five together!' (*Five go to Mystery Moor*, 106). In the same way, when referring to their friend Toby in *Five go to Billycock Hill*, George says 'He's nice – but it's good to be alone again – just the Five' (39).

5.3.3.8 *Point of view*

The 'credibility and enjoyment of a story for a specific age group may be affected by the author's choice' (Norton, 1983:93) of point of view. 'Literary works encourage identification with characters by showing things from their point of view' (Culler, 2000:108).

One of the characteristics of the oral tradition is a relationship between the teller and the audience, as there is a close interaction between the author (Rudd, 2000:161), the text and the audience. Oral tales 'closely [bind] teller and audience' – and, as a result, 'the audience feels very much a part of the action' (Rudd, 2000:169). In addition, oral tales extol 'the deeds of that audience, or its representatives' (Rudd, 2000:169). This means that the point of view of the audience can easily be adopted.

The dominance of children in Blyton's books is related to the point of view from which the stories are told. Blyton successfully achieves this by using children as the dominant characters in her books. By showing things from a child's point of view Blyton encourages her child readers to identify more easily with her characters. Blyton includes the reader in the activities of the characters by addressing the reader. This aspect of Blyton's writing was criticised and is also discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.3.2.7).

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Blyton's books repeatedly make the same point: 'children can cope by themselves' (Wall, 1991:190). This is achieved by the fact that, according to Wall (1991:191), the 'voice that is heard most consistently in Blyton's stories is not the voice of the adult narrator, but the voices of children'. This can be linked to Ray's belief that, in Blyton's books, the 'adults are seen wholly from the children's viewpoint, the author identifying completely with them and with the child reader' (Ray, 1982:163).

According to Wall (1991:178), in twentieth-century fiction for children 'it has become the norm for adult narrators to speak directly to child narratees'. Wall (1991:178) includes Blyton and Dahl among the 'less substantial' writers who make use of this technique. Contemporary children's books often use a first-person narrator – they 'assume the personality of the child and pretend to be a child writing or speaking – this technique has been particularly fashionable in the last twenty years' (Wall, 1991:68).

Blyton does not use a first person narrator, and thus directly present the story from a child's point of view. Instead, according to Wall (1991:68), Blyton assumes a 'third-person stance and become[s] a child equivalent'. In Blyton's books the reader does not view the story through the eyes of a specific character. Blyton uses a third person omniscient narrator who knows all that the child characters know (or one might even say that the events in Blyton's stories are seen through the eyes of the implied child reader – the intended audience – because the narrator does not always know everything about the mystery or about the villains involved). By giving a broad point of view Blyton appeals to various children who might be reading the book as they are able to identify with the character of their choice and are not 'pushed' into seeing things from a specific point of view as the point of view is not limited to that of a specific character.

5.3.3.9 *Language and style*

Style refers to an author's 'choice of words', and 'the way in which they use words and sentences' (Norton, 1983:92), 'how' an author says things (Lukens, 1995:151). Style includes literary devices such as connotation, imagery, figurative language, symbolism and allusion (Lukens, 1995:153-160).

Although the child reader is likely to have a more limited vocabulary and less reading experience than the adult reader it is reasonable to look for a style which avoids clichés, which incorporates original metaphors and similes, which uses challenging language structures and rhythms and in which there is a vivid immediacy of language.
(Ray, 1982:128)

The language used in oral tales is usually simple, straightforward language (Rudd, 2000:160).

If these characteristics of style, such as challenging language structures, are examined, it is possible to understand the criticism of Blyton for a simple style because, as mentioned in Chapter Four (Section 4.2.1.1), her writing allegedly contains few literary devices. In Chapter Four (Section 4.2.1.1) examples of figurative language found in Blyton's books are pointed out, even though the examples are uncomplicated from the perspective of adult literary discourse.

Even though Blyton was criticised for simple language, style and vocabulary, simplicity may hold a certain appeal for children. Simplicity of language can be linked not only to Chapter Two (Section 2.3.2) and the psychological development of the child and the alleged preferences of children of certain ages, but also to the idea explored in Chapter Four (Section 4.2.1.5) that children may enjoy reading stories that are easy to read for pleasure and entertainment, stories in which they do not have to think too much about complicated language. In other words, children may enjoy books with undemanding vocabulary because they do not seem to be a learning exercise for the children. This emphasises Blyton's compliance with changes in dominant discourses that moved away from the didactic approach of children's literature, stressed by the Puritan influence,

towards an approach that takes into account the entertainment value of children's literature.

Blyton 'devised a highly successful narrative technique in which children's thoughts, language and syntax dominate the narrative' (Wall, 1991:192), however, she restricts child readers by 'confining the language and syntax to the level of their minds' (Wall, 1991:193). The use of language that is limited, specifically for children, may be 'stultifying to the child' (Hunt, 1991a:104) and could hamper the process of language acquisition.

Characteristics of Blyton's style include several exclamation marks, short sentences and many interjections (Ray, 1982:160). 'There are few adjectives [and] much of the story development takes place through dialogue, which contains a liberal peppering of exclamation marks' (Greenfield, 1998:75).

"Dick! Anne! Where are you?"...
"Anne!" yelled Julian, in alarm. "Dick! Come here! We're back!"
And then a small trembling voice came down from the tree-top overhead.
"Oh Julian! Oh Julian! I'm here."
"It's Anne!" yelled Julian, his heart leaping in relief.
(*Five get into trouble*, 68)

Furthermore, Blyton uses capital letters and italics to emphasise words: when George's father calls to her mother urgently – 'FANNY!' (*Five go to Billycock Hill*, 10) – his tone is emphasised by the use of both capital letters and an exclamation mark, a technique also used in *Five get into a fix* when the children's mother tells them to go upstairs and take their medicine: 'GO!' (14). In the same way, in *Five have a mystery to solve*, Wilfrid describes Timmy as 'a wonderful dog' (37), italics used by Blyton to emphasise Timmy's nature. In other words, Blyton uses visual elements in her writing to emphasise aspects of the story. This could benefit child readers who may notice the emphasis of words more easily if the words are highlighted visually in the text, by placing them in capital letters or italics. The use of exclamation marks and punctuation also serves to emphasise expression in the text. This can also be linked to the oral tradition,

because if a reader was reading one of Blyton's stories out loud the visual indicators in the text – the capital letters, italics and punctuation – would make it easier for a child reader to see where to place emphasis.

5.3.3.10 *Sensory appeal*

Oral tales are often described as sensory in nature, appealing to the senses of the reader and thus allowing the reader to visualise, hear, smell, see and feel the things described in the tales.

As Blyton's 'stories are essentially sensory...rather than literary' (Rudd, 2000:193), they fit easily into the oral tradition, as appeal to the senses is a characteristic of the oral tradition. '[S]he was seen as a very visual writer, whose stories unfolded with ease in their heads, like films...and with readers seeing themselves as being part of the action' (Rudd, s.a.:9). In Chapter Three (Section 3.5) Blyton's writing process was examined. She described the story unfolding in her mind's eye as if playing in a 'private cinema' (Blyton, in Greenfield, 1998:69; Blyton, in Baverstock, 2000:27). If this is taken literally it could contribute to the visual nature of her writing: for her the story presented itself in a visual way, hence she presented it in this way and therefore it is easy to understand that readers also experience this visual aspect of her stories.

Linked to the idea of Blyton's appealing to the senses is the portrayal of food in her stories, as food is 'the most obvious and immediate reminder of physical pleasures' (Cullingford, 1998:105). Food in Blyton's stories is linked to both sensory and 'sensual pleasure' (Rudd, 2000:102): Rudd believes that the 'mouthwatering descriptions of the feasts' are indicative of a relationship between sex and food (Rudd, 2000:103,104). Similarly, Ray refers to Tucker's suggestion that 'food replaces the interest which sex provides in popular adult fiction' (Ray, 1982:118). According to Cullingford (1998:104), 'gratification of appetite is a very important theme' in Blyton's books and the reader regularly witnesses the

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children eating. Through the portrayal of detailed descriptions of food the reader is reminded of physical pleasure and readers' mouths water when reading the descriptions of the lavish picnics and lunches. Blyton succeeds in making the most ordinary food, such as bread and butter, tomatoes and plums, sound like a feast. In fact, the appealing portrayal of food in her books encouraged a Hindu reader to fantasise about tongue sandwiches:

I remember becoming extremely curious and fantasising about food items that I wasn't very likely to come across in my pretty vegetarian environment...After reading several books, where 'tongue sandwiches' were mentioned, I had this amazing mental picture of what it might be...When my mother finally explained to me what it really was, I remember being quite shocked.

(Rudd, 2000:103)

Cullingford (1998:105) divides the depiction of food by Blyton into two categories. Firstly, there is the reality of domestic life and the fact that children have to eat (Cullingford, 1998:105). Thus, the adventure is interrupted by occasions when the children eat. This serves to encourage and facilitate action – children have to leave the lookout point to go and eat, children have to stop the adventure to go and eat and this allows events to occur *en route* to eating and while the children are away from the adventure eating things happen that they have to solve later. Furthermore, while they sit and eat, the adventure is discussed, plans are made and thus the reader is given the opportunity to catch up on the events. In other words, stopping to eat also serves to 'punctuate the action' (Cullingford, 1998:104).

Secondly, Cullingford (1998:105) refers to events, such as midnight feasts, which elicit pleasure. These events contribute to the story as they are linked to the events involved in the planning of the eating and events that are consequences of the eating. In this case it is easy to find examples in the school stories. Those girls that are involved in planning the midnight feast must somehow obtain the food for the feast, they must find a location for the feast, and they must sneak out to go to the feast. There is usually a large amount of sneaking about, secrets and

other covert activity and often a particular character from whom the planning must be concealed. There is a certain amount of excitement as the feast is either revealed to this character or to an authority figure, leading to further events such as punishment. In *The twins at St Clare's* the midnight feasts contribute to the story through the events that follow as well as providing illicit pleasure, because 'food tastes so much nicer in the middle of the night' (59). In terms of the midnight feast's contribution to the rest of the story, Kathleen's lavish contribution of a fancy cake (60) is significant when she is revealed to be a thief later in the story (79). In *Upper fourth at Malory Towers* much action revolves around excluding June from the events leading up to the midnight feast. Furthermore, as a consequence of the feast, Darrell is demoted from her position as head-girl of the form (99).

Food can also be 'about bonding and companionship' (Rudd, 2000:104). Cullingford (1998:106) points out that the sharing of food by the characters reinforces their group cohesion and only characters whom the children trust are allowed to share food with them. In other words, friends are invited to join in picnics (and pets are also included in the sharing of food) indicating the acceptance into the group. This can be linked to the unity of the children, as discussed in this chapter.

As discussed in this chapter, there is a strong relationship between security and danger on Blyton's books. This relationship can also be discussed in terms of food as 'the security of eating contrasts poignantly with the danger of adventure' (Rudd, 2000:105). Cullingford (1998:104) points out that food is a 'reward' and a 'highlight' and thus would serve as a point of security for the children involved in the story and thus for the child reader as well.

5.3.3.11 *An English setting: utopia and Arcadia*

Traditionally the term 'setting' refers to the geographic location and the period in which the story takes place. In some stories the setting may be used to 'create a mood [or]...provide a historical background' (Norton, 1983:87) or even confer some symbolism. In Blyton's books, however, the setting is seldom linked to the understanding of the story, as it usually provides a backdrop against which the events take place. This means that the detail of the setting is relatively unimportant in the understanding of the plot. Action tells the story and is important, while the setting is vague.

One of the characteristics of Blyton's setting is the 'Englishness' of it, which Rudd (2000:89) describes as a 'discourse of Englishness'. This can be linked back to Chapter Four (Section 4.3.2.3) and the discussion on ethnophobia and xenophobia: her English setting highlights Blyton's patriotic attitude. The majority of Blyton's books are set in the English countryside, an environment to which the majority of children reading the books at the time of writing could relate. It is into this realistic landscape that she places unrealistic scientific experiments and unusual characters, creating stories that are then, to a certain extent, believable. This English setting may reinforce the middle-class values of the time of writing. Blyton's adventures take place in both rural and urban areas: in the *Five Find-Outers* and the *Secret Seven* the adventures take place in a typical English village, while the *Famous Five* is usually set in a more rural location, close enough to a village to buy food and, of course, ice-cream.

However, few child readers actually notice the Englishness of this setting – English readers probably take the setting for granted while 'overseas readers often found that they had been imagining a romanticised country' (Rudd, 2000:92). In fact, the descriptions are so vague, general and limited that they could be almost anywhere (Rudd, 2000:92). Blyton uses a 'stylised social setting, a romanticised country or village background...a world which does not really

exist' (Ray, 1982:116). 'Enid Blyton's books could be located almost anywhere' (Ray, 1982:146). 'All this is part of the oral style, where stories are frequently set in a fairly vague past and fuzzy landscape' (Rudd, s.a.:9).

Blyton's vague setting can be linked to the classification of Blyton's books as fantasy in which the setting is a utopian and/or English Arcadia. As mentioned earlier, the environment in which Blyton's books are set is utopian, as it is an idealised situation in which the characters are never seriously injured and the villain is always captured. In terms of the Arcadian setting, Blyton's adventures usually take place in an 'imaginary place of simple and contented country life' (Kahn, 1989:587-588). Country lanes without traffic, fields to picnic in, high hedges and pretty cottages are all a safe playground in which the children can undergo their safe adventures (Cullingford, 1998:107,108). Again the important balance between excitement and security is evident, as the security and stability of the utopian and Arcadian setting which 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.

Into both the rural and urban setting Blyton places a number of convenient structures and features. She uses a number of islands and lighthouses, castles and caves set in a secure world. Examples of such features can be found in a great number of Blyton's books, a few of which are mentioned below, and include caves (*The sea of adventure, The valley of adventure, The mountain of adventure*), castles (*The secret of Cliff Castle, The castle of adventure, The secret of Moon Castle, Five have a wonderful time*, and the ruined castle on Kirrin Island which feature in a number of the *Famous Five* books), tunnels (*Five go down to the sea, Five go to Smuggler's Top, Five go adventuring again, The Ring 'o Bells mystery, The Ragamuffin mystery, The sea of adventure, The ragamuffin mystery, The valley of adventure*), dungeons (*Five on a treasure island*), islands (*The secret island, The island of adventure*, and Kirrin Island which features in a number of *Famous Five* adventures), circuses (*The circus of*

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adventure, Five go off in a caravan, and Barney's circus background), and a number of unusual and interesting old buildings (*Five get into trouble, The mystery of the hidden house*). These structures provide props to be explored and investigated, thus promoting action in the stories. The great number of these structures and features encountered by the children in Blyton's books obviously exceeds the known features of this kind in reality; however, a child familiar with similar features could perhaps be convinced that these features exist elsewhere. Dark and gloomy caves, tunnels dungeons and secret passages – such as those in *The island of adventure, The mountain of adventure, Five go down to the sea, Five go to Smuggler's Top* – are stereotypical locations in which the villains may hide and go about their nefarious activities. This contrasts with the open, sunny and familiar fields of the English Arcadian countryside where the children camp and explore. It is important to point out that not all caves are bad and children hide in caves that offer them security (Cullingford, 1998:109). One could argue that light and darkness are archetypal symbols of safety and danger respectively and this can be linked back to the oral tradition, as a characteristic of the oral tradition is the use of archetypal stereotypes.

The archetypal danger of darkness can be linked to the night-time adventures of the children: sneaking out at night in a world of darkness inhabited by villains to investigate flashing lights (*Five go down to the sea*) or other mysterious phenomena. This is contrasted with the security of having a torch, as torches produce light, hence they provide security. Therefore even in the darkness the children are in control (Cullingford, 1998:109). Once more this highlights the balance between security and danger in Blyton's books. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Blyton emphasises excitement rather than danger in both the titles of her books and the chapter headings: *Five have a wonderful time*. Children are excited, not scared (Cullingford, 1998:110) and 'the reader is constantly reminded about what an exciting time is being had by all' (Cullingford, 1998:111).

The home as a setting emphasises safety and security – home is an archetypical symbol of safety. However, it is interesting to note the number of families that dominant discourses may describe as ‘dysfunctional’ (Rudd, 2000:182) or broken in Blyton’s books. In the *Adventure* series Jack and Lucy-Ann are orphans, while Phillip and Dinah’s father is deceased and they do not live with their mother (*The sea of adventure*, 16). George’s parents, in the *Famous Five*, feature far more than those of Julian, Dick and Anne; however, George’s father spends the majority of his time behind closed doors in his study rather than with his wife. In addition, there seems to be a certain lack of communication between the couple as is evident in *Five on Kirrin Island again* when Aunt Fanny remarks that ‘He never tells me a word’ (19). Similarly, in the *Barney* series, Barney’s mother is deceased and he is searching for his father. Snubby also has no parents and spends his time with ‘various relations’ (*The Rubabub mystery*, 11). In *The secret island* ‘the three siblings are physically abused by their guardians, their parents feared being dead’ (Rudd, 2000:182). These irregular families can be linked to Blyton’s own childhood (as discussed in Chapter Three) and the ‘dysfunctional’ (Rudd, 2000:182) nature of her family.

5.4 THE INFLUENCE OF DOMINANT DISCOURSES ON BLYTON

Tucker points out that various aspects of child psychology theories ‘may be used at times by children’s writers’ (Tucker, 1992:157). It is possible to pose the question whether Blyton was aware of psychological theories in respect of the development of children and whether she took these theories into account in her writing. Ray believes that Blyton was ‘aware of the stages through which children pass in their reading’ (Ray, 1982:111). According to Tucker, regardless of whether or not children’s authors choose to include psychological theories on childhood in their work, ‘some of those psychological theories of childhood which have become widely taken up will eventually begin to work their way into their writing’ as ‘authors are inevitably influenced’ by these theories (Tucker,

1992:157). In other words, the theories form part of the discourse that surrounds discussions on children and thus children's literature.

As the techniques and settings are discussed in terms of psychological discourses, it is necessary to note the relevance of psychological theories to Blyton and whether she took them into account when writing. In other words, did Blyton deliberately include certain aspects in her writing as a result of the dominant psychological discourse on the development on the child? The 'exact contribution made by psychology to the writing of children's fiction can never be described as a consistent, across-the-board phenomenon' (Tucker, 1992:157). Thus, the threads of psychological discourse may well have influenced the writing of Blyton, whether she intended them to or not. Blyton's horizons of expectations and discourses were affected by the psychological discourses she was exposed to and thus her writing is also affected by these discourses, therefore it is critical to take into account Blyton's training as a teacher and the knowledge that this training may have provided her with.

As mentioned in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, Blyton was trained in the Froebel method of teaching. Froebel's theory focuses on the value of nature in a child's life – a motif that is evident in the writing of Blyton, in both the portrayal of pets and animals (as explored earlier in this chapter), and in the outdoor setting of many books. His theory also emphasises the benefits of play and motor expression, an aspect that is evident in the physical dexterity demonstrated by the children in Blyton's books. The Froebel method of teaching is directed at young children and emphasises allowing children to grow and develop at their own pace and in their own way. This can be linked to the freedom experienced by the children in Blyton's books. These aspects of Froebel's theory are discussed in relation to their portrayal in Blyton's stories.

In the school series the girls participate in a number of physical outdoor activities, such as swimming, tennis and lacrosse. These sporting activities

necessitate physical dexterity and thus highlight the physical skills of the characters. In *Third year at Malory Towers* Bill, a tomboy with seven brothers, spends a great deal of time outdoors riding her horse, Thunder, and dreads lessons when she cannot spend time outdoors with her beloved horse (37). In *Last term at Malory Towers* Amanda's skill at sporting activities is admired, and Blyton points out that 'Most of the girls loved the pool. A few didn't. Those who hadn't learnt to swim were afraid. Those who didn't like cold water hated the pool' (34). The inclusion of those characters who do not like swimming makes concessions for those readers who might not like swimming, again ensuring that there are always characters with whom different readers can identify.

Many of Blyton's adventure books highlight the physical skills of the characters. They row boats, climb trees, and swim, they climb up and down ropes, in and out of caves, through tunnels and wells, and walk and explore along the moors. Furthermore, in *The Castle of Adventure* the children climb over precariously balanced planks in an effort to enter the castle, a motif that is observed in several other books: in *The Secret of Cliff Castle* (24) the children climb a tree to enter the building and the *Mystery of the hidden house* they use a rope ladder to climb over a wall (134). The children spend a great deal of time swimming, particularly in the *Famous Five* where the children swim in the sea around Kirrin Island, and in lakes and ponds at every opportunity that get when they go camping, after all 'George can do anything in the water' (*Five run away together*, 107).

The freedom advocated by Froebel for children to develop at their own pace can be linked to the freedom experienced by the characters in Blyton's books. In the *Secret Seven*, *Famous Five*, and the *Adventure Series* the children are free to walk about where they choose and to engage in activities of their own choice. Adults do not dictate the activities of the children to them, unless there are chores that the children must complete before they may engage in the adventure and excitement. (In *The mystery of Holly Lane* Pip has to complete a whole list of

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chores in the garden and Bets offers to make his bed to help him so that they may meet Fatty at the station (4). Similarly, in *The Ring O' Bells mystery* the children are told to 'feed the chickens for Miss Hannah and collect the eggs' (49). These chores add a realistic element to the stories and contribute to the balance of security and danger.) Children of restrictive parents, such as Theresa Blyton, would crave such freedom, thus one could speculate that the freedom may be a form of wish-fulfilment by Blyton herself.

It is evident that the children in Blyton's books do not need to be entertained by their parents and given activities – they keep themselves busy. This can be linked to Froebel's discussions on self-activity. According to Froebel, play is important 'as a means of engaging children in self-activity for the purpose of externalising their inner natures' (<http://www.froebelweb.org/web2002.html>) and enlists all the child's imaginative powers, thoughts, and physical movements' (<http://www.froebelweb.org/web2002.html>).

There is also a relationship between free play, or self-activity, and the imitation of events in Blyton's books by her readers. Positive elements of play, particularly social interaction, would be encouraged by the imitation of clubs like those in the *Famous Five* and *Secret Seven*, while the imitation of the investigation and exploration activities of Blyton's characters, without the assistance of adults, would encourage independence and self-activity among readers. However, imitation of the events in Blyton's books has served as grounds for criticism of her work and is considered in Chapter Four (Section 4.3.2.5).

It is possible that Blyton was exposed to a variety of psychological discourses, not only those of Froebel. Piaget had a great impact on discourse surrounding the development of children and it is likely that Blyton was aware of Piaget's theories on the developmental stages of the child. These stages, as set out by Piaget, remain relevant in discussions on child development by contemporary

theorists as they form a foundation on which many theorists have built. The stages are discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.3.2) of this study.

Based on Piaget's developmental stages, psychological discourse divides childhood into two broad stages: early childhood and middle childhood. In early childhood children make simple quantitative assessments: things are big or small, right or wrong (Louw, 1991:232). Books for children at this stage often feature animals or toys as a substitute for human characters (Ray, 1982:112). In addition, the stories should be short as the child's attention span is limited (Ray, 1982:112). The *Noddy* books fit into this description very neatly. The *Noddy* books are set in Toyland, and the majority of characters in the books are toys. The books are illustrated in bright primary colours and the stories are short, appealing to a young child who would enjoy the colourful pictures and be satisfied by the short story. Similarly, in the *Faraway Tree* series, and *The Adventures of the Wishing Chair*, the reader interacts with non-human characters and talking animals. Although these are full-length books, they are fairly episodic in nature, with short chapters and a series of events making up the whole.

According to Ray (1982:112), the second stage of childhood ranges from 'the time when children learn to read for themselves until the time when they mature sufficiently to move on to books written for adults'. This description is very broad as it includes both what is usually referred to as middle childhood and adolescence or puberty. The second stage of childhood usually refers only to middle childhood, the stage which takes place before adolescence or puberty. As they learn to take motives for behaviour into account, children in the second stage of childhood – that is middle childhood – may be described as more morally flexible (Louw, 1991:342).

This moral flexibility may be related to several incidents in Blyton's books where thieves are punished, but when the child characters steal food because they are hungry their behaviour is not condemned. In *The island of adventure* the children

'borrow' Joe's boat to practice sailing (104), while in both *The valley of adventure* (51) and *The mountain of adventure* (115) the children steal food. This may be further linked to the way in which it seems acceptable for the children to be rude to those adults who are revealed to be the villains, as discussed in Chapter Four (Section 4.3.2.5).

As children in the second stage of development gain independence from the family, the peer group plays a greater role in their activities (Ray, 1982:113; Louw, 1991:342). This is unmistakably evident in Blyton's adventure and mystery books. The children in the books display independent behaviour – they do not rely on their parents or upon adults to solve the mystery. Only once the children have discovered the truth do adults like Inspector Jenks and Bill appear.

It is important to view the discussions on psychological discourse in the light of Foucault's theories. In Chapter Two, Foucault's opposition to the field of psychology and his claims that it was a tool used by those with knowledge and power to exert control over society and in turn regulate the behaviour of individuals are discussed. Those with knowledge of the fields of psychology use their knowledge as a form of normalization of the individuals classified by the different fields of psychology. Thus, psychological theories on child development classify what children 'should' be and then dictate what 'normal' behaviour of children is.

There is evidence of the application of theories on play in the educational writings of Blyton. Her educational contributions to *Teacher's World*, *Modern Teaching* and *Teacher's treasury*, as discussed in Chapter Three, focus on practical teaching and outdoor activities (as emphasised by Froebel) such as nature study, while her publication *Round the year with Enid Blyton* covered themes such as how to make a garden, an aquarium, or a bird feeder. It is, therefore, possible to conclude that Blyton took psychological theories on children and child development, such as those of Froebel and Piaget, into

account and applied them in some of her educational writing. In terms of fiction it is impossible to determine conclusively whether or not Blyton chose to use certain techniques, and to portray specific themes and settings, as Blyton's intentions are not known.

5.5 CONCLUSION

Although Blyton is criticised for 'poor characterisation' and 'moral unevenness', she is praised for her 'storytelling skills' and for her understanding of children (Ray, 1982:67). 'Her plots are well constructed and undoubtedly exciting, but the simplicity of the writing and of the characterisation lays them open to criticism because, to an adult reader, they are often incredible' (Ray, 1982:201). Blyton's techniques intentionally appeal to children, as Anne Fine commented in 1997: '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' (Greenfield, 1998:85). Her techniques contribute to her popularity among children, but again highlight the discrepancy in her reception by adults and children. As mentioned earlier in this chapter (Section 5.3), those aspects of Blyton's writing that appealed to her child audience are the very characteristics of her writing for which she was so severely criticised.

However, it is clear that 'Blyton successfully identified her market, assessed its taste and catered for it is clearly demonstrated by her continuing popularity' (Ray, 1982:129). This means that Blyton planned what to write, and how to write it. Therefore, it is possible to presume that she took discourses about the needs of children into account.

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that Blyton uses aspects of both formula writing and the oral tradition in her writing. These techniques, in conjunction with her utopian and Arcadian setting, contribute to her popularity with child readers. Furthermore, manifestations of the discourses of psychology and education can

be found in her texts, thus providing further reasons for her popularity. Hence, it is clear that techniques discussed in this chapter are the aspects of her writing which contributed to her success. Changes to her work (as discussed in Chapter Four, Section 4.4.3) would not only be wrong in terms of imposing other discourses on her writing, but would also remove the very aspects of her work that make her books so popular.

Perhaps Blyton's popularity among children can be linked to the fact that 'she really loved children and understood instinctively what would interest them' (Hodder-Williams, in Ray, 1982:28). Blyton's popularity may be a result of the fact that she 'bridged the gap between adult teller and child reader in a new way' (Wall, 1991:191) by allowing characters to display childish behaviour and attitudes. However, it is the portrayal of these attitudes that many critics found 'deplorable' (Wall, 1991:191). The contrast between her reception by adults and children may have to do with the child audience's being so clearly addressed by Blyton, or perhaps with Blyton's ability to reach the child at the child's level. Chambers claims that 'if literature for children is to have any meaning at all it must primarily be concerned with the nature of childhood' (Chambers, 1990:98), thus, it follows that it should appeal to children, not adults.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: ENID BLYTON – EVER POPULAR

Only now, as a generation nurtured on Noddy achieves maturity without either having gone blind or weak in the head, are attitudes beginning to change.

Charles Scarland (in Rudd 2000:3)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study has been to discuss some of the reasons for the immense and continued popularity of Blyton despite vehement criticism of her work against the background of changing discourses affecting the production and reception of her work. These issues have been discussed applying the perspectives created by Hans-Georg Gadamer and Hans Jauss's horizon of expectation, and by Michel Foucault's theories on power and discourse, taking into account the way in which Blyton's personal context shaped the techniques used by Blyton in her books.

The different chapters examined various responses to the questions set out in Chapter One (Section 1.2). The main findings are summarised below.

6.2 THE MAIN FINDINGS

Chapter Two attempted to develop a theoretical framework which could be used to explore the focal research question: the reasons for Blyton's continued popularity. It was decided to use a framework which included selected aspects of reception theory, in particular the concepts of horizons of expectation, and elements of Michel Foucault's philosophies on discourse and power. The choice of these approaches did indeed allow for an effective examination of different influences on both the production and reception of Blyton's texts. The combination of Gadamer and Jauss's notion of horizons, and Foucault's concept of discourse, was found to be effective in this study of Enid Blyton's writing as the dominant discourses of individuals and society influence individuals' horizons of

expectation. Thus the discourses of individuals and society would influence the horizon's of expectation of both Blyton and her both adult and child readers.

It was found that it is necessary to take different dominant literary and social discourses of society into account when examining both the production and reception of Blyton's work. It was established that the horizons of expectation of the reader play a role in the reception of the text. This is significant in terms of the difference in the reception of Blyton by adults and children, as adults and children would have different horizons of expectation and therefore would react in different ways to the same text. (The reception of Blyton by adults and children was discussed in detail in Chapter Four, Section 4.5.2.) Blyton's own horizons – and in particular her training as a teacher in the Froebel method of education – do appear to have shaped the discourses presented in her writing, and therefore have an influence over her readers.

The history of children's literature was briefly discussed to establish generic discourses within which Blyton and her readers – both children and adults – operate. Furthermore, developments in child psychology and education were also discussed as they influence the discourses surrounding all aspects of children, including children's literature, and therefore Enid Blyton. As different definitions of children have influenced Western society's horizons of expectation and views of what a child is, it was found that these views need to be taken into account as they influence Blyton's perspectives and those of her critics in terms of what dominant discourses deem acceptable for children. In particular, it was found that Froebel's theories on the education of children would have influenced Blyton's horizon of expectation because she was trained as a teacher in the Froebel method of education.

The question of what literature is was briefly deliberated so as to develop a broad idea of what children's literature is. It was established that literature in general seems to be a combination of literary qualities that provide aesthetic appeal, the

context in which the language functions, and the function of the text. Following from the discussion of literature, it was found that children's literature, although unique, shares several conventions with literature in general. However, the scope of this discussion is too vast to examine fully in this study.

Blyton's life was briefly examined so as to place her in a biographical context in Chapter Three. This allowed for an examination of the production of texts in relation to Blyton's life and the society in which she lived. It was found in this discussion and examination of texts that elements of Blyton's life – including her love of nature, her independence, and her relationship with her parents – and the dominant patriarchal and patriotic discourses that surrounded her life, are to a certain extent reflected in her writing. Blyton's training as a teacher in the Froebel method of education was also noted and facilitated the discussion, in Chapter Five, on the reflection of Froebel's theories in her writing. Furthermore, her training as a teacher influenced her horizon of expectation. Thus the theoretical framework, as set out in Chapter Two, allowed for an effective examination of the influence of her training.

It was also found that some aspects of Blyton's life subvert the traditional gender-biased dominant discourses of her time and these were discussed in relation to Foucault's ideas on power relations, as discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.1.3). This was linked to Blyton's creation of a *persona* which suggests her desire to conform to the dominant discourses of the time in which she lived. The importance of Blyton's biographical context was stressed as it contributed to her horizon of expectation and is therefore reflected in her work.

In Chapter Four the reception of Blyton was considered in terms of the vast amount of criticism levelled at Blyton. Criticism of Blyton was discussed from the perspectives of literary and social criticism. Changes in dominant discourses, away from patriarchal and patriotic discourses, has led to greater political and social awareness within society, especially in terms of both racial and gender

equality. The discussion examined criticism in terms of both those who criticised Blyton, literary and social critics, and the reasons for this criticism, including her simple language and style, and accusations of racism and sexism, among others.

In an examination of Blyton's texts it was established that there is evidence to both refute and support various accusations. In addition to the examination of texts, the criticism of Blyton was examined in relation to her popularity. It was found that there are a number of discrepancies in the reception of Blyton by adults and children. Even though Blyton was criticised profusely by adults she remained popular among children and this highlights the differences in the horizons of expectation of adults and children. In Chapter Four it was established that, regardless of criticism by adults, Blyton's style of writing appealed to children. This provided grounds for the discussion of Blyton's techniques in Chapter Five.

In the face of the criticism of Blyton by adults she grew to be a best-selling author, an indication that she must have been doing something right. Therefore, following on from the discussions of Blyton's popularity, in Chapter Five some of the techniques used by Blyton, the characteristics of her writing that were criticised by adults and praised by children – such as her use of fast-paced plots and simple language and style – were examined. It was established that there is a relationship between Blyton's books, features of formula writing and characteristics of the oral tradition.

Furthermore, by referring to Blyton's training as a teacher, her texts were examined in terms of the possible reflection of Froebel's theories in the texts. Blyton may not have consciously decided to use Froebel's theories in her writing; however, it was found that there is a definite link between elements of Froebel's theories and Blyton's texts. Froebel's theory stresses the importance of providing children with the freedom to grow and develop in their own way, and encouraging children to use physical skills in play. His theory also highlights the

importance influence of nature on children. This provided insight into the portrayal of these features in Blyton's writing. However, it is impossible to conclude if Blyton intentionally introduced these elements or if they are merely reflected as part of her horizon of expectation.

6.3 ENID BLYTON: TODAY AND TOMORROW

In light of what is often described as a society without morals, parents are increasingly eager to expose their children to old-fashioned values and Enid Blyton is now seen from a far more positive perspective:

there is clearly a very solid market for the old-fashioned virtues of an Enid Blyton Story. Her characters, even the sixteen- and seventeen-year-old schoolgirls, seem to be crystallized into a pre-sex state. There are no flirtations with boys, no talk of even boyfriends. The stories could in fact be played out in a convent.

(Greenfield, 1998:82)

Even though Blyton was criticised for an untrue portrayal of life, the fact that the villains never seriously hurt any of the children, and the asexual nature of the children are all reasons for her positive reception in contemporary society. One could speculate that the old-fashioned nature of Blyton's books may have a negative influence on the reception of Blyton's books by contemporary children. Through their exposure to a greater number of taboo subjects contemporary children may find Blyton boring.

Contemporary society is far more tolerant of formerly taboo issues such as sex, violence, death, and abuse, therefore, these issues occur more frequently in contemporary children's literature. 'Many taboos that existed in children's literature during its early periods are today being withdrawn' (Nikolajeva, 1995:40). Modern media, in particular news media, no longer attempt to exclude taboo and sensational topics. Adult discourses on the right to freedom of expression suggest that everyone has the right to access to the truth. However,

there has been much debate around the portrayal of sex and violence in media to which children are exposed.

It is possible to ask whether the criticism of Blyton for the alleged portrayal of racist and sexist attitudes is still relevant in the 21st century. One may choose to argue that contemporary media attempt to portray ethnic violence, for example, honestly, while still pointing out the fact that it is wrong, while Blyton overlooks the fact that it is wrong. In contrast, one may argue that Blyton portrayed the attitudes of society at the time of writing honestly, or that regardless of the moral at the end of the story the portrayal of violence in contemporary media could be described as unnecessary and that it possibly encourages violence. Moreover, it is possible to presume that Blyton was shaped by the discourses of the time, and that she shaped discourses, and thus used her writing to reinforce her own ideals.

Changes in dominant discourses have influenced changes in horizons of expectation in society. Subsequently, the significance of the age groups allocated to the different series of Blyton's books must be looked at in reference to the fact that contemporary children are believed to be more 'mature' than children at the time of writing. Changes in societal structures mean that contemporary children are left to their own devices more often than children were at the time Blyton wrote. In the 1960s rapid and dramatic changes took place in children's literature and in society and children took on the problems that had previously been left to their elders (Egoff, 1980:193). This means that the division between children and adults is no longer as great as it was in the early 20th century (Egoff, 1980:194). Contemporary children have more independence and share responsibilities with adults – they have had greater exposure to the activities formerly associated with only adults, such as coming home to an empty house after school; tending to their siblings, paying bills, cooking, grocery shopping and other household chores. Parents, and servants, are no longer there to provide lunch and tea when children return from their activities, as they were in Blyton's books. This raises the

idea that Blyton's books, and her old-fashioned values, might not be relevant to contemporary children.

6.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study offers a new perspective on the study of Enid Blyton by combining aspects of Michel Foucault's theory on power and discourse with the concept of the horizon of expectation from Reception theory so as to explore the discourses surrounding the production and reception of Blyton's writing. Furthermore, Blyton's training as a teacher in the Froebel method of education is explored in terms of the reflection of Froebel's theories in her writing. This is an aspect relating to Enid Blyton's writing that has been largely overlooked in other studies of Blyton.

The discussions in this study are limited to aspects of Enid Blyton's life and the history of the children's literature genre that can be illuminated by the perspectives of selected aspects of Michel Foucault's theories in combination with elements of reception theory. This means that some of the discourses surrounding Enid Blyton's life, work and texts are taken into account. The texts are not examined in isolation. Some critical perspectives claim that a text should be examined in isolation, independently from the author and the reader. However, as the understanding of the text is formed by a variety of 'threads' of discourse – those of the author, the reader and the time in which the text is read and written, it is enlightening to examine a text in the light of the production and reception of the text. Every reading of a text is different as the surroundings differ, even if the text is reread by the same person circumstances influence the reception of the text, and thus the understanding thereof. Thus, to develop a greater understanding of the texts of Blyton, in terms of their production and reception, the various discourses surrounding the texts were examined in this study.

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If the discourses surrounding the production and reception of the text are taken into account it necessitates taking into account the discourses that surround and limit my own reception of the texts as these also influence my reading of Blyton. Firstly, my perspective as a young white South African woman in the early 21st century influences my horizon of expectations in terms of my perceptions of class, gender and race, among others. Secondly, my educational background, which is limited to day attendance of English-speaking educational institutions in South Africa, and the areas of study to which I have been exposed through these institutions also shape my horizon of expectation, as do my interactions with lecturers and fellow students. Thirdly, the references to which I have had access for the duration of this study, and the critical texts that I have used, have also influenced this study.

Further limitations of the study lie in the fact that the primary texts examined are the series books written by Blyton for 'older' children (between the ages of about nine and fifteen years). As Blyton is credited with writing approximately 600 books, only a limited number of her texts could be examined in detail.

Criticism of Blyton has led to her either being omitted from critical texts, or discrepancies in the references to her. Unfortunately it is therefore difficult to obtain consistent references to Blyton. It is difficult to know, for example, if '250 million copies' (<http://www.blyton.f2s.com/blyton/index1.htm>) or '400 million' (<http://www.blyton.co.uk/news/Bio.htm>) copies of her books have been published. Ray (1982:63) refers to the fact that Blyton is omitted from many children's literature reference books, while Rudd mentions that 'few have ever looked closely at [her writing]' (Rudd, 2000:5) and that 'one of the key ploys of Blyton's critics...was simply to ignore her' (Rudd, 2000:36). This made finding information on this productive author a formidable task. This implies that this study cannot provide authoritative conclusions regarding some of the facets of Blyton's life or reading.

Owing to the lack of critical source material on Blyton, there is still extensive scope for research into her writing. Furthermore, the limitations of this study provide a number of opportunities for further research, not only into the texts that have been omitted from this study, but also further examinations of those books that have been addressed in this study. There is great opportunity for quantitative studies, such as statistical studies of selected elements of Blyton's techniques, and interviews with readers and other authors about Blyton. Moreover, studies conducted on the effect of Blyton's work in other countries in translation could also prove to be enlightening, as could comparative studies of Blyton in relation to contemporary authors.

6.5 CLOSING REMARKS

'For every person who stands up and passes the opinion that, say, Roald Dahl's books are vulgar, violent, fascist, misogynistic and racist, there are ten who will defend them on grounds that it is all innocent, healthy child-smut, and FUN' (Hunt, 1991b:6). While few would see Blyton as 'smut', this description can be applied to Blyton too. 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. If one seeks evidence of her alleged faults they are easy to find, however, for most there is a defence, and for every adult critic there is an appreciative child reader. Townsend (1980:25) asks for the 'acceptance of literary experience as having value in itself for the general enrichment of life, over and above any virtue that may be claimed for it as a means to a non-literary end'.

Regardless of whether one condemns her or not, Blyton has contributed significantly to the range of children's literature and her influence on children's reading cannot be overlooked. The continued survival of Blyton's books over many years should be noted, as it is a clear indication of her appeal to child readers. Thus, her popularity and success may be used as a reference point to determine what appeals to children.

It is essential that Blyton's contribution to children's literature be taken into account. Blyton must be examined in terms of her impact on the discourses of contemporary society and contemporary authors in relation to the discourses of contemporary society. Blyton continues to contribute to children's literature, both indirectly through authors who read her books when they were children, and directly through parents who enjoyed her books when they were young and now recommend them to their children. As Greenfield (1998:97) points out

One of the advantages of longevity in the children's book world is that the new generation of mothers recalls with affection the stories they grew up with and are likely to encourage *their* children to read those very same stories.

In the words of Robert Druce (1992:45): 'Enid Blyton's attraction for very large numbers of children both was and remains a commanding one'. Greenfield comments on the fact that 30 years after her death Enid Blyton's literary estate is still worth several million pounds and her titles have continued to sell an average of fifteen thousand copies per year – a number that is clearly indicative of a best-seller (Greenfield, 1998:97,98). It is clear that Blyton 'has stood the test of time' (Rudd, s.a.:1). Hence, Greenfield (1998:98) claims:

For touching children's hearts and then holding their interest, generation after generation, in spite of the conflicting attractions first of the radio and then of television, Enid Blyton was truly unique.

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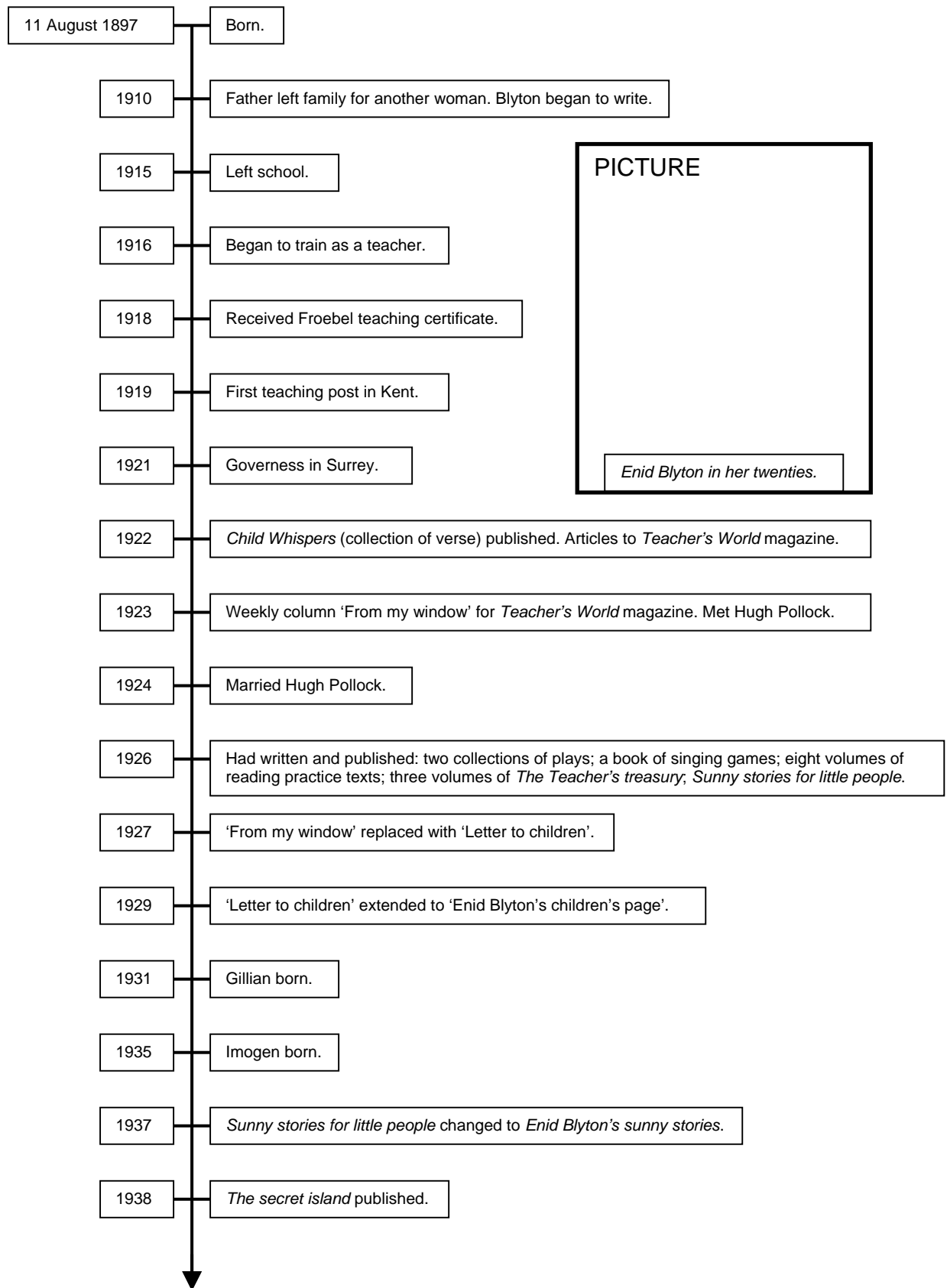
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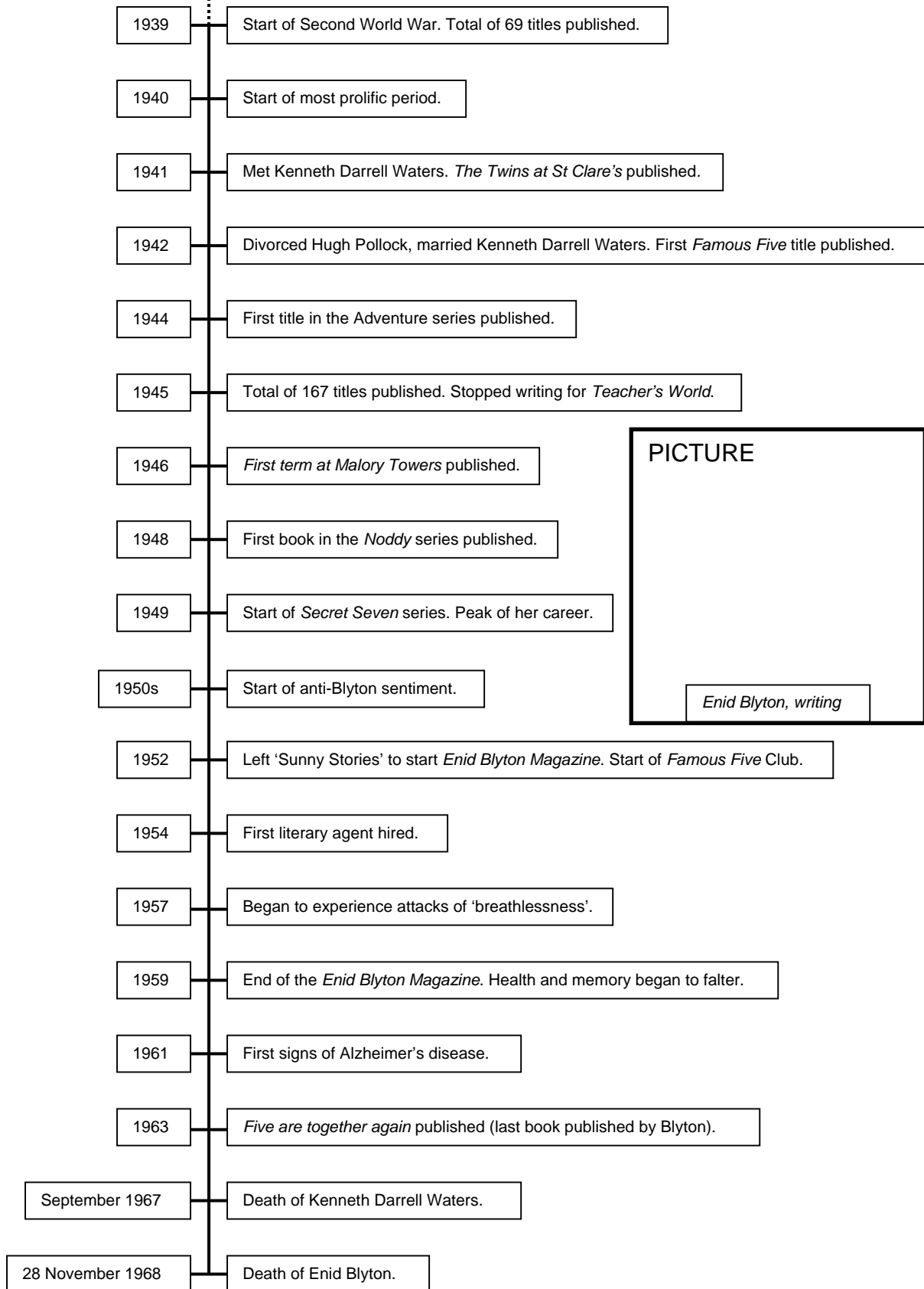
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APPENDIX 1

TIMELINE: THE LIFE OF ENID BLYTON



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APPENDIX 2

BLYTON'S SERIES BOOKS

The *Adventure Series*

- Blyton, E. [1944]. *The island of adventure*
Blyton, E. [1946]. *The castle of adventure*
Blyton, E. [1947]. *The valley of adventure*
Blyton, E. [1948]. *The sea of adventure*
Blyton, E. [1949]. *The mountain of adventure*
Blyton, E. [1950]. *The ship of adventure*
Blyton, E. [1952]. *The circus of adventure*
Blyton, E. [1955]. *The river of adventure*

The *Barney Series*

- Blyton, E. [1949]. *The Rockingdown mystery*
Blyton, E. [1950]. *The Rilloby Fair mystery*
Blyton, E. [1951]. *The Ring O' Bells mystery*
Blyton, E. [1952]. *The Rubadub mystery*
Blyton, E. [1956]. *The Rat-a-tat mystery*
Blyton, E. [1959]. *The Ragamuffin mystery*

The *Famous Five Series*

- Blyton, E. [1942]. *Five on a treasure island*
Blyton, E. [1943]. *Five go adventuring again*
Blyton, E. [1944]. *Five run away together*
Blyton, E. [1945]. *Five go to Smuggler's Top*
Blyton, E. [1946]. *Five go off in a caravan*
Blyton, E. [1947]. *Five on Kirrin Island again*
Blyton, E. [1948]. *Five go off to camp*
Blyton, E. [1949]. *Five get into trouble*
Blyton, E. [1950]. *Five fall into adventure*

- Blyton, E. [1951]. *Five on a hike together*
Blyton, E. [1952]. *Five have a wonderful time*
Blyton, E. [1953]. *Five go down to the sea*
Blyton, E. [1954]. *Five go to Mystery Moor*
Blyton, E. [1955]. *Five have plenty of fun*
Blyton, E. [1956]. *Five on a secret trail*
Blyton, E. [1957]. *Five go to Billycock Hill*
Blyton, E. [1958]. *Five get into a fix*
Blyton, E. [1960]. *Five on Finniston Farm*
Blyton, E. [1961]. *Five go to Demon's Rocks*
Blyton, E. [1962]. *Five have a mystery to solve*
Blyton, E. [1963]. *Five are together again*

The Faraway Tree Series

- Blyton, E. [1939]. *The Enchanted Wood*
Blyton, E. [1943]. *The magic Faraway Tree*
Blyton, E. [1946]. *The folk of the Faraway Tree*

The Five Find-Outers Series

- Blyton, E. [1943]. *The mystery of the burnt cottage*
Blyton, E. [1944]. *The mystery of the disappearing cat*
Blyton, E. [1945]. *The mystery of the secret room*
Blyton, E. [1946]. *The mystery of the spiteful letters*
Blyton, E. [1947]. *The mystery of the missing necklace*
Blyton, E. [1948]. *The mystery of the hidden house*
Blyton, E. [1949]. *The mystery of the pantomime cat*
Blyton, E. [1950]. *The mystery of the invisible thief*
Blyton, E. [1951]. *The mystery of the vanished prince*
Blyton, E. [1952]. *The mystery of the strange bundle*
Blyton, E. [1953]. *The mystery of Holly Lane*
Blyton, E. [1954]. *The mystery of Tally-Ho Cottage*
Blyton, E. [1956]. *The mystery of the missing man*

Blyton, E. [1957]. *The mystery of the strange messages*

Blyton, E. [1961]. *The mystery of Banshee Towers*

The Malory Towers Series

Blyton, E. [1946]. *First term at Malory Towers*

Blyton, E. [1947]. *The second form at Malory Towers*

Blyton, E. [1948]. *Third year at Malory Towers*

Blyton, E. [1949]. *Upper fourth at Malory Towers*

Blyton, E. [1950]. *In the fifth at Malory Towers*

Blyton, E. [1951]. *Last term at Malory Towers*

The Naughtiest Girl Series

Blyton, E. [1940]. *The naughtiest girl in the school*

Blyton, E. [1942]. *The naughtiest girl again*

Blyton, E. [1945]. *The naughtiest girl is a monitor*

The Noddy Series

Blyton, E. [1949]. *Little Noddy goes to Toyland*

Blyton, E. [1950]. *Hurrah for little Noddy*

Blyton, E. [1951]. *Noddy and his car*

Blyton, E. [1951]. *Here comes Noddy again!*

Blyton, E. [1952]. *Well done Noddy*

Blyton, E. [1952]. *Noddy goes to school*

Blyton, E. [1953]. *Noddy at the seaside*

Blyton, E. [1953]. *Noddy gets captured*

Blyton, E. [1954]. *Noddy and the magic rubber*

Blyton, E. [1955]. *You funny little Noddy*

Blyton, E. [1955]. *Noddy meets Father Christmas*

Blyton, E. [1956]. *Noddy and Tessie Bear*

Blyton, E. [1956]. *Be brave little Noddy*

Blyton, E. [1957]. *Noddy and the bumpy dog*

Blyton, E. [1957]. *Do look out Noddy!*

Blyton, E. [1958]. *You're a good friend Noddy!*

Blyton, E. [1958]. *Noddy has an adventure*

Blyton, E. [1959]. *Noddy goes to sea*

Blyton, E. [1959]. *Noddy and the bunkey*

Blyton, E. [1960]. *Cheer up little Noddy*

Blyton, E. [1960]. *Noddy goes to the fair*

Blyton, E. [1961]. *Mr Plod and little Noddy*

Blyton, E. [1962]. *Noddy and the tootles*

Blyton, E. [1964]. *Noddy and the aeroplane*

The Secret Series

Blyton, E. [1938]. *The secret island*

Blyton, E. [1940]. *The secret of Spiggy Holes*

Blyton, E. [1941]. *The secret mountain*

Blyton, E. [1943]. *The secret of Killimoooin*

Blyton, E. [1953]. *The secret of Moon Castle*

The Secret Seven Series

Blyton, E. [1949]. *The Secret Seven*

Blyton, E. [1950]. *Secret Seven adventure*

Blyton, E. [1951]. *Well done Secret Seven*

Blyton, E. [1952]. *Secret Seven on the trail*

Blyton, E. [1953]. *Go ahead Secret Seven*

Blyton, E. [1954]. *Good work Secret Seven*

Blyton, E. [1955]. *Secret Seven win through*

Blyton, E. [1956]. *Three cheers Secret Seven*

Blyton, E. [1957]. *Secret Seven mystery*

Blyton, E. [1958]. *Puzzle for the Secret Seven*

Blyton, E. [1959]. *Secret Seven fireworks*

Blyton, E. [1960]. *Good old Secret Seven*

Blyton, E. [1961]. *Shock for the Secret Seven*

Blyton, E. [1962]. *Look out Secret Seven*

Blyton, E. [1963]. *Fun for the Secret Seven*

The St Clare's Series

Blyton, E. [1941]. *The twins at St Clare's*

Blyton, E. [1942]. *The O'Sullivan twins*

Blyton, E. [1943]. *Summer term at St Clare's*

Blyton, E. [1944]. *The second form at St Clare's*

Blyton, E. [1944]. *Claudine at St Clare's*

Blyton, E. [1945]. *Fifth formers of St Clare's*