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Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children's Literature

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines Enid Blyton as a cultural phenomenon. It seeks to account for her enduring popularity, still immense some thirty years after her death in 1968. However, despite world-wide renown, there is comparatively little serious discussion of her work—just as children's literature is itself a neglected area.

This thesis uses Blyton as a case study of how cultural studies might open up this marginalised area. It brings together three, often separated lines of investigation—textual analysis, production, and reception—using the Foucauldian notion of 'discursive threads' to unite them. For textual analysis, three of Blyton's most popular series are examined: 'Noddy', the 'Famous Five', and, to a lesser extent, the 'Malory Towers' books, with other works discussed *en passant*. The study attends to the literary qualities, but seeks a much wider understanding of the discourses that constitute Blyton's texts, including contemporary events (the context) and other, literary pre-texts. Besides Blyton's own part in the 'production' of her texts (including herself as a text), the study looks more widely at the way Blyton and her work have been manufactured—i.e. 'Enid Blyton' as a cultural icon—and how this has endured, with amendments, over the generations.

The debates around sexism, racism, Englishness and middle-class ethos, which are very much part of the Blyton icon, are closely examined. It is suggested that though there are elements of truth in some of these accusations, they are generally false and, at best, partial constructions. In particular, the Five books are shown to be questioning rather than 'sexist' about the relations between the genders. On racism, a critical analysis is undertaken of the way this whole debate has been constructed, with frequent distortions and misreadings of the texts in question; the terms of reference of such debates are therefore scrutinised, including the history of the golliwog character. In general, it is argued that focusing on these more incidental elements misses the main thrust of Blyton's work, which is largely concerned with another marginalised and disempowered group, children.

This fact is most obviously seen in the way that children's own views on Blyton have been largely ignored. Consequently the 'reception' of the texts informs much of the above. Questionnaires were circulated to schools and elsewhere. They were also circulated amongst past readers of Blyton, both in England and abroad, using the Internet. This resulted in some 900 responses from readers, reaching back to those who first read her as children in the 1930s. Interviews were also conducted with contemporary groups of children in schools. These show the very real pleasures involved in reading Blyton, rather than the adult, 'ism'-ridden discourses. Against earlier 'literary' and 'educational' readings, two more apposite ways of reading Blyton are outlined: an approach which situates her in the oral tradition, celebrating the child-hero in a very participatory way, and a psychoanalytically informed reading, the latter showing how Blyton helps create a psychic space within which children can play at being masters of their destiny.

LIST OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

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Dedicated to

My Mother, the memory of my Father, who only saw the beginning, my acquired Mum and Dad (the Rendles), and Sheena, Duncan and Sophie.

CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT

The aim of this thesis is to explore 'Enid Blyton' as a cultural phenomenon.

Its objectives are as follows:

- to review earlier work on this subject, including not only academic studies, but also popular statements by the media, and contributions from such gatekeepers as librarians and teachers;
- to see how 'Enid Blyton' has been constructed as a cultural icon;
- to see how perceptions of Blyton have changed over time and in different cultural milieux;
- to use 'Blyton' as an example of how the cultural field of children's literature operates, systematically derogating one of its most popular authors;
- to seriously consider the views of the main, neglected voice in discussions of Blyton - i.e. to undertake an empirical study of children's views;
- to bring together three often dislocated moments in cultural studies: production, textual analysis, and reception;
- to do this through the development of a concept of discourse derived from Foucault: the notion of 'discursive threads'.

There is a curious neglect of children's literature by 'Cultural studies', and of popular authors like Blyton, in particular. Sheila Ray's work *The Blyton Phenomenon* (1982), is one of the few exceptions, and has been duly referenced throughout. Though a biographical study, Barbara Stoney's *Enid Blyton: a biography* (1974) is also a key point of reference. I have also built on my own previous work in this area - notably *A Communication Studies Approach to Children's Literature* (1992). All other work, substantial or incidental, is referenced as cited, and compiled in the 'References' section, with further background reading in the 'Bibliography'.

The help of colleagues, supervisors, libraries and resource centres, is noted in the 'Acknowledgements'.

'The phenomenon of Enid Blyton is surely worth a Ph. D. thesis'
- Ernest Moss, *Times Literary Supplement*, 1970

DEEPING.   Enid! We haven't toasted Enid!
BLYTON.   Please don't worry about *me*.
WINN.   We'd forgotten about you!.
BLYTON.   I'm quite used to being ignored.
...
SKINNER (*raises glass*).
                To Enid!
OMNES.   Enid!
BLYTON.   This is quite absurd.
(Michael Frayn (1987) *Balmoral* pp. 71-2)

'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 Sarland, 1983)

'[traditionally] sociologists have been going about their study of children mainly like colonial administrators who might be expected to write scientifically objective reports of the local populace in order to increase their understanding of native culture, and who do so by ideologically formulating only those research problems that pertain to native behaviours coming under the regulation of colonial authority.' (Matthew Speier, 1976, p. 99)

'What it [genealogical approach] really does is to entertain the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchise and order them in the name of some true knowledge... .' (Foucault, 1980, p 83)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Enid Blyton was born in 1897, in *fin de siècle* England. It was a time when the 'cult of the child' was pre-eminent, celebrated most famously in *Peter Pan* (1904). But 1897 was also the year that *Dracula* was published, and the term psychoanalysis had been coined only the year before. So, whilst there was a celebration of innocence and purity on the one hand, there was a recognition of darkness and instability on the other. This was the decade that produced many works that explored this ambivalence: Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) and Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* (1899), to name the most famous. Though Great Britain ruled the waves and the world, there was a growing insecurity about its provenance: at home there were increasing worries about anarchy (Kenneth Grahame was attacked by an anarchist whilst at work in the Bank of England), there was growing unemployment and homelessness, whilst among its territories there was increasing unrest and war. It is this backdrop which informs much of Blyton's life and work—work which seems to promulgate, long past the empire's 'sell-by date', a vision of a cosy, contented world, yet one where, beneath the surface, all is less tranquil.

This tension, between sunny surface and welling undercurrent, is one of the major paradoxes to be explored, but there are a number of others. Why, it needs to be asked, has there been such little serious attention given to one of the best-selling children's authors ever? Why, given her cosy middle-class ethos, do 'nineties street-wise children still find her so readable? Why, given her supposed Englishness, do children in so many countries worldwide find her so engaging? Why, given children's love of her work, have adults so systematically derogated her? And underlying these paradoxes is a more general concern about the role and status of children's literature.

These are questions intrinsic to the material, but there is also a more personal concern, which I know many adults share: their own ambivalence towards Blyton's work. As a child who grew up on Blyton, I also once found the magic in her books that many young readers experience. The controversial *Here Comes Noddy Again!* (*N4*) was a present from a bookish aunt—Auntie Winnie— on my 4th birthday; it was the first book I can remember being explicitly given, and was, consequently, highly treasured (the 'This book belongs to...' box at the beginning cemented this sense of ownership). Later, I have a distinct memory of reading the 'Famous Five' books in bed, late into the night, with suitable 'provisions' hidden under my pillow (*Twiglets* were my favourite, if obtainable; these were eaten individually, each one being licked slowly till all the marmite had been removed, then the slightly damp *Twiglet* was scrunched up). I can also clearly remember when I stopped reading Blyton. I was 11 years old, reading one of the 'Adventure' series in a boarding school 'dorm' by torchlight. Although I was only about half-way through the book, I distinctly recall putting it down and never going back to it. I remember thinking that I really didn't care what happened to Jack, Lucy-Ann, Dinah, Philip and Kiki. Blyton used to say that she wrote for the whole of childhood, 'till you are old enough to read adult books' (Blyton, 1952, p. 96). She also said that if she was interrupted in the middle of writing a story, the spell was broken (Sykes, 1962, p. 21). Clearly, the spell can also break for readers, and usually in adolescence, when we leave childhood behind.[1]

Later, when I trained to be a librarian, I became aware that her work was frowned upon, and though initially perplexed, I soon joined the chorus of disapproval (albeit, as a child, I can also remember being perplexed at the dismissive attitude of librarians to Blyton's books). It was only later again, when my own children were born, that I returned to Blyton, having bought some of the old Five hardbacks in second-hand shops. Sadly, I found the magic lacking, whereas the poor vocabulary, the old-fashioned and often embarrassing attitudes obtruded woefully. Put simply, her world had become a 'closed book' to me

ever since I had shut that 'Adventure' series volume years before. My respondents frequently made similar remarks:

> ...as a part-time adult student having had the option to re-read childrens books as part of a lit model, I found EB to be nauseating and I'm at a loss to understand how or why I related to them as a child. (f)

> I once started to read a FF [Famous Five] book when I was about 13-14 (I think I might have been reading out to my sister who is 5 years younger than me, and who inherited my EB collection) and I couldn't believe how awful it was. I've never tried this again as I don't want to spoil my happy memories of hours spent riveted reading them all. (f)

> I can't say enough how much I enjoyed Blyton as a kid. But now when I look at it, the books look so simple and without any character or real story line that I wonder.(m)

> I found them [Secret Seven] incredibly dated, upperclass and was too embarrassed to read them aloud [to my children], but as a child in a working class background they did not seem like this.(f)

We, clearly, are left with empty words, whereas our children, as millions of others', are transported. For them, the words are the requisite incantation for the spell to begin its magic

My study will explore this curious division between adult and child opinion, which seems more powerful in Blyton than almost any other children's author. It will involve frequent crossing of the adult/child divide erected and policed by society, and the consequent risk of being ridiculed. It will involve looking both outward and inward: 'out' towards the reified media figure, controlled by extensive marketing, frequently repackaged, centre of multimedia tie-ins and spin-offs; and yet, away from all the hype, it will involve looking 'in', to the personal fantasies and psychic resonances that the Blyton industry can only tangentially control and over which it has no accountability.

In this study I shall explore the enduring popularity of Enid Blyton. Contrary to certain critics' predictions, her work has not 'gone away', although she herself died some thirty years ago. Blyton continues to be one of the best-selling

children's writers—not only in this country, but elsewhere too. And, as Townsend declares, 'Survival is a good test of a book', even if he chooses to ignore this criterion in Blyton's case (Townsend, 1976, p. 13).

So the question is, 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?—to fascinate not only in France, Germany and Australia, but also in Malaysia, Russia and Japan, let alone in languages such as Swahili, Catalan and Tamil. There have been various ideas put forward, but generally in an offhand way, as 'off the peg', untested solutions (for instance, that she herself was a child and she wrote as children themselves would write if they could). These explanations frequently support the notion that to become too deeply involved in looking at the 'Blyton phenomenon' is a mistake: it might taint one, or even undermine one's credibility if one is seen trying to explain away something which does not deserve to have attention focused on it in the first place. So, though I have found an immense number of references to Blyton, the majority of them turn out to be little more than one-liners, while her name has itself become a signifier of cosy mediocrity:

> ...the level of forensic ingenuity he displays more often calls to mind the adventures of Enid Blyton's PC Plod. ... (Smallweed, 1991)

> Valpolicella is to wine what Enid Blyton is to literature. (Gluck, 1991)

> ...most contemporary chart hits have words which make Enid Blyton read like Sartre. (Attila the Stockbroker, 1991)

Blyton has become that perfect symbol of a lost, jolly world—as have her creations. The Famous Five have particularly come to stand for this, as lampooned in the Comic Strip's *Five Go Mad in Dorset* Noddy, on the other hand, is more associated with the banal and facile—as in the epithet, 'a noddy course'.[2]

Clearly, the frequent recourse to her name, the use of her characters as cultural reference points, all demonstrate her significance. In fact, the intense media interest in anything to do with Blyton, which I personally experienced when it became known that I was researching her, demands attention. On the one hand she is seen as trivial, not worth consideration, but on the other, the media seize every opportunity to do just that. Thus both Barbara Stoney's biography (Stoney, 1974; 1992) and Sheila Ray's critical study (Ray, 1982) were extensively reviewed, and the reminiscences of Blyton's younger daughter, Imogen Smallwood, were serialised in the *Sunday Times* (Smallwood, 1989b) and made headlines elsewhere.

In this work I take Enid Blyton's *oeuvre* very seriously, as I believe we must. Her appeal is immense, perhaps exceeded only by the need to trivialise her— which is another paradox to be explored. When I briefly became the centre of media attention, I found exactly this: journalists and radio interviewers were prepared to spend much time discussing Blyton, but with the subtext that it was all trivial and a waste of time. In this respect Blyton is no different from other 'childish things'—whether Father Christmas, Disney, comics or whatever. On the one hand they hold a central place in the minds of adults, a nostalgic fantasy area that is sacred, and kept closely guarded. On the other hand, as adults, such areas are to be dismissed and marginalised. When these distinct adult/child worlds merge, great concern is expressed— whether in terms of outrage, or a refusal to countenance it (*cf.* Rose, 1984, Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 1992) .

I have explored this marginalisation of children's literature elsewhere (Rudd, 1992), and it will form a backdrop to much of what is discussed below. But briefly, the way children are constructed, as helpless, innocent beings—girls in particular—means that they can, thereby, be more easily belittled and marginalised. It is a powerful discourse to the extent that children who are not 'innocent' in some way, are frequently described as not really children. In other words, the discourse constructs, in Foucault's terms, what can and cannot be said

16

about children. And this discourse is self-perpetuating, so that it is very easy to argue that children should be protected from a wide range of material—sexist, racist, classist, and so on. But in the very act of doing this, the discourse, in effect, underwrites its own truths; put more simply, the very act of policing children confirms their minority status. So, on the one hand they are pure and innocent—a fact that their literature strives to reflect—but on the other, they are not allowed to be anything else: they are thus removed from much that is considered the 'real' world—the world of adults—a divide which it is foolhardy to try to cross.

This study examines Blyton from various angles, using all the tools that a Cultural Studies approach can muster. Basically, there are three prongs to the work. First, a textual analysis of selected Blyton series; originally I had intended to examine three: 'Noddy', her most celebrated creation, and very popular amongst her younger readership; secondly, the 'Famous Five', her most enduring series, and an example of her writing for the junior school age group; lastly, 'Malory Towers', an instance of her writing for young adolescents, and one for a predominantly female readership. These three not only cover the age-range of her stories, but also seem to be the most talked about in the literature on Blyton, as will be apparent. They are also representative of the three main fictional genres for which Blyton wrote: the fantasy world of Noddy, the adventure story, and the school story. This said, I have been forced to reduce the coverage to just two, owing to the amount of material involved. Consequently, the Malory material is referred to only tangentially (see Rudd, 1996b, 1997a for more detail).

Secondly, there is an analysis of what Blyton means to her readers, both past and present. The past readers are predominantly adults, those who enjoyed Blyton in childhood. They extend from those who read her first in magazine format, often when the material first appeared, whether in the 'thirties, 'forties or 'fifties, to those who read paperback versions in the 'seventies and 'eighties, after their creator's death (often unbeknown to the reader). The contemporary readers are children of the 'nineties, whom I have contacted largely by going into selected

17

schools and chatting with pupils. Whereas past readers are largely categorised by age, these are more clearly demarcated by gender, by ethnic origin, and class. The third prong of my research involves an examination of Blyton as a cultural icon, constructed by the writer herself, and by the media, the critics, and her readership. Sometimes this figure is related to the texts she wrote, but at others, it seems a very different construct.

My study reflects the general shift in cultural studies away from text to reader, but without thereby abandoning the former. It seeks to hold these in tension by examining the context of reading. I started with the texts for a variety of reasons. Pragmatically, I needed to select the most appropriate examples of Blyton's work, and to get to know the material fairly intimately if I was going to talk to 'experts' on the corpus. But I also wanted to try reading them in a number of different ways, picking out what seemed to me to be salient themes and threads— what I call 'discursive threads', aspects of the text that readers find significant and tend to elaborate on (explicated in the next chapter; also in Rudd, 1992).

The organisation of the thesis follows this general trajectory. After a closer examination of my theoretical orientation and methodology (chapter 2), I move on to a general examination of the previous literature, looking at how the Blyton persona has been constructed, both through her texts and non-fictional works (chapter 3). Chapters 4 and 5 look at the key works—'Noddy' and the 'Famous Five' respectively—in more detail, bringing in the views of respondents where apposite. Chapter 6 takes on board the charge of racism; in some respects this discussion might seem a detour, but the discourses around Blyton on this matter are so powerful that they could not be side-stepped. I then move on to suggest two, more productive readings of Blyton than the current literary and educational approaches; namely, situating her in the oral tradition (chapter 7), and as a fulfiller of fantasies, drawing on psychoanalytic work (chapter 8). Chapter 9 seeks to pull these threads together and suggests a re-evaluation of Blyton. However, it is hoped that in unveiling some of the mystery of her writing—partly

a mystery because few have ever looked closely at it—some of the mystery surrounding children's literature is also exposed.

NOTES

1   A female respondent told me of a similar experience: 'I had a Blyton phase
      of my childhood and then it stopped, and yes in retrospect it was dramatic, in
      fact I can identify a pre and post Blyton era in my life, which surprises me
      because I don't remember that being true of other authors.'

      This notion of a definitive Blyton period, before post-Blyton life, can come
      to be seen like a period of innocence before the Fall—and ties in with my
      later comments on the Imaginary. As an example of this, a recent radio
      programme (*Relatively Speaking*, Radio 4, Sunday 14 April, 9.00 p.m.) about
      the comedian Jo Brand, was previewed with the following in the *Radio
      Times*: 'Jo enjoyed a happy childhood reading Enid Blyton at home in Kent,
      but things went badly wrong in her teens ...' (Anon, 1996a).

2   See chapter 4 for more discussion of this. 'Mickey Mouse' has had more
      eponymous success here, in phrases such as 'a mickey mouse job', meaning
      jokey, second-rate, or worthless. The *Oxford English Dictionary* credits
      George Orwell with first using the term in this way, in 1936 (ix, p. 713).
      Blyton, very daringly, herself has a story called 'Mickey-Mouse's key'
      (1939). However, when it appeared in book form, in *The Enid Blyton
      Holiday Book 1* (1946), she sensibly changed it—or was advised so to do—
      to 'Joey's lost key'. This was not her only association with the mouse,
      either; some of the 'Secret Seven' series first appeared in *Mickey Mouse
      Weekly* (Wright, 1994).

CHAPTER TWO

THEORY AND METHODS - LITERATURE, DISCOURSE AND THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CHILD

INTRODUCTION

My methodological approach grows out of a more general concern with the way that children's literature is treated. Many traditional approaches seem to me to be seriously inadequate, for a number of reasons. First, many simply lack any methodological grounding (that is, any systematic use of methods on the basis of some theoretical perspective); they are prone to whimsy and subjective judgement (what Hunt calls 'pseudo-criticism' - 1990, p. 5; see also Hunt, 1981). Secondly, even where more systematic investigations are undertaken, they are frequently too narrow, seeking to explore the topic through the lens of teacher training, children's librarianship, or as a by-way of literary studies, resulting in very partial analyses. Thirdly, even if a wider perspective is adopted, and the analysis is more systematic, studies which only consider the text still seem inadequate. As various works have indicated (e.g. Morley, 1980; Hodge and Tripp, 1986), this is one of the main weaknesses of cultural/media studies; namely, that it rests on too narrow an empirical base (Buckingham, 1993). This is particularly the case with critics of Blyton, many of whom make their pronouncements with no thought of consulting the primary readership (perfectly captured in Brian Alderson's (1969) comment on '[t]he irrelevance of children to the children's book reviewer').[1]

There is thus a certain hypocrisy in critics complaining about Blyton's lack of research in writing her stories, when they also omit this practice. Eales, for instance, complains bitterly that writers like Blyton were to blame for the lack of attention to the miners' strike and for the growing army of unemployed. Blyton and others 'out-storied' them, he says: 'What must neither be neglected, nor

denied, is the *power* of these writers to contribute to a blocking-out of certain cultural possibilities, to sustain and confirm certain basic concepts which ought to be far more strenuously and alertly resisted than they are' (Eales, 1989, p. 89). His discourse is quite exclusionary here. He neglects to consult the children of these groups, who might read Blyton for escapism (as did many of my respondents with unemployed parents); he neglects adults who once read her yet would still argue that they had well developed social consciences; he neglects the fact that Blyton's works were themselves marginalised, shunned by the critical establishment; but most damningly, he effectively asserts that it is a waste of time consulting readers anyway, for it is the texts that seem to hold the power in his model, regardless of a reader's agenda or social background. Likewise, Cadogan and Craig's claim that the girls' school story is moribund, being 'no longer read by working-class girls in comprehensive schools', turns out to have no basis in truth, as, in this case, was later demonstrated in Frith's empirical work (Frith, 1985, p.114).

In the light of the above criticisms, the methodology developed here tries to overcome such inadequacies by looking not only at texts, but their production and consumption too; i.e. the *con*text and *sub*text of the text. It seeks to rise to Margaret Meek's injunction that an informed approach to children's literature must draw on the 'interactions of culture, history, language, literature, psychology, sociology ... to say nothing of the children's reading autobiographies' (Meek, 1987, p.100).

I shall now enlarge on these elements in more detail, beginning with a theoretical section before moving on to the methodology in more detail.

THEORY

Current approaches to children's literature

In this section I shall outline three influential approaches, the 'literary', the 'child-centred' and the 'reader-response'. Though they have been analytically separated, they closely overlap in the work of many practitioners.

The *literary approach.* In this the text is central, and can affect the reader either beneficially or malignantly. Implicit is the notion of a 'gold standard', the belief that some works transcend differences of class, race and gender and espouse universal truths and moral values. Such a view is enshrined in F. R. Leavis's 'great tradition' and his followers—such as Fred Inglis, David Holbrook, Frank Whitehead and A.C. Capey—have continued this notion of 'good' and 'bad' books. Inglis thus talks about a 'lesser great tradition' (1981, p. 101), polemically proclaiming,

> The great children's novelists are Lewis Carroll, Rudyard Kipling, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Arthur Ransome, William Mayne, and Phillipa Pearce.... (1981, p. 3)

Likewise, both Whitehead and Capey were responsible for the Schools Council survey of children's reading, wherein all the books are divided into 'quality' and 'non-quality' (Whitehead et al., 1977)—something that the recent W.H. Smith sponsored replication of the study sensibly abandoned (Hall and Coles, 1996)[2]. Both Whitehead and Capey have also written negatively of Blyton, as has Holbrook. In a review of Ray, Holbrook makes this immediately clear:

> The question is not whether Enid Blyton helps slow children to read, or whether her values are middle-class, or whether she is racist or sexist, or even whether she affects children's behaviour. It is simply that her work is bad art, in itself lacking in life and imagination. (Holbrook, 1982)

The emphasis on the work itself, is clear here, and elsewhere, Holbrook has elaborated on this, though still in very nebulous terms:

> The worst failure in commercial popular culture is that it gives no
> help, offers no wisdom 'felt in the blood and felt along the heart',
> as 'culture of the feelings'. And so we suffer from inadequate
> holds on life, undernourished positives. (Holbrook, 1961, p. 52)[3]

In setting up such a polarised view of texts, Blyton cannot help but be dismissed, or seen as a negative exemplar of literature—as in Margery Fisher's unrelenting claim that Blyton was 'slow poison'.[4] As Maslow put it, if the only weapon you have is a hammer, you treat every issue as though it were a nail, and this seems to be the approach of many literary critics: quite simply, to 'hammer' Blyton. The literary approach's concentration on the text, and such qualities as literary language, rounded character, and organic plot, results in ignoring what goes on 'around' the text. More recently, there have been studies which have absorbed psychoanalytical and structuralist theory to help overcome some of this narrowness, but they still tend to ignore the larger issues of context and reception, discerning, instead, timeless truths. However, more recently still, there has been a breaking-down of barriers, as the traditional literary approach has given way to a 'cultural studies' one. It is impossible to typify this, but it generally pays closer attention to the linguistic dimension of texts (e.g. Hunt, 1991; Jones, 1991); it also takes account of historical, social and ideological aspects (Avery, 1975; Leeson, 1985; Rose, 1984; Sarland, 1992), and finally, gives greater attention to narrative (Chambers, 1985; Hunt, 1991; Wall (1991). Stephens (1992) is exemplary in presenting such a rounded approach.

The *child-centred* approach, usually based on the work of Piaget, would seem, on the surface, to be a more open-minded one, but in practice, seldom is. It suggests that children of different ages will appreciate different things in literature, therefore, critics should take account of these differences—hence the child-centredness. However, because there is a pinnacle of development, where these stages culminate, the pinnacle tends to be taken as the norm. And, although this norm is presented impartially as the ability to reason abstractly, it maps rather too neatly onto the contemporary figure of a mature, white, western male (Gilligan, 1982). Children are seen not in their own right, but according to

how far short of this paragon they fall: the extent that they lack an ability to relate cause and effect, to see conceptual relations underlying surface features, and so on. From the outset, children's literature is treated in a condescending manner, with only the greatest works being worthy of attention, and even then, no children's literature is seen as being great in the way that George Eliot's or Tolstoy's is (Tucker, 1976b, p. 18). A related criticism is that Piaget's model is almost exclusively concerned with cognitive development, to which moral and emotional factors are subsumed. Thirdly, as a result of this model, where development is mapped out in stages, real children are often lost, and in their place we hear about 'non-conservers'; literary texts, likewise, become ciphers of particular developmental stages. Winnie-the-Pooh, for example, is seen clearly to be a non-conserver, fooled by the appearance of things, and animistic in his approach to the world, seeing inanimate objects like clouds as mindful (Singer, 1972); hence the books' appeal to children of a similar age. However, as Milne's books appeal to all ages, this scarcely explains anything.

Lastly, and most significantly, the child-centred approach simply fails to take us much further: for particular books are meant to be popular because they have the qualities that are liked by children at a certain stage; for instance, 'Noddy' books are popular partly because they are animistic; thus, in *Noddy Goes to the Fair*, Mr. Plod's helmet blows off:

> 'Come back helmet!' But the helmet took no notice. It was having a lovely time, bumping and bouncing and rolling along. Ha—this was better than sitting still on Mr. Plod's head! (*N21* p. 17)

The helmet is effortlessly animated, which at this stage of development, children supposedly like. Yet, presumably all books at this stage share this quality (by definition), so it still does not tell us why 'Noddy' in particular is so popular. But the greatest irony is that, though the Piagetian approach is frequently termed 'child-centred', children are rarely present. The approach, in presuming already to know the child, therefore decides to dispense with him or her in actuality; so few Piagetian studies of children's literature actually feature children.

Reader-response is a third very popular approach to children's literature, often seen as standing mid-way between the above two. It certainly seems to bring together text and reader, the latter being something that both the above approaches omit. At its core it suggests that the reader is a more active maker of meaning, as guided by the text. Iser (1974, 1978; see also Chambers, 1985, Corcoran and Evans, 1987) argues that texts do not spell everything out; rather, they contain gaps, or 'indeterminacies', which readers must themselves fill in, drawing on their own knowledge. It has also lent itself admirably to classroom work, where the teacher can see how children actually make sense of texts. However, though laudable in its aims, and, in the hands of certain teachers, genuinely giving recognition to the complexity of children's readings, all too frequently it tends to do the opposite: to shut down on the range of meanings.[5] Instead, meanings come to cohere round a particular centre, usually falling back on notions of the organic unity of a text, as created by some lone, gifted individual. The gaps in a text cease to be spaces that the individual reader can inhabit; rather, they become points to straddle. They are more like spark-plug gaps, which, if set right, will ensure that the reader's mind successfully arcs across to complete a predetermined circuit; a unified reading. In other words, the reader is not really allowed a personal response; rather, he or she becomes a textual artefact, dutifully fulfilling textual instructions—as in the literary approach.[6]

Furthermore, not only are particular readings privileged, but the texts chosen for such work also tend to be predetermined; that is, they are texts deemed to have the appropriate spaces in them, where the imagination can do its work, whereas other texts are seen to have everything spelt out, with the reader being led by the hand. As Benton (1978, p. 30) puts it: 'A text with little indeterminacy is likely to bore the reader since it restricts his participation, a text with a large measure of indeterminacy, as long as it avoids irritating the reader by confusing or puzzling him, is likely to be exciting.' Blyton's texts, of course, are seen to have minimal indeterminacy (Chambers, 1985; Hunt, 1978).

So, each of the above approaches suffers a certain myopia, although each also has its useful elements, which can be used in a broader perspective, one that, in Bergonzi's words, recognises the 'personal, intellectual, literary, linguistic, [and] social... as constituent elements ... part of the network of codes that make up the totality' (Bergonzi, 1978, p. 5). Such a perspective—what I earlier termed a 'communication studies' approach (Rudd, 1992)—is one, therefore, which must make language central.

A Discourse approach

Barthes' notion of 'text as a field of force', which Bergonzi references, is a helpful image to bear in mind. The key term that enables us to speak of this force-field, comprising text, context and readership, is 'discourse'. This allows us to recognise the textual dimension of everything, not just the literary text *per se*. It also helps breaks down the disciplinary barriers encountered above. However, there are drawbacks, the main one being that the term 'discourse' is itself so heavily overwritten with different uses that its implications need to be specified. In this section I shall endeavour to spell out what I mean by the term, and the advantages of adopting such an approach.

It is Foucault's usage to which I am chiefly indebted, for it links ways of speaking about topics to sites of power. It is the latter dimension that is frequently neglected in other approaches (see Fairclough, 1992; Macdonell, 1986, for overviews), so that people talk about 'discourses' as if all had equal status. For Foucault, though, discourses are concerned with the authority with which people speak, what they can speak about, and in what manner. In conveying knowledge, discourses simultaneously embody power and, thereby, a set of social relations. So, certain ways of talking about a subject, deriving from particular institutional sites, actually form that subject; not only this, but a subject, being formed in one way, is not thereby seen in another. Thus certain ways of speaking become sedimented, naturalised, and literally 'in-form' our

thoughts, our way of addressing issues—as Foucault demonstrates in his own studies of madness, incarceration, sex, and in the development of the social sciences more generally. Clearly, with children's literature, we are already in a literary byway, but those works not accorded 'classic' status are particularly marginalised. Foucault's discursive approach, however, seeks to lay aside such value judgments, looking not at literature *per se*, but 'that everyday, transient writing that never acquires the status of an *oeuvre* ...the interstices of the great discursive monuments' (Foucault, 1972, pp. 136-7).

The notion of discourse thus provides a *lingua franca* for discussing moments of production and consumption. There are three points to make about this. First, it allows us to read across from Blyton's texts to the 'texts' of readers (e.g. questionnaire responses, interview transcripts, critical essays, newspaper stories), without prioritising or essentialising either. Second, and more significantly, it recognises that meaning and truth do not originate in the writer, the book or the reader; rather, these, respectively, are the nexus points of particular discourses that we can then unpick. Lastly, it gets us round thorny issues about the 'intentional fallacy' by refusing to read a cause-effect relationship from signifiers to underlying referents. Instead, it simply points to homologies amongst textual elements, be they 'biographical' or 'fictional'.

However, although I am using a 'discourse' approach I prefer to talk about 'discursive threads' rather than 'discourse' *per se* [7]. There are four reasons for this.

i) The word 'discourse' now has so many other associations, particularly in linguistics where it is commonly taken to refer to units of text longer than the sentence (e.g. Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). In Foucauldian terms, one never sees a discourse 'whole', because most of it is simply not made explicit. It is therefore like the proverbial iceberg, and is usually only 'referenced' or 'quoted' (the process of 'intertextuality'—see below). Hence there is no need to define it formally, as larger than a sentence; it may well be, but it might just as easily be a

single word or phrase; as Barthes puts it, 'A discourse is a long 'sentence' (the units of which are not necessarily sentences), just as a sentence, allowing for certain specifications, is a short 'discourse' (Barthes, 1977a, p. 83). The term 'discursive thread' seems to capture this facet more clearly, as against the somewhat monolithic sounding 'discourse'.

ii) It foregrounds the metaphorical resonance of the word 'threads'. The phrase 'discursive threads' clearly spells out the process of teasing out words from a particular way of speaking, words which pre-exist and echo any particular utterance, but which, along with other threads, are ever being woven into new discourses. Texts thus have 'texture', being weaves of various threads—threads which people sometimes worry about 'losing'. There is also the panoply of terms associating *story* in particular with these domestic arts: weaving a tale, spinning yarns, tying-up threads, and so on. And these metaphorical links connect with the textuality of life in general, reaching back to the three Greek Fates, Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos, who, respectively, spun the thread of life, measured it, and cut it off at death—just as discursive threads help weave our identity, much of which is also beyond individual control, mapped out by our gender, class, ethnicity, and so on.

iii) The term is far more dynamic than 'discourse', suggesting a process rather than a thing, and is thus akin to Foucault's notion of 'discursive practices'. For discourses are not simply lumps of language; they are more like what Wittgenstein terms 'forms of life'. To use marxian terminology, they are not just 'superstructural' elements, expressing underlying material concerns, but are themselves 'materialistic', constitutive of a particular social order.[8] In J.L. Austin's famous phrase, we *do* things with words (Austin, 1962). Thus, to give an apposite illustration, if an adult tells-off a child, the adult is not simply using these words to reprimand the child, but is also defining the child in the process; or, more exactly, is re-enacting and re-invoking the relations of adult to child, where the latter is the powerless, the dependent.

This is fundamental to Foucault's conception of discourse as the embodiment of power relations. In particular, he was interested in the development of a new regime of power ('biopower') in which people began to regulate their own behaviour without the show of force ('disciplinary power' - Foucault, 1979). The various ways of speaking that developed in the Industrial Revolution led people to see themselves as 'subjects'—individuals who could monitor and regulate their own behaviour through their 'consciences'. And the vocabularies and explanatory frameworks that people used for this new understanding were those developed by institutions such as education and health. I use the word 'understanding', but this should also be seen as a form of 'self-regulation'. Foucault always talked of 'power-knowledge' as a single concept, to indicate how knowledge always has a controlling aspect, so that even self-knowledge involves a monitoring of one's actions (Foucault, 1979, 1980, 1981). Children, then, are subject to just this discursive process, internalising what it is to be a child who will later become an adult; and literature, especially literature for children, is a powerful part of this process.

This understanding has profound implications when it comes to interviewing, for we realise that there can never be an innocent interview, in which truth is transparently revealed by the words spoken. Interviews are shaped by larger discursive elements, the interview itself being a recognised discursive practice. Thus there are differential power relations involved from the start (it is an 'interview', not a 'conversation'), which might be compounded by others (e.g. of race, sex, age). To give a concrete instance, girls would often use 'Georgina' when referring to the tomboy in the 'Famous Five', though the -ina form was despised by the character. What the girls were doing was using the name strategically, to emphasise that they were talking about a *girl* doing these things. One has to be attentive to such minimal discursive threads, recognising, as Foucault said, that 'there can be no statement that in one way or another does not reactualize others' (1972, p. 98).

It needs stressing, however, that discourses do not exist as some passive archive, but are being reformed all the time. So, at any point, there is the possibility that a discourse will be differently fashioned. Obviously the weight of power behind a discourse (e.g. the power of patriarchy) will tend to slant the outcome, but it is by no means ineluctable. This is Foucault's key point about power not emerging from only one particular place in society, but being everywhere, and, in that very process, developing its own resistances.[9] It was for this reason that Foucault, to the annoyance of many marxists, avoided the term 'ideology' with its totalitarian implications. Instead, he preferred to explore more local issues of what he termed 'the microphysics of power':

> When I think of the mechanics of power, I have in mind rather its capillary form of existence, at the point where power returns into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies, and comes to insert itself into their gestures and attitudes, their discourse, apprenticeships and daily lives. (1980, p. 39)

There are various examples of this in my study, both in the comments of subjects, and in Blyton's texts. To give an example from the latter, there is an interesting exchange in *FGOIC*[10], when Anne draws on her domestic role to enhance her power in the confrontation with patriarchy. Thus when Julian characteristically says they'll eat, '...Anne made them wash and tidy themselves first! ... "I'll give you five minutes—then you can come"' (*FGOIC*, p. 198).

The close relation of power and resistance is also shown in Foucault's notion of '"reverse" discourse' (Foucault, 1981, pp. 101-2). He gives the example of homosexuality, which despite being 'the love that dare not speak its name', actually became able to speak for itself as a result of the discourse developed around it—even though that discourse was derogatory. In a similar way, one can see how the concept of the child permits a challenging of more powerful voices. So, returning to my example above, where an adult is reprimanding a child, there is the option here for the child to use its inferior status to advantage. In other words, the process of defining children as incompetent, irresponsible, clumsy— or whatever—actually gives the child a warrant to behave in this way,

simultaneously empowering the child (one might say that the humour of Richmal Crompton's William Brown is built on just this - Crompton, 1922).

iv) A final reason for using the term is its overt resemblance to 'signifying chains', but without some of the baggage associated with the latter. In particular, it avoids the atomism of the term 'signifiers', which, in my opinion, has permitted too freewheeling a response to many texts; for, despite the almost infinite creativity opened up, it is generally the case that signifiers come 'ready-packaged' in larger units. In this way, the term 'discursive threads' seems to be pitched at a suitable level, between the rather monolithic notion of discourses proper, and the too atomistic signifiers.[11] While the term signifies the partiality, or 'quotedness' of all utterances, in that each thread is connected to and re-works earlier ones, it also recognises that, for most of the time, the overall patterning of the threads reproduces the existing power relations of society. We can therefore continue to use terms like 'preferred readings' to indicate that some versions of events have the weight of traditional interpretation behind them, however contentious.

Although Foucault's notion of discourse is central, the related work of Vološinov/ Bakhtin also informs much of what follows, particularly his notion of the 'multi-accentedness' of signs (Vološinov, 1973)[12]. He was one of the first to recognise that signs are often 'a site of struggle' or contestation. This means that any particular word may be used differently by different groups, to 'mean' in a particular direction (not, note, by individuals in some voluntaristic way—see my comments below on 'freewheeling' interpretations). An obvious example, raised earlier, would be the word 'gay', strategically used by the homosexual community to replace terms such as 'queer', and, equally, resisted by others. Later, Bakhtin speaks of the 'heteroglossia' of texts, indicating how within a text there are different voices present; but, whereas some texts seek to weave their texts into one overall voice (a 'monoglossia'), others flaunt the competing strands (the link with 'discursive threads' should be apparent). Bakhtin's more

general approach is called 'dialogism', which is a recognition that what is spoken is always a response, or continuation, of the dialogue with earlier voices (Bakhtin, 1981).[13] This notion will prove particularly valuable when exploring the discursive threads from which Blyton wove her stories, drawing on both personal and social events; it will also help illuminate how these threads feed back into the culture, as the 'Blytonesque'.[14]

Before moving on to some of the outstanding problems, let me reiterate two main issues about this discursive approach, to avoid later confusion:

- a discourse approach, treating every trace as 'text', gives us a common currency to move across academic barriers, besides a useful way of 'levelling out' the various areas of analysis: primary texts, adaptations, criticism, media reaction, biographical and social elements; it also, building on the insights of Bakhtin, recognises that these various areas are intertextually related, later discourses responding to earlier ones, reconstituting and resituating them.

- though it levels things out for analytical purposes, it does not thereby make everything level. This seems a shortcoming of much work in this area, which can lose sight of the fact that certain discourses carry more weight than others. In concrete terms, this means probing why certain ways of constructing Blyton have been the case, and allows us to hold on to the notion of 'preferred readings', however contestable they might be. It also, precisely because of the way discourses generate their own reversals, shows us how things might be read otherwise: by exploring a non-literary approach to her texts, for instance; or by listening to the voice of that usually muted group, children (not that they should be seen as the source of 'the truth' about Blyton; in Foucault's terms, they simply provide an alternative reading).

Now to the problems. First there is the question of *reliability*. I have been critical of studies which simply engage in textual analysis, ignoring how texts are actually consumed, so have sought to give an empirical base to my study. I have also tried to use a variety of methods, some quantitative, others more qualitative[15], to make my findings more reliable. Whilst I am aware that 'triangulation', or 'multi-methods', has its own problems in that each method tends to produce its own truths according to its own ground-rules, I am confident that there are sufficient checks and variations in this work not to compromise its reliability.

The other side of this issue is that one can impose a false reliability: one gives 'to one voice a pervasive authorial function and to others the role of informants' (Clifford, 1986, p. 15), hence reducing others to adjuncts of one's overall truth. As the whole notion of Foucault's genealogical method is to give expression to marginalised voices, entertaining 'the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchise and order them in the name of some true knowledge' (Foucault, 1980, p 83), I would hope not to collapse these back into a new hierarchy. Certainly, I have suggested some overarching interpretations of Blyton, imposing some sort of coherence, but without, I hope, submerging the currently muted voices.

The second main problem is of *validity*, which brings in its wake considerations of relativism. I have already argued that Foucault's notion of discourse recognises the ultimate arbitrariness of different versions of events, while, historically, noting that certain discourses are undoubtedly privileged, or 'preferred', carrying more weight than others. This notion of power delimiting too freewheeling a reading of a text helps put the excesses of some relativists into perspective. Thus literary critics and students can often turn out different interpretations almost on demand, 'doing' a Kristevan, Kleinian, or structuralist reading (e.g. Easthope, 1985). And such readings can be sustained in academia—at conferences and seminars. But they seem similar in their half-life

to the particles created by nuclear physicists in bubble-chambers (the equivalent in literature to what Stanley Fish (1980) calls 'interpretive communities') which, though they may be cultivated here quite successfully, have little currency in the world at large, where they lack the underpinning of other institutional supports.

This points to a perennial problem for anyone involved in the social sciences: either to be accused of restating the obvious—hence being trivial—or of being 'far-fetched' in rejecting what is common-sense. Foucault's analysis is pitched between these extremes, I feel. He rejects any notion of ultimate truth as a chimera, but he also avoids an open relativism precisely by pointing to the sites of power that underwrite particular truths (e.g. that Blyton is 'poison'). Barthes makes a telling comment along these lines when he says that 'To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it.' (Barthes, 1990, p. 5); in other words, instead of trying to study, for example, racism *per se* (whatever that might be), I have to tried to examine how the discourse of racism is realised in Blyton's works, and how this discourse itself has a history and a trajectory, which changes over time.

So the whole study is conducted in a post-modern recognition that the texts I am studying have no single voice, that Blyton herself was a nexus point of a variety of contending discourses—as are readers likewise, including that variety of reader known as 'the critics', who have clearly failed to find unanimity in Blyton's work. We must then add to this the particular responses elicited by my intervention at a particular point in time (very different from what I might have received in the 1950s, or 1970s, for instance; and certainly very different from the Blyton emerging in the centenary year, after the Trocadero take-over and media-hyping of her works). And lastly, we must recognise my own current positioning, which has itself been mutable over the last five years. Other texts and studies are certainly no different, though many do try to wear a false sense of unity.

METHOD

I have used four principal methods to generate the data for this study—textual analysis, questionnaires, interviews and other activities—each of which I shall now elaborate on.

Textual Analysis

Textual Criticism

Blyton wrote over 700 books, some 4,500 short stories, so it is clearly impossible to look at them all. I have therefore sought to read as many as I could, to develop a general feel for her style and her concerns. I then selected three series to examine in more detail, that would cover the age range of her writing, and which had also proved to be most popular with her readers. Accordingly, 'Noddy', the 'Famous Five' and 'Malory Towers' were selected, although pressures of space forced the last into the margins.

I then carefully read this corpus of fifty-one texts[16] myself, using the approach discussed above, generally seeking to draw out the various discursive threads therein, and relating these to the context of the books' production (i.e. personal, intertextual and social resonances). My warrant for this is based on my own 'cultural capital'—to use Bourdieu's (1993) useful term. I trade on the fact that I belonged to a society at least partially contemporaneous with Blyton (she was prolific throughout my childhood, only dropping her production rate at the time I grew out of her work).

Production

Textual analysis will not be confined to the corpus of texts mentioned above. It will also involve looking at the wider context of their production; that is, at the personal, social and cultural elements that helped shaped the texts, and, simultaneously, shaped the Blyton persona. This involves examining other works by Blyton, both fictional and non-fictional (autobiographical material, her

comments on teaching and contemporary events), and the surrounding literary and cultural context.

Consumption

My own analysis of the texts, informed though I believe it is, is insufficient. My analysis must take account of the many other commentators on Blyton. I am interested not only in what they say about her texts but also in how they construct their own version of the Blyton persona—the Blytonesque. It is particularly interesting in that it is often culturally élitist voices which seek to pronounce authoritatively on her works, albeit their voices are often least representative or aware of its reception. I have tried to cast my net as widely as possible here, drawing not only on 'literary criticism', but on other cultural references, however ephemeral. Besides searching newspaper and journal indexes and abstracts, modern technology has helped. CD-ROM access is now available to many of the traditional sources; there is also the Internet, and such on-line services as CampusWorld's *FT Profile*, which allows electronic searching of a database of twenty-eight newspaper and journal sources by keyword.

Questionnaires

Drawing on elements from my own reading, plus the observations of other commentators, I devised a questionnaire to explore people's experiences of Blyton: which books they had read, when, and what they thought of them (see appendix I). The questionnaire had two main audiences. First, past readers of Blyton, now grown-up, stretching back to first generation readers (i.e. those who were children in the 'twenties and 'thirties); I also planned that this would include some international respondents. Second, contemporary readers, the *fin-de-siécle* kids of the 'nineties, a hundred years on from Blyton's own childhood.

The questionnaire was distributed in several ways. The first was by accident, in that publicity of my research was picked up by the media from my Institute's 'Research Register'. Amongst abstruse titles about 'image processing

tomography' and the like, Enid Blyton clearly stood out! Local/national press and radio immediately wanted to hear about my work, although it had then hardly begun. This I used to my advantage by asking for past and present readers of Blyton to make contact.

Questionnaires were also distributed to the following: readers of the publications of the two Enid Blyton societies (*Green Hedges Magazine: the quarterly publication for all Enid Blyton enthusiasts* and *The Enid Blyton Book & Ephemera Collectors Society*)[17], the staff at Bolton Institute, to students at the same on my 'Children's Literature' module, to librarians both in this country and abroad, via the professional journal of the British Library Association (the *Library Association Record*[18]) and, finally, to reach a truly international audience, I placed a message on the Internet to ferret out Blyton readers worldwide.[19] All these proved productive, and frequently one enthusiast would put me in touch with another—what is known as a 'snowball' form of selection. This, of course, does not depend on a statistically representative sample, partly because the population is unknown, but also because this would be inappropriate, given that my aim was to explore the views of those who had read and enjoyed Blyton— whatever they now felt. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) say, in qualitative research 'sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming... thus *redundancy* is the primary criterion', the idea being to 'maximize information' (p. 202). I let the snowball roll till this point, which I decided had been reached by the time I had 385 adult questionnaires.

There are no set rules in qualitative research regarding number of subjects, unlike those regarding significance in quantitative work. Consequently, numbers vary vastly across studies, not always in line with qualitative depth. Obviously, the literary critic usually constitutes the limit case in idiographic research, although even here, other voices are usually drawn on. But if we look elsewhere, we find a variety: Fry (1985) draws on only six children; Sarland (1991) on forty-six, and Buckingham (1987) on sixty; Ang (1985), though using adults, depends on only forty-two letters from Dutch fans of *Dallas*; also, she provides

no background information on her subjects, only learning of them through placing a magazine advert. Christian-Smith's work (1990) is nearer in size to my own. She analyses thirty-four American teen romance stories and interviews twenty-nine girls from three schools. The latter two studies are based on interested parties, Ang's being self-selecting, whereas Sarland—like Morley's (1980) *Nationwide* study—asked his subjects to examine texts of his choice, not their own.

My subjects came from as wide a geographical, ethnic, class and gender base as possible. Aside from the 385 adults, there were 490 children, 170 of whom were interviewed. I collected my questionnaires from contemporary children more systematically, selecting four schools on the basis of class and ethnic mix, and age-grouping. There were two primary schools, each of 200 pupils; Barney is a predominantly, white, commuter-belt, middle-class district; the other, Amelia Primary, is a predominantly working-class, urban school, with 50% black English (predominantly Asian). The two secondary schools were similarly juxtaposed. Whyteleafe Secondary is a suburban church school, with predominantly white, middle-class children (1200 in number), whereas St. Rollo's Secondary is, again, a predominantly working-class urban school, with mixed ethnicity (about 1000 pupils, one-third Asian —mostly Muslims, but with some Hindus too, and a few Afro-Caribbeans).[20] Questionnaires were distributed to classes in each of these schools (see appendix I), with either teachers or parents helping the younger age groups complete them.

The children's questionnaire responses were anonymous, but I did ask that respondents indicate their sex and age. Interestingly, the question about parents' occupations was most often not filled in, sometimes with 'N/A' against it—often at parental instigation, I felt. This, and the question about ethnicity proved the most contentious, as this was the other question often left blank (the much larger W. H. Smith survey of children's reading found similar problems with the self-reporting of ethnicity - Chris Hall, 1996, personal communication). Ironically, I was able to establish that it was mostly the Asian families who withheld this

information, simply because of the respective proportions of each, and I had far more completed forms from white children.

The Asians' reluctance is not unexpected, given their high unemployment and their subsequently greater dependence on the state, thus being more subject to its bureaucracy and prying. Another form was thus viewed suspiciously, especially when it asked about employment status, coupled with the fact that, for many parents (some lacking English) the name Enid Blyton was meaningless anyway! At the other extreme, enthusiasm for Enid amongst some white, middle-class parents made several of them fill out the questionnaires in their own names, rather than that of their children!

With a selection of the pupils (170) I also conducted group interviews (see below, and appendix II). I had intended to have follow-up interviews with some of the adults who had completed questionnaires, too. However, in the end, there was no time to pursue most of these—apart, ironically, from those who responded on the Internet, where an electronic dialogue was easily conducted.

SPSS for Windows was used to collate and analyse the questionnaire returns, the findings of which are reported in appendices III and IV, although key issues are incorporated into the main text. Besides being informative in themselves, the questionnaires also provided useful pointers to more in-depth investigations with interviewees.

Interviews

The interviews were the most time-consuming aspect of the Reception phase. I had an interview schedule cleared with the relevant authorities (appendix II), which stated my intention to discuss 'golliwogs', amongst other issues. However, for the actual interviews I tried to make the atmosphere as much like a discussion as possible. I used group, rather than individual interviews, normally involving four individuals at a time. Generally these were of mixed sex,

comprising two boys and two girls, but I also conducted some single-sex interviews with all girl groups. This was to counter the tendency of the boys to use what might be seen as patriarchal advantage (Cherland, 1994; Spender, 1990)—albeit, it should be said, in some mixed-sex groups, the girls were more articulate and forthcoming than the boys. (It should not be thought, of course, that removing the boys from the scene removes patriarchy, but it can lessen its interpersonal impact.) I also sought to mix white and Asian children in groups, although, again, I occasionally interviewed all Asian groups—partly to redress the balance with the all-white groups in other schools, and partly to see if different issues might emerge when white peers were removed.

I, however, a middle-class, male, white adult, was present throughout—and undoubtedly influenced responses—which was one of the main reasons that group interviews were conducted. In any adult/child dialogue, the power relations are skewed in favour of the adult, and the interaction is more likely to foreground contrasting worlds. With a group of children, though, it was hoped that the children's own issues would be more easily foregrounded; that a dialogue would occur within the group, with differences over texts, over male/female experience, and so on, emerging.

Of course, the reverse is frequently argued: that in group interviews one loses the views of individuals; that there is 'interference' from a variety of social variables. However, as I suggested above, the whole notion of an individual response is problematic; for there is no way in which an individual stands alone; even if interviewed alone, traces of the social will still constitute their response (just as all-girl groups do not escape patriarchy). There is no way one can unproblematically tap a voice that resonates with some inner self, or, even if it were so, that one might be any more likely to tap it one-to-one as opposed to the group situation. Instead, the subject is more satisfactorily seen as the unique point of intersection of a variety of discourses, which are re-worked and re-woven in particular contexts.[21] Thus, responses will change depending on the dynamics of the discourse, which is the process I have tried to capture in the

41

group situation. And, of course, the reading of texts, just like the viewing of TV programmes, can itself draw out different discursive threads:

> We are all, in our heads, several different audiences at once, and can be constituted as such by different programmes. We have the capacity to deploy different levels and modes of attention, to mobilise different competences in our viewing. (Hall, 1986, p. 10)

In sum, what is said in interview is the result of many interacting variables.[22]

The interviews were taped then transcribed, in recognition of the theoretically-laden nature of transcription (Ochs, 1979). Clearly, from the very moment that the flow of speech is segmented into sentences, one is re-fashioning the source. I have by no means sought the complex 'Jefferson style' transcription, as used by Conversation Analysts (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984). Transcriptions are verbatim, however, except where a passage was unintelligible, in which case the 'drift' has been indicated, and this has been indicated. Prosodic features have been ignored, except where they are dramatic (shouting, for example), or pertinent to the matter in hand. Further details about transcription are to be found in appendix II.[23]

Other Activities

Aside from the questionnaires and interviews, there were some other activities conducted with the pupils. However, in relying on the time and good-will of a number of teachers in a variety of schools—teachers who, in turn, had to rely on colleagues—these activities were not as methodical as I would have liked. Consequently, they are only briefly referred to in the following chapters. Briefly, the activities consisted of the following. In one, older children were presented with two different versions of a Famous Five story, leading up to the climax. In one version the boys took the lead, whereas in the other, the action was more evenly divided up. The children had to complete the story, and indicate which version they preferred. (As said above, reliable conclusions could not be drawn; though, from what responses I did get, there was no determinable preference.)

A second task required children to draw their favourite Blyton character or scene. This was mainly aimed at the younger children, to compensate for their lack of writing skills. However, some of the older children also enjoyed this task, producing some excellent art work. Some examples of this are reproduced later. Lastly, some of the children were involved in choosing both their favourite and their least liked 'Famous Five' illustration from a selection by various of the Five illustrators: the original Eileen Soper ones, Betty Maxey's 1960/70s updates, Jolyne Knox's versions for Award hardbacks, plus a variety of cover illustrations. This activity was elaborated in a follow-up, where contrasting illustrations of the same story were compared. (Again, this was not systematic, but results showed that today's children did not particularly prefer the style of any one artist, rather, they went for what was represented: i.e. content rather than style.)

CODA

The above has tried to emphasise the -ology side of methodology, for I have always felt that too many studies are driven rather mechanically by the 'method' side. But without a keen awareness of why particular methods are deployed it is unlikely that any outcomes can be analysed meaningfully. This is especially the case with a discursive approach like Foucault's, where, drawing on the derivation of the word 'discourse', one is continually running in different directions, reflexively tacking back and forth. Given an awareness of how particular ways of probing, questioning, collating, categorising, analysing and presenting results generate their own 'truth-effects', one has to be wary of whatever 'truth-claims' one makes. There is certainly variety in the range of methods described above, but they are united through this discursive approach.

In terms of writing up, I have sought to follow through the image of a textual weave, by incorporating the responses from questionnaires and interviews within the main text. It is for the same reason that it seemed apposite to have the

discussion of methodology precede my review of the previous literature; for, in looking at the responses of previous writers to Blyton, one is already engaging in textual analysis.

NOTES

1   Going through the many commentators on Blyton in the literature, very few have bothered to consult children (though some refer to their own children, or friends'). Frith (1985) is an exception, with a substantial empirical study; Sarland (1983, 1991) and Fry (1985) also deserve mention, besides the general children's surveys, which were not centrally concerned with Blyton (*pace* Ingham, 1982). Woods (1974) is a curious case here, having addressed questionnaires to 100 schools in Britain, but for the teachers, rather than the pupils, to complete.

2   The Public Lending Right reports continue to divide authors, however, separating out 'classics' like Beatrix Potter from the Blyton and Dahls.

3   Holbrook also criticises Blyton personally as someone who was herself undernourished, thus a child: 'the prose of Enid Blyton is journalism at its most bloodless and fleshless—the writer appeals so widely simply because she has never grown up herself, and so she can offer nothing but the power of not growing up' (Holbrook, 1961, p. 155). I shall explore this more systematically later. Inglis' work is more complex than the other Leavisites, in that he finds a space for popular writers like Blyton, drawing on his own childhood reading. He argues that all the writers he discusses offer 'the promise of happiness', though he does not square this theoretically with his more polemical statements.

4   'I am sorry that a new generation is to be encouraged to feed on what I honestly believe to be slow poison' (Fisher, 1973, pp. 2231; also 1983, p. 4120). But her criticism is undermined by a lack of knowledge of the book she is reviewing (a 'Find-Outers' story). Thus she speaks of 'Goad, the ineffectual ... policeman' (i.e. Goon) and 'Frederick de Trotteville' (p. 2230 - there is no 'de' in his name!).

5   Martin and Leather (1994) discuss how the National Curriculum for English, originally designed to respect personal meanings, ends up reducing 'the experience of reading to the level of the pub quiz' (p. 5).

6   However, as Culler (1981, pp. 119-31) has suggested, it could be that it is the text that is at the mercy of the reader; i.e. the text is seen to have gaps which have really been created by the reader, who has appropriated the text for their own purposes.

7   Elizabeth Frazer uses a similar term, speaking of a 'discourse register', which she defines as 'an institutionalized, situationally specific, culturally familiar, public, way of talking' (Frazer, 1987, p. 420). In her empirical work she certainly found her subjects using a variety of these registers. Unfortunately, Fraser does not discuss the power base that clearly gives some discourses more 'clout' than others. It is this power element that is so important in Foucault's work.

8   '...relations of power are not in superstructural positions, with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment; they have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play' (Foucault, 1981, p. 94).

9   'We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby
     discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a
     hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an
     opposing strategy.' (Foucault, 1981, p. 101)

10   *Five Go Off In a Caravan* - all 'Famous Five' and 'Noddy' titles are referred
     to in abbreviated form. See Bibliography for details.

11   Lacan himself seems guilty of some slight of hand here, most visible in his
     famous reading of Edgar Allen Poe's 'The purloined letter' (Lacan, 1972),
     where he argues that this piece of correspondence is a pure signifier in that
     neither the characters in the story, nor we, the reader, ever get to know its
     content—its signified. Thus, its meaning changes depending on where in the
     signifying chain it lies.

     This is a telling point, but Lacan's reading depends on collapsing a ready-
     made signifying chain—what I would term a 'discursive thread'—into a
     single signifier, with the inevitable pun on 'letter' (i.e. a piece of
     correspondence with a history, that speaks of emotional/power relationships,
     as opposed to an arbitrary grapheme), which others have taken up with a
     vengeance in making meanings.

     The whole notion of overinterpreting texts is interestingly explored in Eco *et
     al.* (1992).

12   I am presuming, as have many others (e.g. Michael Holquist, Bakhtin's
     translator - Bakhtin, 1981), that these are one and the same person.

13   I do have two caveats with Bakhtin's term, however. First, though he
     recognises the 'heteroglossia' of language, with the different voices sounding
     within a text, he also suggests that there are monoglossic texts, which are less
     interesting for this reason (a notion that has several parallels with the reader-
     response theorists mentioned above, who also talk of texts that lack gaps for
     dialogue). This lands Bakhtin in the same quandary that Catherine Belsey
     (1980) creates when she divides 'interrogative' from 'declarative' texts, then
     goes on to suggest that all texts can be read interrogatively. Basically, her
     distinction collapses, for the simple reason that certain texts are read
     declaratively only because their language and subject-matter have become
     naturalised; and the reason for this is, again, custom and usage. A reader
     standing apart from the dominant discourse—either a contemporary of
     different class, gender or age, or a reader from a different time and culture—
     is unlikely to find the 'same' text so declarative in intention. Thus all texts
     are interrogative, though why some are moreso than others might invite
     different questions. A similar argument applies to language in general: it is
     inveterately heteroglossic, albeit at certain times, amongst certain sections, it
     can seem transparent and monoglossic.

The second caveat relates more specifically to the term 'dialogism', which suggests that 'answering words' are always present when we make language. Though this is broadly the case, sometimes words are said unthinkingly, reiterating, or 'parroting' previous utterances, rather than seeking to extend them. Kristeva's term 'intertextuality' is therefore a useful extension of Bakhtin's work, recognising the wider ways in which later texts quote earlier ones. As she says, 'intertextuality' produces 'the insertion of history (society) into a text and of this text into history' (Kristeva, 1986, p. 39).

14 I have also drawn on psychoanalytic theory, especially Lacan's reworking of Freud, but this will be better explained in chapter 8, when it is brought to the fore.

15 In some senses this is an artificial distinction, for the terms are closely interdependent. Briefly, to know anything, to call it important, means that one has some internal scale on which one is gauging it, however subjectively. In textual analysis, to talk about themes, or particular uses of imagery, means that certain words and phrases have occurred more frequently than others.

16 There are twenty-four 'Noddy' books in the classic series, published by Sampson Low between 1949 and 1964, although many other texts about Noddy were also produced. There are twenty-one 'Famous Five' books, produced between 1942 and 1963; there were a few other, more ephemeral pieces about the Five—including one short story that appeared as a 'freebie' in *Wheaties*, an Australian breakfast cereal, in 1956. These have recently been collected and published in *Five Have a Puzzling Time and Other Stories* (Blyton, 1995). There was also a 1956 play, which has yet to be published. The 'Malory Towers' series comprises six books. These were published between 1946 and 1951.

17 Returns from this were disappointingly low. The former then had a circulation of 107, the latter of sixty, yet I received only forty replies. My explanation for this is that both magazines cater predominantly for Blyton collectors; in fact, the former was originally entitled *Green Hedges: the newsletter for the 'Enid Blyton' collector*. So they were bought not only by those who liked to read her books, but those bibliophiles who simply liked to collect them, often preferring the more pristine, unread copies.

18 In the October 1993 issue I placed an appeal in the 'Helpline' section, as follows:

> I am engaged on a doctorate looking at the work of Enid Blyton and her influence. I have a questionnaire that I would be grateful if any former (or current) Blyton readers would complete, from a personal perspective. I am also interested in librarians' professional experiences in the following areas: children's experiences of Blyton (whether positive or negative; particularly their perceptions of her as an author); the 'Blyton

controversy'—problems with groups/individuals over stocking/not stocking her work, problems over racism, sexism, class-insensitivity, etc. with the public, colleagues, superiors, or whatever. Lastly, I would be interested in views of her work and its possible effects. (Rudd, 1993)

Ironically, as we shall see, only positive responses—predominantly personal ones—were received.

19   I owe a huge debt of gratitude to John King here, who first suggested the idea. Not only that, he also had the expertise to help me put it into effect.

20   Readers of Blyton might recognise these pseudonyms: Barney is from the 'R-mysteries' (*Rockingdown Mystery, Ring-o'-Bells Mystery* etc.), Amelia is the feisty doll in the Amelia Jane books, St. Rollo's is the eponymous, co-ed school in *Mischief at St. Rollo's* and Whyteleafe is the co-ed school in the 'Naughtiest Girl'.

21   See Jordin and Brunt (1988) for a critique of Morley along these lines.

22   Gemma Moss (1993) makes the point that one needs a longitudinal view of readers, their reading histories, and so on. It is not enough simply to establish that readers are all of the same class, age, or ethnicity.

23   Some researchers become rather precious about taped material and its transcription. Clearly, it should be as accurate as possible, but faithfulness to this should not obtrude from an awareness of the context within which the taping occurs. Ultimately, what is transcribed depends on whether the tape is running or not—a point Hollway (1989) makes—and it may well be that crucial, or significant information can therefore be missed in the official session. But this seems no reason for ignoring it. Much of this is similar to the debate between Anglo-American 'new critics', with their celebration of the text *per se*—the verbal icon—and marxist critics, who always emphasise the conditions of a text's production.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PERSON, THE PERSONA, AND THE CRITICS - THE CRITICAL CONSTRUCTION OF BLYTON AS CULTURAL ICON

INTRODUCTION

There have already been substantial reviews of the literature by earlier researchers, two works being of particular note: Sheila Ray's (1982) scrupulous examination of reactions to Blyton's work from the earliest critical notices through to the controversies of the 'sixties and 'seventies, and Robert Druce's (1992) scholarly examination of both Blyton and Ian Fleming, seeking for commonalities in their best-selling appeal (this appeared shortly after I began my own research)[1]. I therefore see no point in rehearsing much of this material, apart from giving the reader enough orienting information. Thus, the traditional 'literature review' is actually the first stage of my textual analysis, given that this evidence is as 'empirical' as that gleaned from the readership survey. Accordingly, I have treated the comments of others largely as a resource, in which one can see how the various constructions and interpretations have gone to make up the 'Blyton phenomenon'[2]. This has involved looking not only at the more substantive studies, but also drawing on a rich vein of ephemera. Furthermore, Blyton's own works are also crucial, in that they too are a key part of this construction, frequently precipitating much of the subsequent debate. In ordering this analysis, it therefore seemed appropriate to take a thematic rather than a chronological approach, picking out discursive threads of interest. The five themes are as follows:

- The Life
- Status as a writer
- Literary readings

- Educational readings (reading and child development)
- Social readings (sexism and racism).

THE LIFE

The biographical and autobiographical information is, in many respects, hard to detach from other material about Blyton. This is so for two reasons: first, Blyton herself was very careful in creating a particular persona, both in her public and private life, so that she suppressed a lot of information that did not fit the image; secondly, and as a consequence, the public has been particularly fascinated by the disparity between the 'whiter than white' persona and the 'reality', once the 'secret' information was uncovered, first in Stoney's (1974; 1992) discerning biography, then, and partly as a result of this, in the moving account of Blyton's younger daughter, Imogen Smallwood (1989a). More recently, a Channel Four series, *Secret Lives*, featured a programme on Blyton (alongside others on, for example, Errol Flynn and Douglas Bader), which pursued this 'underside' relentlessly. As its title suggests, it was particularly interested in iconoclastic findings, which certainly intrigued the press.[3]

First, the facts. Enid Mary Blyton was born 11 August 1897 at a small flat above a shop in East Dulwich. She was the first-born child of lower-middle class parents, who had moved down from Sheffield. Her father, Thomas Carey Blyton, a cutlery salesman, was an artistic self-educated man (one sister was a professional pianist, and the author of *Charley's Aunt* was also an ancestor).[4] He taught himself languages, shorthand, astronomy, music, painting, wrote poetry, and was generally a great reader and book collector. Finances improved for the family when he went into business with his brothers, and the family moved to Beckenham. Enid had two younger brothers: Hanly, born 1899 and Carey, 1902.

Enid seems to have been very close to her father, who was also a keen gardener and naturalist. However, there seem to have been tensions with her mother,

Theresa Mary Harrison, who found Enid uncongenial when it came to domestic chores: she always preferred to be out with her father. Relations between her parents were also strained, with many rows, ending in her father walking out just before Enid's thirteenth birthday. He had left Enid's mother for another woman—something that was covered up at the time, and which, Stoney suggests, set the pattern for Blyton's imaginative treatment of the truth. However, despite domestic disruptions, Enid still did well at school, both academically and at games, becoming head girl at St Christopher's School for Girls, in Beckenham. Relations with her mother eventually deteriorated to the extent that Enid left home, scarcely seeing her mother for the next thirty years.

At this time Enid was destined to be a concert pianist, but her heart wasn't in it, and she eventually sought her father's permission to go into teaching. She undertook Froebel training, then taught for several years before her success with publication allowed her to give up the profession. She had had hundreds of rejections in her teens before finally having some poems accepted. Her first book was a collection of verse, *Child Whispers* in 1922.[5] Unfortunately her father was never to see her succeed as a writer, having died suddenly in 1920. Enid, strangely, did not attend his funeral. In 1924 she married Hugh Pollock, an editor at Newnes. After some initial trouble conceiving, they had two daughters, Gillian (b. 1931) and Imogen (b. 1935). Relations with her first husband deteriorated at the beginning of the war, and the couple were divorced in 1942 (Hugh considerately divorcing Enid, on condition that he had access to the children, which Enid later denied him). In the following year she married Kenneth Darrell Waters, a surgeon, though the couple had been intimate a good while before then. As Imogen puts it, 'For a whole year, if my memories are correct, she [EB] carried on her lives [sic] with two different men, deceiving, or appearing to deceive, everyone who might have seriously criticized her' (Smallwood, 1989a, p. 66). Nevertheless, Enid and Kenneth seem to have been very happy together till his death in 1967, and hers the year after, on 28 November 1968. This said, her last few years were marred by mental deterioration, which may have been Alzheimer's Disease.

These are the bald facts, but Stoney, who unearthed much material unknown to the daughters, has fashioned them into a convincing narrative that speaks of a woman who never really grew up, who had many dark fears that she tried to conceal till her last years. Stoney's reading is confirmed by Imogen Smallwood's sad memoir of her mother—of a woman who might have been mother to most of the world, but was not one for her (Smallwood, 1989a, p. 12). Interestingly, the daughters have very different perceptions of their mother. Gillian, the elder, seems to have experienced a more settled early life; then again, she seems to have been an easier child—something Imogen herself concedes. Imogen, of course, had the added problem of hardly knowing her father, whilst her experiences with her step-father seem to have been less than cordial.

I shall refer to several of the biographical constructions in the course of this study, but first I'd like to pick up on several elements from Blyton's own autobiography, written expressly for children—a point she makes plain several times: 'I don't tell this sort of thing to grown-ups, of course, but you children will understand exactly how I felt' (1952, p. 28). *The Story of My Life*—itself a significant title—plays on the notion of 'story' as fabrication. In fact, the whole volume gives a sense of entering a fantasy realm, with the endpapers (see fig. 3-1) featuring an
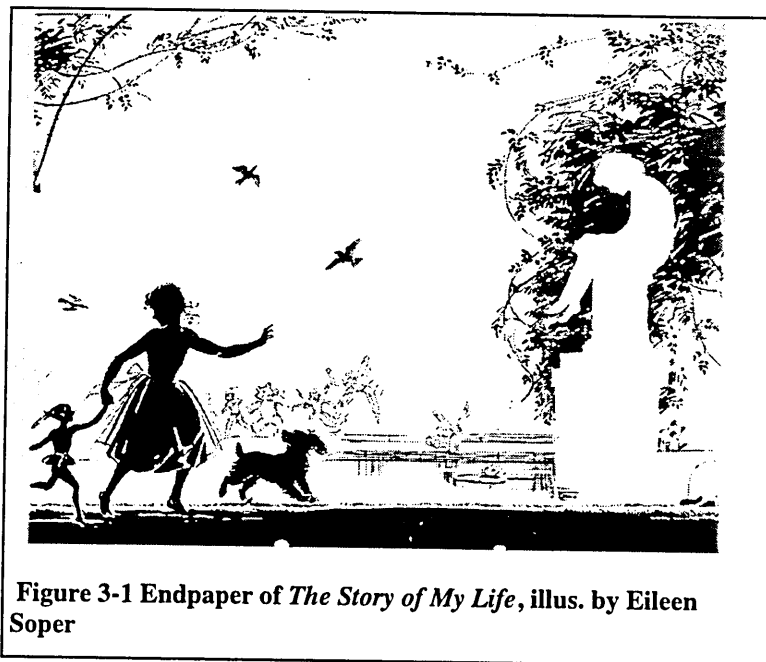
Figure 3-1 Endpaper of *The Story of My Life*, illus. by Eileen Soper

illustration by Eileen Soper of an idealised Green Hedges garden, with a fairy-

like young female leading a spritely figure through the magical realm[6]. Having passed through the garden, we are then greeted at the door by Blyton herself, saying 'Welcome!' (*ibid.*, p.4; see fig. 3-2). 'Dear Boys and Girls' (*ibid.*, p. 5) she writes in a personal hand, and we are introduced to her story. At the end, again there is the personal touch, with a salutation in her own hand, 'Your storyteller and friend/ Enid Blyton' (*ibid.*, p. 124). Finally, the end-paper takes us back out through the garden.

Figure 3-2 Enid Blyton greeting readers of *The Story of My Life*
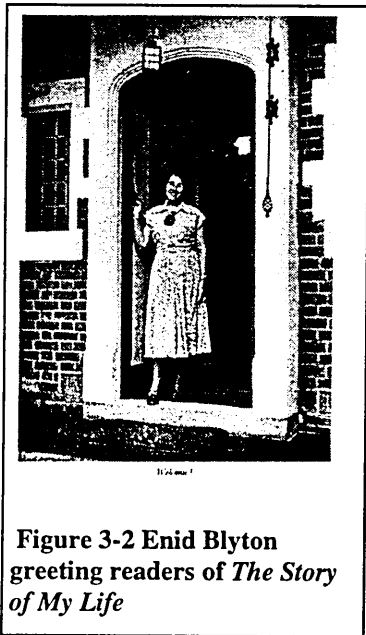
This notion of 'life-as-story' rather than 'life-story' is furthered in the subject matter, in that almost half the book is about her writing (eight of the eighteen chapters). Indeed, chapters are sometimes not what one might expect. Thus, 'How I began' is really about how she began as a writer, not a person, as though she didn't exist until she had created herself thus. (In an early article she has a similarly ambiguous line, 'I love pretending myself' (Blyton, 1924, quoted in Stoney, 1974, p. 189). Another chapter begins, 'One of the questions you so often ask me is about my childhood. ... You quite naturally want to know what mine was like'; but Blyton then proceeds to talk about the books she read. She thus runs life and imaginative experience together, and suggests, both here as elsewhere in the book, that everything a writer writes is derivative, based on previously read or seen incidents. Consequently she recommends that prospective young writers stock their heads full of others' works. I shall return to this in chapter 4, but let me note here a curious parallel with the one other autobiography I know called by this ambivalent title, *The Story of My Life*. It is that of Helen Keller (1903), the autistic, deaf and blind child, who records how she unwittingly plagiarised a short story, thinking it her own.[7] Apart from Keller's experience being a negative one, making her doubt her ability to distinguish imagination from

reality, it is very similar to Blyton's in its description of writing, and, of course, many of Blyton's stories certainly bear the mark of others' work (e.g. *The Secret Mountain* has many parallels with Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, including a flat-topped mountain with a mysterious people inside, and the prediction of an eclipse to demonstrate the superiority of the imprisoned heroes[8]; also Druce calls *The Circus of Adventure*, 'with minor changes, identical' in plot to Dornford Yates's *Blood Royal* (1929) (p. 124).[9]

I'd like now to pick up on two main themes of Blyton's autobiography, which are interrelated. First, the emphasis on house, home and family, and secondly, gardens. Four chapters are devoted to her homes and gardens, and one explicitly to the family, but, aside from this, family photographs infuse the whole text. This said, the work is decidedly economical with the truth: the girls' real father, and Blyton's first husband, Hugh Pollock, is absent, despite a chapter discussing 'Old Thatch', where she lived with him and the family. Instead, Kenneth Darrell Waters is at the centre of the text. This said, a careful reading shows that Blyton remains factually accurate: 'my husband ...and my two girls' (Blyton, 1952, p. 117), she writes—not *our* two girls.[10]

Clearly, statements like the following depend on a united front:

> As you can imagine, we are a happy little family. I could not possibly write a single good book for children if I were not happy with my family, or if I didn't put them first and foremost. How could I write good books for children if I didn't care about my own? You wouldn't like my books, if I were that kind of mother! They certainly wouldn't be the kind of books I always write for you. (*ibid.*)

And elsewhere mothers are singled out:

> Spoilt children are selfish, complaining and often conceited. But whose fault is that? It is the mother, always the mother, that makes the home. The father does his share, he holds the reins too—but it is the mother who makes a happy, contented home. She is the centre of it. She should always be there to welcome the children home, to see to them and listen to them. (*ibid.*, p.118)[11]

Unfortunately, this was not Smallwood's perception:

> Her [Blyton's] feeling for her readers and for all children in the abstract was intense and loving; but as one of her two children who should have been the closest to her of all, I saw her only as a distant authority, a clever person, a strong and imaginative actress on the little stage of my life but never, or almost never, a mother. (1989a, p. 12)

Clearly there is a conflict here between Blyton's fictional ideal and Smallwood's experience of her mother. In the Kleinian sense it is a classic split between good and bad mother figures; for in the above quotation of Blyton's, her father is clearly exonerated, whereas her mother is not; and, of course, her mother had died only the year before she would have written this. More significantly, she had not seen her mother for almost thirty years, despite this parent's pleadings. She did not attend her mother's funeral either.[12]

References to Blyton's parents are significant in her autobiography: her mother is referred to only seven times, whereas her father receives 106 mentions.[13] Only once are they mentioned together (Blyton, 1952, p. 101). Her father is quoted extensively, but her mother, only once (*ibid.*, p. 78), and that in a comment about Theresa's husband Thomas. Her mother also tends to be negatively referenced— not allowing Enid to keep pets, for instance—whereas her father features predominantly in a positive light. In fact, the chapter 'My happiest times' is chiefly about things she did with her father, such as exploring nature.[14] Last, on this aspect, I cannot resist picking up on a quotation that Blyton uses about her ambition:

> "We fail!
> But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
> And we'll not fail!"

Though she does not give the source, these are, of course, Lady Macbeth's words (Shakespeare, I, vii, 59-61)—albeit Blyton has characteristically added her own exclamation-marks. The context is ironic, for here is a woman trying to shut out

her emotions—especially in relation to her mother—though later, as we know, she finds she can no longer sustain this, and in her last years, her actions return to haunt her.

Let me now move on to the garden theme, and its links with Froebel. It is interesting that though Blyton talks of children at Green Hedges, they are curiously absent: the garden is empty of children.[15] But the garden, with its little statue quietly reading a book, and the many animals and ordered beds and lawns, gives the impression of a paradisiacal place—where children might desire to be, where they would have space to grow. In fact, Blyton declares, rather ambiguously, 'People are happy when they grow things, especially children' (Blyton, 1952, p. 28). This association is, of course, Froebel's: the inventor of the kindergarten—literally the 'children garden'. As noted above, Blyton was Froebel trained, and much of his educational thought finds its way into her books.

Blyton's emphasis on mothers, above, is certainly also Froebel's. He pointed to the split in society between mothering and working, arguing that women needed more support for the former. He firmly believed that no child was bad in itself, but that badness was the result of 'grave faults of handling in his first all-important years' (Isaacs, 1952, p. 194). Hence the importance of trained 'child-gardeners' to support the child in developing naturally into a social being, fully aware of its membership of a larger community. In that he saw women in this role, as trained teachers, Froebel was seen as revolutionary, and a threat, and his first kindergarten was shut down. The notion of a 'garden' was not simply metaphorical, however, for he laid great store on the garden as a place for development, and indeed, on nature study in general: 'Teachers should scarcely let a week pass without taking to the country a part of their pupils ... making them observe and admire the varied richness which nature displays to their eyes...' (Froebel, *History of Pedagogy*, quoted in Lawrence, 1970, p. 252). Lastly, he strongly believed in learning by doing, hence gardening and looking

after animals were recommended, as was the use of certain shapes (see chapter 4).

So, in this book, reflexively, Blyton runs together her home, family, animals and views, in order to consolidate the persona 'Enid Blyton'. Let me now recap by pointing out the key elements in the work. There is her celebration of family, even if a slightly reconstructed family. Second, the Froebel influence that informs the way she writes about garden and nature. But most importantly, the overall fictional framing, indeed, the book's celebration of story, and with it, the fudging of the division between fact and fiction—the way, as Blyton says, the one becomes the other ('Writers cannot keep reality and imagination apart for long', Blyton, 1952, p. 124). This comes across clearly in a chapter called 'The little round pond', which seems a curious thing to give so much space to in a book about one's life But, from Blyton's own words, it is clearly of great significance: 'I don't think I have ever enjoyed anything quite so much as my pond' (*ibid.*, p. 44). And, in effect, the chapter could stand as the metaphoric core of the book, showing how reality and imagination are fused in a sunny, reflective surface, unruffled by anything untoward that might lurk beneath. Thus, in this earlier picture (fig.3-3), Blyton, Narcissus like, reclines by her pond, locked in her illusory persona[16]—just as her whole life is 'storied' in this autobiography in many other illusory images, ranging from 'double pigeons'

Figure 3-3 Blyton beside her pond at Elfin Cottage (from Stoney, 1974 facing p. 144)

(fig. 3-4)[17] to her own reconstructed family (fig. 3-5).

Before leaving this biographical section, I'd like to address three further issues, to show that, though a phenomenon, Blyton was also very much a product of her time. First, it would seem true that she was, indeed, rebelling against some aspects of a patriarchal society.
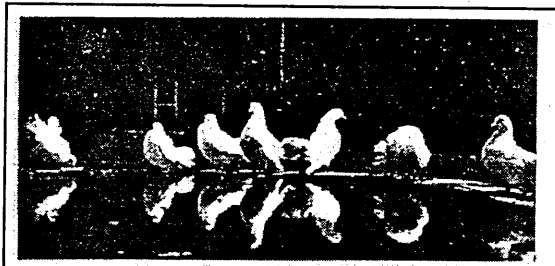
Figure 3-4 Fantail pigeons, Blyton, 1952, p. 43

Dyhouse (1981), for instance, records the strict division of labour between parents at this time, with women expected to be in the home, although it was usually only the man who had his own private space in the home—his study, whence he could escape. Girls were very much expected to help their mothers with domestic chores, whereas boys were given leisure time for playing and reading. If boys worked anywhere, it was usually outside in the garden: girls were meant to do the inside jobs. Blyton seems to have rebelled against this scheme of things, as she did generally in not aligning herself with her mother. Besides refusing the domestic role, it was Enid who created her own private space in the house, locking the door of her room and installing a door-knocker (Stoney, 1974, p. 21).

Enid was certainly unusual for her time, but she was also part of a movement that was challenging this state of things. It is captured in a story called 'The strike of the sisters' (1899), which describes how some girls refuse to wait on their brothers' needs, prompting the boys to react by refusing to be tidier. The grandmother intervenes and tells the girls they are misguided, that it is their duty 'to make the house comfortable for menfolk' (Cadogan and Craig, 1976, quoted in Dyhouse, 1981, p. 12). It is also apparent in various autobiographies, like that of Vera Brittain, who expresses her anger at the sacrifice she is expected to make for her brothers (*ibid.*, p. 32). So, Blyton's childhood seems to reflect a general discontent experienced by many girls at the time, except that she was clearly empowered by her father, and opted to leave home rather than submit to domestic servitude.

The second issue I'd like to address is that Blyton supposedly told stories so successfully to children because 'she was a child, she thought as a child, and she wrote as a child' (Woods, 1968, p. 14; also Blishen, 1974, Holbrook, 1961, Stoney, 1992, p. 191). This has been an attractive explanation for many, but it bears scrutiny. First, because it is really a non-explanation, a tautology (Tucker, 1976, makes exactly this point). Secondly, because children generally do not write as Blyton did. What she writes is only a construction of how

Figure 3-5 Blyton and her family, simultaneously real and imaginary (from Blyton, 1952, p. 45)

children are supposed to think. Although, once attuned to it, children can perform some very creditable pastiches of the Blyton-style (e.g. Clark, 1976), just as children can drop into cowboy or newsreader discourses (Fox, 1993). Thirdly, I am suspicious because this is such a common explanation for the children's writer. J. M. Barrie, Lewis Carroll, Roald Dahl and E. Nesbit, amongst others, have all been described in similar terms.[18] As I said before, such an explanation is, in effect, tautological. With Blyton, however, there is an added piece of evidence, just as there was with Barrie, who was exceptionally short and late to puberty (Lurie, 1990). In Blyton's case it was said that, for a mature woman, she had an under-developed womb, 'almost that of a young girl of 12 or 13' she was later to tell a friend; Stoney logically relates this to the departure of Blyton's father from the family home when Blyton was about this age (Stoney, 1974, p. 79), though she resists exploring Breuer and Freud's view that 'Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences' (1974, p. 58).

This fact certainly adds weight to the 'child' explanation, but I am suspicious in that this notion of the immature woman was itself a popular construct. Thus, the then famous psychologist, G. Stanley Hall, 'argued that women never really outgrew their adolescence—psychologically and emotionally they could best be understood as having had their growth arrested in the adolescent phase'

(Dyhouse, 1981, p. 118). Avery too, draws attention to the fact that even girls' diet was designed to delay the onset of puberty (Avery,1991, p. 316).

I shall return to this later, but let me pick up on the third matter, which will also recur: Blyton's immense productivity, which again, some have queried (e.g. Welch,1958; see also Druce, 1992, pp. 27-8), often adding speculation to the idea that 'Blyton' was the name of a writing collective. But, again, though unusual, she was not unique in her productivity. Others, like Sheila Holland, have also been quoted as writing 10,000 words a day (Worpole, 1984, p. 22); Simenon once wrote a completed a novel in 25 hours, whilst John Creasey, whose first book was published in the same year that Blyton published her first full-length work, 1937, once wrote two books in a single week (Greenfield, 1989, p.9). Perhaps more fantastic is the report that Charles Kingsley 'locked himself in his study and returned half an hour later with the first chapter of *The Water-Babies* complete' (Chitty, 1974, p. 216). At approximately 8,800 words long, this amounts to 293 words a minute, or 4.9 a second—pre-typewriters! Charles Hamilton (best known as 'Frank Richards', the creator of Billy Bunter[19]), had been known to write up to 18,000 words a day, and averaged 80,000 a week for many years; he is estimated to have written over 72-75 million words altogether in his lifetime (Matthews, 1995, p. 141). Though Blyton published an amazing 37 books in 1951—almost one every ten days—many of these were very short. Barbara Cartland, who also had her first book published in 1922, but is still going strong, has averaged twenty-three titles a year for nineteen years. Her total so far (1996) is 635 books (Wyse, 1996, pp. 150-1). Blyton's total, around 700, again, is certainly impressive, but is well short of the record-holding Brazilian author, José Carlos Ryoki de Alpoim Inoue, who produced 1,036 novels over a nine year period (i.e. almost ten a month - *ibid.*, p. 151). So, although productivity such as Blyton's is relatively rare, it is by no means fanciful.

This section has given a brief outline of Blyton's life, but more importantly, it has shown how this life has been mythologised, most capably by Blyton herself. I have tried to show how 'the phenomenon' was very much a product of her times, without in any way trying to belittle her. With her carefully forged persona she managed to create a 'brand name' before most people knew what such a thing was—
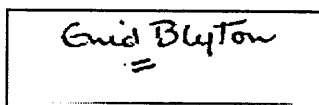
Figure 3-6 The famous signature, seen by some respondents as 'Gnid' Blyton

and it was instantly identifiable from her famous signature (originally developed in her 'Letter to Children' in *Teachers World*[20] in September, 1927, according to Druce, , 1992, p. 31; but not on a book till 1942[21]), which in many cases became built into the titles of her works. Even those who could not yet read might recognise that familiar, rounded shape (see fig.3-6)[22], and be set on the road to brand loyalty, to travel with her all the days of their childhood, as she herself urged:

> I want to know you from the very beginning, and go with you all
> through your childhood till you are old enough to read adult
> books. I don't want you to be friends with me at one age only, I
> want to keep in touch with you all through your childhood days.
> (Blyton, 1952, p. 96)

STATUS AS A WRITER

The Early Years

As both Stoney and Ray have pointed out, Blyton's work was not subject to much criticism at all during her early years, and what little there was, tended to be positive. Her name, as Ray says, is found in the company of works involving A. A. Milne, E.V. Rieu, and Lord Clark. When *Teachers World* published a special issue on poetry in 1923, Blyton's poems appeared alongside others by established poets, including Kipling, de la Mare and Chesterton (Druce1992, p. 31). In an English retelling of the classic story of Babar by the French writer Jan de Brunhoff, it was Blyton who provided the text (Ray, 1982, p. 13) However, as Ray also makes plain, critical awareness of children's literature was still relatively undeveloped. The first dedicated children's book reviewing journal—

The Junior Bookshelf—appeared in Britain in 1936, and this quickly 'expressed a less than enthusiastic opinion of Enid Blyton's work' (*ibid.*,1982, p. 24), but there was still little adverse criticism till after the War; and then it was only a trickle—some deprecating her 'intense mediocrity' (the view of a librarian in Trease, 1964, p. 118), but others still championing her work for being both readable and morally sound.

Ray's point about the development of professional expertise is well-taken; however, I would add a caveat. On the one hand, people certainly had views on children's literature before this, but the critical divide between adult and children's books was not so well established, such that critics would talk about books in general, without the rigid demarcation (e.g. Graham Greene on Beatrix Potter (Greene, 1980), or Virginia Woolf on 'Alice' (Dusinberre, 1987)). On the other hand, those that came into the developing field of children's literature were heavily influenced by the ideas of Leavis and American 'new criticism', which were very élitist and foregrounded the literary text to the exclusion of the reader. Many of the criteria that were promulgated in the 'fifties and 'sixties were actually detrimental to a more child-oriented and democratic approach to evaluation—an approach which has only comparatively recently allowed Blyton, and others, to be viewed in a less histrionic manner (rather than as 'slow poison'—see chapter 2).

Golden Days
Blyton's books appeared in increasing numbers throughout the war years, when many of her most well known series appeared (including the first 'Famous Five', 'St. Clare's', 'Adventure', 'Naughtiest Girl' and 'Mary Mouse' books, plus *The Magic Faraway Tree*). This was at a time when,

> Shortage of paper and of time reduced the output of most writers, but not Enid Blyton. During the four years 1942-45, lean years generally, sixty-seven of her books were published. (Crouch, 1962, p. 92)

Ray explains that Blyton did well out of this because of the diversity of publishing houses for which she wrote, which meant that the restrictions affected her less. There were also the ingenious methods of people like E.A. Roker, who managed to use the offcuts from *Picture Post* to make miniature booklets—perhaps the closest that Blyton ever came to left-wing material in her whole career! She quickly responded to the idea, inventing the character 'Mary Mouse', and the books were an instant success (Stoney, 1974, p. 129). Whilst the wartime situation clearly favoured Blyton, it should not be seen as an explanation of her popularity, contrary to Blishen's comment that 'her popularity ... is largely based on her sheer availability' (Blishen, 1967, p. 29). This is to have the tail wag the dog, besides undermining children's ability to select what they like. After all, it was *Blyton* that publishers wanted. This was shown by the six books she wrote under the pseudonym 'Mary Pollock' during the war years, which became popular in their own right, and were subsequently re-issued under Blyton's own name (Stoney, 1974, p. 125).[23]

Blyton's books were seldom reviewed, but the few that were received quite positive comments, like *Circus Days Again* and *Seven O'Clock Tales*—both reviewed in the *Times Literary Supplement*—the latter praised for its 'understanding of childish thought-processes and suitable language' (Anon, 1943).[24] The 'Adventure' series published by Macmillan probably received more attention than most, regarded, as Ray notes, as probably her best work. In 1948, Eileen Colwell's frequently quoted (and often mis-quoted) comment appeared in a review of *The Sea of Adventure*: 'But what hope has a band of desperate men against four children?' (quoted in Ray, p. 52).[25]

By the 1950s, Blyton's *oeuvre* was substantial, the first 'Noddy' having appeared in 1949. From this period on, she began to top children's lists of favourite authors—particularly in the 8-12 age range (Ray, 1982, p. 38). With this popularity came the critical backlash, which, as Ray notes, was linked to the general growth in children's books as a market, and an increasing critical attention to its quality, especially by gatekeepers like librarians and teachers.

Roy Nash sums up the position well, in an amusing article on 'Noddy-bashing', where he has Big-Ears say, "We're redundant in Toyland ... Children want literature now. Literature with a capital L" (Nash, 1964). This said, there was still very little of a substantive nature before the 'sixties, Dohm (1955) and Welch (1958) being the main exceptions. Apart from these two quite powerful pieces (Welch calls Noddy an 'unnaturally priggish ...sanctimonious ...witless, spiritless, snivelling, sneaking doll' - pp.21-2), there was still much ambivalence about Blyton's status.

The Critical Backlash

All this was to change in the 'sixties, when a more consistently condemnatory critical discourse was advanced. Holbrook is solidly negative in 1961, speaking from an essentially literary (Leavisite) viewpoint. But it is still the gatekeepers who are most vociferously anti-Blyton. The general public either maintained its silence, or rose to her defence when criticisms were voiced. In 1967 the journal *Where* asked the question 'Are your children addicted to Enid Blyton and what, if anything, do you do about it?' To their surprise, twenty-five respondents (66%) were positive about Blyton, seven (18%) saw her as harmless, and only six (16%) were 'firmly anti', this last group including the only teachers and librarians (two of each) in their number (Blishen, 1967, p. 28).

Looking back, it seems that the sensational newspaper accounts massively overdid the reaction to Blyton. First Thompson (1975) and then Ray's assiduous coverage of the issues reveal that very few authorities actually banned Blyton, though the purchase of her books was controlled. Sheila Strauss (1993), who worked at Nottingham City Libraries when the Blyton controversy began in this country, has informed me that the whole event was largely orchestrated by the media.[26] A similar situation obtained elsewhere. Thus Blyton's books were supposedly banned in South Africa 'because of the impertinence her young characters were alleged to show towards their parents' (Tucker, 1970a), although Johannesburg Public Library denied a ban. When Cullingford (1979) wrote

about Cumbria's complete banning of Blyton's works, the County Librarian was greatly surprised, and promptly refuted the claim (Ray, 1982, pp. 96-7).[27]

Woods, writing in 1974, presumes that a new tolerance towards Blyton emerged at this time, but I wonder to what extent things were any different. He writes: 'it gives me a nice feeling to believe that the wind of change that blew fair for *Lolita* and *Lady Chatterly's* [sic] *Lover* (if not for *Fanny Hill*), has also blown with benefit on Julian, Dick, Ann [sic], George, as well as on a dog called Timmy' (1974, p. 733). He had sent out 100 questionnaires to schools in Britain, of various regions, and of different types (though this seems to mean age levels—infants, junior, middle; we are not told whether he included both state and private schools, whether single sex or co-educational). At this time he found that teachers generally approved of Blyton. None used the 'extreme [sic] hostile category'; 72% were 'generally favourable', 8% 'very favourable', and only 11% generally unfavourable. Almost half (48%) found Blyton's attitudes 'generally beneficial', with only 3% regarding her books as 'generally harmful'—an equal number regarding them as 'very beneficial', and 46% being neutral on the issue.

Unfortunately, Woods had conducted no earlier study, so he has no way of knowing whether there was really more tolerance towards her work in the 'seventies than in the 'sixties. However, he might have drawn on what evidence there was, like the *Where* survey (above), or the responses to *The Use of English*'s question to teachers, 'How does one wean 15-year-old girls from a diet of Enid Blyton?' (Anon, 1966a), requesting answers of 600 words maximum. Of the five replies, none was particularly anti-Blyton. Three were very positive, including one from Nicholas Tucker—who was admittedly not a teacher, and who, for some reason, did not seem to have been held to the 600 word limit. Another retorted to the original request with his own questions:

> 'How soon will we all be weaned from the idea that such
> "problems" really matter?' Or, to put it another way, 'How soon
> will we be reclaimed from that form of arrogance to which
> English teachers are particularly prone of believing that it is any

part of our specific task to attempt to determine a child's spare-time reading ...?' ...the short answer to the question as to how one weans 15-year-old girls from Enid Blyton ought to be that one doesn't. (Anon, 1966b, pp. 37-8)

This was from D.W. Crompton, the Head of English at Didsbury College of Education, who even says that some of Blyton's books 'deserve almost unqualified praise', singling out the 'Willow Farm' ones.

Not only am I unconvinced that most teachers were more anti-Blyton in the 'sixties, but I am also sceptical of what Woods calls a 'new tolerance', for in this same year Bob Dixon was publishing two, seminally damning articles: 'The nice, the naughty and the nasty: the tiny world of Enid Blyton' (1974a) and 'All things white and beautiful' (1974b). In general, the debate on sexism, racism and general élitism in children's books was gaining momentum, culminating in the heated exchanges in *New Statesman* in 1980, from which Blyton is surprisingly absent. What Woods calls his 'nice feeling' seems to have been little more than that, with no backing in fact.

However, chronology is suffering here. The point that needs making about the 'sixties is that the nature of the criticism changed. Whereas it had previously been concerned with Blyton's lack of literary qualities, it now shifted to the social concerns of sexism and racism. Jeger (1966) seems to have been one of the first, attacking Blyton's *The Little Black Doll* for its racism, with its well known story of Sambo, the black doll, who is disliked for his colour. Jeger asserted that such reading could be 'more insidiously dangerous' than the neo-fascist literature of the *British Independent*. I will discuss such claims in more detail later.

As Attenborough (1975) noted, though unpleasant, the criticisms and reputed 'banning' of Blyton's books were good for sales, resulting in children rushing out to buy their own copies of her works, and the publicity clearly made the most of this: Brockhampton Press advised children to buy the whole set of 'Secret

Sevens', just as the Noddy dust-wrappers encouraged the same for his books; and Blyton herself always promoted the concept of ownership:

> ...children like to *possess* their own books, I think, unlike many grown-ups, who often borrow all the time, but never buy. If you possess a book, if it's your very own, you can read it as often as you like. It becomes your friend, and so do the characters in it. (Blyton, 1952, p. 122)

The 'This book belongs to' boxes at the beginning of the Noddy books consolidated this (see chapter 4). Thompson (1988, p. 44) says that Blyton's earnings 'soared' with her supposed banning, to over £100,000 p.a. .

The revolution in paperback publishing in the 'sixties aided this process. Children's paperbacks in particular had previously been almost the monopoly of Puffin, with its quality approach. In fact, Puffin's editor, Eleanor Graham, celebrated her antipathy to Blyton: 'I was, of course, frequently urged to get some Blyton on our list but I never did. It was not intended for *that kind of public*'[28] (my emphasis; quoted in Ray, 1982, p. 28). Now other publishers produced junior paperback lists, even if Blyton's were designated as of low literary quality (as in Hodder's 'Green Knight' books). As Ray comments, 'at the very time in the early 1960s when more people were beginning to look critically at children's books and when a new generation of children's writers was emerging, Enid Blyton received a new boost to her popularity by becoming so cheaply and readily available in paperback' (Ray, 1982, pp. 75-6).

Eleanor Graham's comment draws attention to one of the key ploys of Blyton's critics, which is simply to ignore her, in the hope that she might thereby go away. After seeing the way librarians had become caught up in the media and made to look like the Spanish Inquisition, they were probably wise. However, over time, silence can itself come to look like a form of censorship. Thus Trease (1964) berates Dorothy Neale White for omitting Blyton from a critical study, and Townsend's standard history, *Written for Children*, has been similarly criticised (Ray, 1982, p. 62). One might have expected Roger Llancellyn Green's *Tellers*

of Tales (1969) to mention her (its subtitle indicates 1968—the year of Blyton's death—as the limit of its coverage), but there is no reference, and this process continues. Despite the fact that Blyton is still one of the most popular children's writers (now usually second to Dahl), many standard works continue to ignore her. Hobson *et al.* (c1992) omit reference to her, though both Blume and Dahl are included. This is a work specifically about popular children's books for the 6-13 year old, too. Cadogan's anthology, *Chin Up, Chest Out, Jemima: a celebration of the schoolgirls' story*, also leaves out Blyton's hugely popular work (see Auchmuty, below); and Drotner's work on the history of children's magazines manages to omit any reference to *Sunny Stories* or *Enid Blyton's Magazine*. Even a work which explicitly aims to discuss popular culture in the twentieth century (Maltby, 1989) omits her—which, on the one hand, is surprising, given her reference point as a cultural icon, but, on the other hand, given the marginalisation of children's culture, is typical.[29]

Contemporary Blyton(s)

Interestingly, more recent reference works on women writers have started to include Blyton, which is an indication of her revised status, although she is often included first and foremost because of her gender.[30] Some, at least, are more honest about their intentions to ignore her, though they find her popularity militates against it. Auchmuty (1992), for instance, writing about girls' school stories, had this intention. But she found that it was Blyton's books which 'were most frequently recalled from childhood reading. Some women, indeed, were reading them again in current paperback reprints, or even for the first time, in the 1990s' (Auchmuty, 1992, p. 45).

The 'eighties and early 'nineties, going beyond Ray's book, have seen a growing awareness of sexist and racist issues, and embarrassment about the perpetuation of negative stereotypes. It is certainly only in the last decade that substantial changes have been made to the texts, although earlier editing had occurred. The changes to the 'Noddy' books have been the most celebrated, with the 1990 Macdonald edition. Ironically, the texts had been revised only a few years earlier, in 1986,

particularly with a view to breaking into the American market. However, with these earlier updates, the van der Beek illustrations were replaced by inferior ones (see chapter 6 for an example), and the texts were simplified dramatically (golliwogs being generally replaced by teddy bears).[31] The books did not sell as well as expected, the older versions still selling alongside the originals, equalling them in sales. Derek Parker, a Noddy enthusiast, had taken out a second mortgage on his house to raise money to promote the books in America, unsuccessfully in the event, losing him £20,000. Reasons given were the supposed racism of the books and the lack of a TV tie in (Knowles, 1988).

The more recent updates have been far more carefully prepared, with the approval of Blyton's two daughters, who had had less oversight over their mother's work in earlier years. The new edition obviously prepared the way for the BBC's Cosgrove Hall animated series, with spin-offs in terms of videos, a magazine, and over 300 licensed products, making it one of the BBC's biggest money-spinners. In the 1995-6 financial year it had an estimated value of £42 million in merchandising and brought in £3.5 million (Winder, 1995). The programmes have also been sold to thirty-two other countries (Cowe, 1996). The Noddy books themselves topped 100 million sales in 1992, with forty-six million of these overseas (Smithers, 1992b). However, the rumours that the BBC were negotiating a full-length Hollywood film of 'Noddy', with narration by Macaulay Culkin (Anon, 1993b), seem to have been make-believe, according to Gillian Baverstock. In fact, America is still one of the few markets that, until recently, has resisted Blyton.[32] The latest sticking point was reputedly Big-Ears' name, drawing attention to a physical feature, and it was suggested that his name be replaced with 'Whitebeard'—albeit this is another physical feature (as is 'Noddy', come to that). This seems strange, however, from the country that has Goofy and Big-Foot as two of its star attractions.[33] (However, as I write, April 1997, there is another 'push' to get Noddy into the States; £5 million is to be spent on an animated series, but it will mean changing the vocabulary and giving the character an American accent.[34])

The media generally reacted negatively to the changes, harping back to the originals, and deriding the changes as part of a political correctness drive, as they did with the Five updates, too. I shall consider these accusations in more detail below. Here I simply want to note that, despite many critics' wishful-thinking predictions—'it seems reasonable to suppose that the fabulous popularity will die a natural death', as Martin (1970, p. 26) put it—Blyton's readership is still immense, with cumulative sales now totalling over 500 million copies worldwide, and continuing to sell at eight million a year.

Below are some further indicators of her standing:

- The 'Famous Five' continued to sell a million copies each year, prior to the renewed interest with the latest TV series (see below).

- 'Jackanory', the BBC's successful children's story telling programme has a Blyton title (*Circus of Adventure*) as its second most popular reading ever (Dahl was first - Wainwright, 1990).

- The final Assessment of Performance Unit report, published in 1991 after the unit's demise, found Enid Blyton the second most popular author amongst junior children (again, Dahl was first). Perhaps more surprisingly, she was also very popular with 15 year old girls, alongside Judy Blume and Virginia Andrews. The survey also suggested that those who enjoy the books they first meet, mature into better readers and writers (Hughes, 1991).

- Public Lending Right figures make similar reading. The figures show Blyton and Dahl as consistently the most popular, with the names of other authors changing each year. As *The Bookseller* notes for the year ending February, 1993, 'The most popular children's authors were Allan and Janet Ahlberg, Enid Blyton (some things never change), Roald Dahl, René Goscinny and Kate William' (Anon, 1994a)[35]

- Three recent surveys of children's reading confirm Blyton as second most popular writer to Dahl: Wray and Lewis (1993), of 450 junior school children, the extensive 1994 W.H. Smith replication of the 1971 'Schools Council' survey[36], and, most recently Roehampton Institute's survey of some 9,000 7-16 year olds. This said, the Institute's director, Kim Reynolds, has more recently reported that Blyton is now back outselling Dahl.

- In 1992, two Blyton fanzines were founded, and in 1995, 'The Enid Blyton Literary Society' was formed.

- There are translations into 27 languages (the year before her death, in 1967, she was listed as the third most translated author, after Lenin and Simenon, with 128 translations (Stoney, 1974, p. 221); the translations have included Catalan, Swahili, Tamil, and Latin).[37]

- A new 'Famous Five' TV series was produced at a cost of 2.7 million and shown nationally on ITV from July 1996. It was shown regionally in 1995, and also in Germany (ZDF helped fund the production, where it attracted record ratings). It has also been sold to a number of other countries, including America. A second series is being shown in 1997. The 'Adventure' series has been made into eight mini-series (or 24-half hours) by Cloud 9, at a cost of £6.2 million. They have been shown on the new terrestrial Channel 5 and the satellite Disney Channel, and have sold to forty-four countries. As opposed to the parochial Famous Five, these have been made more cosmopolitan, with a James Bond flavour—action, gadgetry, even romance. The chief scriptwriter is reported as saying, with apparent insouciance, that 'Not one word of Blyton's is in the script' (Brown, 1996b). There also 'novelisations' of this series available, alongside the 'original' books. Cloud 9 is also filming the 'Secret' series—not to be confused with *The Secret Island*, which has

also been filmed. Also in the pipeline are 'The Adventurous Four' from Scottish Television for Hallmark Entertainment of America (Ivison, 1996) and TV series of 'Amelia Jane' and 'The Secret Seven' (Preston, 1996).

- In November 1995, the family company Darrell Waters Ltd announced its intention to sell the copyright on Blyton's works by 1997, the centenary year. There were various bidders, but in January 1996 the Trocadero emerged as the winner, buying the rights for a figure variously estimated at £12-14 million. It hopes to do to Blyton what has previously been done with 'Thomas the Tank Engine'.[38] Blyton was variously described as a 'goldmine' and 'Britain's Disney' by Trocadero representatives (Brown, 1996b), and Nigel Wray, its multi-millionaire owner, declared his ambition 'to Noddify the world' (Snoddy, 1996a)—unwittingly realising the 'denoddyfication centres' dystopically envisaged by Blishen some thirty-years earlier (Blishen, 1967, p. 28)! David Lane, Gillian Baverstock's son-in-law, and managing director of the new Tocadero subsidiary 'Enid Blyton Ltd', commented, somewhat strangely given his position, that 'The family never managed the asset properly. They were not business oriented. They adopted the wrong approach' (Brown, 1996b). Nevertheless, it was certainly reported that Darrell Waters Ltd only made a profit of £428,000 after tax on a royalty income of £900,000 in their last year (Anon, 1995b).

- The Trocadero has since renegotiated royalties on Blyton stories, pushing them back up to their former percentage (15%). In May 1996, Enid Blyton Ltd and the BBC re-established the rights to Noddy, after the former had accused the latter of exceeding its prerogative and there was talk of suing. Enid Blyton Ltd now handle all the Noddy books not owned by the BBC (rights having now been bought by HarperCollins), and license merchandising (e.g. wallpaper, sweets, clothes, computer games and a specialist Enid Blyton shop, plus development of an

'edutainment' centre, with characters and storylines). Interactive CD-ROM versions of Blyton's books are now also available—the first, *Five on a Treasure Island*, appearing in October 1996.[39]

- The Trocadero prepared an application for a London Children's Radio which would feature Blyton characters such as Noddy and Big-Ears (Snoddy, 1996b)—unsuccessfully, in the event

- In the centenary year—which was extended by running it from August 1996 through 1997, there are various events: 'An Awfully Big Tea Party', commemorative stamps, a nationwide writing competition, a national treasure hunt, sponsoring a cockatoo (Kiki) at London Zoo, besides the general development of theme parks.

As the above indicates, Blyton is becoming more rather than less popular, but with different resonances to her work. The notion of her being seen as a dangerous presence for children—except, perhaps, as an economic drain—now seems laughable to most. More recent moral panics—over high illiteracy rates, 'couch-potato' TV consumption, video-nasties, child crime and violence, lack of morality, child-abuse, incest, satanic abuse, and more—make Blyton seem rather innocuous, standing, if anything, for an age of innocence and security and, in the fears over morality and illiteracy, to represent a possible answer. However, she does so in a society that is preoccupied with its mythical, golden past, with recapturing its special, rural Englishness, which Blyton again seems to epitomise, just as everything un-English becomes 'other'.

When BBC2 put on *Sunny Stories*, a dramatic biography of Blyton, in Christmas 1992, it was interesting that Maureen Lipman played the author, whether consciously or not, with intimations of Margaret Thatcher.[40] There are certainly parallels: externally the show of a housewifely, motherly type, but underneath, a fairly calculating business-woman in each case.[41] In an amusing article entitled 'The life and times of the Famous One', Miles Kington rewrites Margaret

Thatcher's life in Blyton vein, seeing her going off on holiday with her dog Denis, having 'found some Spanish-speaking villains occupying some islands they didn't own (see The Famous One Goes to the Falklands) and had got them out. On another holiday she had found some valuable treasure belonging to the family and sold it all to help pay for things (see The Famous One Privatises Everything)' (Kington, 1991).

John Major's version of society has also been likened to a Blyton story—especially his vision of an ideal nation given in his 1993 Mansion House speech, a 'country of long shadows on country grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pool fillers and—as George Orwell said—'old maids bicycling to holy communion through the morning mist' '. This vision was explicitly described by The Independent as 'the lost England of Enid Blyton's novels, where uncles were jolly, picnic hampers were overflowing and policemen rode bicycles—a private England whose citizens went harmlessly about voluntary and neighbourly activities, without bothering their heads over politics'. However, it goes on to point out that most of the increase in crime was occurring in the rural counties of old England—as the Famous Five had clearly shown!—'where Labour-controlled councils are as plentiful as fornication in Enid Blyton' (Anon, 1993a). John Major would certainly have been the right age to have read many of the Famous Five and Noddy books as they came out—and has drawn on Blyton to disapprove of 'loony-left' councils for banning her works: "Big Brother versus Big Ears" he is reported to have quipped (Aitken, 1991). Interestingly, The Economist reviewed a book about John Major's decision-making group, describing the set-up as 'an Enid Blyton Number 10' and 'The Famous Two Go Mad In Downing Street' (Anon, 1995a).

There are clearly links with the new conservatism, with its stress on traditional values, on law and order, on hierarchy and national sovereignty, let alone its implicit xenophobia. Not that I am suggesting that this is all Blyton's stories are about; I simply want to indicate that these discursive threads are present, hence how adaptable her stories are to different times and conditions. Ironically

Blyton's Noddy was also tied up in capitalist machinations with the downfall of the Maxwell Communication Corporation, which owned Noddy's publisher, Macdonald. Most of the publisher's writers found a new home with the American publisher Little Brown, but Noddy himself was not wanted. Fortunately, others were keen, and BBC Enterprises finally bought the rights for a substantial sum. And, as reported above, the films, books, and other products have been a huge success.

What should come across though, is an interesting tension surrounding Blyton's image. She is associated with the *laissez-faire* of the new right, where the market dictates cultural values, yet she is also seen to represent a past free of such commercial sovereignty: a lost age of innocence, when children could roam the country without fear of molestation (unless at the hands of the Five themselves!). And yet, this same writer was supposedly banned for taking the side of children against adults, for poisoning them, and for presenting effeminate hero figures. Thus Blyton's name has been used not only as a reference point of sanity and solidity, but also, as a signifier of the decline of such notions. To give a brief flavour of this, here is Blyton's name used on a variety of subjects, starting with books (Judy Blume's, in fact):

> ...if ... millions of readers really do crave pap on the lines of "The Mystery of the Vanishing Gro-Bra" or "Five Go Jacking Off Together" then the time has come to say "Come back, Enid, all is forgiven". (Renshaw, 1980)

> Don't run away, Famous Five! Come back, Biggles! All is forgiven. (Watson, 1987, p. 215)

television:

> The frisson factor survives adaptation. Not so the charm: 'Oliver, what's that?' 'My cock.' 'But it's eenaaawmuss.' 'I've got an erection and I want to poke it into you.' This is Enid Blyton needing to wash her mouth out with carbolic: Five Talk Dirty in Cornwall. (Pearson, 1992)

75

music:

> ...most contemporary chart hits have words which make Enid
> Blyton read like Sartre. (Attila the Stockbroker 1991)

or poverty:

> ...a study of contemporary poverty that makes Orwell's *The Road*
> *to Wigan Pier* read like Enid Blyton. (Morrison, 1993)

Summary

Blyton, then, has been seen differently at different periods, moving from an early

reputation in educational circles to a popular children's writer, thence to a hack,

and finally, in her lifetime, to a morally questionable, if not dangerous influence.

Since her death this reputation has continued to change, with the 'p.c.' debate

making her work more taboo, until, just recently, criticism has ameliorated, with

several more positive reassessments (and see below). With the recent Trocadero

takeover, it looks as though things are due to change again. However, the sales

of her books from the 1940s on, worldwide, with the notable exception of

America, suggest an enduring appeal which cannot be explained simply in terms

of marketing.

Let me now move on to look more closely at how her work has been received by

adult gatekeepers. This should show how, in analysing Blyton's appeal, they

have constructed a generally negative profile. Though there is much overlap

between the various groups, I have divided them into a Literary camp, an

Educational one, and a more Socially based one.

LITERARY READINGS

In chapter 2 I gave a broad indication of the literary approach to children's

literature, and its inadequacies. In looking at how literary critics have dealt with

Blyton, I shall now concentrate on three main aspects of their critique: discussions of her language, her characters, and her plotting.

Language

From early on, with *The Junior Bookshelf*'s negative comments on Blyton's Babar (Ray, 1982, p. 24), her language has been criticised, and for many this is an enduring criticism. For instance, the teachers mentioned above by Woods, though generally in favour of her, found her limited vocabulary her worst disadvantage. Peter Hunt, in a well-known article called 'The cliché count' (1978), specifically uses Blyton's work to make his point, and estimates that almost 75% of an extract of her work is cliché.

But as we shall see with other aspects of Blyton, critics disagree on this. Fisher (1961), as ever, is particularly critical, contrasting Blyton with Beatrix Potter, the latter not being afraid to use unfamiliar words, whereas 'Blyton and others think that children are taxed too much if they are confronted by so much as a polysyllable' (Fisher, 1961, p. 28). On the other hand, both Tucker (1976) and Wright (1980) have pointed to a variety of polysyllables in her work.[42] Dixon is predictably damning, calling her language 'colourless, dead and totally undemanding' (1974b, p. 54). Blishen too, says it is 'the dreariest and most anti-imaginative characteristic of these stories', adding, 'This is not children's language, but rather the language used when talking to children by ill-informed aunts who suppose children must be wrapped in verbal wool ... diddums-language ... *diddums*-plus-*dear me*-plus-*naughty-naughty*' (Blishen 1967, p. 28).

Dyer, on the other hand, says it is just how children talk: 'If anyone wants an idea ... for a valuable thesis in the realm of children's language, they might do worse than take Blyton as if she were a child writing as a child would want to write if adults weren't around' (Dyer, 1969, p. 16; I wish I could say, for his sake, that he were parodying the Blyton style here). He also says that her writing is of Bernstein's 'restricted code'—that is, highly predictable, unelaborated, and seeking reinforcement (*ibid.*, p. 13). This is ironic, as Bernstein saw the

restricted code as characteristic of the working-class; whereas, to quote Dixon again, 'In Enid Blyton, the language which which [sic] we are invited to identify is, sociologically, middle class based' (Dixon, 1974b, p. 54); according to Bernstein, of course, the middle-class child uses a more 'elaborated code' (Bernstein, 1971; Bernstein has modified his views on this, but that need not concern us here).

There is a key insight here, though Dyer seems unaware of it. Indeed, some of his own atrociously turned sentences tacitly demonstrate the point I want to make. He writes: 'Few children can write in it for adults, don't respond to it; so it goes unnoticed or despised' (Dyer, 1969, p. 16). Here, along with the misplaced comma, we have one of Bernstein's key points about the restricted code: that it is characteristic of environments where knowledge is shared, where reference points are held in common. This indeed seems a key aspect of Blyton's writing, one which links her into the oral tradition of storytelling: for it depends on the close circle, on common bonds, on shared knowledge—but equally, on knowledge to which outsiders are not privy, because of its very restrictedness. If it is characteristic of Blyton's process of storytelling, it is even more true of the groups of children who feature in many of her books, who have their own closeness, their signs and coded words; and the reader— particularly the initiated reader of a number of her stories—becomes party to this (e.g. watching Timmy's reaction to new characters; attending to George's frown). The converse is that most adults are generally excluded.

This partly accounts for some of the contradictory statements about Blyton's writing: for whilst it is generally flat and limited in the manner of many oral tales, it also involves us in being initiated into some less than usual lexical choices, their usage usually being explained and reinforced—for example, 'ingot' is explained in the first Famous Five, then 'taken as read' in the second. And though some critics have despised Blyton's condescending explanations of words, this is a fairly standard practice, to the extent that one even finds critics engaging in it: 'The Noddy books are not polysemic—they have no layers of

meaning' (Bentley, quoted in Faulks, 1990). Dixon seems to forget this intimacy that Blyton fostered, even criticising her banal choice of proper names—like Appletree Farm and Redroofs—when, of course, these frequently came from the children in the first place—hence 'Cherry Tree Farm' and 'Green Hedges'. Even here, though, we find contradictions: for whereas Dixon criticises her banality, Dyer objects to her names being unusual! (1969, p. 16[43]).

It is not simply the limited range of her vocabulary that is objected to, but its predictability: her overuse of particular words such as 'nice', 'good', 'little', and, less acceptably today, 'queer' and 'gay'. On the last two, one has simply to note that they are words whose connotation has changed, though they were once popular with a whole range of writers. Thus Miller, commenting on Henry James' story 'The Jolly Corner', notes that a character can be both 'gay' and 'queer', these being 'favoured adjectives of the Fin-de-Siécle and after' (Miller, 1987, p. 236)—the period, in fact, of Blyton's childhood. But these words make the point, for they do now obtrude, whereas most of her vocabulary is so common as to be invisible: in no way does it impede access to the narrative.

A related issue is Blyton's lack of figurative language—which has also been criticised. Thus Fisher bemoans the fact that her vocabulary has no resonance. When Blyton describes some rocks as 'a curious red colour', Fisher complains that that is all there is to it: their redness has no metaphorical association; it is irrelevant to the story (Fisher, 1986, pp. 386-7). Dixon makes a similar point, complaining that the sea, which 'shone as blue as cornflowers' in one book, continues to do so 'thirteen years and twelve books in the series later' (Dixon, 1974b, p. 55).[44] But whilst Dixon complains about the overuse of this particular simile, Dodsworth declares, 'In a search through many of her books I found not one metaphor or simile...' (p . 26)! One might query whether this critic knows what a simile is like (the pun being intentional). Apart from the above, a cursory glance at *FGTST* brought forth the following, interesting images (ignoring many of the more banal):

It [a tree] had cracked the roof of the house like an egg-shell... (*FGTST* p. 24)
The rope-ladder ...slipped like an uncoiling snake... (*ibid.*, p. 60)
[Block] wrapped up in the blanket like a caterpillar inside a cocoon. (*ibid.*, p. 102)
...the twilight hung like a soft purple curtain over the house... (*ibid.*, p. 120)

As noted above, Hunt (1978) used Blyton to demonstrate cliché-laden writing. Hollindale, though, disagrees: her books are not '*badly* written, as compared with the bulk of children's fiction: the Blyton style is crisp and economical, and not over-packed with clichés—it is just very simple' (Hollindale, 1974, p. 154). Similarly, Wall claims:

> ...she wrote good, clear, straightforward and vigorous sentences. 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, p. 190)

I find Hollindale and Wall closer to the truth here, for they attempt to measure Blyton in her own terms, whereas Hunt and many other critics rebuke Blyton for something she was not: a literary writer. In fact, Blyton specifically referred to herself a 'storyteller' rather than a 'writer' (Blyton, 1959).

Aside from the contradictoriness of much of the above, another point about it is that it is frequently not about Blyton *per se*, but her shortfall in contrast to other writers.[45] Clearly, compared with the preferred 'literary' writers, this is a 'no contest', and one wonders why critics feel the need to stage such a match and 'rubbish' a writer they feel isn't worth discussing in the first place. There seems a certain duplicity here. I'm sure most children are either unconvinced by such demonstrations (not that they would ever read them), or else find no problem in accommodating different styles of writing, often turning from quality to non-quality fiction without concern (see below). We thus have Blyton outpointed by Leon Garfield (Fisher, 1986), Beatrix Potter (Fisher, 1961), Alan Garner (Coupland, 1982), William Golding (Hildick, 1970), Robert Louis Stevenson,

Leila Berg (Dixon, 1974b), A.A. Milne (Welch, 1958), William Mayne (Hollindale, 1974), E. Nesbit ('simply about 1700 times more intelligent' - Sullivan, 1982), Jean Webster and L.M. Montgomery (Lehnert, 1992)—amongst others.[46]

To take just one of these in more detail, I shall consider Elizabeth McQuire's article, 'a comparison of Enid Blyton's *The Magic Faraway Tree* and Kenneth Graham's [sic] *The Wind in the Willows*' (Mcquire, 1975, p. 48).[47] Although McQuire starts out by declaring that 'home is basic to the structure of each book', she is soon criticising Blyton's book for not expressing 'a love of home'—it 'is just the place you hang your hat' (*ibid.*)—unlike Grahame's 'dulce domum'. One might ask, why should it? This is not what the book is about (home is simply the place to contrast with adventure, as in 'Jack and the Beanstalk'). After several pages, McQuire seems to realise this, and gives up: 'It becomes increasingly difficult to compare the two books, until it reaches a point where it is better to let Enid Blyton fade away'; among 'his great underlying themes' she has no place (*ibid.*, p. 51). All well and good, but one wonders why she went through the academic exercise of setting them alongside each other in the first place.

Certainly, Blyton did not pretend to be a literary writer: her concerns lay elsewhere, and to measure her on this yardstick seems inappropriate if we wish to explain her popularity. However, if we were to try measuring her on storytelling ability, or readability (Hollindale calls her ''readable' to a point where readability becomes a sin', 1974, p. 153), the tables might be reversed. As we shall see later, children are themselves quite capable of looking at Blyton's work in a critical mode if required to, but they don't let this impede their enjoyment. Laurie Taylor's analogy of a ride on a big dipper is apposite here; as he says, you don't look down at the flimsiness and contrivedness of the construction when you are riding, you simply enjoy the experience (quoted in Root, 1986, pp. 64-5).

In this section, I have pointed to the contradictions in what critics say about Blyton's language, and have tried to indicate the literary *cum* educational style of their discourse. Against this I have hinted at a different construction of Blyton, which draws more on the oral tradition; in many ways it is a 'restricted' as opposed to an 'elaborated' style of writing, but one that, paradoxically, is more 'indeterminate'. In Barthes' terminology it is, in certain respects, more 'writerly', giving the reader greater latitude in imagining events. I shall develop this alternative reading in detail in chapter 7.

Character

Another common criticism of Blyton is that her characters are flat and 'unmemorable', to use Cadogan and Craig's (1976) word for Julian, Dick and Anne. Dixon makes similar comments, describing Anne as quite insignificant, and as for the boys, they are 'scarcely nonentities—it is a single nonentity split into two'[48]; their 'literary destiny is, clearly, to figure in the stories of *Woman's Own*' (Dixon, 1974b, pp. 52-3)—a swipe at women's popular reading, and by implication, an indication of the place where the young Blyton reader might end up.

However, once more, there is a lack of agreement, some finding her characters more than 'pasteboard' (Hollindale, 1974, p.153). Wright, for example, takes issue with Dixon. Julian and Dick *are* distinguishable, Wright maintains: the former is the leader, who 'liaises with the adult world on the Five's behalf', the latter is a supporter, 'a convenient second focal point for the reader, should Julian's competence overwhelm him. He also has slightly Bolshie tendencies such as liking sleeping and objecting to washing up' (Wright, 1980, p. 19).

Whatever the differences over Julian, Dick and Anne, most agree that George and Timmy are in a different league. Cadogan and Craig describe George as having a 'fairly strong character', with 'fierceness, resentment, the wish to have

been born a boy' (Cadogan and Craig, 1976, p. 338). For many readers George seems to have provided a powerful role model:

> Harum-scarum, tomboyish George still lives with me now. I despised feminine frills and flounces and longed for the freedom, which was the privilege of the boy. I admired George for the ability to escape the restrictions and dressed as a boy, to be accepted as their equal.... (Bentley, 1969, p. 7)

But for others George is not original in her behaviour; indeed, Fisher calls her 'the ultimate stereotype ... the crudest representative of a huge class of tomboy heroines' (Fisher, 1986, p. 382), and Fisher mentions superior examples, like Bessie Marchant.[49] But this cannot detract from the experience of Bentley, above, and many of the readers I talked to.

Dixon endorses Fisher's view, throwing in some simple psychoanalysis, explained in a fashion reminiscent of Blyton herself. He describes George as 'perhaps, (unless we exclude Noddy) Enid Blyton's most fortunate invention [I presume he must mean 'if we exclude Noddy']. She is a very bad case of that castration complex, or penis-envy, first described by Freud, and her success with readers rests almost entirely upon the fact that, in our society, and for what seem very obvious reasons, small girls frequently wish they were boys' (Dixon, 1974b, p. 53).

As for Timmy, Wright (1980) perceptively points out how the children can express their emotions through the animal, and how he in turn acts as an adult with all the best qualities. For one child, at least, this seems particularly true: "I have read *Five Go Off to Camp Again* [sic]by Enid Blyton. The five are five children who are very adventurous ...." (quoted in Ray, 1982, p. 71).[50]

It should be said that my concentration on the 'Famous Five' arises from the literature, not a personal preference. The 'Famous Five' series is simply the most discussed, and this includes not only the Five, but George's parents, too— though once again we find differences of opinion. Wright expresses the more

orthodox view, saying of them that 'familiarity becomes an adequate substitute for characterisation' (1980, p. 18), whereas Hildick commends Blyton for her perceptiveness in creating adult characters. He finds the depiction of Quentin's temper and his dislike of children 'refreshingly unusual enough, in a field where the heroes' and heroines' fathers are usually stereotyped as bluff hearties or mild eccentrics' (Hildick, 1970, p. 88). Tucker also admits that Uncle Quentin gave him 'a far more fearsome object than any of the stop-at-nothing crooks' (Tucker, 1981, p. 109). Hildick credits Blyton with going further, exploring Quentin's character, and showing the remorse that underlies his actions:

> 'What are you going to do today?' asked Uncle Quentin, towards the end of breakfast. He was feeling a little better by that time, and didn't like to see such subdued faces round him. (*FRAT*, quoted in Hildick, 1970, p. 88)

He also credits Blyton with having 'fully portrayed the nasty, snobby, cruel selfishness that most children are capable of when they collect in packs of this sort—a dark side to children that very, very few children's authors ever touch on, and then usually only in their hero's and heroine's adversaries' (*ibid.*, p. 86). Hildick even speculates that 'one reason for the inordinate venom with which Enid Blyton's name is mentioned by many librarians and teachers is the discomforting accuracy with which she reflects some of the nastier traits of children of the middle-classes to which they themselves belong' (*ibid.*, p. 88; yet, in a seeming *volta face*, Hildick also describes them as characterless).

Druce makes a related claim about Susie, from the 'Secret Seven', with whom

> Blyton comes closer than anywhere else in her writings to questioning the values she proposes through her central group of protagonists. Whether, through the character of Susie, Blyton is (with what degree of awareness) engaged in subverting her own text, or is gathering together potential criticism of the favoured group in order to counter-attack it in the person of a scapegoat, is an open question. (Druce, 1992, p. 121)

The question of what is 'in the text', as opposed to the reader, is always contentious. Whilst I think there are instances when the attitude of each of the

Five is shown to be wanting, generally I don't think Blyton does distance herself from her protagonists—and certainly conveys no ironic detachment. So, when in *FRAT*, the narrator joins in in calling Tinker—the Sticks' dog—by the Five's nickname for it, 'Stinker' (p. 142), I think Blyton is herself enjoying the fantasy. However, this is not the end of the matter, for, we have neglected the reader's input to the text, and, as we know, readers read in differing ways—as Hildick's own reading shows, and as my respondents will later show. Moreover, even the same reader reads a text differently over time.[51] So, broadly speaking, it seems that readers will often start with a serious reading (if they engage with the text at all), which becomes more distanced and parodic as they re-read the texts—something most overtly portrayed in the Comic Strip's *Five Go Mad in Dorset* (the process is similar with the reading of fairy tales, which can subsequently be lampooned in pantomime).

This relates back to the whole conception of character, and, again, the contradictory responses we find to it. I would argue that Blyton's characters are certainly distinguishable, and that the more books in the series that are read, the more small details emerge on which difference can be constructed, so that the reader can latch on to whichever he or she feels most comfortable with, from daring to timid, unorthodox to conventional. Yet within these differentiating elements, individual readers have a great deal of latitude in interpreting the characters as they wish.

In this way, I would suggest that rather than talk of characters per se, it is more useful to talk about the 'semic elements' that constitute them (Barthes, 1980). These are deliberately vague, so that readers can easily import whatever fits the shell. Thus, the whole notion of character is turned round: action does not develop out of the behaviour of rounded characters; rather, action produces the characters, requiring particular functionaries to perform it. This is the point Propp (1968) makes in his seminal analysis: that there are various types required to perform certain actions in a story; though what their characteristics beyond

85

this might be are not relevant to the story, in spite of the fact that an individual reader might elaborate them in any particular way that suits.

Blyton's characters, like the Five, are thus very close to E. Nesbit's earlier 'Five' in *Five Children and It,* who also enjoy their adventures in holiday 'time-outs'. They are also similar, I would suggest, in being kept deliberately vague, so that they can function as a unit. In fact, Nesbit actually refers to her group as a single entity (and as an 'it' at certain points) and Blyton, for reasons I shall elaborate later, does the same. Interestingly Hildick also refers to Blyton's Five as a *'collective* personality, the pack personality' (Hildick, 1970, p. 89).

This reading might seem to contradict Blyton's own view, that 'The true story-teller has ...an ability to make his characters live—to be, in fact, so real that some young readers imagine them to be alive, and will even write to the author for a character's address' (Blyton, 1959). But if we realise that characters do not just have to be rounded in the literary sense, on the page, that they can 'live' in readers' minds, then the paradox disappears.[52] As Inglis candidly relates:

> Partly I read them [Blyton's books]for the untaxing safety of their
> stereotypes—the facility with which the children won the day to
> the amazed acclamation of parents and police, the unrufflable,
> wholly impossible calm of big boys, the clinging unreliability of
> little girls. Indeed, I was hardly troubled by the notion of
> 'character' at all. (Inglis, 1981, p.65)

Let me now move on to plotting, though the issue of character will recur in relation to the credibility of Blyton's stories—as it will return when we discuss issues of sexism and racism.

Plotting

Most critics are kinder on this aspect of Blyton. After all, her popularity has to be accounted for in some way, so for many it is in her narrative ability, and Blyton herself certainly saw her role as essentially a 'story-teller'(Blyton, 1959). Wall is generous in this respect, acknowledging her 'remarkable skill in the

manipulation of events and the management of pace', which shows up would-be imitators. Blyton, says Wall, has a 'particular strength …[in] the briskness and economy of her narrative manner' (Wall, 1991, p. 190). Others are more guarded, though still acknowledge its potency. Thus Hincks-Edwards (1982) complains of contemporary books where 'The prose may be melodic and charming, but, in an endeavour not to have blacks and whites, the authors give us greys, and consequently no story or plot worth talking of at all'. Having recently re-read the Noddy books to her 4 year-old, Hincks-Edwards was impressed with Blyton's stories, so thinks that a 'space-age' equivalent is needed. A similar sentiment is quoted by Leeson: ' "What we want", a publisher remarked to me a few years ago, "is a working-class Enid Blyton", a writer with that ability to captivate children, but minus the snobbery, suburban prejudice, acquisitiveness, golliwog-racism, which she shared with more respectable writers but spread a good deal more effectively than they did' (Leeson, 1985, p. 163).[53]

However, the contradictory reactions are still here, for some maintain that Blyton only had one plot, endlessly reworked: 'Enid Blyton demonstrated that children are so hungry for *stories* that they will read the same story over and over, slightly disguised', Moss claims (1974, p. 336; Moss does not entertain the hypothesis that it might be *Blyton* stories that children hunger for). I would also suspect that Moss herself had not read very many to make this pronouncement.[54] Given Blyton's incredible output, it is certainly true that she repeated herself, but not so algorithmically.

Dixon points to *FFIA* to show that 'flaws occur at almost every turn in the story' (Dixon, 1974b, p. 54). He gives instances of people being locked up, twice with the keys left in the locks on the outside, so they can easily be freed by others. 'If a wall has to be scaled ivy happens to be growing conveniently on it' (*ibid.*). I would not call these flaws[55]; they are contrivances, or coincidences, for which one might just as readily reprove Thomas Hardy. Dixon continues, 'It is a pity, indeed, that more 'brain' was not brought to bear in her writing, or that she never felt it necessary to plan or prepare her stories…'; for, to give children less in

terms of details of story structure, 'is to treat them with something approaching contempt' (*ibid.*). Once again, I would suggest that a critic is approaching Blyton from an inappropriate angle. Given her immense popularity with children, to suggest as an adult that she treats her audience contemptuously, seems in itself scornful, belittling children's own faculties—especially considering the feedback that Blyton established with her readers.[56]

Dyer makes this adult-centred criticism even more explicit, criticising the 'startling looseness' of her plots (Dyer, 1969, p. 17), using *The Castle of Adventure* as an example. In this, a spike moves a slab to reveal a hidden staircase, but when the children are inside, Dinah pulls a similar one and it reseals the slab, trapping the children. Dyer comments, 'I had foreseen the possibility of the spike acting exactly contrary to the one upstairs. But children do not naturally project causation in this way' (*ibid.*) But he is wrong in several aspects. First, he is wrong to lump the children together; for clearly, some do feel superior—readers (like Dyer) included—which is why Philip goes on to say "You are an idiot, Dinah, messing about with things before you know what they do" (Blyton, 1946, p. 169). Secondly, Dyer's projection of causality is not natural at all: it is equally tenable to argue that if a lever closes by moving it one way, it opens by moving it the other—as, indeed, most levers do. What Dyer is 'naturally' projecting is not causality at all, but an awareness of genre convention—a *contrivance* of plot, rather than a looseness.

Tucker, commending Blyton's professional writing skills, seems closer to most readers' experience: 'although the excitement and happy endings ...are always predictable, the details in between are not, and for a time can keep even an older reader guessing' (Tucker, 1981, p. 114). This can be supported by the texts, which certainly set up formulaic expectations, but these are then played with. For example, many say that Timmy's growl is a clear indication of someone's criminal tendencies, but in *FGTBH*, Mrs. Janes confounds this, despite other stereotypical indicators: being old, toothless, and looking exactly like a witch (*FGTBH* p. 54). She turns out to be just a rather sad old woman (Timmy is

similarly misleading with Martin Curton in *FOKIA*). Others maintain that it is Blyton's description of the eyes that is the 'give-away', but what, then, of Mr. Lenoir? He 'smiled all the time, but with his mouth, not his eyes' (*FGTST* p. 50); these are 'cold' (*ibid.*, p. 53), besides which, he hates dogs (Timmy is therefore hidden from him); perhaps even more significantly, Lenoir is 'black' in French, as Blyton makes clear, particularly with reference to Pierre, his son, who's nicknamed 'Sooty' because "He's awfully dark! Hair as black as soot, eyes like bits of coal, eye-brows that look as if they've been put in with charcoal. And his name means 'The black one,' doesn't it?..." (*ibid.*, p. 13). Later, in case we've missed this lead, it is reiterated: 'He was certainly very very dark. Black hair, black eyes, black eyebrows, and a brown face' (*ibid.*, p. 37). Pierre is also cheeky and "climbs like a monkey" (*ibid.*, p. 13). But, as turns out, the Lenoirs are all quite innocent.

Another character who looks particularly suspicious is Mr. Penruthlan:

> He was a strange and magnificent figure of a man—tall, well over six feet, broadly built, and as dark as a sunburnt Spaniard. His mane of hair was black and curly, and his eyes were as black as his hair... . His hand was enormous, and was covered with hairs so thick and black that it was like fur. (*FGDTS* p. 26)

Not only does he have similarities with the above, but he has another feature—supposedly a give-away in Blyton's stories: 'people of evil intent tend to be bearded or ill-shaven' (Dixon, 1974b, p. 56). Mr. Penruthlan is not only toothless with 'shaggy eyebrows drawn over his deep-set eyes', but he also has a 'dense black beard!' (*FGDTS* p. 175). And yet, he ends up on the side of good, as does the similar Morgan Jones in *FGIF* despite the fact that he, like his mother, and several other respectable characters, are Welsh. In a remarkable generalisation, Dixon lumps the Welsh in with gypsies, circus people and foreigners, claiming that in Blyton 'They are all rather less than human ...' (1974b, p. 55).[57]

Clearly Blyton is leading us on a false trail, as with Mr. India-Rubber, who "can bend himself anywhere, and wriggle through drain-pipes and get in at a window if it's left open just a crack!" to which George responds, "Gracious! He'd make a good burglar!" (*FHWT* p.23). However, he is not—although I would predict that most adults would also be misled.

All in all, Blyton's plotting is less contentious; in fact, it is one of the more highly rated aspects of her work. There is still a lack of unanimity, but I have suggested that this is because Blyton has in fact confounded the critics. She is, I have suggested, quite adept at showing children the conventions of fiction. Just as most of her vocabulary is simple, with occasional words of more difficulty thrown in, so her plots are generally, and genre-ly conventional, with the occasional one confounding predictability (see next section also).

More generally, the literary reading of Blyton has been shown to be remarkably contradictory in its judgements. It has also been shown that it is often based on blatant misreadings of her work. And, of course, these misreadings have frequently fed into a commonly accepted construction of Blyton as monosyllabic, threadbare and pedestrian.

EDUCATIONAL READINGS–READING AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

One of the key discourses in Blyton criticism is the question of her effect on the developing child, of how she might help or hinder reading ability, and, more significantly, what might be termed 'quality of life'. As I have commented elsewhere (Rudd, 1992), underlying most discussions in this area is the notion that children's minds can be helped to grow—but not mechanically; rather, in some enriching, organic way (see chapter 2). Blyton's failure to allow a child to grow is repeatedly emphasised. Hence many critics' concern over the future of Blyton readers, though hardly any seem to have looked for empirical evidence.

First in this category are those who see reading Blyton as leading, ineluctably, to later, non-quality fiction: "And then the girls tend to go straight from Enid Blyton to Mills and Boon. We have to try to get them to look at other books" (a librarian, quoted by Ray, 1982, p. 96; see also Capey & Maskell, 1980; Woods, 1955). Alderson (c1982), reviewing Ray, makes a similar comment, that 'there is little... to suggest that the Famous Five and the Girls of Malory Towers will carry their readers to any future but the wonder world of pulp romance'. Curiously, the books are here regarded as being read only by girls—which, one might say, is already a move to typify them as second-class. So to demean the world of romance seems doubly to undermine them, whereas it may well be, as researchers like Christian-Smith (1990), Modleski (1988) and Radway (1987) found, that some girls seek out this sort of literature to empower them in the first place, from an otherwise marginalised status.

It is also interesting how concern is expressed particularly over the female readers. Will they, like Madame Bovary, or Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, confuse reality with fantasy? Such tales are often recounted by the media, drawing attention to the dangerous consequences of reading Blyton. For example, one headline 'Tragedy of the schoolgirl from Malory Towers', tells of a girl who had committed suicide at a boarding school, where she had been sent at her own request after being inspired by the Blyton series (Woodcock, 1993).[58]

Mushram (1983), giving us an Indian perspective (a place, where, she says, 'English speaking children ... read almost *only* Enid Blyton's books') also speaks of progression, from Blyton to the Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew and James Hadley Chase. She specifically exonerates the 'Noddy' books from this, however, whereas Gutteridge (1982) pointedly cites Noddy as the culprit: 'when the child who started on Noddy became the grown-up reader it would read tripe in the main library instead of Jane Austen or William Golding.' Welch, earlier, had commented, rather superfluously, that reading Blyton would not help you with the Cambridge English Tripos, adding, 'It certainly did not help poor Christopher Craig, of whom, at his trial for murder, it was stated that "the only books he

knows anything about are the books of Enid Blyton..."'(Welch, 1958, p. 20).
This is even worse than Frederick Woods' prediction that a diet of Blyton would
lead to a life of *Reveille* and strip cartoons (Woods, 1995)!

In complete contrast, others have suggested the opposite, 'that those who now
read adventure stories for adults did not read at all as children, and those who
were hooked young on the Famous Five are now more likely to be reading
Booker Prize winners or modern poetry' (Armstrong, 1982, p. 118). It seems
that some such remark must have prompted Jan Mark's recent sarcastic comment
that adult writers seldom admit to having read any children's books, with the
'alarmingly often' exception of those by Enid Blyton: 'I grew up on the Famous
Five, never did me any harm, made me the Booker Prize Winner I am today, etc.
etc.' (Mark, 1992, pp. 101-2).

Generalisations say little, but the testimony of 'prize-winners' deserves attention,
and, clearly, 'the frequent mentions of Enid Blyton' (p. 11) surprises Antonia
Fraser in her introduction to *The Pleasure of Reading* volume, where celebrities
from the arts reveal their formative writing influences. She draws particular
attention to the contribution of Ronald Harwood, for whom, 'as a child in Cape
Town, too young to see her deficiencies, her work represented the 'magic world'
of England (Fraser, 1992, p. 11). Harwood later states:

> Enid Blyton described the English rural scene so vividly that I
> carry to this day what I believe to be her images of tree-tunnels
> and green hillsides and well-kept careless gardens. I am told now
> it was a sugary, middle-class idyll she created (a criticism as
> meaningless to me now as it would have been then), romantic,
> idealized, nostalgic. The fascinating aspect of her power,
> however, is that when, many years later, I went to live in a
> Hampshire village and walked the footpaths and climbed the
> hangers, my memory was jolted by her descriptions of the
> England in which the capers of the Famous Five took place and
> seemed to me accurate. I cannot say she influenced my own
> writing but as a reader I owe her an enormous debt ... . (Fraser,
> 1992, p. 121)

Similar comments are made by others (e.g. Melvyn Bragg, Sally Beauman, Wendy Cope, Carol Ann Duffy, Paul Sayer and Joan Smith; also, elsewhere, see the accounts of Beryl Bainbridge (1974), Judith Bentley (1969), Anne Fine (Palmer, 1997), Ken Follett (1994), Susan Hill (1982), Jan Leeming (1982), Christopher Milne (1979), Brian Patten (1995) and Polly Toynbee (1982)).[59]

Sally Beauman writes that 'Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* and Blyton's *Malory Towers* were equally magical' for her. She candidly continues:

> I might like to think now that I could differentiate between the imaginative power, the prose style, of Carroll, Blyton or Conan Doyle, or to kid myself that I found the adventures of Alice more resonant than William Brown's run-ins with the housemaid or the perils experienced by those intrepid adventurers Philip, Jack, Dinah and Lucy-Anne (from Blyton's *Adventure* books)—but it would not be the truth. The truth is I was a little heathen and— true god or simulacrum—I loved them all. (Fraser, 1992, p. 186)

The poet Wendy Cope recalls that Enid Blyton's *The Buttercup Farm Family* was the first book she read for herself, before going on to speak of her 'addiction to Enid' (*ibid.*, p. 192):

> Though I was beginning to have some idea of myself as an egghead, I still mostly read Enid Blyton. The *Secret Seven*, the *Famous Five*, the *Malory Towers* stories, and anything else I could get hold of. Except *Noddy*. By the time *Noddy* reached our house, I was too old and sophisticated for such things, and left him to my younger sister. I don't know if Enid Blyton did me any harm. I keep meaning to re-read some and find out what's wrong with it. (Fraser, 1992, p. 190)

Elsewhere Beryl Bainbridge (1974), in an article asking individuals to nominate the few books that made the deepest impression on them, writes: 'When I was nine I was reading *Just William, What Katy Did, The Mill on the Floss* and Enid Blyton.'

There are two observations to make here. First, it is apparent that Mills & Boon is not the inevitable result of reading Blyton.[60] Though Blishen derides the idea of progression, jokingly querying, 'From the Famous Five to the Three Musketeers in one leap?' (Blishen, 1977, p. 82), many of the above readers recall exactly this: 'Ten and eleven were my Blyton years; by twelve I was into Daphne Du Maurier, Hugh Walpole, the Brontes and Dickens' (Richardson, 1980, p. 4); one respondent explicitly stated that his favourite authors were Blyton first, then Dumas, whom he read later! As suggested above, it is quite likely that Blyton actually provides some of the basics to facilitate such progression. The literary critic Hugh Crago speaks of how a particular Famous Five book 'scaffolded …[his] first attempts to "read" Dicken's [sic] classic'; without this, and other similar inputs, he says, 'I doubt I would ever have opened it until, as a young adult, I was forced to' (Crago, n.d., p. 5) Secondly, it is of note that most do not sort literature into exclusive 'quality' vs 'non-quality' categories. They simply read, whether comics or classics, 'from Biggles to D.H.Lawrence ... from Blyton's *Famous Five* to John Steinbeck' as Melvyn Bragg puts it (Fraser, 1992, p. 169). As Roberts (1990, p. 51) notes, this is characteristic of what most adults do, too: 'Even the most sensitive readers of literature enjoyably read, watch, or listen to some form of vernacular fiction as well'. So, Chambers (1975) might be highly amused by a young reader explaining that the 'Topliner' series usefully covers the 'big step from Enid Blyton to Doetovsky (sic)', but it is not impossible for the same person to be reading both, exactly as the critic Alison Hennegan claims she was doing, aged 15 (Hennegan, 1988).

Unfortunately, critics of children's literature too often assume a one-track notion of reading progression: 'each child should read books which challenge his growing powers of thought, feeling and imagination, and stimulate him to more ambitious sorties into the field of reading', as Leng puts it (1968, p. 12). We need to get away from such notions, I think, and explore the idea that people can derive different pleasures from books, albeit the reading ages of the books might be vastly different. Wright gives an indication of this, confessing to 'reading Enid Blyton, 'approved' children's literature and adult novels simultaneously'.

He contends that Blyton's books 'provide a resting place, a position of strength from which more difficult texts may be tackled' (Wright, 1980, p. 22). Certainly, many of my respondents indicate just such a range of reading, as do those in more wide-reaching surveys. The recent W. H. Smith survey thus comments on children's 'eclectic reading tastes ... . One girl's reading in the previous month consisted of Enid Blyton's *The Naughtiest Girl in the School, Cinderella, Having a Baby,* and *A Beginner's Guide to Feminism*' (Hall and Coles, 1996, p. 4).[61]

I shall return to this notion of pleasure later. However, those critics who still think Blyton harmful might claim that I have only quoted those readers who were already reading 'a varied diet' of literature, and for whom there is no problem. The problem is more with those who become addicted to Blyton to the exclusion of all else. There are several references to this in the literature, but Lowe's is one of the most extensive, so I shall examine it in detail. It begins, 'Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Kate', who fared quite well till she read Blyton, 'and now, poor child, she has joined the ranks of the Enid Blyton addicts, reading, re-reading and never tiring of the Blyton formula' (Lowe, 1979, p. 107). Lowe persuades Kate to write her own story, which is reproduced, arguing that it is 'a style blighted with Enid Blytonisms!' (*ibid.*, p. 108). Unfortunately we have no idea of what her writing was like pre-Blyton, to see whether there really has been a deterioration or, *horribile dictu*, an improvement. Neither does Lowe comment on the extensive length of the narrative, nor the generally good quality of spelling and punctuation; rather, it is specifically its Englishness that she objects to, given that Kate is Australian.

Regrettably, Lowe's own knowledge of Blyton's books, and of cultural influences in general, seem limited. Thus, Kate is rebuked for numbering the police cars (she refers to 'car number two' in her story), which we are told 'is definitely not an Australian trait [sic]'. It was certainly not a British one, either. Lowe also picks up on the use of 'Mam'. Again, this might not be Australian, but neither is it a Blytonism. From this, it is certainly inappropriate to claim that

'Kate is so adulterated [sic] by the language in her favourite novels that a story would not be a story unless it occurred in front of an English backdrop' (*ibid.*, p. 108), for the items I have mentioned show not an English influence, but an American one, of course. Interestingly, Lowe does not draw attention to the phone number dialled in the story, which is not '999'—the English emergency code—but '000', which, I presume, is the Australian equivalent. In other words, local knowledge, plus that of American films *and* of English books, are all interwoven in Kate's story.

Aside from Lowe's specific comments, it should be said that the entire story is not characteristic of 'the Blyton formula'. The children are not active agents; rather, they are at the mercy of the criminals, who tie them up. As a consequence, it is not the children who bring in the police (and are subsequently rescued by them), but their mother; lastly, the criminals escape in the end. All this is very unlike Blyton, where children are the heroes, outwitting the adults. Kate's story reflects a more realistic stance, in which adults are still very much in control of children. If it shows anything, it shows how Blyton is read through a different cultural lens.

It is a shame Lowe was not aware of Margaret Clark's research, which looked at the reading of thirty-two children able to read proficiently by the time they started school at 5 years old. Clark follows them through junior school, finding that alongside books by Kipling, Lewis Carroll and Swift, 'most of the children had an obvious love for a variety of books by Enid Blyton' (Clark, 1976, p. 77). Of particular note here is an extract from a 7 year-old girl who enjoyed both telling and writing stories—'mystery stories of twenty or thirty pages' (*ibid.*, p. 86)—which, as can be seen from the extract given, are far more Blytonesque:

> ...Suddenly through the little dirty window at the door there came
> a sound. 'Psst.' It was Joe. 'I've come to rescue you,' she
> whispered. 'Joe you are a wonder,' said Julian ... . (*ibid.*, p. 87)

Clark notes that most of the stories tended to adopt the style of the author, which meant using a different vocabulary, a more elaborate syntax, inversion, and a variety of conjunctions, together with direct rather than reported speech (more recent research by Fox (1993) has come up with similar findings).

Returning to the issue of the child who only reads Blyton, Christine Hindle's personal testimony in a letter to *The Guardian* (1982) sounds more serious. She found that she could not read anyone else after a solid diet of Blyton, until rescued by a headmistress, with Hardy and Dickens. It is interesting to link Hindle's experiences to those of the novelist, Sally Beauman, quoted above. Beauman too, a keen Blyton reader, also stopped reading for several years, though she later went on to read English Literature at Girton College, Cambridge. Ironically, Beauman blames not Blyton, but being introduced to proper 'literature'. Certainly, the abandonment of reading for a period in adolescence is not unusual—in fact Ray credits Blyton with being one of the first to write books for young teenage readers, a group not previously catered for—and Hindle's subsequent move from Blyton to Dickens 'in one leap', to borrow Blishen's phrase, would certainly be regarded by most as quite an achievement. Perhaps Blyton was developing her skills more than she realised (*cf.* Crago, above).

Against the above statements, that Blyton impeded reading, there are also those who speak of Blyton with gratitude, for turning their children into readers. Cadogan (1982b), for example, writes that the 'Noddy books ... turned my non-reading daughter overnight into an avid word devourer, and gave me—like thousands of other parents—cause to bless Enid Blyton'. Another writer makes a similar comment: 'As for so many children, fluent reading for me began with Enid Blyton', being rescued from 'the truly awful readers that we had at school'. I might be accused of cheating here, for these are actually Imogen Smallwood's words (1989a, pp. 57-8). However, an Australian researcher, who says that she 'became a reader overnight' when given a copy of *FGAA* at 9 years old (Phillips, 1992, p. 273) provides more systematic evidence. As a result of her own experience she explored that of others, and found that the majority of students

enrolled in a language and literature course leading to an Education or School Librarianship degree named Enid Blyton as their favourite author; five of these had been unable to speak English when they began school. Watson, too, admits to feeling challenged by an English undergraduate's comment, "'If it weren't for Enid Blyton, I wouldn't be here!'" (Watson, 1987, p. 209), since which time he has been aware of many similar comments on the pleasure of reading opened up by Blyton. Lastly, Hunt found amongst his literature undergraduates that *The Magic Faraway Tree* 'was by far the best-remembered book of their childhoods' (Hunt, 1994, p. 116).

Fry, who gives detailed accounts of various children's reading experiences, also credits Blyton with establishing the habit in Karnail, 'as for millions of other readers' (Fry, 1985, p. 47). This said, Fry is nevertheless concerned about Karnail moving on from Blyton, which he thinks less easy, as do Chambers and Leng. One might have thought Chambers would value Blyton more, in writing about reluctant readers, but he speaks of it as 'drug' literature—the 'Blyton neurosis ... a symptom of arrested development' (Chambers, 1969, pp. 18, 22). Leng has a similar concern, giving the example of two contrasting readers, one of whom

> ...begins the year by borrowing Enid Blyton's *Mystery of the Hidden House*. Three months later, he is reading Enid Blyton's *Lucky Story book*; three months later still, it is Blyton's *Sunny Story Book*, and at the end of the year he is back where he began, with Enid Blyton's *Mystery of the Hidden House*. In all he borrowed 74 books in the year, 38 of them by Blyton. In the following year, he borrowed none at all. It need not be doubted that he enjoyed his reading, but it got him nowhere, and so he gave it up. And this, perhaps, is not entirely to be regretted; others, less wise or less fortunate, fail to break the habit, but obsessively continue looking for they know not what, reading ever more futilely until at last they become incurably addicted to reading-matter of the most ephemeral kind.

> ...begins the year in much the same way, with Enid Blyton's
> *Mystery of Tally-ho Cottage.* In the following five weeks, he runs
> through ten books by Enid Blyton in a row, and then moves on to
> other tales of mystery and adventure...reading altogether 43 books
> in the year, and finishing with *Biggles Takes the Case*, an
> adventure story with an adult hero, by W.E. Johns. The following
> year he rejoined the Library and took out a further 27 books.
> Whereas the first boy's reading was static or regressive, finally to
> be rejected as being of no value, this second boy had stumbled by
> some chance upon the secret of progressive reading; his reading
> grew with him and played a part in the process of his growth.
> (*ibid.*, p 183)

I find this a curious conclusion, and would certainly want more information before being convinced by it. For some reason, Leng believes that the first boy will never return to books, unlike the cases quoted earlier, where, after a few years' gap, reading was again taken up, often with a vengeance. Leng also regards the second boy's reading as progressive because his first year finished with a 'Biggles', whereas the other returned to Blyton—presuming, of course, that the boy took the book out for himself the second time.[62]

The favouring of Biggles over Blyton may seem curious to some, who might regard the two as similarly tarred (Chambers, for example, writes: 'Because there are so many 'like the last one' the drug has time to take hold, to hook the victim and ever after, when at last we've read the 78th version of Biggles, the 24th version of the Famous Five, the 34th version of William ... we are unable to find anyone like them to read' - Chambers, 1969, pp. 44-5). However, elsewhere Leng spells out how the duller boys are less keen on 'tales of high adventure, war, capture and escape, violent crime and death'; their heroes 'are not the men or youths of courage, aggressiveness and powers of leadership admired by other boys, but children more of their own age'; so these duller boys prefer books 'with boyish sport and mischief, and the rivalries and friendships of the peer group' (Leng, 1968, p. 141). This explains Leng's approving comment about Biggles featuring 'an adult hero', and why he feels that this is progress. It also,

as we can now see, clearly dates his work, besides showing Leng's own value-judgement in preferring books about 'war ...violent crime and death'—especially for boys. Nowadays, I would guess, his ordering would be reversed.

But apart from this, Leng's conclusion still seems strange. Does it turn on this single 'adult' book (which we don't know the boy actually read)? for we are not told what he read in his subsequent year, when he took out twenty-seven books. The former boy had still borrowed (not necessarily read) more books overall (seventy-four, as against forty-three), when he supposedly abandoned reading. Yet how do we know that he did abandon it? Might he not be obtaining books elsewhere? Leng's comment that he is probably wise to give up the habit, to avoid the fate of those who read 'ever more futilely until at last they become incurably addicted to reading-matter of the most ephemeral kind' is a strangely value-laden judgement, presuming that reading is only about intellectual development. It ignores all the emotional and psychological pleasure that might be derived from books. Leng is quite explicit about this, earlier speaking approvingly of children moving on from 'childish books' (not, note, 'children's books') to 'adult' ones (*ibid.*, p.12). The former are seen as being about 'problems of adjustment to home, family and friends', whereas the latter are concerned with 'the great problems of life, death, love, pain and immortality' (*ibid.*, pp. 12-13). Thus he commends one 10 year-old of high intelligence for reading titles 'indicating the girl's preoccupation with approaching adolescence', whilst frowning on her choices of Blyton, which 'reveal her reluctance to leave the security of childhood'. As he puts it, 'The vacillation evident in her reading, it seems likely, reflects a very real emotional confusion which, if prolonged, could hinder the process of maturing' (*ibid.*, p. 19), and he goes on to recommend careers stories!

Summary

I have dealt with Leng at some length because his work typifies a general attitude to children's fiction, that it must 'stretch' the child, otherwise it is worthless. A great deal of the above is specifically concerned with this issue. Blyton has been

seen to leave children as they are, or to move them on to other worthless fiction, dead-end jobs and generally, to a poor quality of life—females especially. Even though many celebrities have shown otherwise, there is still the fear that 'weaker' children are more at risk (a less than helpful tautology):

> ...many children soon outgrow the Blyton cult leaving the backward or culturally deprived child to wallow in a sticky morass of Blytonese which may give temporary delights without the smallest impetus to struggle out of it and beyond. (Martin, 1970, p. 26)

At the other extreme, writers such as Armstrong (1982), Billman (1984) and Hollindale (1974) have specifically praised the adventure story for the way it develops readers. Billman argues that it helps children realise how the conventions of literature operate, seeing how suspense is constructed, and how good and bad characters are both depicted and detected (as I instanced in the previous section). Armstrong, Hollindale and Wright (1980), citing Blyton in particular, also maintain that the adventure story is read faster than others, as the 'child ...discovers that he can romp through these yarns at such a spanking pace'[63] (Hollindale, 1974, p. 154). Wright thinks it is Blyton's stories in particular that are read 'faster than any other type of story' (1980, p. 17). Finally, Sarland writing more technically about the virtuosity of Blyton and Dahl, concludes:

> By the time they have read these two books readers will have been introduced to the basic 'grammar' of narrative stance and narrative function ...virtually every technique that is available to adult authors may be found in embryo form here ... technical expertise abounds ...and is put to the service of moving the story on in such a way that children will continue to read it. (Sarland, 1983, p. 170)

SOCIAL READINGS - SEXISM AND RACISM

When adults, as opposed to children, talk about Blyton, two of the discourses most ready to hand are those of 'sexism' and 'racism'. For much of her writing career such accusations were simply undeveloped: the sexual division of labour,

codes of behaviour, sexual differences in ability, were all regarded by many as natural, and thus not subjects about which 'difference' was much debated. 'Racism' too, was so much part of a colonial culture, that it too was not a subject of much reflection. It was only in the 'sixties that accusations of sexism and racism in Blyton's books started to be heard. But, as with the other areas so far discussed, here too we find oppositional views. Because racism has its own chapter (6), I shall concentrate here on framing the debate on sexism, leaving a more detailed analysis of it in relation to the 'Famous Five' till later (chapter 5). This should show, again, not only the contradictoriness of opinion, but the blatant misreadings that have become part of popular mythology.

Blyton became a standard target when accusations of sexism began, with Rosemary Stones even taking the title of her standard work, *Pour Out the Cocoa, Janet* (1983) from Blyton's 'Secret Seven'[64]. This said, there has been little that goes much further than the fleeting comment, usually about Anne being "a proper little housewife" (beautifully captured in the Comic Strip (1982) spoof, where Anne can be observed sweeping the grass at their camp site). Dixon (1977a), though fiercely critical of most aspects of Blyton, is surprisingly silent on her 'sexism' (despite Ray's comment, 1982, p. 69); also, discussion of Blyton is curiously absent from the *New Statesman* (1980) debate. Cadogan and Craig (1976), who do take a more serious look at this issue (see chapter 5), unexplainedly omit some of the key evidence—Blyton's school stories. Thus it is these that I shall concentrate on here, particularly as lack of space has meant the relegation of my analysis of the 'Malory Towers' series (see Rudd, 1996b, 1997a).

Blyton wrote three school series plus the often neglected *Mischief at St. Rollo's* (1947, originally published under her Mary Pollock pseudonym)[65]. The 'Naughtiest Girl' series of three books came first (1940, 1942, 1945), the six 'St. Clare's' next (1941-5), followed by the six 'Malory Towers' books (1946-51). Though some have fastened on the first series, set in a co-educational boarding school, as progressive, with sexism challenged by 'the fact that the school is run

by two women' (Ray, 1982, p. 197), Mullan disagrees, asserting that Ray is 'easily pleased'. However, he does not argue with Ray, but simply presents a passage from the series which shows Elizabeth—the naughtiest girl—in argument with Julian, a boy she wrongly suspects of stealing (Mullan, 1987a, pp. 95-6). Mullan himself, one would have to say, is also easily satisfied. There is no attempt to look at this passage in the context of the whole story (for instance, Elizabeth comforting Julian when he later breaks down in tears, and, finally, making both he and Martin—another weak boy—see the error of their ways). Unfortunately neither of these critics really analyses what sexism means, so the debate goes no further (to anticipate, I shall argue that Blyton is in fact drawing attention to the disparity between the sexes, of which the above is an early example).

Mullan unfortunately makes no mention of Gill Frith, who also looked at the school stories, and is unusual in that she based her analysis on the views of the books' fans. She found that the 'Naughtiest Girl' series was actually less popular than the others with readers. One girl, Rachel, describes the series as more realistic, but not as enjoyable. Revealingly, the 'Naughtiest Girl' series was not re-read, but the 'St. Clare's' and 'Malory' ones were, repeatedly—'about twenty times' each, according to Rachel (Frith, 1985, p. 117). It was these all-girl worlds that gave the most satisfactory reading experiences:

> In a world of girls, to be female is *normal*, and not a *problem*. To
> be assertive, physically active, daring, ambitious, is not a source
> of tension. In the absence of boys, girls 'break bounds', have
> adventures, transgress rules, catch spies. There is no taboo on
> public speech... . The ructures [sic] and rewards of romance are
> replaced by the ructures and rewards of friendship, and pop stars
> by idealised Head Girls. (*ibid.*, p. 121)

From this Frith concludes that 'the school story is most 'relevant' when it seems most 'unreal'' (*ibid.*, p. 133). It is seen to offer a magical resolution to contradictions in the children's lives.

Interestingly, Rachel's rereadings were selective, homing in on 'the rituals of opening and closure ... the points where the order of the school is disrupted, its limits transgressed (the tricks, the sneaking out of the school at night); the rituals which assert the autonomy of the girls within the school (having their own studies and furnishing them)' (pp. 117-8). And Frith points out that this mixture of power experienced by the reader, in command and control, is tempered with tradition and safety:

> The almost invariable opening gambit of the school story—the first day of term—signifies *both* the movement out of the safe, normal, humdrum world of the family into the exciting, varied, turbulent world of the fantasised 'school', *and* the movement from the uncontrollable world of reality to the predictable, clearly defined world of fiction. (*ibid.*, p. 118)

The fantasy of these stories 'combines the dream of autonomy and control with the freedom to be irresponsible within 'safe' limits' (*ibid.*, p. 122). As Frith says, the stories therefore combine both subversive and reactionary elements, for this freedom is only seen as a stage, before moving into the 'real world'. Thus, in escaping masculine definitions, the feminine itself becomes unanchored, and effectively undefined. There is an attempt to escape gendered-ness altogether— hence the many neutral names, hence the lack of female issues, hence the remaining effectively pre-pubertal, despite the girls being sixth formers by the final book. But whereas Frith sees the series as representing a stage that must be grown out of, I would suggest that such a reading is warranted only by looking from the outside, diachronically. For the young reader there is simply a space opened up, in which the young reader, like Rachel, is likely to wallow.

Another more detailed treatment of Blyton's school stories comes from Lehnert, writing in *Poetics Today*. She concentrates on the 'Malory Towers' series in German translation (re-named 'Burg Möwenfels'—i.e.Gull Rock Castle), where Darrell has become Dolly. Here, twelve anonymous sequels have been added to Blyton's original six—which chart Darrell's progress into the sixth form, with adulthood still in the distance. In the sequels, Dolly returns after gaining a degree, marries a teacher at Malory, and becomes, not a teacher herself, but a

'housemother'.[66] Lehnert argues that this is part of the 'implicit feminine ideology' of the stories, that learning itself is not so important for girls as becoming women ' "who have their hearts in the right place"; that is, women who will find their place in life by making others happy' (Lehnert, 1992, pp. 112-3):

> Individual talent is important only so far as it can guarantee the success of extracurricular activities, such as Christmas parties; that is, to the extent that it serves a benign function in the world of school. Real professional achievement or even vocational training ...is, in fact, clearly disapproved of. (*ibid.*)

Lehnert discusses Mavis—though without naming her—who loses her voice in the third 'Malory', thus, according to Lehnert, showing the futility of girls seeking professional success or fame. Unfortunately for Lehnert, in the final Blyton book we are informed that Mavis *has* 'gone to train as a singer' (*Last* p. 15), with several other pupils also going into artistic careers—Belinda specifically as an artist, Irene to study music, and Darrell, after university, hoping to be a writer. Lehnert thus seems misinformed: professional success is encouraged (though not seen as the ultimate goal, which is 'character'—see below); also, the teachers in the English Malory are not married; in fact, some are quite independent characters, like the strikingly resourceful Miss Peters. On the other hand, the few males are mostly quite weak (a few incidental functionaries at the school, Mr. Young, the music-master, and some parents). It is therefore ironic that Lehnert should criticise Blyton for these qualities—her article is called 'The taming of the shrew'—when most of the evidence for it is from books which Blyton did not herself write, books where the patriarchal elements have been allowed to constrict the very space Blyton opened up. Even the six original texts are only referred to in translation, wherein Darrell, with her fairly gender neutral name, has become 'Dolly'—a name with altogether different connotations (though they are not the same in German, I have been informed).

Let me conclude this section by reiterating the key point that one cannot simply read off *isms* from isolated signifiers. The whole text needs to be considered, and, beyond that, the likely relation of the reader to the text. If one doesn't do this, then one is limited to current 'p.c.' usage only. For instance, many people are now aware of the 'sexist' usage of the supposedly gender-neutral pronoun 'he', such that it is now generally avoided. However, many writers of the 'sixties and 'seventies, before this became the convention, still wrote disapprovingly of 'sexism' in children's books, with no less conviction. Thus, Davey writes of *'man* and *his* surroundings' and speaks of how 'the child can avoid and disregard any deeper meanings which *he* is not ready for' (Davey, n.d., p. 15; italics added). Likewise, one finds writers on racism speaking about 'non-whites', as though whites were the norm. But such 'ways of speaking' should not be seen necessarily to undermine what is said.[67]

CONCLUSION

This has been a long and involved chapter, but so are responses to Blyton. Also, it has not simply been a literary review, but an analysis of the literature's trends: the discursive threads that have been woven round her name and work—by others, certainly—but also by Blyton herself. Having tried to summarise each section as I have gone along, let me here try to return to the major issues, before finishing the chapter by looking at the most recent developments amongst the Blytoneers[68].

One of the most enduring findings of this survey has been the contradictory opinions held about Blyton. This has been found in all sections, whether on her general reputation—changing over the years—her language, her characters, plots, influence on reading and personal development, or her sexism and racism. But the one constant that unites most of the critics is that they are anti-Blyton, despite the different grounds of that claim. The more I examine critics' statements, which are sometimes blatantly contradictory, the more it seems that

this dislike is a 'gut-reaction', to which reasons are later attached. This becomes clear in statements like Dohm's, comparing Blyton with quality books: 'no one who has known or seen the difference between a child's shining response to that and the empty clamour (like teen-agers for a crooner) accorded the formula book can doubt which is really 'just what the children want''(Dohm, 1955, p. 361). This sounds very much a Leavisite speaking, where one has to be an initiate with sufficiently refined sensibility—'felt in the blood and felt along the heart' (i.e. a gut-reaction)—to appreciate such differences.

It is not only apparent in the contradictory statements critics make, but in the loaded way that criteria are adduced to hammer Blyton. An instance would be Dixon's pointing up flaws in Blyton's plotting though these might just as easily expose Hardy. Even in the contentious area of physical punishment, Blyton seems to have been singled out, whereas it occurs just as much in the work of her contemporaries (C.S. Lewis especially) and is also to be found, unremarked upon, in more recent work for children (e.g. Waddell's 'Tough Princess' not only biffs the Bad Fairy, which 'bent her false teeth and bust up her glasses', but also biffs the prince, who retaliates; in the end, 'They biffed happily ever after' Waddell (1986); also, Pingu (BBC, 1994) is actually put across the parental knee and spanked). Equally, accusations of Blyton depicting a cosy, bucolic middle-class world could just as readily be levelled at the Ahlbergs' celebrated books (e.g. Ahlberg and Ahlberg, 1991).

The most frequent areas of attack, though, are to do with sexism and racism. It has simply become a standard chain of association (a discursive thread) to have the name Blyton invoke accusations in this area. Yet, if we take the issue of sexism and look at the supposedly quality writers, are things any different? Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* features no female protagonists at all; in fact, they are almost entirely absent except as working-class background figures; the same is true of Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937). Barrie's *Peter Pan*[69] (1911/1986) features one girl, Wendy, and her mother, Mrs. Darling, but the two—it could be argued—are very stereotyped, with Wendy pretending to be a

mother, sewing, ironing, dusting and cooking, and, of course, taking no part in the fighting. Milne's 'Pooh' books (1926, 1928), likewise, feature only one female, the equally domesticated Kanga. The point, I think is made, that none of these books are criticised in quite the way that Blyton's are.

None of the above books features any black characters, either (though Barrie's 'Picanniny' tribe might cause concern). C.S. Lewis's 'Narnia' series, however, does.[70] They are the dark skinned Calormenes, armed with scimitars, and enemies of the 'fair-skinned' Narnians. They are therefore on the other side in the final Crusader-style battle between Christian and heathen. The following comments are typical:

> Then the dark men came round them in a thick crowd, smelling of garlic and onions, their white eyes flashing dreadfully in their brown faces. (Lewis, 1956, p. 25)

> "Had enough, Darkies?" they yelled. "Don't you like it? Why doesn't your great Tarkaan go and fight himself instead of sending you to be killed? Poor Darkies!" (*ibid.*, p. 124)

All the above books also feature very middle-class characters (with the possible exception of *The Hobbit*, though Bilbo strikes me as a very comfortably acquitted gent.).

I don't wish to pursue this line of argument further, which is simplistic in many regards. I merely want to indicate the negatively preferential treatment Blyton's work has received, some of which now seems disproportionately vitriolic and misplaced.

This said, there does seem to be something of a sea-change in criticism of Blyton, which has been noticeable even over the five years of my study (and, of course, this study is itself part of that sea-change). I have already given some indication of the number of celebrities who have recently expressed their appreciation of Blyton's work—to Jan Mark's chagrin. I have also mentioned

the re-evaluation undertaken by critics like Peter Hunt, who was far more
negative in earlier years, describing populist works such as hers as 'requiring no
thought, disturbing no brain cells, and thus, one assumes, appealing to the lowest
common denominator' (Hunt, 1978, p. 147); even earlier he had declared that 'I
would as much consider including her in a study of children's literature as I
would consider including, say, Mickey Spillane on a literature degree course'
(Hunt, 1974, pp. 121-2); whereas he has more recently analysed *FGDTS* and
concluded that it is 'a rich text', both in "literary" (his scare quotes) and populist
terms (Hunt, 1995, p. 239), besides writing a more detailed entry about her for
Gale's *Dictionary of Literary Biography*[71]. The latest to join this list is Iona
Opie, who is solidly praiseworthy, calling Blyton 'a first-class story-teller' with
'an excellent system, well-disguised, to get children reading and to keep them
reading' (Brown, 1996a).

As the centenary of her birth comes upon us, then, Blyton seems in for a
renaissance. Her name is everywhere. Aside from the well-known names
discussed above, her work also appears in more 'grey' areas, which deserve
mention. For instance, Blyton's work has been taken up by several music bands.
'Current 93' have appropriated Noddy, just as 'Die Funf Freunde' have the
Famous Five[72], whilst a third, 'Church', list as their influences 'Camus, Sartre,
Fournier, Gide and Enid Blyton' (Anon, 1994b). An Irish singer-songwriter,
Mickey MacConnell (c1993) has even recorded a song called 'Enid Blyton',
which looks at how the Five might have matured into adults—a theme which has
exercised a number of people, including Adrian Mourby (1994), who had a half-
hour piece on Radio 4 called 'Whatever happened to The Famous Five?' (Julian
went into the Army, Anne married the Chancellor of the Exchequer and annoyed
Lady Thatcher, Dick turned to drink and now runs a pub, and George became a
quiet nurse and colonial administrator). Also in 1994, Michaela Morgan
published *The Not So Famous Four*, which explicitly pastiches Blyton's Five.
The Internet is a rich source for more ephemeral material, including other spoof
stories of the Five as grown-ups, instructions on playing a card game called
'Enid Blyton', home pages from individuals naming themselves after Blyton

characters, and pages of quotations from *The Magic Faraway Tree*. One of my favourite appropriations, however, is from *The Turkish Daily News*, whose most popular item is a daily column called 'Noddy's Notes'.[73] Noddy here is the equivalent of pundits like Smallweed and Attila the Stockbroker. However, the choice of Noddy for a paper popular with the 'ex-pats' suggests a certain nostalgia for home and country referenced in terms of Blyton (see chapter 5).

NOTES

1   Druce's title, *This Day Our Daily Fictions*, has always reminded me of
     Bloch's comment: 'When I get up in the morning, my daily prayer is: grant
     me today my illusion, my daily illusion' (quoted by Zipes, 1992, p. 123),
     though Druce himself makes no mention of Bloch.

2   The phrase is Eileen Colwell's but has been taken up by others; for
     example, Eyre (1952, p. 49), *Where* magazine (see Blishen, 1967), Moss
     (1970), but most notably by Ray, who uses it as the title of her book (see
     Ray, 1982, p. 3).

3   I was 'wined and dined' as a potential contributor, only later to be dropped.
     Clearly, my involvement was with the work, which was hardly mentioned,
     so was seen as having little to contribute alongside stories about nude
     tennis and cheating at cards!

4   Brandon Thomas (1856-1914) wrote the play, produced in 1892. I have
     asked Gillian Baverstock about the relationship, but she has no more
     knowledge of it. We do know that Thomas Blyton had Irish ancestry on his
     mother's side, however, which is perhaps why Bingham and Scholt's
     standard work calls Blyton an 'Irish author' (Bingham and Scholt, 1980, p.
     303)!

5   There was some controversy over this in 1995 which hit the national press.
     A previously unknown work by her, entitled *Sports and Games* was bought
     by Mason Willey for £125. He argued that it was very early, possibly 1918
     or 1919 (Willey, 1995), and the ensuing debate caused a few rifts amongst
     Blyton collectors. However, it now seems as though the book is a Birn
     Brothers publication of 1924 (Rouse, 1995).

     Interestingly, it was a colleague of mine, who used to teach at Bolton
     Institute, before going into the second-hand book business, who discovered
     the volume, and asked me if I knew of anyone who might be interested.

6   The 1986 edition (Collins, Grafton Books) is a poor imitation, with only
     four black and white photographs, compared with eighty-seven in the
     original. It has also been carefully edited, omitting much information.

7   Freeman (1993, pp. 58-80) discusses Keller's autobiography in some detail.

8   The parallel is noted by several commentators. Ray commends Blyton's
     reworking at points—'Blyton's style does reflect the awefulness [sic] of the
     occasion'—though Ray wrongly, I think, implies that this is a conscious
     reworking (1982, pp. 168-70).

9   I have not managed to corroborate this, though some of Druce's other parallels I find dubious. For instance, he says that *Mary Mouse and the Doll's House* 'owes much to Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Two Bad Mice*' (Druce, 1992, p. 16), which seems tenuous, leaving aside the fact that both feature mice which move into dolls' houses. Blyton's is actually far closer to 'Goldilocks' in its first section.

But there are many more substantial derivations, both from her own works, and those of others, and they operate at a number of levels, from whole stories to intertextual references. Of the former, there is a clear retelling of Andersen's 'The ugly duckling' in Blyton's 'The odd little bird' (orig. 1934; in *The Three Naughty Children and other Stories*, pp. 84-90).

Likewise, her story, 'The magic treacle-jug' (orig. 1957; in *Enid Blyton's Storytime Book*, pp. 7-15) is 'The magic porridge pot' under another name, just as 'The three strange travellers' (orig.1933; in *Enid Blyton's Chimney Corner Stories*, pp. 51-61) reworks 'The musicians of Bremen'. Others use other works more imaginatively; thus 'Sulky Susan' (1941) uses Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol' theme, where Susan is shown different versions of herself in future years (*Good Night Stories*, pp. 90-6)

Other stories are retellings of her own previous work, as 'Nippy the Pixie' (1937; *Snicker the Brownie and other stories*, pp. 94-102) reworks 'The little bully' in *Chimney Corner Stories* (pp. 89-93); or 'Don't tell anyone' (1931; in *Snicker the Brownie...pp.172-83*) retells 'The boy who was shy' (1935; in *The Red Story Book* pp. 56-63).

Elsewhere again, there are more tantalising intertextual links, as in *The Folk of the Faraway Tree* where the children are led down a rabbit-hole Alice style:

   "Down here," he said. So down went the children and the four Tree-Folk— down, down into the darkness. It was a good thing the rabbit-hole was so big....
   "I've never been down a rabbit-hole before," said Connie. "Never! It's like a dream! I hope I shan't wake up and find it isn't real. (Blyton, 1946, pp. 147-8)

or in 'The land of nowhere' (*Sleepytime Tales*, pp. 41-70) where some children travel to an island by air, with wings: 'It was a strange island, for it changed its shape as they watched it. It seemed alive' (p. 63), which is very much in the manner of Barrie's 'Neverland'. I shall refer to other links later, and draw attention to the implications of these.

10   The truth could easily have come out in the newspapers during the War, but didn't. For example a report in *The Evening News* is very carefully worded, saying that Blyton is the wife of Mr Kenneth Darrell Waters and

that, 'She has the patient, good temper of the natural mother—she has two daughters of her own', later adding, that 'up to the time of her marriage she ran a school of her own at Surbiton' (Carpenter, 1944).

11   Blyton had also recently (November 1949) spoken at an exhibition of mothercraft at Central Hall, Westminster, where she criticised the governmental policy of encouraging married women to work, arguing that it would mean 'abandoning children to the care of others' (Stoney, 1974, p. 146).

Neither of these quoted passages from *The Story of My Life* is in the revised 1986 edition.

12   There is clearly much ambivalence here. It is ironic that Mullan, who wrote *The Enid Blyton Story*, should have written a book entitled *Are Mothers Really Necessary?* in the same year (1987b)!

13   This is counting both noun and pronoun references.

14   The whole balance of the book is peculiar. Enid's two brothers are hardly differentiated, and they are certainly not named (Blyton, 1952, p. 47), though her pets are! There are no pictures of her family (i.e. her parents and brothers), only of the family Enid created, in her garden, with her animals.

15   There is only one picture of a group of children listening to her tell a story, and this is not at her home (Blyton, 1952, p. 115).

16   Narcissus becomes locked into immobility, achieving immortality, but at a price. Doubles for Freud (1961, 1985) are also closely associated with death and its avoidance—see chapter 8 for a development of these ideas.

17   'Their brilliant white plumage was reflected in the pond, and when they stood round, it was as if they were all double pigeons—a lovely sight!' (Blyton, 1952, pp. 41-2). This fascination with doubles extends to her fiction, too, where we have many examples of twins, or even triplets in *The Three Golliwogs* (1944).

18   Lurie (1990, p. 122) writes, 'Perhaps it was because E. Nesbit remained emotionally about twelve years old all her life that she found it natural to speak as one intelligent child to another'. Powling (1983, p. 53) reports that Dahl himself, when asked how he could write so easily for 8 year olds, replied, 'I am 8 years old'); and Carpenter, extrapolating from the example of Dahl, said more generally of children's writers that they 'themselves have to be genuinely childlike' (Carpenter, 1994). Hulbert (1995) makes a similar generalisation, reviewing biographies of children's writers. J. M. Barrie is notoriously 'the boy who couldn't grow up' (Lurie's chapter title); he himself wrote in *Margaret Ogilvy*, 'Nothing that happens after we are

twelve matters very much' (quoted in Lurie, 1990, p. 140). Virginia Woolf said of Lewis Carroll, 'For some reason... his childhood was sharply severed. It lodged in him whole and entire. He could not disperse it. And therefore as he grew older this impediment in the centre of his being, this hard block of pure childhood, starved the mature man of nourishment.' This is quoted in Morton Cohen's recent biography (1995, pp. 190-1), whose own view is similar: 'In a way he was himself ever childlike, but only in that he appreciated, for much longer than most of us can, the child's mind and heart and knew how to make them easy and happy' (*ibid.*, p. 530).

19   These books, almost inevitably, have been criticised for 'fattism' (e.g. Hendrie (1993), Chair of Grampian Education Committee, and ensuing correspondence in *The Scotsman*).

20   *Teachers World* is written with the apostrophe after the 's' by Stoney (1974), Ray (1982) and Mullan (1987a)—viz. *Teachers' World*—and before the 's' by Smallwood (1989a) and Druce (1992)—viz. *Teacher's World*. However, the journal itself has the title without apostrophe. Blyton, herself, wrote it with the apostrophe following the 's' (Blyton, 1952).

21   Thanks, again, to Tony Summerfield, for this information. It was first used in *Enid Blyton's Readers, No. 1* (August, 1942), then in *I'll tell you a Story* (December, 1942)—both published by Macmillan.

22   I don't know why Woods describes it as a 'babyish signature with those coy dots beneath' (Woods, 1969, p. 12)! It seems another example of a value judgement slipping in unwarrantedly. Several of my respondents confessed that they had always read it 'Gnid'.

23   Ray (1982, p. 43) quotes a librarian who stated that at least one Mary Pollock book was not very popular till reissued in 1950 under Blyton's own name (from the dates given, this must have been *Smuggler Ben*, the only one reissued in 1950). I think this librarian's comments are more likely 'sour grapes', for although no sales records survive, it is known that all six books were reissued under the name Pollock between 1945 and 1947, and two of the titles had already been reprinted earlier. Clearly, in wartime, this must have been based on healthy sales. (My thanks to Tony Summerfield, for his encyclopaedic knowledge of Blyton's publishing history.)   Druce (1992, p. 39) distorts Ray at this point, in suggesting that none of the Pollock books was popular, and that this was based on Ray's own library experience.

24   My thanks to Barbara Stoney for pointing these out to me.

25   Regarding the mis-quotes. There is Eyre (1952, p. 53), who quotes
      Colwell as saying 'but what chance has a gang of desperate criminals
      against three small children'; whereas Grove (1993) goes the other way:
      'What chance have a gang of desperate men against five small children?'

26   Ironically, the Nottingham County Libraries School Librarians asked me to
      speak on Blyton recently. I also appeared in a British Council sponsored
      film to promote Blyton as a British author, which was shot in Newark
      Library (Anon, 1997). Times have certainly changed.

27   Not all such bans are apocryphal though, nor are they all 'history'. In
      Dunfermline, 1996, there was an outcry in the local press that the District
      Libraries were not stocking any Blyton.—a policy confirmed by the Director
      of Leisure Services, David Arnott, reaching back to the 1970s. It was argued
      that as there were so many titles, and they couldn't buy every one, they
      should not buy any. Selective buying, it was argued, was an 'impossible
      ...half-measure', as they didn't know what criteria to use—a strange thing
      for librarians to admit! (Anon, 1996b). Particularly, as other respondents
      pointed out, the library managed such selection with other popular authors
      (Anon, 1996c). (My thanks to Sheila Ray for these cuttings).

28   If one wanted a good example of a 'classist' remark, this is surely it!

29   This is a selection from a potentially much larger list. Mortimer's *What
      Shall I Read?* (1978), Butler's *Babies Need Books* (1995), Lynn's *Fantasy
      for Children* (1979) and Trelease's *The Read Aloud Handbook* (1984) are
      also silent. Mortimer, ironically, does mention a Blyton, but it is Enid's
      nephew, Carey, with his musical work, *The Faber Book of Nursery Songs*.
      Butler, though she covers 'babies' up to six, clearly sees 'Noddy', 'Amelia
      Jane' and the 'Faraway Tree' books as dispensable, despite their immense
      popularity. In her follow up work, *Five to Eight* (1986) Butler only
      mentions Blyton as someone to be weaned off. She is not included in the
      recommended list of books. Trelease's omission is particularly gaping in
      view of many teachers I know who still fall back on Blyton for a good book
      to read aloud. Longhurst (1983) records her own classroom experiences of
      reading *The Castle of Adventure*, which, she claims, 'enthralled' the
      children, and provided lots of follow up work.

30   For example Shattock (1993) *The Oxford guide to British Women Writers*;
      Blain et al. (1990) *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English*; Buck
      (1992) *Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature*; Todd (1989) *Dictionary
      of British Women Writers*. Unfortunately many of the entries on Blyton
      contain errors.

31   In 1975 Hall and Cosgrove's *Noddy* was produced for ITV, narrated by
      Richard Briers, also with the golliwogs absent. Not so the original
      Adventures of Noddy, one of the earliest successes of commercial (ABC)

television; this was a marionette show, first screened on Sunday 25 September 1955 (Knowles, 1988). I can still distinctly remember the very tall and erect hat sported by Noddy.

32   Another cultural icon of the twentieth century,Tintin, has met the same resistance. America was 'the one major market Hergé never cracked' (Thompson, 1991, p. 48)

33   Ironically Blyton has stories involving each of these characters 'Silly little Goofy' (1941; in *Enid Blyton's Happy Time Stories* 1970, pp. 127-32), about a pixie, and 'Big-Foot is very clever'—Big-Foot being a brownie, like Big-Ears (original date unknown; *Little Animal Stories* 1971, p. 80).

34   David Lane, of Enid Blyton Ltd., is reported as saying, 'We have done market research in New York and a lot of American children and their parents could hardly understand a word he was saying' (Boshoff, 1997). This is sad news, but also surprising, given America's own multiculturalism; even moreso given that the U.S. took so readily to the much broader, regional accents of 'Wallace and Gromit'.

35   Those for 1987-1988, published in 1990, showed Blyton as one of the most popular, alongside Jean and Gareth Adamson, Dick Bruna, Roald Dahl and Shirley Hughes (Keel, 1990). In the figures published in 1991 the position is similar, with Blyton, Dahl, and René Goscinny (creator of 'Asterix') the three most popular children's authors (Cook, 1991). The following year,1992, sees Goscinny replaced by Janet and Allan Ahlberg, otherwise things are the same (Coles, 1992).

36   The W.H. Smith study had a sample size of approximately 8,000, replicating the 1971 survey, of 10, 12 and 14 year olds. Blyton was named by 6% of all children as favourite: '15% of 10 year old girls, 6% of 10 year old boys and 7% of 12 year old girls named her as their favourite' (p. 6). She has obviously slipped slightly since the 1971 Survey, but is the only author still to be in the 'Top Ten'. In 1971 she was named most popular by 1604 children, as opposed to 498 in 1994 (Hall and Coles, 1996, p. 6). She was also shown to be more popular lower down the social scale—as was Dahl, the all-out favourite. One key difference from the earlier study— referring back to my comments about criteria of children's book criticism—is the abandoning of the 'quality' 'non-quality' distinction in children's reading matter.

37   These figures predate the take-over by Trocadero, and centenary promotions.

38   Blyton also has a character referred to as 'the fat station-master', in *The Three Golliwogs* in 1944 (1968, p. 102). The Reverend W. Awdry's railway series, which featured the Fat Controller, began in 1945.

39   The rights are owned by Systems Integrated Research, who have drawn on
      my work (especially Rudd, 1997, in the 1995 edition).   The first 11 books
      are under way, and I was informed that there was to be text, read by
      Susannah York, plus plot summaries, questions, prediction activities,
      games, etc. I asked them whether they had used the original versions, thus
      giving them the chance to talk about outdated slang and changing attitudes.
      Unfortunately, they weren't even aware that there were different versions,
      though the representative admitted that this explained some curious
      anomalies that had perplexed her (e.g. in her versions the characters wore
      jeans)! Helen Cresswell also found, when she came to do the TV
      adaptations, that she had been working from updated texts, despite her
      wish to preserve the period feel (Anon, 1997).

40   Lipman (1995) herself does not mention Thatcher, only Joyce Grenfell—
      whom she had portrayed in a one-woman show. Interestingly, Grenfell had
      mocked Blyton's compositional style in a sketch in her series 'Writers of
      Children's Books':

          '...I go upstairs to my Hidey Hole ...I pin a notice on the door and it says
          "Gone to Make-Believe Land". This is just my way of saying "Please
          don't come and bother me because a book is writing itself to me and we
          mustn't disturb it, must we?"
              'No I never re-write and I never read what I have written. But you
          children do, millions and millions of you children do and that is my great
          joy ...' (quoted in Lipman, 1995, pp. 96-7).

41   Carol Thatcher (1996), in a biography with several parallels to
      Smallwood's, inadvertently shows other similarities between the two, as
      does Beatrix Campbell, in *The Iron Ladies*. Thatcher also made children
      central in theory—'When children are young, however busy we may be
      with practical duties inside or outside the home, the most important thing
      of all is to devote enough time and care to their problems' (Thatcher,
      quoted in Campbell, 1987, p. 236)—whilst in practice, it seems that this
      was not so. It is reported that when Thatcher was in hospital, having her
      twins, she decided then and there to put her name down for the Bar finals:
      the children were given a nanny and sent off to boarding school. Thatcher
      also left her mother out of her *Who's Who* entry, only giving her father
      credit for her existence (cf. *The Story of My Life*, above).

42   I have listed some from 'Noddy' later. Here are a few from the first
      'Famous Five' books: 'encrusted', 'forlorn', 'festooned', 'deputation',
      'disclosed', 'traipse', 'surly', 'dismal', 'doleful', 'ferociously', 'captors',
      'ransom', 'impassive', 'affable', 'obstinate', 'monotone', 'beseechingly',
      'bewilderment', 'niches', 'sarcastic', 'biddable'. A personal favourite is
      'stentorian', which I used to drop into compositions and conversations,
      having long forgotten that I had picked it up from Blyton; that is, till I went

back to her books as an adult. Blyton herself presumably took it from Homer.

43 This is actually page 15 in the article, but the pages are wrongly numbered: there are two page 16s, no 15.

44 Twelve books later is actually only seven years in Famous Five time. The cornflowers also shone between these two periods, but no matter.

45 This form of criticism runs right through children's literature, so that even its 'classics' are regarded as inferior in comparison with adult works. I have related this adult-oriented approach to the influence of Piaget, and his whole notion of the child as an incomplete adult, lacking in particular qualities (see Rudd, 1992 for more detail).

46 Such comparisons are not uncommon. McDowell (1972) sets up a similar contrast between Clive King's *Stig of the Dump* and Joyce's *Ulysses* in order to make a point. See Rudd (1995d) for a critique of this tactic.

47 Hunt (1995), in his recent reappraisal of Blyton, also contrasts her work with Grahame's, but grants her far more serious attention.

48 For Druce it is 'Dick and Anne [who] are virtually interchangeable ...' (1992, p. 120).

49 I would add Jane Turpin from Evadne Price's *Just Jane* (1928) and its sequels, an unduly neglected series about a feisty tomboy, easily a match for its inspiration, *Just William*.

50 Though Enid Blyton, very late on in life, made a similar comment (see chapter 8).

51 This too is apparent from Hildick's text for, after praising Blyton's ability to depict the unsavoury side of middle-class childhood, in a later chapter he laments that she does not give an authorial view on their reprehensible behaviour; in fact, she does worse, approving of it, touching 'the very core of childish malicious irrationality' (p. 135). However, Hildick does not question whether Blyton herself saw it as reprehensible. Obviously the paragons of childhood Blyton thought she was depicting are one and the same with Hildick's disagreeable snobs!

52 Fans of popular TV soaps and other series engage in similar behaviour, enjoying the fantasy (e.g. Hobson, 1982; Jenkins, 1992).

53 For reasons that I shall elaborate in chapter 9, this might be a tall order.

54   This is a particularly disappointing comment from Moss, given her famous article 'The 'Peppermint' lesson', where she explores why her daughter found a particularly cheap and 'totally expendable' text to be 'pure gold', reading it repeatedly over the years. Moss, realising its personal relevance for her adopted daughter, makes the sensible comment that 'a book by itself is nothing', one can only assess its 'value by the light it brings to a child's eye' (Moss, 1977, p. 141-2).

55   There certainly are flaws, though, and I shall detail some significant ones later, but a minor one will illustrate the contrast with Dixon's coincidences (leaving keys in doors); thus, in *FGIT*, a key is also turned and left in a lock, but then Julian manages to peer through the keyhole later, as though the key weren't there (*FGIT* p. 101).

56   One thinks of A.A. Milne's response to Dorothy Parker's criticism of his work:

>When, for instance, Dorothy Parker, as 'Constant Reader' in *The New Yorker*, delights the sophisticated by announcing that at page 5 of *The House of* [sic] *Pooh Corner* 'Tonstant Weader fwowed up' (sic, if I may), she leaves the book, oddly enough, much where it was. However greatly indebted to Mrs Parker, no Alderney, at the approach of the milkmaid, thinks 'I hope this lot will turn out to be gin', no writer of children's books says gaily to his publisher, 'Don't bother about the children, Mrs Parker will love it. (quoted in Thwaite, 1990, p. 336)

57   As other commentators have suggested, the whole notion of the stereotype needs rethinking, in that stereotypes are not necessarily negative, they often contain inconsistencies, and often have an empirical basis (Perkins, 1979). Blyton is obviously playing with the stereotype here; in Propp's phrase, 'everything drawn into a tale from outside is subject to its norms and laws' (quoted in Barker, 1989, p. 127). See chapter 6 for further discussion.

58   Sheila Ray has quoted some correspondence to me which suggests that this particular tragedy had very little to do with Blyton's books. They were simply what the journalist saw as an appealing angle. This, of course, is revealing in itself.

59   Beryl Bainbridge also comes to Noddy's defence in Knowles (1988), as do Jane Asher and Mike Read. Brian Blessed claims that her books were also popular in his working class youth: 'When I was growing up in Yorkshire, we were very poor, so we swapped our Enid Blyton hardbacks for marbles' (Ewbank, 1990, p. 8). Others I have come across, singing the praises of a Blyton-filled childhood are: Janet Ahlberg (Foster, 1992); Heather Brigstocke (life peer, and former High Mistress of St Paul's Girls School), who confessed, 'I loved Enid Blyton and the Famous Five'; Anne Fine; Di Trevis, the opera and theatre director, who says more-or-less the same,

verbatim, adding, 'It was a fantasy middle-class world so far removed from my own ...on a big council estate'; Hanif Kureishi, the Anglo-Indian film director (Lambert, 1993); Pat McLoughlin, the person responsible for serials on *Woman's Hour* for over twenty-two years, who explains how she learnt to read overnight: 'I was so entranced I have never forgotten the magic. From then on I used to save up for Enid Blyton. I almost didn't want to grow up because I didn't want to get too old to read Enid Blyton' (Kirby, 1992); lastly, Ken Follett, who claimed, 'Enid Blyton was the inspiration for my writing career' (reported on The Enid Blyton Pages on the Internet, 1997).

In the *New Statesman & Society*, there is a column where people express their 'Influences'. Again, Blyton features prominently: Simon Regan names The Faraway Tree [sic] as a book 'that you would want everyone to see, read or hear (Regan, 1993; he is the editor of *Scallywag*; in the *Adventures of the Wishing-Chair*, the children actually visit the Land of Scally-Wags!). The actor and writer Nabil Shaban, in answer to the question 'What books and authors have had the greatest influence on your political beliefs?' responds with, amongst others, Plato, the Gospels, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Enid Blyton, Ghandi, Marx, Proudhon and Bakunin (Shaban, 1993); to a similar question, Max Clifford, though declaring that he 'can barely read', also cites Blyton (Clifford, 1993).

Elsewhere, Brian Patten (1995) is fulsome in his praise:

> Of all the scenes in all the books in all the libraries in all the world, the scene that had the deepest and most lasting effect on me, that kick-started my imagination and flooded it with strange possibilities, mysteries and wonder, that led me to love poetry and literature and much else, is a scene in which a group of children find steps leading down into the depths of a secret pool.

> God bless you Enid Blyton—I read your stories sitting on a cushion in a back alleyway in Liverpool. You helped me escape from a drab world. Hidden tunnels, lost passageways, the whole lichen-coated paraphernalia of forbidden places poured into my head and washed what seemed mundane reality aside. Your writing was repetitive and clumsy and bigoted, your villains were stereotyped, your characters all wooden but so what? You transported a million children beyond the reach of the grown-up thou-shalt-not world. You were a pied-piper and none of us cared that the pipe you played was wooden and ill-made. And those secret steps leading down into the secret pool? You know what, I think I invented them myself, but only because I read you first.

Christopher Milne's attitude is more complex, but typical again. He had met Blyton when she came to interview his father, in 1926, just before the Pooh books were published (Blyton, 1926). He confesses that *The Enid*

Blyton Book of Bunnies, which she had given him, he 'almost knew by heart' (p. 148); and yet, he decided not to stock her work in his bookshop. This is in contrast to most bookshops, even those of more radical persuasion, like Centreprise, where economics overcame ideology. It confessed to selling the Famous Five 'because of the continuous demand for them' (*New Statesman* (1980, 12 December, p. 19).

60   Suggestive evidence that this might not be the case has been available for a good while. In the U.S.A. a similar, lowly fate was feared for readers of the popular Stratemeyer series books (Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, etc). But this was confounded in a 1930 study, where not only were these books the most popular, but when I.Q. scores were taken into account, it was found that 'about twice as many series were reported by the people with greater mental ability' (quoted in Soderbergh, 1980, p. 69).

61   See the quotation from Margaret Clark's study of gifted readers later in my text, where the range of reading is also noteworthy.

62   I have given Leng's study some close attention because it is indicative of the problems of purely quantitative work. It is also highly regarded, being the exemplar for the later Schools Council study (Whitehead *et al.*, 1977). But for all its quantitative credibility—Leng looked at the reading of 1,055 children, aged 6-13, who attended certain local schools, and lived within one mile of Llanfair Public Library—the study falls down in not exploring the meaning of its data. Druce picks Leng up on a similar point:

> A ten-year-old girl brought back to the Library a book by Enid Blyton which she had taken out the previous day and had evidently much enjoyed. Finding no other Blyton on the shelves, and presumably failing to find any other book to suit her tastes, she took out again the very book she had just returned, and on three successive days the self-same thing occurred. (Leng, 1968, p. 187)

As Druce comments, 'It may have been ...that she was merely maintaining her hold on a valuable bargaining counter' (Druce, 1992, p. 41). Remarks like Brian Blessed's 'we were very poor, so we swapped our Enid Blyton hardbacks for marbles' (Ewbank, 1990, p. 8) suggest this might be likely.

63   This is not simply a nudge at a *double-entendre*, for Freeman (1969), at least semi-seriously, suggests an erotic frisson that some readers obtain from Blyton's obsessively reread books (see chapter 4)!

64   'Pour out the cocoa, Janet—and remember that we all like heaps of sugar' (*Go Ahead Secret Seven*, 1953, p. 20). It continues, 'She poured out the cocoa, and Peter handed round the sandwiches' (p. 21).

65   It is not mentioned by Ray (1982), Mullan (1987a) or Druce (1992). It is worth noting that St. Rollo's is also a co-educational boarding school (see text).

66   These anonymous sequels seem to draw on a wider tradition of school stories, including Elinor Brent-Dyer's 'Chalet School' series. In the latter, the protagonist, Joe Bettany, does return to the school, which is set up a mountain in Austria, marries, and has eleven children. Blyton herself might also have drawn on some of Brent-Dyer's ideas, for Joe also writes the Christmas plays and has aspirations to be a writer. She too has a temper.

There are also several parallels between these writers' lives—not least of which is their almost exact contemporaneity (1894-1969). Brent-Dyer came from a lower-middle class background too, and had a father who walked out on the family for another woman, which the young Brent-Dyer had to cover up. Lastly, Brent-Dyer also trained as a teacher, though she practised far longer than did Blyton (see McCelland, 1986, 1989).

67   To use such words now—in fact, to speak exactly the same words—would not be the same, however.

68   I was going to credit this term to Richard Walker, founder of *The Enid Blyton Book & Ephemera Collectors Society*, and I am sure he devised it. However, so also did Crago (1990, p. 103).

69   The novelisation is more correctly *Peter and Wendy* (1911), though many editions carry the title of the play.

There is a clear double standard when it comes to classics, which are aloud to stay unrevised. Thus the 'picanniny' tribe lives on, and children can not only be heartless and ruthless, but 'gay' too (Barrie, 1986, p. 217). Peter Pan can even say to Wendy, 'You are so queer' (*ibid.*, p. 133), though these have gone from Blyton. So too has the period slang—'wizard', 'gosh' and 'crikey', although, once again, they remain in Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954). Finally, 'niggers' live on in E. Nesbit, though they were removed from Blyton (and from Crompton's 'William', though more stealthily).

70   There are many parallels between Lewis's writing and Blyton's, although the former is frequently celebrated as a modern classic. Both use very intrusive narrators, both can write very loosely (Lewis has descriptions like 'a pretty enough scene'- *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* p. 97) and both can be patronising in style; for instance:

"Wherever is this?" said Peter's voice, sounding tired and pale in the darkness. (I hope you know what I mean by a voice sounding pale.) (*ibid.*, p. 98)

'This lasted longer than I could describe even if I wrote pages and pages about it.' (*ibid.*, p. 107)

Lewis is also fairly stereotypical in his sex roles, as Father Christmas puts it, "battles are ugly when women fight" (*ibid.*, p. 103); Lewis has very middle-class children, believes that one should not 'spare the rod', and even refers readers to his other books (e.g. *The Horse and His Boy*, p. 58 refers readers to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*). If they differed in anything, Blyton was more progressive when it came to educational matters, approving of co-educationals, which Lewis despised!

71   Peter Hunt also uses Blyton's Famous Five as as intertext for one of his children's novels (Hunt, 1985).

72   Perhaps they were influenced by the news that 'the recorded stories of Enid Blyton outsell even supergroups ...in Germany.' World Wide Audio Products have eight gold albums from sales of over 2 million in Germany (Manning, 1980).

73   My thanks to Mike Humphreys, for drawing this to my attention.

CHAPTER FOUR

NODDY - DISCURSIVE THREADS AND INTERTEXTUALITY IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF BLYTON'S TEXTS

Q: Why do elephants have big ears?
A: Because Noddy won't pay the ransom.

Though Shakespeare's our national bard
His poetry's terribly hard.
It would benefit those
Who were sitting their 'O's
If in *Lear* it was Noddy who starred.
- Roy Fuller (1976), p. 10

Nesbitt: [about to strike Burney] Ya little ..!
Burney: [pointing a warning finger] Lay one finger on me and you're in serious
                Sophie Bubble!
Nesbitt: [taken aback] Eh?
Burney: [he points to a book he's holding - *Do Look Out Noddy*] Violence is a
                running sore on the human spirit. Read your socially updated Noddy!
Nesbitt: Aye, that'll be right!
[He takes the book from Burney, hits him with it. Burney jumps up.]
Burney: Right! You're for the court of human rights!
- Ian Pattison *Rab C. Nesbitt* 'Touch'

'The Noddy books are not polysemic—they have no layers of meaning.'
- Diana Bentley, quoted in Faulks (1990).

INTRODUCTION

The Noddy books are the bane of any Blyton researcher's work. Blyton was

herself referred to in 'Noddy' terms, this character metonymically replacing her

name in newspaper stories. So too for Sheila Ray, and, in my own experience.

Noddy was first launched on the world in 1949, and, almost fifty years later, he

is her best-selling creation, not only in terms of books, but also merchandising;

'Noddy' material is even amongst the most valuable for Blyton collectors.

Part of the success is rightly attributed to the brilliant illustrations of Harmsen

van der Beek, who, unfortunately, did not live to illustrate any beyond the first

seven titles. It was certainly his illustrations that seemed to inspire Blyton in the

first place, thanks to David White of Sampson Low, and together they produced

some exceptional books for the period, with colour illustrations on every page. There were twenty-four books in the original series, though altogether there are probably over 200 titles bearing Noddy's name. It is the Sampson Low series, however, that I shall analyse, picking out what seem to be the significant discursive threads. The issue of racism will be dealt with separately in chapter 6.

After a brief overview of the books' history and popularity, this chapter is organised around three themes. First, I shall explore the various discursive threads that led to the production of 'Noddy', and to his subsequent development; this will involve examining Blyton's creative process, showing how closely her views accord with the modern notion of intertextuality, leading on to the recent rewriting of the texts. Second, I shall look at the order of things in the Toyland world. Lastly, the overt consumerism of this world will be considered.

NODDY— A BRIEF HISTORY

1949   David White of Sampson Low, Marston & Co. Ltd discovers, by mistake, the work of Dutch artist Harmsen Van Der Beek and arranges a meeting with Enid Blyton. They have an immediate rapport and later that year *Noddy Goes to Toyland* appears.

1951   The fourth book in the series, the controversial *Here Comes Noddy Again!*, is published, though nothing much is said about it till the 'sixties.

1953   Beek dies, after completing the seventh book, *Noddy at the Seaside*. Other artists take over.

1954   The play *Noddy in Toyland* begins its first Christmas run at the Stoll Theatre, London.

1955   A puppet series, *The Adventures of Noddy*, appears on the new commercial TV, first shown on Sunday 25 September.

1958   The first substantial criticism of Noddy appears in *Encounter*, by Colin Welch (1958), who describes Noddy as a 'witless, spiritless, snivelling, sneaking doll'.

1963   The last Noddy book, *Noddy and the Aeroplane* appears, though there was a twenty-fifth at the title stage, *Noddy Goes to the Moon.*

1960s   Social criticism of the books grows.

1968   Enid Blyton dies.

1975   There is a second ITV version of *Noddy*, by Cosgrove Hall, narrated by Richard Briers, without golliwogs.

1986   A simplified 2nd edition appears.

1987   An unsuccessful attempt to launch Noddy in America.

1990   3rd edition appears, with remastered drawings by Mary Cooper and revised text by Stella Maidment.

1992   BBC Enterprises purchase the 24-Noddy book series, for a reputed figure of £2-3 million, giving it control of worldwide distribution rights for TV, video, books, magazines and merchandising, though this was later successfully disputed by Trocadero.

1992   Noddy books are reported to have sold over 100 million copies, with overseas sales of 46 million.

1992   Cosgrove Hall puppet series launched on BBC.

In my survey, the 'Noddy' books were the fourth most popular with readers. However, Noddy as a character came second overall (just behind George), and if we look at the different age groups, Noddy vies with Timmy for being the most popular of all with 6-14 year olds. Interestingly, he is far more popular with boys than girls: he is second most popular with boys (13.1%), just behind Timmy, but fifth for girls (5.2%). Unsurprisingly perhaps, the Noddy books were the most commonly 'first read' Blyton books (22%), just ahead of the Five (20%). They also vied with the Five for second place as the least favourite Blyton books (Noddy 8.1%, Five 8.3%). Reasons given for this were that the books were 'silly', 'babyish' and 'boring'. Clearly, it was important for many of the more sophisticated readers to distance themselves from the little nodding man. As one pithily wrote in response to the question about their least favourite character, 'Noddy—because it was' (m). Another respondent criticised his brother: '[he] still reads Noddy books and he is 11½ years old' (m, 13).

For many of the young, however, the Noddy books are 'magic', and even for some older readers they still hold a fascination: 'Now, I still just like the ideas in the Noddy books of living in toyland. The situations which the characters get into are quite surreal in parts .... I think it prepared me for Vonnegut (who I moved on to later)' (m). The leader of the avant-garde group 'Current 93' lists Noddy as amongst his biggest influences, alongside Aleister Crowley and Tibetan Buddhism. He writes, 'We are the Final Church of the Noddy Apocalypse. He's a character in children's books who I find very, very surrealistic' (Tibet, 1987). No doubt this inspired them to feature a crucified Noddy on the cover of their *Swastikas for Noddy* album.

CREATIVITY—DISCURSIVE THREADS AND INTERTEXTUALITY

Blyton's creative process has often been subject to attention, partly because of queries about whether she wrote all her stories herself, and partly because she personally was very interested in how she wrote. My own interest in pursuing this matter, which I have written about more extensively elsewhere (Rudd, 1996c, 1996d), is that it makes explicit the way that texts are weaves of discursive threads, supporting the post-structuralist conceptions of authorship outlined by Barthes (1977b) and Foucault (1986). They argue that an author is far less in control of her or his material than previous conceptions suggest; that any text is, in fact, a reworking of others, both literary and oral: snatches of conversation, idiomatic expressions, current news, personal experiences, and so forth.

It is curious how suspicious many have been about the way Blyton said she wrote (see chapter 3). Blyton herself was very interested in where all her material came from, though, and made a number of largely consistent comments about it over the years (Blyton, 1950, 1952, 1953, 1959; Sykes, 1962). She even interested a psychologist, Peter McKellar, in the matter, her letters to him being auctioned in 1994 for £5,400! This correspondence, between February 1953 and

May 1957, provided McKellar with a useful case-study of the creative process, referred to in his own works (McKellar, 1957; McKellar, 1989).[1]

In these Blyton admits that she recognises 'many things that are thrown up from my under-mind, transmuted and changed—a castle seen long ago—a dog—a small child—woods long forgotten, in a new setting ...' (Stoney, 1992, p. 218). Later, she elaborates:

> I think my imagination contains all the things I have ever seen or heard, things my conscious mind has long forgotten—and they have all been jumbled about till a light penetrates into the mass, and a happening here or an object there is taken out, transmuted, or formed into something that takes a natural and rightful place in the story—or I *may* recognise it—or I may not—I don't think that I use anything I have not seen or experienced—I don't think I could. I don't think one can take out of one's mind more than one puts in. ... Our books are facets of ourselves. (*ibid.*, p. 221)

Certainly, this would seem to be the case with the Noddy material, as I shall now detail. I shall begin by looking at its pre-texts, then discuss its con-text, picking up both on contemporary issues and more enduring themes. Lastly, the post-text—the rewrites—will be examined.

What first made me curious about the books was the way that Blyton linked Toyland with the world at large. This is only drawn attention to in two places: in the first book, where we learn that Noddy was created by Old Man Carver, from whom he ran away, and in *N11*, where we are introduced to Father Christmas, the 'King of Toyland'. The link between Toyland and our own is made explicit here, with toys being provided by the various villages of Toyland, then dispatched via Father Christmas to the children. Thus we find him exercising quality control, exploring a complaint that some of the balls do not bounce properly—in reply to which the Chief Bouncer 'promised to see that every ball in the village should have proper bouncing lessons before being sent to the world of boys and girls'; the golliwogs, on the other hand, are praised: "I've had very

good reports from boys and girls about their golliwogs—they love them very much. I want to give some praise here" (*N11* p. 40).

This seemed quite an alarming thought—that some toys were chosen and taken away to be the playthings of children. However, an earlier series of linked stories by Blyton, 'Tales of Toyland' (1942)[2], made the links more explicit, and were clearly the basis of the Noddy stories. I shall describe this earlier story in some detail, before pointing out the intertextual links.

We begin by meeting a Sailor doll, at first nameless, who lives in a big nursery with other toys. He is unhappy because the others don't like his jolliness, nor the fact that he sings loud, 'yoho' songs. At Christmas, a fairy-doll—also anonymous at first—arrives from the top of the Christmas tree. She too is resented by the others. They think she shouldn't belong in their toy-cupboard. The Sailor and the fairy-doll pair up—naming each other Jolly and Tiptoe respectively—and decide to escape to Toyland, though they haven't a clue of the way.

They ask directions fruitlessly till a rabbit responds, "Is that where Father Christmas lives?" and Tiptoe replies, "Yes, I think he *must* live in Toyland ...because he brings so many toys". So the rabbit directs them to "a brownie who lives in the wood over there, in an oak-tree. He knows Father Christmas. He might be able to tell you where Toyland is" (*Tales*, pp. 20-1). The Brownie obliges, though he comments that Tiptoe doesn't look like a toy. He directs them to a station down a rabbit hole, where they can get a train to Toyland. They enter a crowded carriage and are 'all aboard for Toyland' (to borrow a later phrase), only to be refused entry on their arrival, because of Tiptoe being a fairy. "She can't go to Toyland. Only toys live there" (*ibid.*, p. 24). However, with the help of a washer-woman, who helps disguise Tiptoe (shades of *The Wind in the Willows* here, and Toad's escape from gaol dressed up in similar fashion), they manage to get inside. However, they still have nowhere to live, there being no empty houses. Eventually, a policeman advises them to "Build one! ...Go to the

warehouse where toy bricks are stored and choose what you want" (*ibid.*, p. 29). They do so, taking a box filled with bricks, and build themselves a house.

For readers of *Noddy Goes to Toyland* (*N1*), several parallels might be noted; for example, there is the Brownie who, like Big-Ears, helps them on their way (although in her initial covering letter to Sampson Low, Enid confusingly refers to the brownie as 'Big Ears the pixie'[3]); there is the train journey motif, that Enid expressly (no pun intended) wanted as a feature on the jacket of each Noddy book; Tiptoe, like Noddy, is accused of not being a toy, and of course, Noddy too has problems finding accommodation, till a soldier (rather than a policeman) advises him to build his own, and he and Big-Ears collect the box of bricks for 'House-for-One'

The parallels by no means end there. We meet other characters who will later find their way into the more famous Toyland of Noddy. There is a Wobbly man called Mr. To-and-Fro. There are some soldiers who live next door, until their fort is completed; then they all decamp; and who then moves in but a teddy-bear called Bruiny, which is also the name of Noddy's neighbours' son in *N22* and *N23*. In fact, it is this that may have caused Enid some confusion in her later years: in the earlier Noddy books the bears' son is always referred to as 'little Tubby Bear'. On the other side of Jolly and Tiptoe lives a Clockwork Clown. We are also introduced to the Skittle family of nine, to a pink cat, and to a 'fat clockwork policeman', who is unnamed (though so is Mr. Plod till *N5*; in the new editions, however, he is named at his first appearance). Some other characters in *Tales of Toyland* that Blyton fans will know are Josie, Click and Bun, and the unfortunately named Golly, Woggie and Nigger—both sets of characters also having books of their own (the latter trio also appearing in the *Noddy in Toyland* play).

The Noddy books, of course, also feature a Sailor Doll, who sings 'very loud and rollicking songs' around a 'yo-ho' refrain (Noddy, like the toys in Jolly's nursery, also tells the Sailor Doll not to sing so loudly in *N12*). Of more interest

is the fact that one of the only times that Noddy changes outfit is in *N18*, where he dons a sailor's costume. Jolly the Sailor doll also goes off to sea in *Tales*. The latter travels in a boat, the *Saucy Sue*, with an elephant called Jumbo as mate, and they visit 'Roll-About Town', a place of bouncing balls. On their way there, they also pass other districts familiar to readers of Noddy: Rocking-Horse Village and Humming Top Town. The behaviour of the bouncing balls should also be familiar to those who know *N4*. In *Tales* the balls 'came rolling up to see the ship. ... Some of them bounced themselves instead of rolling, and one of them bounced right on top of the *Saucy Sue*, nearly swinging it over' (*Tales*, p. 67)—just as in *N4*, it is Noddy's car which is bounced into. It is also worth pointing out that, whilst at sea, Noddy spies someone sitting in his car (which is following the ship): "Who's that in my car? It looks like a fairy doll from the top of a Christmas tree," (*N18*, p. 41) he remarks.

I have already mentioned the common element of Father Christmas. In *Tales*, we are told that he comes to stay in a castle in Toyland once a year, in order "to get toys from Toyland to put into his sack to take to children" (*Tales*, p. 89). Again, as in *N11*, Father Christmas arrives in the street with his four reindeer, but Jolly and Tiptoe, unlike the little nodding man, are not pleased to see him, fearful of being taken back to the nursery they ran away from.

The 'choosing time' is a strange scene, reminiscent of Judgement Day, with Father Christmas 'up in the big toy castle, sitting on his throne, his red cloak flowing out round him. He sat there, fat and jolly, making jokes as the toys marched by' (*Tales*, p. 93). And, of course, only a few are chosen, in a eugenically sound way: 'Only balls that bounced well, only tops that hummed properly, toy animals that were quite perfect, and dolls that looked happy and smiley were chosen' (*ibid.*, p. 92). Jolly and Tiptoe hide, but are eventually found and summoned. However, when Father Christmas finds that they have "been out in the big world before", they are saved; as Father Christmas explains, "Don't you know that toys are only allowed to go out into the world once?

There aren't enough adventures to go round more than once, you know. You are taking somebody else's turn!" (*ibid.*, p. 97).

These threads have been teased out in some detail to show the links, but I'd like to pursue the name of the character 'Noddy' still further. For, in *Teachers World* there are two earlier references to Noddy,[4] showing that the nodding head was not the sole impetus for naming the character. In the 26 August 1931 issue there is a story called 'Tom Noddy', about a boy who is always bottom of the class, mainly because he is so forgetful (the name here seems to connote the notion of nodding as in the phrase 'Homer nods'). Of more interest is a story called 'Hot roast chestnuts', which appeared later that same year.[5] This features 'Noddy the gnome', who sells chestnuts round Fairyland from his barrow. He goes round trying to find people to help him, among whom there is a frog called 'Big-Eyes'.[6]

We can see here, then, that the origins of both Noddy and Big-Ears have their roots much earlier, in juxtapositions of names and incidents of which Blyton herself was probably unaware. In fact, it seems that the influences go back even further than this. Some Blyton collectors have come across a few postcards with movable parts. They are undated, but thought to be just pre-First World War. The one illustrated here (fig. 4-1) [7] shows Nickleby Noddy with his dog, who is called 'Timmy'! Though there is no known connection, it is fascinating that this character has a bell on his hat (itself rather like a certain policeman's helmet), and he has pointed ears— just as we might have expected 'Noddy the gnome' to have. Also, if the tag on the left is pulled, the doll nods his head! The colours are also of note: the bell is yellow, as is the cowl, the jacket is red, together with the shoes, and the trousers are blue—Noddy's colours exactly. Whilst there is no firm

Figure 4-1 Nickleby Noddy postcard, with nodding head

evidence, the closeness of resemblance would suggest that Enid saw these in her formative years and that she had some subsequent influence on van der Beek's. choice of colours for Noddy's outfit.

Let me bring in a related issue here, concerning the origin of the word 'noddy' to designate something simplistic. Many seem to regard this as deriving from Blyton's creation. In fact, Peter Hunt, in the authoritative *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Hunt 1996, p 69) claims that Noddy 'has entered the English language as a dismissive phrase for idiotic simplicity', little knowing that this usage is far older, appearing, ironically, in Nickleby Noddy's predecessor, *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838): 'To think that I should be such a noddy!' (*OED*, 1989, x, p. 459). However, apocryphal though Hunt's derivation is, it has become an actuality. Thus, in a recent work on education the following sentence appears: 'A 'Noddy and Big Ears' account of a skill or a concept can provide a basic framework, on to which can be grafted more sophisticated understanding' (Peelo, 1994, p. 97).

A similar history occurs with the slang term for a policeman, 'plod', thought to derive from this series. However, a social historian has recorded its use in the 'thirties, referring to 'the slow-witted Constable Plod of the comics [who] popped up in many a guise' (Valery, 1991, p. 148). Thus Blyton actually took the term from common usage (like many of her names), and used it for several policemen in her stories before Noddy was conceived.[8]

Other references to her 'pre-texts' are clearly more conscious than many of the above. Thus we find Mary Mouse appearing in Toyland (*N4*), though she had her own series of strip books earlier. We also find the Saucepan Man, who had appeared far earlier in *The Magic Faraway Tree*, in *N20* and *N21*. He now has a donkey, which we actually see him acquire, thanks to Noddy, in the stage play *Noddy in Toyland*.[9]

Besides her own texts, Blyton was also clearly influenced by the work of other writers. The donkey, 'Ee-Aw'[10], sounds suspiciously close to Milne's Eeyore, though in name only. Blyton also uses capitalisation in a Milnean way, to emphasise important statements. Thus Big-Ears talks about a "Very Big Worry" (*N5* p. 22)— in fact, at one point it is a 'VERY BIG WORRY' (*ibid.*, p. 21). Some parallels with *Pinocchio* are noted below (see page 142), and Lewis Carroll would seem another big influence; for instance, in the first book the court scene climax is clearly reminiscent of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* There is also much sub-Carrollian word play, as for instance in *N6*, where Noddy says, "I can't add up. I can't add down either" (*N6* p. 32); or, in *N3*, where Noddy has established that he should charge "sixpence all the way there and back" (p. 11), but doesn't know what a single fare might be, "going there and not back". Mr. Tubby replies, somewhat confusingly, "It's exactly the same as if you go back and not there". As the toy cat says, "But can you go back if you haven't been there?" (*N3* pp. 16-17).

The cat here brings to mind Carroll's felines, and some exchanges certainly have this 'semiotic' word play about them, as we have to learn how things signify. Thus, the toy cat complains to Noddy, "I wish you wouldn't say *no* and nod your head at the same time ... It's very muddling" (*N3* p. 16)[11], which clearly brings to mind the cat Dinah in *Through the Looking-Glass*:

> "If they would only purr for 'yes,' and mew for 'no,' ... so that one could keep up a conversation! But how *can* you talk with a person if they *always* say the same thing?"
> On this occasion the kitten only purred: and it was impossible to guess whether it meant 'yes' or 'no.' (Carroll, 1970, p. 341)

Meaning, as we know, is based on difference: one cannot mean if one uses the same signifier for opposing meanings.

So far I have concentrated predominantly on the literary pre-texts of Blyton's work, but I'd now like to turn to the wider cultural reference points that inform the work: the con-text.

The post-war period in which the books were conceived was a time of social upheaval, with the old class system of the pre-war years shaken up; there was also a new sense of cosmopolitanism, after many English had encountered foreigners for the first time in their lives, and many had also seen their first black people—both during the war (either overseas or at home, in the form of black G.I.s), and after, with the first wave of immigrants from the West Indies arriving in the late 1940s. For many, it was also a time of homelessness, both in England and more widely across Europe. Lastly, the phenomenon of the 'spiv' was seen as a social problem, with a thriving black market.

In the series we are introduced to Noddy as something of a refugee, literally, found naked in the woods having fled Old Man Carver's house, because he fears a lion that the carpenter is carving. Big-Ears takes him to Toyland, but there is doubt about whether he will be allowed to stay there, as stated by the policeman: "Only toys are allowed to stay in Toy Village" (*N1* p. 27). The follow up questions—

> "Have you ever been stood on mantelpieces?"
> "No, never," said poor Noddy.
> "Have you ever been played with by children?" asked the policeman.
> "No, never," said Noddy. (*ibid.*, p. 28)

—remind me most of the House of Un-American Activities questions: 'Have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?'

There are certainly echoes of the plight of new immigrants to England here. There is a general sense of people finding where they belong, of each having their separate patch, albeit all are thrown together in Toy Village. The next concern for Noddy is finding a house, when all are occupied:

> "Could you just let Noddy live with you till he gets a house of his own?" asked Big-Ears. "Or do you know anywhere he could stay? He wouldn't

mind sleeping anywhere—even in a garage—would you Noddy?" (*ibid.*, p. 30)

He is directed to a toy farm, 'but the dogs barked so loudly at them that they were afraid to open the gate' (*ibid.*). Noddy reflects on this:

> "It's no good. I shan't be able to find anywhere to live here," said Noddy, sadly. "I'll have to take the train again and go back to Old Man Carver." (*ibid.*, p. 32)

Again, this could very easily be the plight of any new immigrant seeking accommodation in London, to find nowhere available, to have dogs ward them off—and yet, it could just as readily be the plight of some of the indigenous population, many of whom were dispossessed and homeless. There were many 'squatters' at this time, particularly around London, holding protests to highlight their situation.

Noddy's next step in the first story is to go and get some bricks to build his own house—a kit called 'House-for-One', which seems very like the post-war prefabs that were so popular—"a back room for a bedroom and a front room for living in. No stairs. We can't manage those" (*ibid.*, p. 33, spoken by Big-Ears). Then, after they've erected the house, they go next door to Noddy's new neighbours, Mr and Mrs Tubby, for tea. Their house has an upstairs, with a 'nice little bathroom. Noddy didn't even know what that was!'—a point Big-Ears explicitly emphasises, showing Noddy's naiveté, "He doesn't even know what a bath is!" (*ibid.*, p. 41). This was certainly a common view of the ignorant, whether working-class or foreign, that the bath, that mark of civilised humanity, would only be used for keeping coal in.

I am not suggesting, of course, that Blyton has written a social allegory here, simply that she was influenced by the events of her time. Neither am I suggesting that young readers will pick up on any of this—it is merely the raw material that gives shape to her fantasy. However, I would suggest that children

will relate to the feeling of being thrust into a strange world, and of learning how to fit in, how to belong—part of which involves learning the order of things.

I shall enlarge on this in more detail shortly, but first I'd like to finish this section by looking at the way the various discursive threads have been textually re-worked since Blyton's time. What might be called the post-text. My aim here will be to show how an author's works are not only open to different interpretations (through readers providing their own personal and cultural contexts), but are subject to more constraining pressures, through textual and pictorial revision. (Apart from physical revision, the reading of texts can also be constrained by more amorphous cultural discourses—as of racism and sexism. These are larger issues, and have been treated as such elsewhere.)

One of the main accusations levelled at Blyton is the poor quality of her writing, with banal, deliberately monosyllabic, vocabulary. Reading through this series, though, I was surprised at some less than expected words: e.g. 'unexpectedly', 'wrench', 'precious', 'dolefully' , 'rapturously', 'extraordinary', 'becalmed', 'horde, 'surge' 'mischievous', 'belching', 'gallivant', 'mournfully', 'overhauled', 'solemnly', and 'dreadful'. Interestingly, the second edition pandered far more to the stereotype of Blyton and the Blytonesque, removing most of the above and generally simplifying her prose, resulting in stories that were about half their original length. Mary Tapissier, then director of children's publishing at Macdonald, justified this by saying that the books 'seem very long and have language that they [the children] do not experience' (Bates, 1987).[12] In the third edition there has been more attention given to the original text, but even here, at times, the polysyllables have been removed; for instance, taking the above list, 'unexpectedly', 'becalmed' 'surge' and 'dreadful' have been replaced, respectively, with, 'just then', 'isn't moving' and 'come', whilst "Oh, how DREADFUL!" becomes "Oh dear".[13] It is as if there is an acceptance that Blyton must conform to her stereotype, even to the adding of exclamation marks at various points (e.g. *N10** pp. 11, 53, 56).

Revisions are always contentious. Even classic authors have had their texts changed where it was felt that typographical errors had been made, or wrong words used, but, the more popular the author, the more such amendments seem to be regarded as acceptable. The third edition is certainly more sensitive than the abortive second, but it is still erratic. Some errors in the original have been amended; for instance, mistakes such as Big-Ears doing car hooter impressions—"Sorry to frighten you, rabbits," called Big-Ears, "but we're in a hurry. Parp-parp!" (*N3* p. 40)—are now, more appropriately, left to the car.[14] There are also attempts to standardise place and character names (e.g. Toy Town[15]; Little Tubby vs. Bruiny Bear), and to correct some stylistic features, such as Blyton's sometimes ambiguous use of pronouns ('it knocked it over', *N2* p. 30), idiosyncratic use of prepositions ('built it of toy bricks' *N2* p. 8) and use of the present tense instead of the past. But this is done in such an *ad hoc* manner that any policy is unclear: stylistic excrescences remain (e.g. "Fancy singing it all out without making a mistake", *N6** p. 54), together with incomprehensible sentences like "And I sold a bell to Mrs. Sailor Doll for the little donkey she has for Sammy Sailor Doll", albeit, the sex of the doll *has* been changed: it is now 'Susie' (*N8** p. 38). Even where Blyton has used the wrong word, this sometimes remains, as in "parked nose to tail in a neat row!" (*N2** p. 50), which should clearly be 'line', not 'row'. Though the words 'gay' and 'queer' have generally been removed, others, like 'jerked' and madly'—replaced in most instances——are still extant.[16]

Certain changes have obviously been prompted by the illustrations, where they conflicted with the original text, and, since it is easier to change text rather than illustration, Blyton's words have proved the more expendable. For example, 'fluffy dress' becomes 'spotty dress', because this is what the illustration depicts (*N16** p. 36); in another instance, Noddy is described outside Big-Ears' house as being 'down below'—the author clearly envisaging Big-Ears looking out of an upstairs window; however, as Beek has depicted the brownie looking from a downstairs window, the text has been amended to 'outside' (*N4** p. 46).

In some instances, though, the illustrations have been changed—notably, of course, in replacing the golliwogs,[17] but also to increase ethnic diversity and redress the gender imbalance. However, revision has occurred elsewhere too; for instance, where the text describes Noddy's head nodding and his bell jingling, though the illustration shows him hatless (*N17** p. 8). Unfortunately, there is still a lack of consistency—so that no revision has been made in a similar case elsewhere (*N13** pp. 45-6). Likewise, in *N3** (p. 49) Noddy should be shown wearing a fur round his neck, to make it consistent with the related pictures—but he is not.

But one of the most puzzling revisions occurs in *N17*. When Noddy returns to his house, the original describes Big-Ears, Mr. Plod, Mr. Golly and the Tubby Bears being there (p. 37). In the revision, Mr. Golly has obviously been replaced by Mr. Sparks, but Mrs. Tubby Bear has also been removed—from both picture and text. I presume the idea was to use her outline to create Mr. Plod (a device used elsewhere), except that no Mr. Plod has been put in. This anomaly is then compounded in the illustration on the following page of the new edition, where the Bumpy dog flings himself out of the house and knocks them all over— including Mrs. Tubby—who, it should be remembered, had been erased from both text and illustration on the previous page. Big-Ears, on the other hand, expressly mentioned in the text as having been knocked over, is not pictured. Finally, Mrs. Tubby comes up several pages later, as if unaware of events, asking, "What's the matter?" (*N17** p. 42). Here, the revisions have not cleared up inconsistencies, only created more![18]

These might seem minor points, but I was surprised at how perceptive the children were in pointing out these errors—and more. Their views on the morality of changing a writer's text were as varied as adults, who were also asked. But, if one were to generalise, the majority thought it ethically unacceptable. As an 11 year-old girl put it: ' 'Cos if someone's rewritten them they shouldn't really be allowed to put Enid Blyton's name on it, really, should they? Because it's not Enid Blyton's work any more.' A 15 year-old boy is

more legalistic: ' 'Cos like, if she had it in her will, or something, that they could change it, then they could have done but if they never, then she might not have wanted it changed.' Others simply saw it as historical fact: 'that's what it was like when she wrote about it', therefore it should stand. Many maintained this principle—even if, ideologically, they approved of the revision:

> Yes that's a good change ...but it's still... they shouldn't change it because it's not, now, it's not Edin [sic]Blyton's real book ... 'cos they changed it. They should have left it how it is, or they should re-wrote it and written it by whoever changed it. Instead of leaving it as Enid Blyton.

Here a 14 year-old Asian boy is talking about smacking, the original Miss Rap having been replaced by Miss Prim[19]. As he argued, ideologically the change was 'right because them kind of books, only really young people read them. And if they had the idea of teachers hitting them they probably scared of going to school.' Many others took this view, always speaking on behalf of younger, more vulnerable children—never themselves.

Others were also against modifying the text, but for different reasons—taking what might be termed a 'tabloid' view: 'They'd have more discipline if they didn't change them' (f, 9). This view was endorsed by older children, too:

> I don't think they should be changed either because you've got to portray, I think you've got to portray like, sort of, discipline from an early age... . If you start showing them you should get away with it in books and things, they tend to get a general appearance of behaviour—just by reading...books that can symbolise it. (m, 14).

Others, yet again, were simply amused at the concern over such a small matter, given the prevalence of violence elsewhere:

Daisy:	Well they should read some of these modern books, I mean, there's worse than getting spanked. People get shot and things, in a lot of the books.
Dan:	Yeah, and strangled.
William:	Tubby Bear shot ...shot Noddy [laughter] (11 year olds)

and

> I suppose, if you take it in—with the way that most cartoons, I mean little animals are getting anvils dropped on their heads, and being blown-up. I mean, a slap, compared to that!—especially when it's ... I mean, if it was, rather than like Noddy, if it was like, children, and then, some person in a house, maybe they wouldn't be able to distinguish it. (m,17)

As I said earlier, the variety of views is similar to that expressed by adults. It also needs to be emphasised that this was what the children thought *in the abstract*. In the context of the story, the smacking was thoroughly enjoyed, and, when they were asked about their favourite part, many would refer to it (one group talked animatedly about playing schools in their back garden, with smacks for naughtiness, an idea borrowed from 'Noddy').[20]

More surprising were the children's explanations of the changes. Most of them suspected some dubious reason, like jealousy: 'They thought, "if I change it people will think I wrote it"' (f, 10); even as young as 7 this was posited: ' 'Cos, they wanted like, to get the same ideas, because Enid Blyton had brilliant ideas, and they're just pinching the ideas' (m); commercial gain was another suggested motive, as this 9 year-old indicates: 'If it's the same old thing all the time, they wouldn't enjoy it any more, and they'd say, "Oh, I've read that one before", but if they say it's a new word, they'll think that it's a new book and it's new pages, new things and new words ...' (f). This 11 year old is more direct: 'other authors are just rewriting the same thing with a few little changes and getting quite a lot of money out of it when it was like, all Enid Blyton's doing...' (f, 11). As is apparent, the children are quite pragmatic: the driving force is commercial, removing elements that it was felt would impede the acceptability of the books—though even this can never cater for all tastes, as recent objections to the name 'Big-Ears' indicate[21].

Having looked at the discursive constitution—and reconstitution—of the texts, I would now like to see how these various threads are realised in two particular thematic concerns: the order of things and consumerism.

NODDY AND THE ORDER OF THINGS

Many children's books are concerned with 'the order of things', with understanding 'the rules of the game', *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* being the most celebrated. This is a concern of the Noddy books, too, both for the reader trying to understand Toyland society, and for the central character, Noddy, who, as said above, is trying to establish his place in the scheme of things. At certain times this becomes almost an existential quest, as at the very beginning when he is found in the woods by Big-Ears, wandering naked and nameless, on all fours. We learn that he was made out of wood by Old Man Carver. Remarkably, Noddy knows the order of his own creation:

> "He made wooden feet, and then wooden legs, and then a round wooden body, and then wooden arms and hands, and then a wooden neck, and then a round wooden head," said the little man.
> "And did he stick them all together and make *you*?" asked Big-Ears.
> (*N1* p. 10)

Like Pinocchio, there seems to have been some consciousness even in his wooden formlessness, though it is only collectively that these bits become a '*you*', as Big-Ears puts it—with the addition of blue bead eyes, and hair from a cat's fur. It is also worth noting that, again like Pinocchio, his creator is male, and a carpenter, like Jesus's father, Joseph, albeit both are very pagan creations. The illustration of Old Man Carver, with a cat by his side, certainly seems to owe something to Gepetto in Disney's 1940 version of the story, which also added a cat, Figaro. However, whereas in Collodi's story the creation eventually becomes reunited with his creator, and learns to love him, in Blyton's Noddy, the creation never returns; in fact, Noddy never mentions Old Man Carver again. Noddy claims he left because he was lonely, but does not consider whether his creator might also be lonely. It is perhaps worth remembering Blyton's own inability, psychologically, to return to her mother (who died the year after Noddy's creation), and physically, to her father.

I have called this concern 'existential' for several reasons, but mainly because of the distinction between being and non-being, which seems central to the series. In a way, this is the *raison d'être* of toys, to be invested with life of some sort, and Blyton seems to celebrate such animation throughout Toyland, whether it be in Bouncing Balls or Rocking Horses. Even more dependent things are given some form of volition—Noddy's car, for example—and, beyond this, everyday objects, like teeth, raindrops and hats. Thus, in *N6* Big-Ears explains to Noddy that his hat keeps coming off "because it's cross with you for getting a swollen head" (p. 21)[22]. Mr. Plod also has recalcitrant headgear:

> "Come back, helmet!"
> But the helmet took no notice. It was having a lovely time, bumping and bouncing and rolling along. Ha—this is better than sitting still on Mr. Plod's head! Mr. Plod ran after it at once. (*N21* p. 17)

We even have the helmet's thoughts here, in a sudden shift of narrative voice, and I have already drawn attention to it as an example of Piagetian animistic thinking (chapter 2).[23] However, Blyton is more likely to have developed her ideas from Froebel, who developed a stage theory much earlier:

> ...the child at this stage imparts to each thing the faculties of life, feeling, and speech. Of everything he imagines that it can hear. Because the child himself begins to represent his inner being outwardly, he imputes the same activity to all about him, to the pebble and chip of wood, to the plant, the flower, and the animal. (Froebel, *Education of Man*, quoted in Lawrence, 1970, pp. 252-3)[24]

It is of note that most of the stories begin with Noddy waking up—coming to life—for, having animated things, there is the responsibility of keeping them alive. Sleep, therefore, is a particularly tenuous state, which is why Noddy is so carefully lowered into unconsciousness:

> "It's dark and it's quiet,
> I'm going to sleep;
> My eyes are tight shut,

They can't even peep;
I'll dream of old Big-Ears,
And dear Tessie Bear;
I'm going to Dreamland,
And now—
I—
  am—
    THERE!"

And so he was, fast asleep, dreaming of having tea with Big Ears and little Tessie Bear. (*N17* pp. 8-9)

This is found elsewhere in Blyton's writing, too (e.g. in the 'Famous Five') and I shall return to it later.

Of course, different things have their own 'species-being', which might be very different from our own. Blyton likes to comment on the Toy skittles, for example:

The road was full of skittles doing their shopping. Noddy didn't bother to hoot at them, because they never minded being knocked down.
    "That's the best of skittles," said Noddy, knocking over a small boy-skittle.
(*N9* p. 18)

The tension between giving these toys their own *raison d'être* and anthropomorphising them is seldom a problem, but it does surface in the treatment of animals, where some are animated toys, with the power of speech, whilst others are mute, kept as pets.[25]. Big-Ears' cat, Whiskers, is an example of the latter, and the issue is actually highlighted by Blyton:

"Could you tell me if you have seen a quite *ordinary* cat here, [sic] asked Noddy. "A cat that only says 'meow' or 'purr-purr' or 'hiss-hiss'."

The reply comes:

> "...I did see a common-looking black cat running through here on four
> paws yesterday—*on four paws*! Fancy that! He didn't even know how
> to walk properly!" (*N16* pp. 35-6)

But even if there is tension here, everything does have its place, apart from Noddy. Just as for any young child, it is Noddy's task to find out where he fits. At the very beginning, when he is nameless and naked, he and Big-Ears pass through various towns on the train—Golliwog Town, Rocking-Horse Town, and Clockwork-Mouse Town—and Noddy enquires, "Is there a Nodding-Man Station?" (*ibid.*, p. 20). His search for identify and a place to belong is also a concern of others. Big-Ears tells him, "You're not a brownie, so you can't live in my town," adding, "You're not exactly a toy either—but you're very like one" (*ibid.*, p. 11). The forces of law and order also want to know whether Noddy has a right to be in Toyland, for,

> "Only toys are allowed to stay in Toy Village."
> "I *think* I'm a toy," said Noddy, nodding his head in fright. "I know I
> don't belong to the fairy folk. Please let me stay here. I'm sure I'm a
> toy."
> "You might be an ornament," said the policeman, sternly. "Like a
> china pig. That's an ornament, unless it's a money-box pig, then it's a
> toy. You look rather like an ornament. Have you ever been stood on
> mantelpieces?"
> "No, never," said poor Noddy.
> "Have you ever been played with by children?" asked the policeman.
> "No, never," said Noddy.
> "Well, dear me—it seems as if you're not an ornament and not a toy
> either," said the policeman. "You'll have to come before the Court
> tonight, and we'll decide just *what* you are!" (*ibid.*, pp. 27-8)

A concern with where one belongs, of course, is partly determined by issues of class and gender (ethnicity, also an issue, is discussed elsewhere). Obviously, by removing characters from the real world and making them animals or toys it is often possible to conceal these issues, though not to erase them. In Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, for example, the individualised animals are all of the leisured classes, whereas the amorphous rabble of stoats and weasels—the baddies—are distinctly working-class. The main characters are also generically

male—'Toad', 'Mole' and so on—with females curiously marginalised. However, Blyton, I would suggest, keeps these issues at least partly in view.

Taking the class issue first, aside from the king—Father Christmas who only puts in one appearance—there are a number of leisure-class individuals, whilst there are also those who seem simply to serve, like the milkman and postman (neither of whom seem to own their own businesses). These individuals are not invited to parties, do not ride in taxis, and are generally not seen 'about town' buying things. Both the postman and the milkman have cause to complain about their lot—and this they do. The postman complains about delivering letters inviting people to parties, but never being invited himself (*N16*), and the milkman complains about others going on holiday when he cannot (*N15*). It is also worth noting that these two are depicted as adult humans, as are other functionaries in Toyland (e.g. the police).

It might still be protested that these are hardly working-class. Certainly there is an absence of workers. One might wonder just what this economy is based on, given the amount of consumption going on. There are no miners, no road-menders or sweepers, nor factory workers. There is, however, one very interesting picture in the first book, of Golly Town, which depicts it as significantly different from the usual rural settings (fig. 4-2). The characters here are clearly in a park, in what looks like an urban
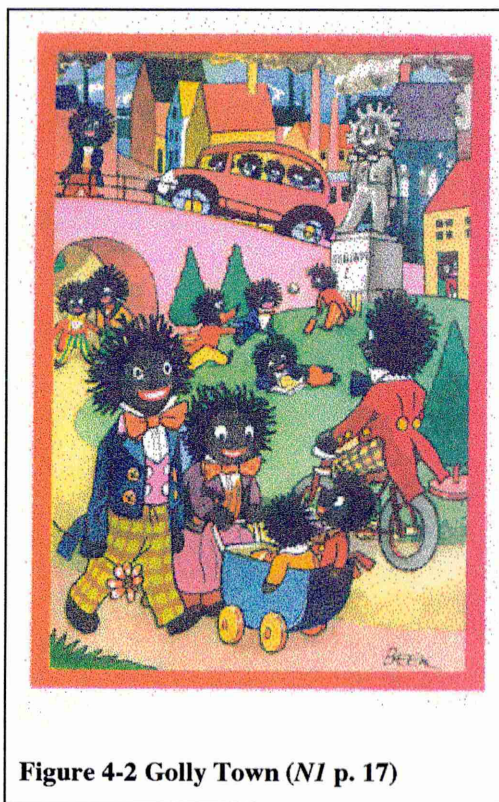
Figure 4-2 Golly Town (*N1* p. 17)

townscape, with a back-ground of belching factory chimneys. There is no textual justification for this depiction, so the extent that Blyton was aware of it is

unknown (certainly, the only other time Golly Town is depicted, it is more picturesque - *N11* p. 42). The only explicit reference to class occurs when Noddy is looking for work at Four-Chimney House, where one of the servants goes and fetches the mistress, 'a very beautiful doll with curly golden hair and bright blue eyes' (*N2* p. 14). Noddy, though, is clearly one of the servants, and is asked to sweep the chimney.

So, one could say that class is not particularly concealed in these books. More significant is the view we get of it, which is from fairly low down in the hierarchy, with neither Noddy nor Big-Ears being part of the establishment. Noddy certainly has to work for his living, and has a great deal of trouble being accepted (indeed, this never fully happens).[26]

Let us now move on to consider gender. Toys are usually without genitalia, and therefore, provide the opportunity for a loosening of gender bonds. Certainly, there are the dainty dolls, and, for some reason, cats tend to be female, dogs male. But Noddy himself is more androgynous. In fact, this reputedly caused him problems in Australia(Knowles, 1988), where his long lashes were regarded as making him effeminate (clearly a euphemistic way of saying he was 'queer'); not only that, but in many pictures, he often appears to be wearing lipstick on full red lips (especially*N11* pp. 15, 17). (It is notable that the gender of the judge has been changed in new editions of*N1*, without needing to change the illustrations at all.)

However, it is not just the illustrations, for Blyton's text supports this feeling of androgyny. Thus in the first story Noddy puts on a blue doll's bonnet to wear (*N1* p.24), and in *N6* Mrs Tubby lends Noddy a bonnet trimmed with flowers to wear in place of his hat. It is only when others laugh at him that he abandons it. Interestingly, some of the younger children
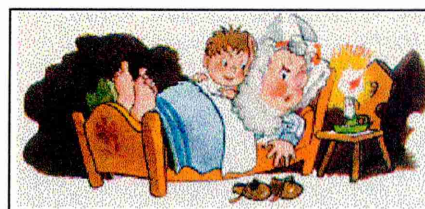
Figure 4-3 Noddy and Big-Ears in bed (*N2* p. 34)

I spoke to referred to Noddy as 'she', sometimes correcting themselves, or being corrected by others—but the slips were definitely there. This aspect of Noddy has often been criticised, but he could also be seen as refreshingly sensitive—in fact, an example of the 'nineties New Man at his advanced age of forty-something!—often bursting into tears without compunction. Though many snigger at his relationship with Big-Ears which has been made less physical in the new edition, it is pleasantly unsullied (see figs 4-3,4-4):

> "...if you can squeeze into my tiny bed, you can sleep with me tonight." ...they squashed into Big-Ears' tiny, soft bed, put their arms round one another to stop themselves from rolling out, and fell fast asleep. (N2 pp.33-4)
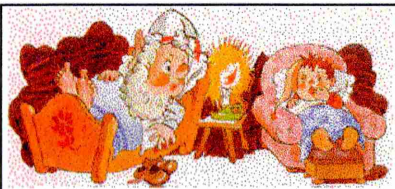
Figure 4-4 Noddy and Big-Ears in bed,(N2*- revised edition, p. 34)

Similar sentiments are expressed elsewhere: 'Best of all he had got Big-Ears staying for supper, and sleeping with him that night' (N3 p. 59); "You are a good friend to me, Big-Ears, and I love you very much" (N13 p. 43). Big-Ears, an avuncular figure, gives Noddy security, letting him 'creep into his kind, friendly arms' (N7 p. 50). Noddy has a similarly open friendship with Tessie Bear, who, aside from Big-Ears, is his main confidante in the series. Thus, when Noddy is upset and cries, Tessie Bear comes in and hugs him, and they hold hands, sitting on his bed (N8). In a later book, Tessie Bear has Noddy to stay—"It *will* be nice to have you staying for the night" (N17 p. 32)—though, of course, she lives with her Uncle and Aunt.

In a sense, being toys, this is all academic—what could possibly go on? And, as we know from N11, the toys are *made*, not *reproduced*, which might explain the lack of babies in Toyland (only in N1 is there a picture of a pram). Yet it is unlikely that such close friendships could have been given expression if the characters were human—and clearly, the revising of Noddy and Big-Ears' relationship suggests that even this was too much for the '90s![27]

Some commentators, though, have sought to give this open sensuality a more overtly sexual reading. Thus, the frequent references to tails being chopped off are oedipally instanced—

> "What a nuisance tails are!" said Noddy, pushing the mouse's tail away. "I'm glad *I* haven't one. I'd cut it off if I had." (*N17* p. 14)[28]

—and Noddy's relationship with the milkman is regarded as masturbatory: "Well, the milkman just loves to nod my head as fast as he can", and, "I have to pay him a lot more nods for cream, though—it's not so cheap as milk" (*N7* p. 10). Short of a nudging snigger, though, such comments are rarely taken further—I suspect, because commentators do not know what to do with them.[29]

Big-Ears is less often attended to so closely, though brownies are traditionally linked to the *pilosi*, or 'hairy ones' (Duffy, 1972)—which certainly describes him—the only hirsute character in the series. Brownies are also associated with sexual potency, which is reflected in their close ancestors, the gnomes, whom Big-Ears most closely resembles. Garden gnomes have been popular since the 1920s, originating in Germany; significantly, they are all male; as Paul Oliver says, 'Their form and, in their pointed caps, their colour, was phallic; the postures of the standing figures priapic'(Oliver *et al.*, 1981, p. 170); in their pond-guarding role, they are seen to police a garden.

Though I find the idea of Big-Ears as a sexual being unlikely, he is certainly a potent figure, 100 years old, and able to do almost anything from driving cars to flying planes—even challenging Mr. Plod at times (e.g. *N2* and *N24*). It is significant that when Mr. Plod is injured, it is Big-Ears who assumes the policing role. But he also seems to be above the law, having magical powers: "*I* know a magic too, though I don't use it much nowadays," he declares, making a wizard disappear (*N16* p. 56). In many ways he is reminiscent of Badger in *The Wind in the Willows*, inhabiting an equally isolated habitat, outside the confines of Toyland, in the Dark Wood. His house, too, is the nearest to a natural habitat in

the whole series. Toadstools, of course, are unusual plants, growing in darkness (a dark wood would therefore be ideal) and living off decaying matter; they are also renowned for being either edible or poisonous, though it takes expertise to know which is which (Druce, 1992, p. 127, has identified the species from van der Beek's illustration as *boletus edulis*)[30]; it certainly seems to suit Big-Ears' querulous character, which is most unpredictable; also, like his abode, he is known for his sudden nocturnal appearances, being the nearest thing to a *deus ex machina*—which is established right from his appearance on the opening pages of the first book. It is no doubt this power that makes Big-Ears so popular with readers—eighth most popular overall in my survey—but fourth with the younger readers, and significantly more popular with boys (interestingly, he seemed particularly popular with Muslim children).

Overall then, the books carry markers of gender which make them products of their time. For instance, when Big-Ears first meets the naked Noddy, he assumes that the creature is male, and though Noddy is independent and domesticated, Mrs Tubby still mothers him, with Tessie Bear deferring to him. There is also a lack of a powerful female character. Father Christmas's admonition to the dolls is also characteristic of its time:

> "I've just come to say that some of you dolls who go to live in doll's-houses in the playrooms of boys and girls are not very good at house-work," said Father Christmas. "You don't know how to dust or to scrub floors or clean windows. Well, you must learn, please." (*N11* p. 48)

Also, there are no female drivers, police, posties[31] or milk deliverers. But, as said above, given their time, this is to be expected. What is less acceptable is that the books have been updated and still lack such presence. This might explain Noddy's greater popularity with boys (2nd) than girls (5th)—though he is still immensely popular with both. It also needs reiterating that Noddy himself, in terms of both class and gender, stands apart from the norm to some extent. In many respects he is surprisingly modern, confounding traditional sex-role stereotypes: he is quite androgynous, cries openly, cross-dresses, is sensitive, and

fully domesticated (both he and Big-Ears are regularly seen doing their washing). Ironically, it was for these very reasons that he was criticised for being wimpish (Welch's 'snivelling, sneaking doll') and banned in Australia!

CONSUMERIST NODDY AND THE WORK ETHIC

When I first re-read the 'Noddy' books, I was surprised at how much they celebrate certain values: of consumerism, of property, and working hard to attain this. However, the more I thought about this, the more of their time the books seemed—with the post-war economy struggling to spend its way out of recession, with the low unemployment until the 'sixties, and a general revolution in shopping and consumerism (television, car and house ownership increased dramatically over this period, with buying on 'hire-purchase' becoming acceptable). This ethos informs the Noddy books in quite a profound way. Rarely have I seen the economy of a 'toy' culture so dramatically laid out. In the first book, Big-Ears explains to Noddy about money:

> "It's something you get when you work hard," said Big-Ears. "Then you put it into your pockets and wait till you see something you want. Then you give it in exchange. You will have to work soon, then you can get money to buy heaps of things." (N1 p. 23)

However, there is never a sense of superfluity; one is always thrifty, as Big-Ears advises: "But if I were you I'd go to the market. The shops are so dear" (N1 p. 22).

At the beginning, Big-Ears lends Noddy some money, so that he can get established—even to the extent of becoming a house-owner: "I'm in my own little house! I'm so happy! I'll work hard and buy lots of things for my house..." (N1 p. 60). It is not till the second book, however, that Noddy acquires a car, and establishes himself properly, as Toy Village's taxi service, which receives the narrator's blessing at the end: 'It is a good idea, little nodding man—and if ever we come to visit Toy Village, we'll ride in your taxi' (N2 p. 60). Before

this he does other jobs. He helps with spring-cleaning and in Mr. Golly's garage.
Noddy stresses the importance of this, since he must pay Big-Ears back: "People
must always pay back what they borrow" (N2 p. 20) .

Over the course of the books, Noddy's growing accumulation of property can be
seen. First, he acquires clothes and a house (N1), then a car (N2); in N3 he
doubles his money, in N4 he gets a garage (this last is again interesting in that a
great deal of property built after the war did not initially have garages—a lack
soon found wanting). In N5, Noddy gets some new lamps for his car, besides
saving for a new bike for Big-Ears. His schemes in this book are varied: he tries
planting sweets in his garden (just as Pinocchio is advised to plant money in
order for it to grow), and even composes and sings songs for money. But always
behind it the work ethic is stressed:

> "...our money has come to an end," said Big-Ears.
> "So we must go home and earn some more," said Noddy. "That will
> be nice. It's good to work hard and earn lots of money." (N7 p. 53)

Even when Noddy is prevented from taxiing, he does not idle away his time, but
gets other work. In N20, when Noddy's car has crashed, Big-Ears suggests he
uses a barrow to deliver goods, and Noddy immediately costs this at sixpence a
time. Big-Ears also suggests that Noddy could go to market for fruit and flowers
cheaply, and sell them in Toyland Village, adding "You could charge an extra
penny on everything you sell, to pay for your trouble" (N20 p. 18).

Other characters are given similar advice. On a windy day at the fair, a bun-
seller—obviously with a vested interest—suggests that Bumpy-Dog should
retrieve people's hats at a penny a time; as he puts it, "A penny a hat—a penny a
bun!" (N21 p. 33). Later in the same book, Noddy, prompted by Tessie, suggests
that the skittle children make money for themselves by lining up and being
knocked down (ibid., p. 44). In fact, when Noddy knocks over a coconut with
Mr. Plod's face drawn on it, he is told that he can't have that particular one,
because it's "making so much money" (N21 p. 48).

Even amongst friends, the importance of 'paying your way' is repeatedly stressed. Thus, when Tessie finds she only has a penny in her purse, rather than the normal sixpence for her ride, she insists, "Well, I'll let you take me if you'll take one of my eggs and not pay for it" (*N12* p. 15). In *N23*, when Noddy picks up Mrs.Tubby Bear, he comments, "Mrs.Tubby, let me drive you home! I won't charge you even a penny because you made me such a lovely cake last week!" (*N23* p. 18). It is this, rather than the recognition of her as a neighbour and a friend, that is the motive.

Bartering, none the less, does seem permitted. Noddy scarcely ever seems to pay for his milk, always getting it 'on the nod':

> "You can have this little pot of cream if you'll allow me to sing your song as I go on my rounds."
> "Oh yes, *of course*," said Noddy, beaming at him. "And you can tap my head three times if you like, and make it nod ...." (*N22* p. 8)

Perhaps the milkman should not be so generous, for he obviously suffers cash-flow problems at holiday periods, complaining about people not buying his milk (*N15* pp. 9-11). He also makes Noddy aware that there will be no taxi passengers either. Noddy's pleasure-principle answer, of taking a holiday himself, does not find favour with Big-Ears, who counsels saving during hard times.

However, it is in *N11* that the real twist to this consumerism comes. This is the story where Father Christmas comes to Toy Village—though it is not winter (it only ever seems to be spring or summer in Toyland, with occasional wind and rain). However, during this story, it emerges just why it isn't Christmas. We learn that the toys in the various villages are to be dispatched by Father Christmas to the children. Father Christmas visits them like some turkey-farmer examining his seasonal stock. As I've already quoted, he conducts a form of quality control. But the biggest shock comes when Father Christmas and Noddy

arrive at 'N. & B. Works' (*N11* p. 50), where we find Noddy and Big-Ears dolls being made. These are new toys that the children have specifically asked for. Even Father Christmas has not yet seen them. He comments:

> "N. & B. Works— of course, Noddy and Big-Ears Works!" said Father Christmas. "I see that the children have asked for Noddy and Big-Ears toys, Noddy. I wonder why."
> "Well, there are lots of books about me, " said Noddy. "Perhaps they have read them. Oh, Father Christmas—OH, Father Christmas—when I see all these little toys *just* like me I feel Very Very Important!"
> "Now don't you be grand and important or you won't be the dear little Noddy that children love," said Father Christmas He looked closely at the tiny figures running excitedly round the car. "Yes, I like them. Pity the Noddies haven't little cars like yours, Noddy. I'll have to make a note of that." (*N11* pp. 51-2)

He certainly does—and of toothbrushes, mugs, lamps, and the rest! A bit later, just to consolidate this promotional line, Father Christmas comments, "one of the nicest, kindest little toys I've ever met" (*N11* pp. 58-9). Obviously, quite a *coup* to have your product officially endorsed by Father Christmas! This book, it should be noted, came out in 1955, so would have been written in 1954, just before both the play, the early ITV series and the start of the extensive merchandising.

Figure 4-5 'This Book Belongs To' - *N2*

But the careful packaging of this product seems to have been envisaged by its creator from the outset:
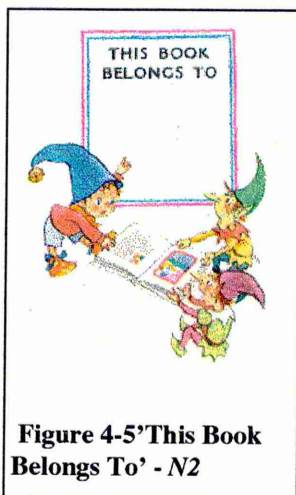
> ...I imagine we might have as a 'motif' a toy train rushing along ...going all round the jacket top, sides and bottom ...to give the books a 'series' look. The specific titles ... will each contain the name 'Noddy'. In the end, if they are very successful, they'll probably be referred to and ordered as the 'Noddy' books. (Blyton, letter to van der Beek, quoted in Stoney, 1974 p. 158)

154

The whole thing stresses ownership, and consumption, from the personalised bookplates at the beginning, 'This book belongs to ...' onwards. Quite a few of these bookplates emphasise the power of ownership quite blatantly through the accompanying pictures (see figs 4-5, 4-6, 4-7). (It is also worth pointing out that the book being read in these pictures is often clearly the very book you are holding.)

Figure 4-6'This Book Belongs To' - *N12*
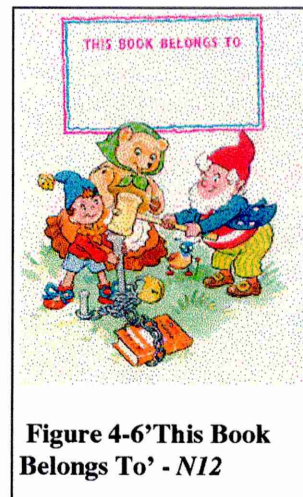
This, in turn, links to the message at the end of each volume: 'Look for the Next Noddy Book', we are advised (removed, for some reason, from the new editions). The dust-wrappers on the first edition also have the enticement: 'Have you read all the Enid Blyton Noddy books just like this one? There are lots of them—here are the titles ... Start collecting them now and see if you can get all 24 titles.'

 So, in sum, the books are very much part of the expanding economy of the '50s—even if this itself was rather a fantasy in the bankrupt early years after the war. The characters in the books are forever consuming, and Noddy aids them in this process by ferrying them to the shops. The rest of the economy is relatively hidden, apart from the one picture of the factory-ridden Golliwog Town (*N1*).

Figure 4-7'This Book Belongs To' - *N17*
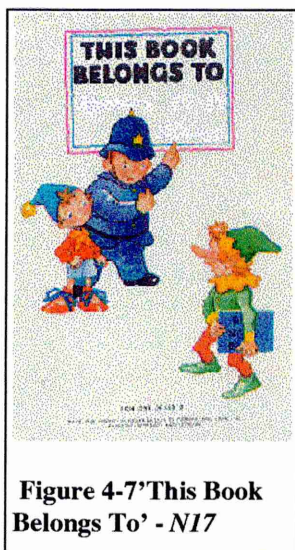
More generally, we can see that Blyton was very shrewd at judging the market and promoting her books. The script of the Noddy play is entitled, *Enid Blyton's Book of her Famous Play Noddy in Toyland*, and others have similar self-congratulatory titles. We have seen how she cannily promoted other 'Noddy' merchandising through the books, and she did this elsewhere, too; for instance, in the story 'Peter's pencil box' (*Good Night Stories*, pp. 17-26), we are told that this pencil box 'was made of yellow polished wood,

and had Little Noddy and Big-Ears on it' (*ibid.*, p. 20). In *Secret Seven Win Through* (1955), we find that Colin has some of his precious 'Famous Fives' stolen, and he particularly mentions *FGDTS*, which had been published the year before this 'Seven' book was written.

However, getting back to the consumerism of Toyland, it is worth noting the converse of all this acquisitive behaviour: an overriding fear of theft. Again, coming back to the books as an adult, I was surprised at the level of concern for this in the '50s. But this is something that certainly gives the books a contemporary feel. People who isolate the 'mugging' of Noddy by golliwogs in *N4* miss the fact that crime is rife in Toyland. The golliwogs aren't particularly distinctive, despite the press. There are also car thefts in five other books (*N2*, *N17*, *N19*, *N20*, and *N23*)—none of which involve golliwogs—besides many other thefts in seven other books (*N3*, *N5*, *N8*, *N12*, *N14*, *N15*, and *N22*).

Forgetting to lock your door even once is a clear invitation to burglars, as Noddy finds out in *N14*. Mr. Tubby Bear even goes to the length of borrowing a dog for a night when he leaves his house empty (*N9*), though Mr. Wobbly-Man simply puts his faith in Mr. Plod: "It's a very good thing we've a policeman to look after us all, and see that we aren't robbed at night" (*N22* p. 16). Even in daytime this fear prevails, as Tessie exclaims after Bumpy Dog's barking, "There must be someone outside—a burglar perhaps" (*N24* p. 13). There seems to be more crime here than in the whole of the Famous Five!

What is even more disturbing is the lack of trust in the community. Noddy spends much of his time trying to clear his name. One might expect this at the beginning, when the toys are establishing who he is—but it seems that he never attains their complete trust. In *N2* he has to convince everyone that he is not a car thief. In *N4*, the jingling of a bell is thought to establish Noddy's guilt. In *N5* he is accused of stealing from the Sailor Doll, and is arrested. In *N8*, Mr. Plod accuses him of breaking into the houses of Miss Fluffy Cat and Mr. Wobbly-Man, and, as a consequence, no one in Toyland will use him as a taxi.

In *N17*, Mr. Plod accuses Noddy of going to Big-Ears' and stealing his flowers as some sort of trick. Each time, Noddy has to prove himself afresh.

The books also seem surprisingly modern in the ambivalent attitude expressed towards the police. Generally this means Mr. Plod, although in the first books there seem far more police based at the Toy Village station (see *N2*, p. 49). As a figure of authority, Mr. Plod's position is often undermined—Big-Ears, for instance, overrides it when he wants, as mentioned earlier. However, it is in *N21* that it is most expressly challenged (interestingly this is at the fair, an area of Bakhtinian license, where authority is often stood on its head). When Noddy hears that Mr.Plod has taken the steering wheel of his car, he is incensed. "How DARE he? I'll get his helmet and stamp on it! I'll pull off all his buttons! I'll..." (*N21* p. 49). He is interrupted at this point by Big-Ears. But elsewhere at the fair Mr. Plod's authority is also being undermined. The coconut-shy man has a coconut wearing Mr. Plod's helmet, with the policeman's face drawn on it. He comments, "It's funny how many people want to knock off that helmet. Anyone would think they didn't like Mr. Plod!" (*N21* p. 47). This whole book finishes unresolved; in fact, with Mr. Plod left at the fair while Noddy and Tessie quietly escape. Noddy then proceeds to sing a song, "wasn't it FUN/To go to the Fair!" (*N21* p. 60).[32]

In general, the economy of reward and punishment in Toyland is very basic, based on carrot and stick. This is most clear in *N12*, when Noddy and Tessie Bear fear being smacked for causing the loss of some milk and eggs which, unbeknown to them, have been raining down on unsuspecting villagers. Instead, they find Big-Ears and Mr. Plod rolling about on the floor with laughter. Big-Ears is laughing because Noddy and Tessie must be presented with the reward which was set up for anyone providing information about the missing items. This notion of the letter of the law prevailing is common in the tales, and may be linked to Piaget's conception of a stage when morality is seen very much in black-and-white terms. However, as this literalism is, *de facto*, based on language, it is also post-Piagetian, and has more in line with some discourse

theorists who foreground the power of language to determine our feelings and thoughts. This is clear, for instance, in *N13*, where Noddy sings a brave song to make him feel brave (*N13* pp. 36-7; repeated, pp. 54-5).[33]

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have clearly seen how texts are weaves of earlier threads—personal, literary, and, more generally, social—and how Blyton, despite being seen as very reactionary, held a quite modern conception of the creative process. She never, as far as I'm aware, celebrated her individual creative genius (in the Romantic manner). We have also looked at what these threads constructed, in the two main themes that seem to emerge from the 'Noddy' books: concerns with the order of things—with one's place in society, with existence and animism—and the consumer ethic. I also indicated that these issues are double-edged. On the one hand the reader is gently comforted—very much a concern of the post-war '50s society. On the other hand there is an underlying insecurity, a fear that the celebration of existence is in the face of nothingness; that if things are not animated, they are inanimate, inert; that consumerism is itself a conveyor-belt that has to keep turning, or its emptiness becomes apparent; moreover, that the acquisition of property also brings in its wake the fear of its loss, of theft. All these undercurrents lurk within the safe haven of Toyland, and however much their occurrence is dealt with, and order restored, it recurs—it returns—as I shall return to it in later chapters.

NOTES

1   The nine letters have not been published, but Barbara Stoney reproduces extracts from four of them, which is more than is quoted in McKellar's own work, where he also erroneously dates the correspondence as beginning a year earlier, in February 1952.

2.   These were originally serialised in *Sunny Stories* in 1942 (Summerfield and Wright, 1995, p. 7), and appeared in book form in 1944 (referred to as *Tales* hereafter).

3   This is not so surprising, though, for she had earlier written about 'Big-Ears, the Pixie' in *More About Josie, Click and Bun* (1947), p. 48; he's pictured on p. 67, and seems to be the only one with a car, too. There is also a 'Big-Ears the Goblin' in *Adventures of the Wishing-Chair* (1937, p. 164).

4   My thanks to Stephanie Main for the following information. She has scrupulously recorded all Blyton's contributions to this journal.

5   The full reference for each of these stories is as follows: *Teachers World* Junior edition 26 August 1931, No. 1474, xlv, p. 817, and *Teachers World* 11 November 1926, No. 1485, xlvi, p. 222.

6   He also features eponymously in 'Big-Eyes, the frog' in *Sunny Stories* (1943), collected in *The Yellow Story Book*. There is at least one other story which features a character called 'Noddy': 'Tom Noddy's Imp' in *Sunny Stories* (1937), later collected in *A Book of Naughty Children*. (I'm grateful to Tony Summerfield for bringing this to my attention.) Robert Druce's suggestion that Noddy might derive from the story 'Four little wheels' about a 'little tin man at the wheel of his motor-car' (1992, p. 127), published in *Sunny Stories* (1944) and collected in *Sleepytime Tales*, seems to have rather less textual support: he is not only tin, but old, too, and does not run a taxi service. This story has more in common with 'The Meccano motor-car' (*The Three Naughty Children and other Stories* pp.91-6), which is also driven at night round the playroom.

7   It was Stephanie Main who found the first of these, and has since acquired another. Norman Wright also has one in his collection. There is also, reputedly, a book about the character, but no one seems to have a copy. This illustration is from Janet Seller's collection, who acquired it from Stephanie. Many thanks to them both for their help.

8   For example 'I was here first' (*Sunny Stories*, 1946) and 'It's just a dream' (*Sunny Stories*, 1948) each feature policemen called Mr. Plod. They can both be found in *Bedtime Stories* (1970). Druce's explanation of the origin of Mr. Plod—suggesting a link with S.G. Hulme Beaman, who has Ernest

the policeman going 'plod, plod, in the dusty road' (Druce, 1992, p. 127)—
seems less likely. But many words are overdetermined in this way.
Barbara Baines was kind enough to send me newspaper cuttings about her
father, P.C. Christopher Rone, of Studland, Dorset, whom Blyton used to
watch pushing his bike up a steep hill (plod, plod). Blyton told him that he
was the original Mr. Plod (Harrison, 1990).

Morrison (1984) quotes a police chief who resents such a stereotyped
image in children's literature; however, this P.C. was clearly already out of
date about children's literature—though this might not be for the good:
'Most policemen are corrupt ... We have moved from the dull but safe
world of Mr. Plod to the bleak and dangerous milieu of P.C. Pig and the
short sharp shock' (Hoffman, 1984, p. 183). Cathy Currie, a criminologist,
has suggested that the earlier image is precisely what the police should
strive for, Plod being the ideal 'community policeman' (Anon, 1988b).

9   The Saucepan Man and Moon-Face also appear elsewhere, for instance, in
     'You simply never know' in *Sleepytime Tales* (1970, pp. 83-90).
     Unfortunately, the latter is depicted as a crescent moon, though the text
     specifically mentions his 'shining round face' (p. 88).

10   'Eee-Aw', with an extra *e,* in the stage play. Mr Pink-Whistle, Silky and
     Moonface—other characters from the 'Faraway Tree' books—also appear
     in the stage play, as does the tree itself.

11   Big-Ears asks the same of Noddy in the first book: "Why do you nod your
     head when you say 'No'?" (*N1* p. 8). The problem is exacerbated for the
     Milkman: "You nod for one bottle, and you nod for two! How am I to
     know which you want?" (*N2* p. 8).

12   The books were emasculated far more than this. For instance, in *Here
     Comes Noddy Again!* (*N4*), the goblins only remove Noddy's shoes and hat
     (see fig. 6-2); they also say they're sorry at the end and polish his car.

13   They are from the following: 'unexpectedly' (*N1* p. 48), 'becalmed' (*N18*
     p. 44); 'surge' (*N19* p. 55)' 'dreadful' (*N24* p. 59). The amendments are on
     the same pages in the new editions.

14   Also, in *N19*, the eponymous cross between a bunny and a monkey is
     found, in the end, to be pure monkey, wearing a hat with bunny ears
     attached. However, Blyton at one point describes him, impossibly, as
     'twitching his rabbity ears', whereas now they're simply 'waving' (*N19/*
     p. 16). Likewise, in *N5*, the villain is described as a 'little red goblin' (*N5*
     p. 45), whereas he is not red at all: rather, he is to be found at 'red goblin
     corner'.   ·

15   It is called predominantly 'Toy Village', but also 'Toyland Village' (*N13* p. 34) and, in *N5* p. 55, 'Toy Town', with Blyton perhaps thinking of S.G. Hulme Beaman's eponymous radio series. In the 3rd edition it has been changed to 'Toy Town' throughout—apart from one missed 'Toy Village (*N13* p. 49).

16   Thus, whereas 'Noddy drove madly' has become 'Noddy drove as fast as he could' (*N4** p. 24), we still have him 'hooting madly' (*N13** p. 48). Likewise, though 'jerked' becomes 'jolted about' (*N5** p. 15), in *N15** we still find that 'Mr. Plod jerked Mr. Monkey out of the car' (p. 56).

17   One seems to have escaped in *N11** (p. 23), however. Clearly replacing gollies is problematic. It would obviously not do to insert black characters in their stead, although the series has also been criticised for the lack of black characters. This problem is exemplified in *N10** p. 49, where one could argue that a replacement black figure is dangerously close to the minstrel stereotype. Avoiding stereotyping can be particularly difficult with toys, which are often stereotypically simplified objects anyway.

18   Some other amendments are very strange; for instance, in *N8**, Noddy's foot has been very clumsily redrawn with his big toe on the wrong side of his foot (p. 16)!

Textual mistakes are more prevalent in the later books, clearly when Blyton's memory was failing. Thus in *N21*, we never hear of the joy-rider Tommy Bear again after he has smashed up Noddy's car; in *N22*, there is the sudden appearance of Bruiny Bear, rather than the little Tubby Bear of earlier volumes. Also in *N21* where Mr. Plod, who has confiscated Noddy's car's steering-wheel, drops it whilst being whirled round on a roundabout, only to be found holding it again on the following page, both in picture and text (pp. 53-4). (Clearly, Mr. Plod could have dropped it and picked it up again, but, to avoid ambiguity, I note that this has been cut in the revised edition).

However, it is in the final book that there is the most clear decline in quality. Here we find Noddy learning to fly—twice!—having been shown once by the pilot, who 'says he has never seen anyone learn to fly so quickly!' (*N24* p. 36), then later by an instructor, until 'he could fly the aeroplane just as well as he could drive his car' (*N24* p. 41). This whole book is very bitty and unresolved, with Noddy knocking Mr. Plod off his bike and being threatened with never driving his car again (itself a non-sequitur, as he was flying his plane at the time!). Big-Ears merely says "Don't worry" and requests a song for himself, on which the story ends (this final chapter is rather feebly called 'Noddy and the aeroplane', too, when, of course, the whole book has this theme, and this title).

19   Interestingly, the name 'Miss Rap' meant little to most of the junior school children, though they had several ideas: first to do with music: 'Because she liked rap music' (m, 8), ''Cos shouts, like in the fast talking that people do' (m, 9), or, more directly, ''Cos she always sings raps' (f, 6); second, to do with 'wrapping': 'Because she's wrapped up in clothes' (m, 9), or more observantly, 'Because she wears wraps' (i.e. a shawl; m, 6); thirdly, it was her speed: 'She's rapid - goes fast'; lastly, it was suggested that it was because of her littering: 'Because she throws wrappers around' (f, 6). This said, the name 'Prim' was, if anything, less known. One or two did suggest that it was short for 'Primrose', 'Because she's like a rose'.

      I confess that I confused some groups here, calling Miss Rap, 'Miss Slap', obviously thinking of Dame Slap in other Blyton stories. Needless to say, it was the children who put me right.

20   A sixth-form boy ended his Five story thus: 'They all went home to Aunt Fanny's for lashings and lashings.' Freeman (1969) in her book on sexual fantasy, draws attention to the smacking in Blyton, which she found her children also enjoyed thoroughly. But she worries that it is titillation that is being gratified, which might lead to a future 'need ...to inflict or experience pain in later years' (p. 97). My general comments here about children's remarks in the abstract, as opposed to their manifest behaviour, raise a query for those who would use children's books as springboards for discussions of morality. The comments also query the wisdom of extrapolating what children 'really' think from what they say, especially from small bits of dialogue.

21   See p. 69, and figs 4-3, 4-4. Moving the text in a certain direction obviously changes others. Thus attempts to avoid the supposed taint of paedophilia between Noddy and Big-Ears can lay the reviser open to accusations of homophobia.

22   Again, echoes of Pinocchio, with his enlarging nose, might be detected.

23   Piaget began his publishing career at almost the same time as Blyton, his first book appearing in 1923, but it was a lot later before his ideas became popular in educational circles.

24   Froebel's ideas inform Toyland in other ways, for he stressed the importance of scaling an environment to a child's size, and of the importance of bright colours. He also laid great stress on geometrical shapes that would foster development, such as the ball and building block. In a sense, Toyland is exactly this, a child-sized land of bright colours, fashioned out of building blocks. Froebel even talked of children building houses from these shapes, as a way of encouraging the child 'to reflect upon larger patterns of order in society' (Shapiro, 1983, p. 24). Lastly, Froebel emphasised singing and dancing games, also structured to encourage the child to see the unity of society, in the way that all would

come together at the end—which is certainly characteristic of many of the final scenes in the Noddy series.

25   C.S. Lewis created a similar problem for himself in Narnia, such that we have some talking animals, whereas the others are mute, and are eaten by the former without concern.

26   We should bear in mind that this is Toyland, based on the sort of toys that supposedly exist; hence there tend to be toys in certain categories, but not others (e.g. no miners and factory workers). The same explanation might account for the absence of any church, in that there are few toy clergy. Toys, one might suggest, are themselves pagan idols, animated by children, hence religion would be inappropriate (Kuznets, 1994, develops this idea).

27   With fears of pederasty, this is even more the case.

28   Instances are certainly plentiful: in *N3*, the pink cat is warned to keep its tail under control in Noddy's car. She does not, and, Isadora Duncan style, the tail catches in a wheel and is pulled off. In *N5* a toy horse is similarly warned, as is Mrs. Minnie Monkey in *N10*. The most independent tails, however, belong to two other monkeys. First, Bert Monkey, who, like certain trickster figures, has a tail that seems independent of his will (though it does seem to fulfil his unconscious wishes). He features in two stories—*N6* and *N9*; in the latter Noddy rubs out Bert's tail while he sleeps (the magic rubber can rub out anything, from stains on things, to the things themselves). There is also Marvel Monkey in *N15*. He has a long tail that plays tricks, like removing Big-Ears' hat. Marvel Monkey also has a false tail which he leaves trailing from his tent, supposedly to prove his presence. But such normal, metonymic links are not inevitable in Toyland. Marvel Monkey proves not to be on the end of his tail; instead he is chopping bits off other toys: the rocking-horses have their tails chopped off, the dogs their whiskers, and the clockwork clowns lose their keys. It should be noted that, though such metonymic play—about losing or gaining parts—is frequent, metamorphosis (metaphorical rather than metonymic change) is rare. There is only one instance of metamorphosis in the Noddy series, where the Wily Wizard gives Big-Ears' cat, Whiskers, an elephant's trunk (*N16* p. 53). Instances of tail removal in other Blyton works are given in chapter 8, where this matter is more fully developed.

29   Druce's reading (1992, p. 257) is discussed in chapter 8.

30   *Boletus edulis* (Cep, or Penny-bun fungus) is edible, and quite common, but Little-Ears' toadstool (*N11*, p. 29)—*Amanita muscaria* (Fly Agaric), I would suggest—is poisonous, and more infrequent.

31   Blyton actually uses this gender-neutral name in *FGTDR* (p. 108) for the postman, though he is a man!

32 In fact, I have wondered whether *N22*, in which the value of the police is
    expressly endorsed (see the Wobbly-Man's comment, quoted above in the
    main text), was written after some criticism of this earlier book. Even in
    its title—*Mr. Plod and Little Noddy*—it is the only one where another
    character takes priority over Noddy. However, I have not been able to find
    reference to any criticism. It should also be said that even here we hear of
    "a few ...[who] aren't very sorry" about Mr. Plod's accident (*N22* p. 30).

33 In psychology, this is close to the 'Cannon-James' theory of emotions,
    which posits the idea that one notes one's behaviour, and from this, infers
    how one must feel.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FAMOUS FIVE - FROM DISCURSIVE THREADS TO CULTURAL READINGS

"This all sounds most interesting. Quite Famous Five-ish, in fact!" (Julian, *FOST* p. 74)

'...the Five, all in swim-suits went off to the beach...' (*FHPT,* p. 70)

INTRODUCTION

This series, perhaps alongside 'Noddy', typifies Blyton's work more than any other, hence the highly successful Comic Strip lampoons, *Five Go Mad in Dorset* (1982) and *Five Go Mad on Mescalin* (1983). The Five is the most filmed series, with adaptations by the Children's Film Federation (1957, 1964), Southern TV (1978, 1979), and Zenith Films (1995, 1997). This popularity is endorsed by my respondents, for whom the Five was by far the most popular series, with almost one third rating it their favourite. As for the individual characters, all of the Five appeared in the top fifteen, George being the most popular character of all (21.5%) with her dog, Timmy, in third place. Even Quentin crept in as the nineteenth most popular character (see appendix III for details). The sex differences are interesting here, in that, not only was George pre-eminently popular amongst the girls, but she was also the most popular Five character with boys too, beating Julian into second place. Given the unwillingness of most boys to read fiction about girls (albeit girls will read stories about boys)—let alone find them more popular than the boys— this is quite an achievement. (It is worth noting that the early books are subtitled 'an adventure story for boys and girls'.)

In this chapter, I shall examine why this series is pre-eminently popular. I shall look at the series from an 'adult' perspective, pulling out the major discursive threads which critics have put on the agenda: those of sexism,

nationhood, and class (the issue of 'race' will be dealt with separately, in the next chapter). I shall then move on to consider what the children see in the books—what might be termed the pleasure of the texts—much of which derives specifically from an oppositional stance to adults. Let me begin, however, with a brief overview of the series.

The first book appeared in 1942, having been written in 1941. The books were then produced annually, apart from 1959, till the last, twenty-two years later, in 1963. This last, *FATA*, was one of the final full-length books written by Blyton, whose mind by then was clearly deteriorating. She had originally intended the 'Famous Fives' to be a series of six, but their popularity made her continue, making it her longest running series. Contrary to many critics' views (e.g. Druce, 1992, p.120), these books were not all serialised first in Blyton's magazines. Thus, the notion of her being so readable because of the climaxes, or cliff-hangers, created at the end of respective issues, is unfounded.[1] Only eight of the books appeared in serial form, the first being the seventh, *FGOTC,* the only one to appear in *Sunny Stories*. Then, in *Enid Blyton's Magazine,* four others appeared: *FGDTS* (no. 12), *FOST, FGTBH,* and *FGIF* (nos. 15-17). Three more of the twenty-one books were serialised in the girls' comic, *Princess*: *FOFF* (no. 18); *FGTDR* (no. 19) and the last, *FATA* (no. 21). (There were some other, shorter pieces which appeared in magazines and elsewhere, since collected and published as *FHPT*).

The series is based around three siblings, Julian (12 years), Dick (11 years) and Anne (10 years), who have a cousin, Georgina—though she prefers to be called 'George'—(also 11 years old)[3], and her dog, Timmy (see fig. 5-1). The relation is through their father's brother, Quentin, an irascible and absent-minded scientist. He is married to Fanny, who, we learn, has always lived at Kirrin Bay. However, one of the main problems with any series is

Figure 5-1 The Famous Five in characteristic pose (from *FGAA*, endpapers)[2]

consistency, and even the phenomenal memory of Blyton generated a number of inconsistencies, like the different surnames given to the main characters (Kirrin and Barnard), the cook being Joan in the first books, then Joanna after book 8, whilst the fisher-boy changes from James to Alf even in the course of the first book—an inconsistency that runs through the series. (I have dealt with these more extensively elsewhere - Rudd, 1997b). [4]

FIVE HAVE A GENDER-FUL TIME?

The daughter of a friend was told at school that she should not be reading Enid Blyton's books, because they were 'sexy'. The parents, after a long while, established that it was 'sexist' that the teacher had meant, and had then explained the concept to her. For the girl this immediately made sense, and cleared up her perplexity. She replied that it was obvious that the books would be 'sexist', given when they were written. In other words, this girl had enjoyed the stories,

but was in no way being sold into gender slavery by them. Many of the school-children endorsed this view:

> I think they should have left them, 'cos that's how things were done. (F, 15)

> When they were written they were—I don't know—they were a different type of times [...] I think they should keep them as they are, and if you don't like them as they are, then don't read them. (f, 10)

> I think the old ones are better 'cos it portrayed the better, like, Enid Blyton wanted to show how it was like in that time, and that was a sexist age then, so, if you change it like the revised versions where some of the sexism's been taken out it just doesn't work as well [...] They shouldn't be altered. (m, 15)

The Critics' View

It is George who has been most criticised, called 'the ultimate stereotype' by Margery Fisher (1986, p. 233). Dixon endorses this view, which I have quoted earlier (chapter 3), of her being 'a very bad case of that castration complex, or penis-envy', whose success 'rests almost entirely upon the fact that... small girls frequently wish they were boys' (Dixon, 1974, p. 53). Cadogan and Craig too, describe George as being in a 'false position ...like all tomboys, she can be "as good as", but this implies a basic deficiency. She never can be the genuine article'. They say that 'there is no suggestion that ...[George's] fantasy of being a boy is just as "normal" as Anne's acceptance of a "housewifely" role'; rather, 'the author's view of girls who "pretend to be boys"[is] that they are pretentious and silly. They will "grow out" of it; the growing out is a process of adjustment' (Cadogan and Craig, 1976, pp. 338-43).

I shall begin by questioning whether Blyton's views were as orthodox as Cadogan and Craig suggest, before looking more closely at the texts.

The tomboy character does seem to have had a particular appeal for Blyton. She herself cited Alcott's *Little Women* as one of her favourite books, with its famous tomboy, Jo. Blyton certainly has many strong females in her books, like Susie in

the Secret Seven, Daisy in the Find-Outers and several of the girls in her school series—Bobby in 'St. Clare's', and Darrell, Alicia and Bill in 'Malory Towers' (many with gender neutral names). Noticeably, it is these characters who are given the more positive qualities, whereas the more conventionally 'feminine' ones are criticised for being concerned with superficial things, like their appearance (e.g. Gwendoline and Zerelda in 'Malory Towers'). In other words, in a world of girls, there is no notion of deficiency, or penis-envy: the girls can be strong in their own right[5].

I shall return to this issue later, but first, in the light of Cadogan and Craig's comment about the 'author's view', it is worth noting the biographical evidence. We know that Blyton herself resented having to do domestic chores as a child; we also know that, even in her twenties, she liked to be referred to as Richard, or 'cabin-boy', and that she modelled the character of George on herself (Stoney, 1974). Finally, as an adult, she certainly asserted herself effectively in the intensely male world of publishing. In view of this, it hardly seems likely that she would portray Anne as the paragon, George the 'queer' one. Blyton seems to have had too much invested in George for this—something of which most readers seem keenly aware, like Bentley, quoted in chapter 3 ('I admired George for the ability to escape the restrictions and dressed as a boy, to be accepted as their equal...' - Bentley, 1969, p. 7). This view was endorsed by many of my respondents: 'she was bold!' (f), 'she was definitely a role model much to the dismay of my mother' (f). 'I really enjoyed the way George would stand up against authority. I guess I saw myself as a more sensible George who had all the fun ...' (f). One eight year old girl added on her questionnaire, 'P.S. I would like to be called George'. Subjects were not unqualified in their praise, however:

> I liked George (Famous Five) because she refused to be patronised because she was a girl or left out of the most exciting parts of the adventures. I also liked the way she often rebelled against adult authority. I didn't totally identify with her though, because I myself did not want to be, or look like, a boy. (f).

Even antipathetic critics tend to overemphasise George's role, like Dohm (1955, p. 360) commenting that 'she [George] is the one allowed to find most clues or unmask the criminals, sometimes because she has disobeyed orders and gone to the secret passage or cave or turret at the crucial moment'.

Sexism— a working definition

Before returning to the texts, I want to clarify the issue of 'sexism', which, I would argue, is not a *thing* but a *process*. Nothing is innately 'sexist'; rather, sexism draws its energy from relations of power. Thus, even terms like 'bitch' and 'dyke' have been appropriated by feminists and given positive connotations; however, to know the connotation, one must look at the word in context, and at the audience's perception of that context. Of course, as society is 'patriarchal' (ie. the institutional sites of power are controlled by males), it will be the case that certain meanings predominate—just as the concept of 'sexism' is itself normally concerned with the power of men over women, not vice-versa.

The crucial point is that it is not enough simply to point to certain things and shout 'Sexism!' or 'Patriarchy!'; to do so is to accept them, *fait accompli*, and thus, effectively, to underwrite a particular state of affairs. As Foucault argues, power relationships are worked out at a much more fine-grained level. In this light we can start to understand Bentley's comment above. We can also see how easy it is to undermine children—especially girls—if we dismiss such comments. What the Famous Five in particular seem to offer is a dramatisation of the power relationships between the sexes.

The Texts

The first book of the series, *FOTI* (1942), demonstrates this power struggle well. George, is introduced as a loner, but it is precisely by standing apart from society that she manages to be powerful (i.e. in not subscribing to the standard relationships of power). As she tells Anne:

"...if they're going to be nasty to me I shan't take any notice of *them* ...I didn't want any of you to come, anyway. Interfering with my life here! I'm quite happy on my own." (*FOTI* p. 40)

The more she becomes part of the Five, the more she is expected to conform to their ways. Bodily, she can still present an image of empowerment, but in relationships, she comes up against Julian, often described as 'almost grown-up', and patriarchy in general.

Over the course of the first six books—which was all Blyton initially intended to write—George's power can be seen to erode. It is only by stepping outside the circle of the Five that she can assert herself. Timmy is particularly useful here, for although he 'naturally' stands apart from this struggle, he implicitly increases George's prowess.

In *FOTI*, George's powers are clearly foregrounded (and this, of course, was written in the early years of the war, when women were being called upon to step outside their traditional gender roles; children, too, were required to be more independent, as evacuees). George, it is emphasised, can handle a boat like a man, whereas it is doubted whether Dick could even row it ashore. George can swim better than the boys, too. Indeed, she is given the most physical action in the book, destroying the crooks' boat with an axe. Even the bossy Julian defers to her; for example, when exploring the wreck, 'Julian did as he was told. ...Then George clambered up....' (p. 86); and later: 'Julian had a torch. He handed it to George. ...George switched on the torch and then swung herself down the ladder. The others followed' (*ibid.*). Despite not appearing till the second chapter, George speaks more in this book than any of the other children.

At the end of the first book, then, we might say that George has joined the symbolic order: they—the Famous Five—are henceforward a named entity, with their name in the public domain. It is public in two respects: first, in being reported within the story by the press; secondly, in being narrated to an audience

through the medium of the book. 'The Famous Five' are henceforth a commodity that an audience can seek out.

But even if George has accepted that 'no man is an island'—despite owning one, and being 'no man'!—she has not forsaken her independence. First, she maintains her own version of her given name, and insists others use it, rather than the feminised, -ina form (her father, Quentin, tries to impose this more than most: "Don't be silly, Georgina" (p. 106)). She thus manages to define her own identity rather than accepting that of others. Secondly, she has Timmy—a formidable ally, and one who stands alongside her as something not quite civilised (as one girl said in interview, 'George and Timmy is like, not as individuals—they weren't really individuals, they were like ... George and Timmy'). These two things George insists on preserving, even while she accepts the idea of going away to school.

In the second book (FGAA) George's acceptance of a more socialised existence is developed. Here, greater patriarchal forces are ranged against her: not only Quentin and Julian, but also the tutor, Mr Rowland, a big, bearded man, who tries hard to make her respond to 'Georgina'. Anne's willingness to accept Mr Rowland's positioning of girls is nicely contrasted with George's rebellion. In fact, Mr Rowland and Quentin seem to collude in this—as do the other children, especially Julian. However, George's (and Timothy's) intuitions turn out to be right, and it is her discovery of the old secrets of her, and her mother's home, that allow George to prevail.

The third book (FRAT) shows the continuing development of the Five as a team, this time against the malevolent Sticks. But there is also the question of Julian's increasing assertiveness. However, being Kirrin-based, George still has the edge. In FGTST (no. 4), Julian is more domineering, arguing for the boys' rightful position at the centre of any adventure. Interestingly, this is the first story to be based away from Kirrin, at a place owned by a friend of the boys. The Five do start at Kirrin, however, and George's parents still feature, whereas

in the fifth book—the second in which Julian and Dick have a boy ally—neither Kirrin nor George's parents appear at all. Away from George's seat of power, Julian is a more assertive leader:

> "I'm old enough to look after you all."
> "Pooh!" said George. "I don't want any looking after, thank you. And anyway, if we want looking after, Timmy can do that." (*FGOTC*, p. 16)

Julian's authority is endorsed by his father:

> "You will be in complete charge, you understand, Julian," said the boy's father. You are old enough now to be really responsible. The others must realize that you are in charge and they must do as you say." (*ibid.*, pp. 20-1)

But George adds, "And Timmy will be in charge, too. ... He's just as responsible as Julian"; this is echoed first by Anne and Dick and, finally, their Mother: "You certainly wouldn't be allowed to go without Timmy".

The struggle between Julian and George continues on their holiday, ending only when Julian manages to use Anne as an excuse for having his way, "Timmy or no Timmy" (p. 67). Even so, the reader is left in no doubt that George has not given in for herself. Julian is imperious in victory: "You get the breakfast, Anne and George, and Dick and I will catch the horses" (p. 68).

The sixth, and, at the time of its writing, supposedly the last 'Famous Five' (*FOKIA*), is particularly interesting. Here George's power seems to suffer further erosion. First there is Quentin's appropriation of Kirrin island (it is emphasised in the first book, incidentally, that the island was passed to George through her mother, not her father[6]). On it Quentin erects what can only be described as a highly-potent phallic symbol, 'a tall, thin tower, rather like a lighthouse. At the top was a glass-enclosed room, which glittered in the sun' (*FOKIA* p. 23). In Lacanian terms, we have here the phallus, the law of the Father. This 'erection' pulses with energy periodically, and the whole thing

blazes with light! Even James, the fisher-boy, seems to delight in George's loss: "'Your father's got the island, I see," he said to George with a grin. "Bad luck, Miss'" (p. 66). It is worth noting that James calls her 'miss' here, when he has previously addressed her as 'master'. Prophetically, he asks George if she'd like to leave Timmy with him "for a week or two" (p. 67). And so George's next sacrifice to her father soon follows, when she is persuaded to give up Timmy to him. Her concern for Timmy is made light of by the others, but we find her uncharacteristically described making the tea and washing-up afterwards, without protest.

We might suppose from the above that the tamed shrew now knows her place. Not so: she reasserts herself by going off to her island, alone, and at night (the only other time she does this is, significantly, fifteen books later, in the very last of the series). Her father is forced to recognise her on her own terms: "Good girl," said her father, and gave her a hug. "Honestly, George, you do behave as bravely as any boy. I'm proud of you" (p. 146). The book ends, significantly, with her father's 'erection' being destroyed: "'Can we ... watch the tower being taken down tomorrow?" begged George. "Do say yes!'" (p.191).

These gender struggles are reinvoked in the following books, but I think the point is made. What is worth remarking, however, is a gradual down-playing of George's power. Thus, by the seventh adventure, the growing control of the boys is clearly evident. Julian actually says to George at one point, "This is my adventure and Dick's—and perhaps Jock's. Not yours or Anne's" (*FGOTC*, p. 118). This, it should be noted, is even endorsed on the endpapers, with the three boys featuring: there is no sign of either girl.[7] The narrator, too, endorses this marginalisation. Thus, Mr Luffy is described as a good swimmer, 'faster even than Julian' (p.89)—not, note, 'George', albeit in the first book she was the fastest.

The undermining of George's independence is increasingly characteristic of the Five books, read in chronological order. By the time of *FGTDR* (no. 19) George

does not even raise her normal protest at being left out of an adventure; remarkably, she doesn't speak at all in this adventure-setting chapter (20), whereas even Anne speaks once! She seems effectively silenced. In fact, Julian actually demands her silence at times— even in her own home:

> "Mother, how *could* you take people in when you knew we were coming home today?"
> "That's enough, George," said Julian .... (*FGTDR*, p. 23)

In the final adventure (*FATA*) George is neglected to the extent of being totally mislaid by her author! In chapter 4 we are told that George and the boys set off from a professor's house to Kirrin on the bus; then, in the next chapter, while the boys are still away, George is found patiently sitting inside the house!

Once again though, the patriarchal order is confounded, despite Julian laying down the law: "There's to be no back-chat from *you*, George ...." (*FATA*, p. 22). This is made more explicit later, when Julian forbids her to go to her island: "You heard what I said, George. You are *not* to go!" He will go instead, he says, after all, 'If danger was about, he could deal with it better than George could. After all, she was only a *girl*!' (p.129).

To his surprise, she complies. But, as in that earlier 'final' book of the series, George takes matters into her own hands. She returns to her personal island, alone, at night, and despatches the crooks. (This return is not really necessary, but it is obviously a place of symbolic power for George, and for Five readers generally). In this book George ends up with one of the longest solo performances of the series. Not only does she deal with all this single-handedly, but the entire series ends on her:

> What an exciting time we've had! I really did enjoy every minute of it! So did we, George. Hurry up and fall into another adventure. (p. 176)

175

In fact, it ends on such a celebratory note that the initial plot mechanism—the quarantining of George's family —is completely forgotten!

A Token Boy?

Despite George's overall triumph, Cadogan and Craig's criticism that George is a token boy—as good as, but not the real thing—warrants investigation. First, it wants stressing that the term used—"as good as"—is Blyton's own: it is Blyton who makes this an issue, having both boys accuse George of being a fake. The point is, such discussions of what constitutes gender appropriate behaviour occur throughout the series. For example, here is Toby, explaining why George should not go to see an airfield:

> "But you're a *girl*," said Toby. "Girls don't understand the first thing about aeroplanes or motor-cars or ships—or spiders either, come to that! I really don't think you'd be interested, Georgina dear."
> "My name is *not* Georgina," said George furiously. "And don't call me 'dear'." (*FGTBH*, p. 67)

Not only interests, but looks are debated too, as with Dick:

> "Jolly girlish-looking boy you are, that's all I can say."
> George flared up at once. "Don't be mean! I'm *not* girlish-looking. I've far more freckles than you have, for one thing, and better eyebrows. *And* I can make my voice go deep." (*FOKIA*, p. 64)

The problem of what is appropriate behaviour for the sexes is something that concerns children a great deal—no less than it does feminists. Blyton, I am suggesting, did not just make George another tomboy; rather, Blyton put the whole debate about 'sexism' on the agenda in this series. Nevertheless, it might still be claimed that George is nothing more than a token boy. What makes her different, I would argue, is her emotional reaction to things—something that Dick tackles her about later in this same book: "Just like a girl, can't help blabbing" (*FOKIA*, p. 86). George shows emotion more than any other character in the series, much to her chagrin, whether it be tearfulness, her love for Timmy (e.g '"Lie down here by the fire, darling" ... He put his head on her knee. She

stroked him and whispered to him. ...George settled down with her head on his neck' - *FGAA*, p. 110), or simply anger. It is this which really distances her from the boys.[8] In the first book, George cries five times—once more than Anne, and two of the latter's tearful episodes are a result of being kicked under the table; George's passionate nature is clear; she 'sobbed with rage ... drying her eyes ... furious with herself for crying...' (*FOTI*, p. 104). In *FRAT* she loses not only her appetite but also her spirit of adventure, the former returning with a vengeance when her mother is better:

> George suddenly found that her appetite had come back. She ate her bacon hungrily, and scraped the dish round with a piece of bread. She had three cups of tea, and then sat back contentedly. (*FRAT* p. 65).

Of course, I am not seeking to argue that girls should be 'emotional', boys 'rational'—although many feminists have found themselves unwittingly backing down this 'essence of femininity' *cul-de-sac*.[9] However, it is what makes George more intriguing, and not simply a token boy. Henry, another 'tomboy' in the series, is cited by Cadogan and Craig to clinch their argument that George is not the real thing, in contrast to Anne. Yet a close look at the text shows that Henry (Henrietta) is depicted more as a contrast to George. Thus early in the story we find Henry cleaning her clothes and mending her riding jacket in anticipation of Julian and Dick's arrival (*FGTMM*, p. 19)—something George would never do. Also Henry is later to discover that she does not have George's mettle, and she calls on a boy to help her: "He'll know what to do. I only *pretend* to be a boy" (p. 160). Unlike George, she admits that she only pretends to be brave.

Strangely, Cadogan and Craig omit to mention Jo, who is the main alternative tomboy in the series. She was clearly a favourite of Blyton's (perhaps with a nod towards Alcott's heroine), and of Blyton's readers, appearing in three of the Five's adventures. Initially a gypsy girl, Jo effortlessly surpasses the Five in daring and capability—often rescuing all of them from scrapes. But once again, she is depicted as a contrast to George.

Let us now turn to Anne, who is a favourite target for those adopting a crude approach to sexism. With comments like, "You'd never get your bunks made, or your meals cooked, or the caravans kept clean if it wasn't for me! ... I love having two houses on wheels to look after" (*FGOIC*, p. 40), it is easy to see why. But this is a very narrow view, neglecting the fact that many girls do enjoy this behaviour, and are empowered by it, given the confines of a patriarchal society. In other words, they use their control of the domestic sphere to enable them in others. As Anne proclaims, "although Julian thinks he's in charge of us, *I* am really!" Here is Anne in action:

> "I'll just see what we've got in the larder, Julian," said Anne, getting up. She knew perfectly well what there was in the larder—but it made her feel grown-up and important to go and look. It was nice to feel like that when she so often felt small and young, and the others were big and knew so much. (*ibid.*, p. 61)

There are various examples of Anne engaging in what Foucault terms the 'microphysics of power' to good effect. For instance, in this same book when Julian characteristically says they'll eat, we are told, 'But Anne made them wash and tidy themselves first! ..."I'll give you five minutes—then you can come"' (*FGOIC*, p. 198). In another story Anne has a good put-down of George, calling her as 'ham-handed as a boy' (*FHMTS* p 78).

It is clearly because of this that some of my respondents came to see Anne as having a key role, like Diana (9), who thought Anne was the leader, alongside Julian. I asked her why:

Diana:	Well, she's the oldest girl and you need a, like a girl because the boys are a bit funny sometimes, silly, and get silly and leave it ...
DR:	What does Anne tell them to do then?
Diana:	Well she tells them to wash and stay clean when they're on adventures.

It would be wrong therefore, to belittle Anne's behaviour, particularly as it still represents a reality for many women. Rather than ignoring it, Blyton's books seem to engage in a dialogue about it—addressing it as an issue. By pretending that the world is suddenly free of these power struggles, that all the Five habitually engage in washing up, is to miss the tensions that Blyton explored. The latter might be a desirable state, but, as most ethnography shows, it is not yet a reality. To pretend it is so 'for the sake of children' is, as suggested earlier, to demean them. In the Five books, this sort of equality is not a given: it is fought for. Sometimes George wins—as in the instance below—but by no means predictably:

> "You three girls must wash up for me afterwards" ... .
> "Why can't the boys help?" said George at once.
> "*I'll* do the washing-up," said Anne with a sudden grin. "You four *boys* can go out to the stables!"
> Dick gave her a good-natured shove. "You know we'll help, even if we're not good at it." (*FGTMM*, p. 86)

So, George not only queries washing-up as 'women's work', but in this instance manages to involve the boys.

Those who simply pick out Anne's behaviour miss the intricacy of the sex war being waged. Without the contrast of Anne, George's behaviour would not appear half so subversive. Moreover, without Anne's representation of the traditional female role, the books would all too readily celebrate traditional male behaviour—something in which George is overly willing to collude. Thus, when Julian congratulates George for being "more like a boy than ever", simply because she acts magnanimously, we not only have George's smugness presented, but also Anne's 'indignant' reaction: "It isn't *only* boys that can learn to give in decently, and things like that"(*FOKIA*, p. 25).

So, rather than stick this essentialist label, 'sexist' on the books, I would prefer to say that they explore sexism in a way to which children can relate. To take away this dimension is to deny children some of the pleasure experienced in the

books—in particular in the person of George. At a time when boys' and girls' books were more clearly demarcated, it was to Blyton's credit that she produced 'adventures for boys and girls' (as the early subtitles had it)—and created a female character that boys not only find acceptable (generally boys avoid girl protagonists in stories), but positively rate (moreso than Julian). Trying to launder the books in terms of 'political correctness' is to undermine children's own capacities—particularly girls'; girls, it is often reasoned, need to be protected from such material. But to do this is to perpetuate the very discourse that many are trying to circumvent (i.e. perpetuating the notion that girls really do need wrapping in cotton-wool). As the opening anecdote of this article demonstrates, this attitude can frequently backfire.

Some modern books miss the tension of the Famous Five precisely because they inscribe a world of unlikely equality—whereas many children experience a world that is not like this. The Famous Five, I contend, allow children to take part in the struggle, to fight it themselves, rather than be protected from it. It is interesting here to note the research of Davies (1989), who found that the more 'feminist' versions of fairy tales were often resisted by children, chiefly, she theorises, because the children were caught, insecurely, in a double-bind. On the one hand their sense of personhood was mapped out in bi-polar gender terms, whilst on the other, these tales confounded such gender expectations. Perhaps books which start from a position that mirrors what is still the gender reality of many children, might have more success in questioning that identity.

Blyton's Famous Five engage in this struggle. However, it should not be thought that I am trying to promote Blyton as a feminist *avant le lettre*. She may have toyed with her own childhood resistance to the domestic role, but her vision is decidedly circumscribed. Thus the majority of her adults are stereotypically presented. Moreover, though the children are liberated from this stereotyping for a period, their ambitions are in keeping with the patriarchal views of the time. Hence George comments at one point, "...I shall NEVER marry a scientist" (*FFIA*, p. 18)—never considering whether she might *become* one, or even decide

against marrying. Such speculation is only for the boys; it is Julian who says, "I wouldn't mind being a scientist myself" (FOKIA, p. 28).

Having said this, the point about the Five is that their adventures celebrate the fact of not being grown-up, of being apart from the adults; and this is especially true of George. It is interesting that many find that George matures least over the course of the series, for George is undoubtedly the Peter Pan of the group: "I don't want to grow up," she thought. "There can't be anything nicer in the world than this—being with the others, having fun with them. No—I don't want to grow up!" (FGTBH p. 42).

It is also worth noting that not all the adults fit into the boring, stereotypical mould. But those that escape, who are less gender stereotyped, are those on the periphery of society. Thus, in FHWT, we have Anita who makes her husband— Alfredo—do some of the chores, much to Anne's surprise. This is specifically drawn attention to; Dick comments, on first seeing her, "What a tiny wife he has! I bet he makes her run around him, and wait on him hand and foot", but then Anne points to Alfredo fetching water for his wife. He also cooks the breakfast, and is later seen pegging out washing: 'It seemed a most unsuitable thing for a fire-eater to do, but Alfredo didn't seem to mind' (FHWT p. 79). Like George, the only way that they can manage to maintain this difference is by standing slightly aside from mainstream society, by being 'other'. This is emphasised at the end of the book, too, for, though the gypsy fair-folk are on the side of good, they are also outside the law; as Jo puts it, "No gypsy ever asked the police for help" (ibid., p. 142) and, sure enough, when the police arrive, 'Immediately almost all the fair-folk melted away into the darkness' (ibid., p. 180).

ENGLISHNESS

On re-reading the 'Famous Five' I was struck by the social context, which seems to have fed into the texts in a variety of ways, just as it was found to have done in 'Noddy'. I thought it was particularly interesting that the first book, FOTI,

was written in 1941. This is the story of George, with her friends, defending her island at a time when King George's people were also seeking to defend themselves from being overrun by 'wicked men'; when St George's 'sceptred isle' was under attack.[10] Churchill, with whom Hugh Pollock had been closely involved, had a little earlier spoken to the nation about 'This wicked man ... resolved to break our famous island race...' (Warner, 1994, p. 81).[11]

It is also of note that in the next book George reflects on the former glory of her family:

> "Did all this land round about belong to your family once upon a time?" asked Julian.
> "Yes, all of it," said George. "Now we don't own anything except Kirrin Island, our own house—and that farm away over there—Kirrin Farm."
> She pointed with her whip. (*FGAA* p. 27)

It is also in this 1943 book that Julian makes the comment, "Anne, the only way to stop you giving away secrets is to sew up your mouth, like Brer Rabbit wanted to do to Mister Dog!" (*FGAA* p. 71). The merciless kicking and nudging of Anne for her loose tongue is particularly prevalent in the early part of the series, and reminds me of the wartime slogan, 'Careless Talk Costs Lives'. Lest it be thought that I am making too much of this, it is worth noting that the wider context is often made explicit, as here by Julian: "We're doing this for your father—and maybe for our country too ..." (*FGAA* p. 162).

The idea of the country being under threat from traitors was a prevalent concern, increasing after 1945 with the many Cold War spy cases. Julian finds such behaviour incomprehensible: "That's a thing I don't understand—to be a traitor to one's own country. It leaves a nasty taste in my mouth to think of it", to which Dick adds, "Beasts! There's too much of that sort of thing nowadays, it seems to me!" (*FHWT* p. 28).[12] This Five story is about scientists who turn traitor, who "disappear to another country to sell our secrets!" (*ibid.*, p. 15). Later, the rogue scientist makes the comment, "They won't like life, where we're

going!" (*ibid.*, p. 135), clearly a veiled reference to Russia. This book was written in 1951, the year in which the Rosenbergs were found guilty of their wartime spying, giving atomic secrets to the Russians.

However, it is not only traitors that concern Blyton. There is also the growing influence and power of America over British destiny, arising out of post-World War II reparations, together with the more general cultural influence of America following the war. This is most explicit in *FOFF*, where the issue of "Selling our birthright" (p. 92) is made explicit, to which the brash American, Mr Henning, retorts, "You ought to be glad that a poor, run-down, back dated country like Britain has got anything to sell to a fine upstanding one like America!" (*FOFF* p. 93).

There is certainly a celebration here of Britain, and more generally, Blyton celebrates England, sometimes explicitly:

> "That was good," said Julian, voicing the feelings of the others. "Very good. I somehow feel more English for having seen those Dorset fields, set about by hedges, basking in the sun." (*FOFF* p. 73-4)

It is clearly something that makes an impact on readers too. Several drew attention to this, as have other commentators, as in Ronald Hayman's eulogy (see chapter 3).

> I could see through her eyes, the brook, the villages, the surroundings of an old English garden. (f)

> ...her books were everything "English" ...the beautiful countryside and green of England (f)

Clearly, from an adult point of view, the discourse of Englishness is plain. The very landscape in which the Five play, one of hedgerows, village greens, rolling hills and woodlands, is one that is iconically English (Howkins, 1987), although it is more specifically the south (the nearest the Five get to the north is Wales).

It is also 'the countryside' that is seen to epitomise the true England, with its cottages and large country houses (*Country Life*, which helped forge this myth, was itself founded in the year of Blyton's birth), in opposition to the town:

> "Why is it that people on farms always have the most delicious food? I mean, surely people in towns can bottle raspberries and pickle onions and make cream cheese?"
> "Well either they can't or they don't," said George. (*FOHT* p. 89)

Even Quentin's science is presented as pre-industrial, individualistic, a hobby-like cottage-industry. This belief in the 'beauty and moral worth of England' was one that was common at the end of the nineteenth century, and certainly informed the works of the influential Arthur Mee (Smith, 1987, p. 271). It celebrated the Elizabethan age, even down to its 'Tudorbethan' houses—of which 'Green Hedges', the name itself metonymic of this England, was a prime example. As a number of writers have commented, ideologically this move helped naturalise middle-class aspirations by linking them to older aristocratic values: the country and the soil were seen to capture the true character of the English, as cultivated in the spartan, 'masculine' public school system. Julian would certainly seem to epitomise this type: cool, manly, a born leader of men, and one who laughs at all notions of effeminacy (just as does Julian in the Comic Strip's *Five Go Mad in Dorset*, when Dick starts to go 'soft' and emotional).[13]

If we turn from the text to the readers, though, the discourse of Englishness is not so prevalent. Only one percent of respondents said they liked the books for this aspect—and this was exclusively the adults. Some overseas readers made the following comment: 'Many of us have been disappointed on visits to the UK because it is not Enid-Blyton'ish at all'(m). I would suggest that, though the discourse of Englishness is certainly a preferred reading for the student of popular culture, for others, it is far less explicit. Her minimalist descriptions can be linked to a great variety of actual landscapes, which is why so many readers seem to have personalised them. Even here, though, most admitted to being

vague about any concrete location, seeing the landscape as more imaginary than real: 'I don't actually remember where I saw the story happening, I don't really think that I related it to any country'(f). Certainly, where translations have attempted to capture more local colour, they have been less successful; one respondent informed me that 'the Malay version was not popular at all—due to the fact that all the names and the places were converted to local names' (f).

So, while the signifier Blyton itself evokes a conception of 'Englishness', it is essentially a secure, cosy environment that is being constructed, one with minimal historical or geographical coordinates.[14] And this homeland is set against all that is 'other', which is usually inferior in the Blyton world. I have already drawn attention to her perspective on Americans, which was very much of its time (Hebdidge, 1982). There are some who do not fit this stereotype, but generally they are loud and brash, like Zerelda Brass in the 'Malory' series. As her teacher speculates, "Was America really so slack in its teaching of children, or was it just that Zerelda was stupid?" (Third p. 47).

The French are most prominently lampooned though, mainly in the Laurel and Hardy double-act of 'thin and sour' Mam'zelle Rougier and 'fat and jolly' Dupont, with their misunderstanding of idiomatic English. There is also Suzette, a French pupil (as there is Claudine in 'St.Clare's'), who 'hadn't quite the same ideas of responsibility that the British girls had' (Sixth p. 100), and it is of note that spineless, selfish Gwendoline wishes she were French, 'Then I shouldn't have had to swim if I didn't want to, or tire myself out trying to hit a silly ball over a net' (Second, p. 27).[15] The Five stories do not involve many foreigners. They are far more prevalent in the 'Secret' and 'Adventure' series with their more cosmopolitan background, but the message is the same: the English (i.e. the home-side for readers in most cultures) are seen as the standard bearers.

CLASS

Not only is there a pride in being on this home team, but it is grounded in middle-class codes and manners. The middle-classes are paragons of deportment and behaviour, the Famous Five being their young representatives: "We're on the side of the right, and it's worth while running into a bit of danger for that", as Julian puts it in *FOHT* (pp. 165-6). Julian also believes in the liberal notion of 'one nation'. Following a comment from one of the circus people that, "Us-folk and you-folk don't mix" (*FHWT* p. 48), Julian responds, "There's a lot of that kind of feeling about these days, and it's so silly. We're all the same under the skin" (*ibid.*, p 49). This, perhaps, reflects certain sensitivities of the time (it was written in 1951); for example, a concern with the breakdown of old class barriers following the war and the installation of a fairly radical programme of social reform with the post-war labour government of 1945.

So, does this mean that the books are 'class-ist'? Such a reading can certainly be sustained. We find a far more hierarchical society, with servants, cooks, gardeners, and a more deferential approach to authority; there are also travelling gypsies and circuses and an occasional concern with tramps ('Anne put her bicycle carefully into the middle of a bush. You never knew when a tramp might be about, watching to steal something!'- *FGIT* p. 52). The police, on the other hand, are the 'agents of middle class, keeping their established order and dignity in being and discriminating in their favour' as Jackson notes (1991, p. 318), and they are generally deferential to the Five. But it does not seem problematic that Blyton should feature such elements, given that they were part of the social landscape, just as they are in, for instance, Edgar Wallace, Aldous Huxley or Somerset Maugham. There is also a middle-class sensitivity to smell, about which some critics feel rather embarrassed—though, again, it is typical of the period, such that George Orwell has called it 'the real secret of class distinctions in the West ... *The lower classes smell'* (1962, p. 112), continuing: 'Race-hatred, religious hatred, differences of education, of temperament, of intellect, even differences of moral code, can be got over; but physical repulsion cannot' (*ibid.*, p. 160).[16]

Are social critics worried that children might see it as reflecting contemporary society? Certainly, even the youngest of my respondents were aware that the stories were old-fashioned, part of a bygone age (though some, disconcertingly, had this age situated only as far back as the 1980s!). They mentioned a number of the above elements as evidence, plus the stereotyping of sex roles, the lack of television and computers. But most frequently they mentioned the freedom that the Five have, to roam the country and do things:

> ...hedges and roadside trees grew unchecked from one springtime to the next, turning every lane in summer into a green tunnel, waist-deep at the verge with campion and cow-parsley .... Farther away the tunnels led to stranger destinations, to secret lakes in overgrown woods where swans rose screaming from their nests ... to small waterfalls tinkling bright in the gloom of stream-cut grottoes under bridges at the turn of an oak-hung road; to short-tufted upland sheep runs where we improvised picnics to the wheeled, hump-backed sheds to which shepherds lambed their ewes.

This is John Keegan, a military historian, writing about his boyhood war years, which he remembers as 'six years so consistently illuminated by sunlight, so deeply suffused by happiness, so consistently unmenaced by danger' (Keegan, 1982, p. 4), thus conveying a very Blytonesque feel in the process of depicting the child's blithe unawareness of other issues.

Not only were my readers aware that the books were from a former age, but it was one whose class structure they readily parodied. Frequently, in interview, they would drop into 'posh' accents to render Five speech. For example, one mocked the idea of asking her mother if she could go off with her friends in a caravan, to which her friend responded, very plum-voiced, 'Oh yes, dear, of course' (f,12), to much laughter. Older readers recalled doing the same: '...we tended to put on rather middle-class accents and say things like 'I say, what's going on here, Ju?'' (f).

Some critics, though, seem to think that Blyton was not merely a product of her times, but that her books are more actively anti-working class. Dixon was

probably the earliest to take this view, and it has been regularly parroted by others since, becoming ever more simplistic. Thus Druce, taking such a stance, argues that Blyton's own social progression to upper-middle-class made her specially anxious about the lower classes (Druce, 1992, p. 223). However, this type of reading is only sustainable from a very partial look at the texts. First, most of the working-class characters, whilst they are usually background figures, are perfectly normal and acceptable—like Joan, for instance. In *FGOTC*, in fact, we find those involved in the black market, whom Julian calls 'the wrong kind of workers' (p. 59) contrasted with Will, who explicitly distances himself from these 'ninnies and idjits' (p. 58).

But, of course, it is those that are *not* acceptable upon which the debate tends to concentrate, some even seeing Blyton as making all the working-class characters criminals. Having carefully worked through the twenty-one Fives, though, I can say that this is not the case: eight have working-class villains whilst ten are middle class (there are two where the situation is more mixed, and one story— *FOFF*—has no criminals). Regarding foreigners, only four feature vaguely foreign-sounding villains.[17] Lastly, it is often said that the Five only deal with higher-ranking police, whilst 'ordinary policemen, who are working class ...are often held in contempt' (Dixon, 1974b, p. 58). This also seems false. In the Five there are six dealings with inspectors, certainly, but seven with ordinary police, with whom the Five are most cordial.[18] I suspect that Dixon is here pinning too much on the character of Mr. Goon in the Find-Outers, who seems merely a representative of a long line of abused figures of authority (for instance, the police in *Punch and Judy*, Charlie Chaplin, and *Top Cat*, plus the genre convention in much detective fiction, from Conan Doyle to Agatha Christie, where they are humiliated by figures such as Miss Marple).[19]

So, while middle-class values and behaviour are undoubtedly the unquestioned norm, there is no simple formula of middle-class = good, working class = bad. There are quite a few middle-class children whose behaviour is criticised—Cecil Dearlove (*FGOTC*), Toby Thomas (*FGTBH*), Junior Henning (*FOFF*), Henrietta

(*FGTMM*) and Richard Thurlow Kent (*FGIT*), for instance. What these have in common is a lack of 'character' when put to the test—a common ploy of folk and fairy tales. As Judith Rowbotham has argued, 'character' is a neglected notion, often missed by those concentrating on such issues as gender:

> Character concerned itself with temperament rather than sexual nature; it was 'character' that marked people out as good, bad or indifferent. It encompassed the attributes that helped people either maintain their original station in life or where fitting, rise to a higher one. Equally, it was the factor that explained the downfall of people who were, in a superficial way, blessed by possession of natural talent. Both of these implied potential, but character summed up the merit, or lack of it, that accompanied them and ultimately, made them socially useful and worthwhile: one reason why middle-class society in this period accepted merit as an arbiter of fortune in life, and something that could overcome established class barriers. (Rowbotham, 1989, p. 101)

She goes on to indicate how it was developed by good education, emphasising that it was not just a 'patriarchally inspired plot to restrict women to a limited sphere. Estimation of character for both sexes is established as one of the fundamental elements of the spirit of the age' (*ibid.*, p. 103).

Blyton, especially given her Froebel training, seems particularly concerned with this, seeing parents as bearing the brunt of responsibility for wayward offspring. Thus, in *FRAT* (a favourite Five amongst critics; see Druce, 1992[20]; Hildick, 1970; Watson, 1987; and Wright, 1980), young Edgar Stick's parents are described as 'no good to Edgar, and had taught him nothing but bad things. There might be a chance for the wretched boy if he were kept away from them, and set a good example instead of a bad one' (*FRAT* p. 191). This is a key theme in the school stories (see Rudd, 1997a), such that Miss Grayling, the headmistress of Malory Towers, reflects, 'Really, I think somebody should start a School for Parents too!' (*Sixth* p. 120)—which is just what Froebel tried to do (and for mothers in particular).

Blyton's concern with 'character', therefore, needs to be seen in conjunction with class difference (as it was perceived in Blyton's day), and this can most

clearly be seen in those stories which deal with cruelty or deprivation. Many of her short stories are concerned with this theme, with exacting punishment for those maltreating either animals[21] or other children. In the Five stories this is seen with characters like Nobby and Sniffer, but especially Jo: 'To think that in these days there should be a forlorn waif like Jo, going in fear of others, and often hungry and lonely' (*FFIA* p. 64). When Dick tells her she shouldn't steal food, the exchange is revealing:

> "Well, wouldn't you, if you were so hungry you couldn't even bear to look at a baker's cart?" said Jo.
> "No—I don't think so. At least, I hope not," said Dick, wondering what he really would feel like if he were starving." (*ibid.*)

This is particularly pertinent in view of Joan's earlier comment:

> "...last holidays I left a meat pie and half a tongue and a cherry tart and a trifle sitting on the shelves for the next day's meals—and when I came back from my half-day's outing there wasn't a thing to be seen." (*FFIA* p. 18)[22]

So, though Blyton had little insight into those of another class, here she shows an awareness of their plight, and of the different value systems. In this regard it is interesting that Jo is scarcely reprimanded for running away from her new and kindly foster-parents, whereas Richard Thurlow Kent (*FGIT*) is severely upbraided for neglecting to inform his parents of his whereabouts.

As I mentioned earlier, those on the periphery of society—the gypsies, fair- and circus-folk (scarcely even working-class)—are allowed far more latitude. They tend to break the rules of patriarchy, have less sex stereotyped children (Jo being the key example), and are free of many social conventions.[23] Just as George can only escape the patriarchal yoke by running off and acting independently, so, it seems, the only way that others can escape the confines of society is by living in its interstices, between nature and culture.

This peripheral group is also more child-like, and their very fascination for the Five is bound up with their difference, the unsavoury smells and lack of manners. Thus the children encountered by the Five in *FGOIC* are described as 'dirty and ragged, but most of them had beautiful eyes and thick curly hair, though it wanted brushing and washing' (*FGOIC* p. 90). In this book, both Dick and Anne are seen to envy Nobby, doing cart-wheels rather than fractions (*FGOIC* pp. 86-7). The Five often enter this interstitial, forbidden world in their adventures, as in *FGDTS*, where the Five are particularly fascinated by the Barnies, a travelling group of players, whose pantomime horse, Clopper, the boys dress up in.

So, all in all, it is certainly the case that the Five are middle-class, and that differences between them and the working-class are marked, but I have also suggested that most readers are already aware of this, some through personal experience—'when I was 7 I certainly didn't want to read about the kind of life I was leading, and relished tales of scrounging chocolate cakes of [sic] the cook, etc.'(f)—the appeal for these being precisely their fantasy quality, 'completely different than my life on a council estate in Wigan' (f), whereas, for others, their awareness comes across in the accentuated 'plummy' voices they put on for the Five. I would suggest that it is the more basic notion of 'character' that drives most of the tales, albeit this notion is itself middle-class in many ways.[24]

However, moving towards a child's reading, I have also indicated that one of the main pleasures of the books is the fact that the traditional framework of society—with regard to sex and class—is temporarily questioned: patriarchy can be challenged, and the Five can upset middle-class tenets by going below ground, both literally, with their tunnelling, and socially, in joining the gypsy and fair-folk. Thus Joan, the cook, describes the Five as "dirty little tatterdemalions ...You might all be sister and brothers to that ragamuffin Jo" (*FFIA* p. 125), which they compound by eating like her.[25] As Sarland neatly puts it, 'it is the challenge to the cultural order that children find absorbing rather than the re-

establishment of it at the end of the stories' (1983, p. 171). This will be explored in more depth in the sections that follow.

ADULTS vs THE FIVE

The challenge to cultural order is nowhere more evident than in the relation between adults and children. In fact, if Blyton is guilty of any *ism* it is age*ism* that is the real culprit. Adults are always suspect—and particularly so in the Five books. There may be good and bad ones, but all are tarred to some extent; even George's parents are shown as untrustworthy, capable of doing exactly what they want by selling George's island. Quentin's put-down is significant: "You're only a child. Your mother didn't really mean what she said—it was only to please you" (*FOTI* p. 108). Julian reinforces this view. "It wasn't a bit of good fighting grown-ups. They could do exactly as they liked. If they wanted to take away George's island and castle, they could" (*ibid.*), which is endorsed later by all the children (*ibid.* p.183). The put-down, "You're only a child", is, of course, also a key cry of their adversaries (*ibid.*, p. 148), but to their cost, for 'what hope has a band of desperate men against four children?' as Eileen Colwell famously put it. And yet, it is not only superiority to the crooks, but to adults in general—a basic opposition which seems to unite readers irrespective of differences in sex, ethnicity or class.

The adults who have more sense are those who recognise that children should be given space. Thus George's mother deliberately absents herself in *FOTI*, as does Mr Luffy in *FGOTC*. This is in line with Blyton's Froebel philosophy, that children should be left to their own devices as much as possible, and should be given a rich, natural environment; then they will grow 'straight'. Rural England is seen as the perfect nursery in which the Five can flex their moral and mental muscle. Of course, the absenting of adults is common in this sort of series fiction. They are removed by illness (again, following E. Nesbit), by work, or are simply dead. But Blyton seems to go beyond the convention. Not only does she have the children celebrate their own company, but she also emphasises

adults' right to be free of their children, to be on their own (this might reflect Blyton's own concern to have time with her new husband, Darrell Waters—whom she had met in the spring of 1941, and was to marry two years later, Blyton's children having been packed off to boarding school). For example, in the very first book, it is suddenly put to the children that their parents want to go away on their own.[26] In *FHPOF*, George's parents do the same. Fanny says, "I'll go with you, Quentin ... I could do with a quiet two days" (*FHPOF* p. 78). They also, rather too frequently, leave no forwarding address—"it's so like them not to give us an address!", as Julian says in *FHPOF* (p. 117). Clearly, they are not quite in the same league as Hansel and Gretel's parents, but they are far from exemplary.

Julian is an interesting creation in this regard, often seen to be "almost grown-up"—as Fanny says (*FFIA* p. 15).[27] He is very good, for instance, 'at getting porters and taxis' (*FOKIA* p 18). In *FRAT* we are told that, 'He somehow seemed a different Julian—a grim and determined Julian, a very grown-up Julian, a rather frightening Julian' (p. 38). Julian himself strives to live up to this image. In *FFIA*, when Joan, the cook, offers to lock up, Julian declines her offer. "That's the man's job, you know, locking up the house. You can trust me all right" (*FFIA* p. 26). Unfortunately for Julian, the house is burgled that very night, gently undermining his role (out of context, without the irony, this sentence can convey a very different message).

This behaviour explains many readers' ambivalence towards Julian: he can be looked up to as he aspires—like any child—to gain access to the freedom of the adult world; yet he can also, as a consequence, be fun no longer, but staid, boorish, and overly-rational. His bossiness is frequently in evidence. He even advises the other members on how to dress: "'I'm glad you girls took my advice and wore your thickest shoes," said Julian...' (*FOHT* p. 25), and, in *FGOIC*, we are told that, 'The children had all put on extra jerseys, by Julian's orders' (p. 141).

This domineering nature is often commented on by the others. For example, when he captains the raft in *FOHT*: "None of you need paddle till I say so," he tells them (p. 131), and, when Dick and George argue, Julian tells them to "Shut up". George retorts, "All right, Teacher!" (p. 138). Earlier in the same book Dick also upbraids Julian, after the latter's remark:

> "...perhaps you feel able to tell us exactly why you ignored my instructions and didn't arrive where you were supposed to last night."
> "You sound like our headmaster at school!" said Dick. (*FOHT* p. 71)

Even Anne considers him 'high-and-mighty and proud' at one point (*FHWT* p. 91), though it is with George that most of the clashes occur:

> "You know quite well that if ever you go against the orders of the chief— that's me, my girl, in case you didn't know it—you won't come out with us again." (*FOHT* p. 34)

Being almost an adult, Julian can also be guilty of adult hypocrisy. In *FGTDR*, he reprimands Tinker for talking about his father's absent-mindedness: "'That's enough," said Julian. "We don't tell tales about our parents in public'" (p. 51). Yet Julian does just this several pages later, when discussing Tinker's father in front of a much larger audience (including Tinker and George's mother): "I bet the Professor won't be down till about eleven, and forget all about his bacon and eggs!" (*ibid.*, p. 55). Julian's rational approach to things can also distance him from some of his audience; thus he is sometimes dismissive of the stories they hear; for example, in *FGTDR* Julian comments, "It's a jolly good story—but please don't think there's any treasure still hidden somewhere, George" (p. 97).

So, though Julian might possess adult qualities, thus giving him more power, these qualities can also make him appear myopic. George is clearly the most intuitive—excepting Timmy, whose sixth sense is legendary (and who is always playful, never boorish; always sensual and exuberant)—and she often shows Julian to be in error, which, to Julian's credit, he usually admits: "You were right and we were wrong, George" (*FGAA* p. 192).

Comments from my subjects support this reading, many finding the ambivalence to Julian I have mentioned. He was certainly seen as a paragon, in fact some females even admitted to having a 'hopeless crush' on him, and of being jealous of Anne. One amusingly juxtaposed him with Dick: 'I can imagine Julian being dead tall and nice looking, and Dick would just be small and spotty', but this also made him suspect, as others said: he was 'like a father', 'the boring and sensible old one', 'too goody-goody', and 'really bossy' (a word commonly used). The following 12 year old boy captures it neatly, contrasting the leadership styles of George and Julian. Whereas the former would 'just lead them into the wild', Julian, 'sort of, gets the calculator out, if you know what I mean'.

George is generally seen as a more dangerous character, likely to go out on a limb over an issue: 'harum scarum George'—as Bentley put it—a sentiment echoed by many of my subjects: 'awesome', 'George was just the best', 'she's really the main person in the stories ... Everything sort of ... goes round her'. I have already stressed the power struggle between her and Julian, but it is interesting to see respondents endorsing the view that Timmy is George's 'right-hand man', empowering her independence. The two are a unit. And Timmy, of course, not Julian, is also the second favourite Five character.

Some boys disapproved of George precisely because she did not act as a girl:

| Simon: | Yeah I don't like George because she was a girl but she was trying to be like a boy ... Georgina. [...] She ought to be a proper girl. |
| Gillian: | That's sexist! (11 year olds) |

The other two Five members were certainly less popular. Dick had his supporters: 'When I was really young I always liked parts were [sic] Dick was given prominence' (m). And in one group of 14 year olds it was most interesting to see the dynamics of the one white boy, Joseph, against a power bloc of two

Asians. Joseph chose Dick as his favourite character because 'He says interesting things and he's funny, like', and then proceeded, unwittingly, to play out the role of joker in the interview (as others played out characteristic roles, too). Despite the general dominance of Shahid and Waqas, Joseph managed to undermine their authority thanks to his superior knowledge of the Five, at one point by feeding Shahid misleading information (see appendix V).

Anne, without a doubt, was despised by many. One girl described her as 'really wet with her alice band' (not in the original, but worn in the 1978 TV series, and in Betty Maxey's book illustrations); others called her such things as 'a wimp', 'feeble', and 'namby-pamby'. However, it should be said that she did have her supporters. When I mentioned the stereotyping, one girl objected, 'That's not true' and immediately adduced evidence: 'if you've read *The Famous Five Get into Trouble* [sic], Anne climbs up a tree' (f, 10). Others were simply comfortable with Anne's dependence:

> Rebecca (16): I really like that yeah, 'cos... I always wanted ... someone to look after me. I don't know. I'm just really different, aren't I? [...] I just always liked the fact that ... I didn't, I didn't relate myself to anybody. But I liked er, the boys looked after the girls, and it were just ... I just liked it. [laughter from other three girls] I like to get to do the chores at home.

But regardless of her behaviour, Anne is still seen as an essential part of the Five. One 10 year old girl complained of one story (*FFIA*) that 'it wasn't really like the Famous Five adventure, 'cos Anne stayed at home all the time...'. As I've shown above, there is also a sense of power in Anne's role, and some readers certainly saw this. I would also suggest that Anne is important for another reason—not simply as a stereotypical counterpoint to George, but as a signifier of the security of home, with her portable hearth.[28] (I would suggest that many respondents were far more ambivalent about Anne than they made explicit: they found her presence comforting, but also enjoyed despising her).

But the main thing is the Five's unity. As George says in one story before the boys have arrived, "Why—we shan't be the Five—the Famous Five—if they don't come!" (*FOST* p. 21). Many readers liked it when the Five were 'all together' (m, 15), 'all involved' (m, 15). As one adult put it, 'one relates to the camaraderie of the main characters' (m), and their friendship seems to be one of the pleasures of the texts. Some explicitly commented on this: 'I liked the friendship between characters', the 'group feeling' (f), 'a happy collective' (m)—which added to the feeling of security in the books, especially as 'Everybody got on much better with each other than the children and adults I knew' (f). For others, though, the friendship went further than this, giving some psychological comfort: 'I found the characters believable—and a lot more interesting than my friends in everyday life!' (f) and 'The characters became my friends, I am an only child' (f).

There seems to be a recognition here that children's power lies in their solidarity—in being a unit, which we see being forged in the very first book. In the earlier volumes especially, the physical closeness of the Five, their bonding through touch, is quite explicit, and unusual. For example, in *FGAA*, Dick and Julian hug the girls (pp. 17-8), and Dick repeats this gesture with George at the end of the story (p. 192). Dick also calls Anne "darling", and sends Julian to George with their love (p. 136). In one way, there should be nothing unusual about this, but given the stereotypical division of the sexes in many books, it is quite exceptional. This said, there is a suggestion that if anyone is left out of this emotional coterie, it is Julian, not George: 'George...linked her arms in Anne's and Dick's' (*FFIA* p. 11). Timmy has already been mentioned in this connection, but the physical closeness that he can attain is a perfect metonym of their general unity, sometimes resulting in quite comical writing, as in *FGTDR*, when Fanny phones the Barnards and asks for George; a neighbour replies, "all the Five have already left, on their bicycles" (*FGTDR* p. 13).[29]

Drawing on a post-structuralist notion of subjectivity, then, I would suggest that, for readers, the Five can be related to as a composite. Readers can enjoy a more

'grown-up' subject position in Julian, but also delight in George's obduracy and impetuosity, Timmy's intuition and physicality, Dick's appetite and cheeky humour, yet still have a place for Anne, as a more timid and homely self (even though they might frequently despise this self).[30] As one male respondent put it, 'I came from a family of three boys and no sisters, and I suspect the brother-sister relationships portrayed in the books filled something I may have felt was lacking.'

To sum up these last three sections, I have made the move from adult discursive threads about gender, nationhood and class, to the way that most children seem to read the texts. For them it is the empowering of children against adults that appeals, and, in this, 'St George' is the children's champion. She is the most outspoken against adults and their ways, and, as I quoted at the end of the gender section, she is the one who celebrates not growing-up, envisioning herself and Timmy on their island, forever. In this way we can explain George's overall appeal across the sexes, whilst also recognising her extra appeal for girls in standing up against patriarchy.

THE FIVE AND THE 'F' WORD - PLEASURES OF THE TEXT

Whereas adults might find some of the above discourses, on gender, nationhood and class, suitably serious, the young reader might prefer to code them as 'boring'. Children enjoy the companionship, as has just been argued, but this is just one of the pleasures of the text. The word 'companion' is, literally, someone with whom you break bread, and it would be impossible to think of the Five together without 'Food'—as for them it is always "Food with a capital F", as Mrs Barnard puts it (*FHMTS* p. 9). But besides food, also involved are freedom, leisure and the experience of holidays in general. I shall also suggest that for many readers, the pleasure of the text is not merely a mental enjoyment, but a sensual one.

The food scenes in the stories are certainly memorable, as in the Comic Strip's litany of 'lashings of ginger beer, plus ham and turkey sandwiches, tomatoes, lettuce and hard boiled eggs'[31]. Barker confesses that he always thought 'condensed' meant sweet, after Blyton's evocative description of condensed milk as a 'creamy, sweet liquid' (Barker, 1982, p. 10), and Jan Leeming (1982) admits that she tried to make her own 'honey-pop' biscuits, inspired by the 'Faraway Tree' books. Readers readily endorse the power of the food images:

> The one thing which remains most valid in my mind next to the tension of each mystery is the food scenes. In every book there was at least three mouthwatering descriptions of the feasts (always with ginger ale). It makes me hungry just thinking about it now. (f)

> Whenever I eat popping candy now I still feel like I'm in erm, Enid Blyton books (f, 17)

Older readers, who experienced rationing up until the early 1950s, confessed that the books were particularly attractive in this regard. This was even more potent for overseas readers, for whom some of the items were pure fantasy:

> ...she made mundane things like fresh bread and butter sound so mouth watering. For years i lusted for hot buttered scones, treacle tart, blackmange [sic] pudding (without having the slightest clue as to what they were). I got the chance to taste the stuff years later when i spent some time in england. I don't think i've ever been so disillusioned. (m)

For some, the cultural shock was even worse, as this Muslim reader related:

> I found her description of food items and activities centered around eating, most delightful. I remember becoming extremely curious & fantasising about food items that I wasn't very likely to come across in my pretty vegetarian environment. A hilarious incident comes to mind. After reading several books, where 'tongue sandwiches' were mentioned, I had this amazing mental idea of what it might be (a kind of culinary exotica that people-who-are- cool-must-eat-at-picnics!! :-)). When my mother finally explained to me what it really was, I remember being quite shocked. (f)

Certainly the texts are full of food, such that some critics have sought to make a psycho-analytical point here.[32] Woods, for example, describes the food as more reminiscent of an orgy in an Edwardian emporium than a modern child's idea of a good 'blow-out. ...This is not food it is archetypal feasting, the author's longing for the palmy days of her own childhood' (Woods, 1968 p 13; also Barker, 1982b). Others see it more in sexual terms. Katz, for instance, surmises that food might be 'the sex of children's literature ...' (Katz, 1980, p. 192). The two are obviously closely related, but ultimately this is a reductionist move, in that each has its own pleasures; it is also rather adult-centred—as true, perhaps, as a child saying that sex might be the food of adult's literature!

If one were to make any psychoanalytical connection, Klein's perspective would seem most appropriate, in that she sees the provision of food as associated with the offer of the breast, and its withholding in similar terms. Defined in this way, there are certainly many examples of good and bad mothers in the Five stories. Mrs Stick would be a good example of the latter, with Mrs. Andrews exemplifying the former[33]; significantly, the latter is only described in terms of her larder: "Did you get a peep into that enormous larder of his mother's? It's like a great cave, goes right back into the wall, with dozens of stone shelves— and all filled with food" (Dick speaking, of course, *FGOTC* p. 81). When the Five are given the sustenance they need, they are emotional putty: "I could hug you", says Julian, when offered food in *FOHT*, a sentiment the others endorse. Feelings are frequently demonstrated in this way, as the following extract shows:

> "Best sandwiches I've ever tasted," he said. "I do like those sardine ones. Does your mother make them for you? I wish I had a mother. Mine died ages ago."
> There was a sympathetic silence. The four could not think of any worse thing to happen to a boy or girl. They offered Martin the nicest buns, and the biggest piece of cake immediately. (*FOKIA* pp. 74-5)

This is a common compensation, which their cook, Joanna, also uses: 'If she thought anyone was upset, she offered them her best and freshest food' (*FOKIA* p. 104).

Dick feels that cooks should be seen on a level with scientists and writers, putting a traditionally female activity on a level with more celebrated male ones:

> "You know, I do think good cooks deserve some kind of decoration, just as much as good soldiers or scientists, or writers. I should give Joanna the O.B.C.B.E.[Order of the Best Cooks of the British Empire]" (*FOKIA* p. 104) [34]

Not only is food enjoyed in the books, but readers often like to simulate this oral satisfaction themselves while reading of the Five's activities. I have already confessed my own indulgence with *Twiglets*, and other readers have made similar confessions: 'memories of eating picallilli butties'(f) or of reading with 'a copious supply of digestive biscuits'(f).

Clearly, the security of eating contrasts poignantly with the danger of adventure. But eating is only one way this emulation of their heroes is achieved. Other readers hid themselves away, creating, like Anne, little hearths, or nest-like areas. These are a few of the places readers confessed to reading: 'secret place— in winter in built in wardrobe (den) over hot water pipes (warm!)', 'by the fireside', 'sit hunched up in the cupboard half of the airing cupboard (having removed the lego and meccano, etc) with a torch', 'secret place—in a corner of the living room behind the sofa', 'settee, lawn in summer', 'Under the bedcovers with a torch when my parents insisted on the light being switched off', 'on a sofa sitting upside down' (an interesting reversal). This activity is reminiscent of that of soap fans (Hobson, 1982) and romance readers (Radway, 1984), part of whose pleasure was precisely the space that these texts gave them, to resist their usual activities under patriarchy. For the following Blyton reader, this resistance is more explicit: 'In the class room while a class was going on had immense satisfaction doing that :-). used to have a competition about who can complete reading a full book without getting caught' (m).[35] However, the most popular place of all was bed, often nested under the bedclothes with a torch, and sometimes eating—engaging in a personal 'midnight feast'. This is obviously another challenge to parental authority, creating one's own space, but it is also a

way of emulating the activities of the Five. Thus, in *FGOTC*, the Five are described in their 'warm, soft sleeping-bags' (p. 25)—a description that is made more alluring in that they're eating chocolate and biscuits.

Sleep is quite prevalent in the books—something that surprised me when I returned to the texts. Despite their Englishness, the Five seem to be firm believers in the siesta: after a picnic, on a sunny day, the Five are likely to sprawl on the grass and doze (e.g. *FGIT* p. 23). Again, it clearly marks out leisure time. But even their night-time sleeping activities are alluringly described, particularly the shift in consciousness from what Schutz (1962) terms one 'life-world' to another. The following passage, for instance, with Julian falling asleep, is typical:

> He didn't hear Timmy howling outside once more. He didn't hear the screech owl that made the night hideous on the hill. He didn't see the moon slide down the sky. (*FGIT* p114).[36]

We, the readers, are privy to the background noise of the Blyton universe, where nature diurnally proceeds. However, it has a separate function in the books, which is equally alluring. This is to shift us into the adventure realm. It is most clearly done in *FGOIC*, where the Five fall asleep in the afternoon, awaking to observe a circus going by (pp. 9-10), which provides their adventure. In *FOKIA*, there is a passage quite reminiscent of Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, with Timmy going rabbiting while the children sleep. George wakes to find that Timmy has gone down an extra deep rabbit hole, and then proceeds to follow him (*FOKIA* p. 76). It should also be noted that their adventures themselves are often described as dream-like:

> "This is a most peculiar adventure to have."
> "It's probably a dream," said Julian, and laughed. No—not even a dream could be so mad." (*FGTMM* p. 130)

This device, I believe, is used to shift the reader into the 'mythic' time of the story: a fantasy realm from which normal life is bracketed off. It is a time in

which to indulge one's leisure, preferably while eating. Dick expresses it in a quite sybaritic way:

> "I can't think of anything nicer than lying down on hot sand with the sun on every part of my body, eating an ice-cream, and knowing there are still three weeks' holiday in front of us..." (*FHPOF* p. 9-10).[37]

Holidays, of course, are the key markers of this mythic time—a legitimate 'time-out' for children. Dick expressly draws attention to the word as "the nicest ...in the English language" (*FHMTS* p. 9) and elsewhere is the narratorial comment, 'How lovely to wake in a strange place at the beginning of a holiday—to think of bathing and biking and picnicking and eating and drinking—forgetting all about exams and rules and punishments!' (*FGDTS* p. 37).

Holidays are counterposed to school, which only features in one book in the whole series (*FOHT*). Generally, any mention of school is *Verboten*: "Let's not talk of school", says Anne in *FGTDR* (p. 112); and Dick is similarly critical in *FOHT* (we have also seen how calling someone a 'teacher' is used as an insult). For the holiday period the rules of ordinary existence are in abeyance, if not occasionally inverted in the manner of Bakhtin's 'carnival' time. Rules belong to 'the Law of the Father', where the Symbolic realm of school holds sway, where they have to suffer the fact that, as George puts it, "Grown ups were so powerful, and could dole out all kinds of punishments" (*FGAA* p. 102). In the stories, Quentin is their chief representative—an unpredictable God. Even when he is not seen, his presence is felt throughout the house, and even further afield—given that he seems to be known world-wide. Quentin is someone who sends his daughter away all school term, then does not seem to want her around in the holiday either; he is someone who cannot understand a colleague putting his daughter's safety ahead of work (*FHPOF*). It is only natural then that one of the worst impositions on the Five is being given a tutor in the holidays. This only happens once (*FGAA*), but his invasion of their holiday space is clearly resented, and he effectively spoils their adventure. It is fitting therefore, that this school representative turns out to be a crook and gets his come-uppance. In fact,

adult invasion of their adventure space is generally resented: "...it's not so much fun when grown-ups share a secret" as George puts it (*FOKIA* p. 114).

The holiday realm is also a place where normal rules don't obtain, where fun and adventure are in the air. As Anne says, "...I do think it's funny the way we always plunge into something peculiar when we're together" (*FOHT* p. 110). And, of course, they are together as and when any reader opens a book and joins them, or envisions them. Thus, in *FHMTS*, Julian reflects on their going out in a boat called *Adventure*. "We might have *known* something would happen!" (p. 94). Again, there are similarities with that earlier Five—Nesbit's *Five Children and It*–which also begins with a celebration of holidays; their adventures are also set in motion when their parents are removed and they are left in the charge of a cook. This former Five also leave behind a mundane existence to enter a magical realm, which is wished for. Thus, just as Nesbit's children set out to dig for prehistoric remains in a gravel pit, and, sure enough, find some, so too do Blyton's Five at their quarry, at 'a place where they thought they might find some stone weapons' (*FOKIA* p. 71), not to mention a secret tunnel!

The transition into this fantasy realm is expertly achieved, though going back to the books as an adult, I was surprised at how long it takes for the adventure to begin. In fact, for a few readers, it is too long:

> I think that the beginning of her books are really boring but as it goes along it gets more interesting. i think she should make the beginning of her books more interesting because I once picked one of her books and read the first few chapters and found really boring so i didn't read the rest of that book (f, 12)

> Though it was a mystery book, half the book was taken up with them just eating and partying. (m)

For others, though, it is precisely this period of anticipation that is enjoyable. Readers can wallow in the new-found freedom of the children from the normal restrictions of life, as the Five re-unite and simply enjoy each other's company.

And, of course, part of the contract with the reader is the expectancy this generates, for once the Five are together, the elements are in place, and something must happen. Druce describes this pre-adventure period as one of 'ennui', drawing parallels with the Bond books (where it is more applicable), but to me it seems more like a time of delicious anticipation, as one of the books has it: 'Really, the start of a holiday was the happiest thing in the world!' (*FGTBH* p. 22). It is similar to what Freud calls 'forepleasure', a notion that Brooks (1984) picks up in his discussion of plot, and, certainly, we find Blyton teasing readers as they journey through the text. For instance, in *FGTST*, Dick comments "I wonder if we shall have any adventures there!"(p. 31), which Julian later builds on: "I have a kind of feeling there might be an adventure somewhere about" (p. 47). Sometimes Blyton is even more playful, toying with the notion of withholding adventure. Thus in *FGOIC*, the other members go along with Anne's wish to have "an *ordinary* holiday...not *too* exciting", continually declining to pick up on adventurous elements (pp. 32, 82).[38]

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the Five books have been re-examined in terms of some of the main social criticisms made of them: that they are sexist, anglo-centric, and class*ist*. I have sought to argue that they are not so *in any simplistic way*. I then tried to move away from this critics' homeground, which is basically an adult's perspective, to find what pleasures children derive from the texts. Drawing on the comments of respondents, I have argued that, of any *isms*, ageism is the most appropriate, with children being empowered in a world where adults usually rule. I then finished by looking at other areas where readers find pleasure in her books. These focus on adventure on the one side, but comfort and security on the other. Thus food and drink, setting-up homes, sleeping and enjoying holidays are all given space in the books. But more than this, the pleasures herein are not just textual; they are sensual, visceral even, with readers emulating the Five's activities. Hence they are both *physically* comforted, secure within themselves, and *imaginatively*—in fantasy—in that they are being taken out of themselves.

I shall return to some these issues in the later chapters, suggesting some deeper pleasures to be found in Blyton. Briefly, though, it is worth emphasising how much the books feature interstitial realms—whether holidays, the margins of sleep, or the literally interstitial world of passages between walls—unknown ways that most never encounter, but pass across. The Five open up these secret ways to their readers as readily as their readers open up the Five's books.

NOTES

1   Deane (1991) says that this is not characteristic of any series fiction, contrary to the general view.

2   This illustration, by Eileen Soper, proved the most popular representation of the Five, chosen by the children from a selection of pictures drawn by various artists. This said, it was only just ahead of another picture, by Betty Maxey, of a very different Five, sitting planning together (see chapter 8, fig 8-4). This Soper one was liked chiefly because it was 'adventurous'—' 'Cos looks like been in danger and just getting away' (f, 10)—though this was sometimes qualified by drawing attention to their close-knit nature, their togetherness, 'Julian taking care of Anne... she's got to be looked after' (f, 14).

3   George is not 13 years old, as Druce persists in asserting.: '...Georgina remains thirteen and Anne ten years old twenty one years after their first appearance' (Druce, 1992 p. 115). Though it is interesting that he makes this slip, effectively responding to her power in the text. Dohm (1955, p. 360) does the same, saying more vaguely that George is 'in her teens'. However, George's 11 years is clearly flagged up in the first book, only to be mentioned one other time, in the third, *FRAT*, where all the children are said to be one year older (p. 10). Despite George's comment that "...Julian is in his 'teens already, and I soon shall be and so will Dick" (p. 27), ageing is not chronologically acknowledged again by Blyton. However, *were* we counting, taking into account the seasons, George and Dick would be 23, Anne 22, Julian 24, and Timmy, very long in the tooth by the final adventure!

4   I have drawn attention earlier to the negatively preferential treatment that Blyton receives (see end of chapter 3, esp. note 69), though other authors are little different in many respects. On names, for instance, Dostoevsky, manages to change the character 'Molovtsov' into 'Kurmyshov' in the space of one chapter in *The Idiot* (Dostoevsky, 1955, p. 397, 407).

5   Strangely, Cadogan and Craig do not consider Blyton's school stories, though these are far more in the 'girls' story' tradition (Cadogan and Craig's subtitle) than the non-exclusive adventure series. Even more strangely, they are not considered in Cadogan's 'celebration of the schoolgirls' story' (1989), despite Blyton's schoolgirl stories being so popular with readers, according to Auchmuty (1992).

6   It is interesting that in the 1957 film there is no mention of the island being passed down the female line. Also in the film, George's parents are referred to as Mr and Mrs Kirrin, suggesting that it is Quentin's name. In the books, surnames are avoided till number 16 in the series, *FGTBH* (1955), when we learn that George's cousins are also Kirrins, despite the

link being through the females. However, in the very next book, *FGIF*, their surname is explicitly 'Barnard'!

7   Also, this was one of the few Five books where the dust-wrapper illustration was changed. The first featured all the Five, but later imprints only portrayed the boys.

8   Eileen Soper's illustrations are interesting here, particularly as they, unlike those of later illustrators, were endorsed by Blyton. Soper frequently foregrounds George and often makes her taller than her cousin Dick (e.g. in *FOKIA*, p. 84), though the text says that Dick is the taller (I am grateful to Ros Brunt for drawing my attention to this issue). Soper also tends to make George quite physically developed for her age (*cf.* note 27). This should be seen in relation to note 3, where I pointed out how critics, no less than children, tend to make George older than Blyton says.

9   Boys with feminine qualities are a different matter. "Why doesn't he get his hair cut?" said Julian in disgust. "Boys with long hair are just too sissy for words" (*FGOTC* p. 110.). This is the predictable reaction of the manly Julian to the rather soft Cecil Dearlove. However, Martin Curton in *FOKIA* is presented in a sensitive way, artistic temperament notwithstanding, despite crying. And Anne magnanimously admits that "Boys do cry sometimes". In fact, her brother Dick "had been a bit of a cry-baby" (*FOTI*, p. 31).

10   G. Wilson Knight's drama, *This Sceptred Isle: Shakespeare's message for England at war* (1940), was first produced in 1941.

11   Frank Eyre becomes remarkably Churchillian himself when discussing Blyton:

   Never were so many fully armed blackguards so easily overcome by so few children; never were adults so incompetent or adolescents so invincible; never were boys so brave or girls so gaily indifferent to danger; never, alas, were parents so entirely non-existent or children so much encouraged to enter a world of fantastic wish-fulfilment. (Eyre, 1971, pp.89-90)

   Blyton's admiration for Churchill perhaps blinded her to more obvious things. In *Enid Blyton's Magazine* No. 7 (10 June 1953, p. 45), she includes a letter from a Virginia Waldron, who 'suggests that a good signal [for Famous Five Club members] would be the Victory sign—two fingers held up in the shape of a V, which is the Roman numeral for five'. Blyton then goes on to discuss the huge increase in membership, ending, 'I feel like giving you Virginia's V sign!'.

12   In a later book Dick is even more affronted, "traitors deserve to die" he says (*FGTBH* p. 125).

13   See Cedric, note 9. This is a recurring type; for example, in *Six Cousins at Mistletoe Farm* (1948) there is a similarly named Cyril, who's name, 'long hair and languid ways' amuse the main boys, though Cyril can see nothing wrong with his name:

> "No. That's just the trouble ...If you could, you'd jolly well get your hair cut as short as possible, you'd talk properly instead of in that namby-pamby fashion, and you wouldn't wear floppy bows and spout poetry!"
> (p. 39)

However, he is also a stock type in much children's fiction (commonly mocked, for example, in the 'William' stories), possibly originating in Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1886) who is lampooned by E. Nesbit in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899/ 1958).

14   In many ways the 'Malory' series are more concretely located than most, the name itself associated with the work of Sir Thomas Malory. Malory Towers is also likened to a castle, set against the backdrop of the sea in North Cornwall—similar to the Arthurian Camelot at Tintagel: 'She saw a large castle-like building of grey stone rising high on a hill. Beyond was the deep blue Cornish sea, but that was now hidden by the cliff on which Malory Towers stood. Four towers stood at the corners of the building ...' (*Fourth*, p. 7). The very landscape is described in terms reminiscent of medieval courtly symbolism, with its 'enclosed garden, set in the hollow square in the middle of the four-towered building ... crammed with hundreds upon hundreds of rose-bushes ...[whose] sight and scent of these filled the fathers and mothers with delight' (*Sixth* p. 86).

15   I have not the space to pursue this here, but the main fear with these countries is that their children grow up too quickly, acting more as sexual beings, whereas the English ideal was an asexual, pre-pubertal adolescent (see Avery, 1991). As the young Darrell speculates, 'Perhaps girls grew up more quickly in America though? ...Zerelda's beautifully powdered face, with its curling eye-lashes and rosy cheeks' (*Third* p. 8).

16   I had always envisaged similarities between Quentin and Orwell, probably after reading Bernard Crick's biography, where he relates how Orwell once ate some boiled eels that had been put out for the cat, instead of the shepherd's pie specially made for him! (Crick, 1980 p. 295). Quentin, of course, manages to put mustard on his toast, instead of marmalade, and custard on his fish (*FHPOF*).

On the issue of smell, one also finds it a problem for other writers, even those more sympathetic to the working-class. For instance, the Independent Labour Party social reformer, Margaret Mcmillan, expressed similar concerns - see Steedman (1990, pp. 44-5).

17	Dixon says 'the names of foreigners are often German or Russian' (1974b p. 55). In the Five this does not seem the case. I could only find Carlo and Emilio from *FHMTS* (Spanish?), Mr Wooh from *FATA* who 'spoke like a foreigner' (Chinese?), and Red Tower's henchman, Markhoff in *FFIA* (possibly Russian). If I were to count Gringo of Gringo's Circus (*FHPOF*), I could muster five.

18	I'm leaving out the one sergeant, and another story where there are both ordinary and higher ranking police; in the other Five books the police don't feature.

19	Dixon and Druce's selective readings go further. They each draw attention to the fact that characters such as Jo are made animal like, being compared with 'a squirrel, a monkey, a cat and a weasel', which Dixon thinks is about more than her agility, being rather subhuman, or pet-like (Dxon 1974b, p. 52; Druce, 1992, p. 239). Unfortunately, other, acceptable characters are also described in such terms, like Pierre Lenoir, earlier, or Mr. Luffy who, we are told, was 'odd-looking. He had very untidy, shaggy eyebrows over kind and gentle brown eyes that always reminded Dick of a monkey's' (*FGOTC* p. 18), and George herself, clambering 'up the side of the wreck like a monkey' (*FOTI* p. 82). Druce (1992, pp. 224-5) even suggests that the names of the working-class characters are less than serious—with Nobby, Sniffer and the like. However, he should remember that for each of these there is usually a middle-class equivalent (e.g. Sooty or Tinker).

20	Druce's analysis is marred, however, by his persistent reference to Edgar Stick as 'Edwin' (Druce, 1992, pp. 354-6).

21	A long and established theme in children's stories, from Mrs Trimmer's *Fabulous Histories,* or *The History of the Robins* (1786), which, with its baby robins, Robin, Dicksy, Pecksy and Flapsy, could easily have been a Blyton creation. But Blyton's stories are actually quite anodyne compared with many; for example, Andersen's 'The girl who stepped on bread' (Andersen, 1974, pp. 606-613), where the girl in question, who is unkind to animals, goes to hell for her actions!

22	A similar moral dilemma is addressed in E. Nesbit's *Five Children and It* (1959) chapter 4.

23	Many children's authors have a fascination with the gypsy; e.g. E. Nesbit and Kenneth Grahame.

24	'I want decent, fair, honest, citizen values, all the principles you were brought up with. You don't live up to the hilt of your income; if someone gets the bill wrong you tell them, you don't keep the extra change; you respect other people's property; you save; you believe in right and wrong; you support the police.... We were taught to help people in need ourselves,

not stand about saying what the government should do. Personal initiative was pretty strong. You were actually taught to be clean and tidy, that cleanliness was next to Godliness. All these ideas have got saddled as middle class values, but they're eternal' - Margaret Thatcher, *Sunday Times Colour Supplement* 20 Aug 1978, quoted in Bromley (1988, p.140).

25 It is worth noting that Julian is often the more distanced. It is Dick, after all, to whom Jo is particularly attracted; Dick, who is damson-stone spitting champion till he comes up against Jo.

Dixon—and Druce—draw attention to the ritual washing of Jo by Joan, to purify her. They ignore the fact that the Five undergo their own initiation into Jo's world, though. Besides the elements I have mentioned in the main text this also involves Julian in having his hair 'whipped' in *FFIA*. In this book Jo also regains her strength by pointedly discarding middle-class trappings: her clothes and cleanliness.

26 A short story called 'Staying with Auntie Sue' in *Sleepytime Tales* (1970, pp. 11-22), sounds very similar to the opening lines of *FOTI*:

"Where are we going to for our holidays this summer, Mummy?" asked Katie. "I want to go to the seaside again - the same place as last year."
"Daddy and I are going away by ourselves for a change, dear," said her mother. "I feel rather tired, and want to be just with Daddy."
"But what's to happen to me?" cried Katie, in dismay. "I want to come too."(p. 11)
However, it post-dates *FOTI*, first appearing in *Sunny Stories* in 1947.

27 Of the Five, Julian most embraces the adult world, and George least:

"I don't want to grow up... No—I don't want to grow up!" (*FGTBH* p. 42). The passage is quoted in full on p. 181.

So, despite the fact that it is always understood that George is simply going through a phase, which she will eventually outgrow, the books celebrate her insistence on remaining in this phase. This said, some of Eileen Soper's illustrations give George quite a bust, thus undermining her attempt to 'pass' as a boy (e.g. *FGDTS*, ch. 2)—though perhaps empowering her as a female figure in other ways, and accounting for why some critics make George older (see note 3).

28 In the latest TV series of the books, Anne's role has been extended, making her more the 'ideas' person of the Five.

29 There are other intimate moments with Timmy, too, one of which Tucker cannot resist quoting, after a comment about bestiality: "'Dear Timmy," murmurs the androgynous George sleepily to her dog, settling down for the night in *FGTDR*, "I love you—but do keep your tongue to

yourself."' (Tucker, 1970c). Needless to say, the Comic Strip reworked this line to good effect.

30 In their general unity, they are quite like their precursors, E. Nesbit's 'five' in *Five Children and It* (1902) and other stories. This earlier Five comprised four children and a baby rather than a dog (the former a lot less use, but better for generating plot). It is particularly interesting the way the Five in Nesbit are described as a composite entity—an 'it': 'Everyone got its legs kicked or its feet trodden on...' (Nesbit, 1959, p. 19). Sometimes Blyton's Five seem to be an entity too; they often speak as one, for example, and Blyton uses expressions like the following: 'They brushed their hairs...' (*FOHT* p. 187).

31 The phrase, 'lashings of ginger beer' is, in fact, never used in the books, though it clearly appealed to the audience, to the extent that an Ambrosia advert used the same phrase, substituting 'creamed rice' for 'ginger beer'.

32 Ironically, the critics' comments on Blyton are littered with food analogies, although I am less certain what to make of these. The following is but a small selection:

> ...books which ... appeal to children in much the same way as do fish fingers and minced meat. (Capey and Maskell, p. 22)

> Just as we would think a parent very wrong who fed his children exclusively on jelly and shop cake, so I feel we are greatly to blame if we let our children grow up solely on formula stories. (Dodsworth, 1982, p. 27, quoting John Rowe Townsend).

> ...Enid Blyton's books are like baby food—nice and palatable but absolutely useless when it comes to needing a good diet. (Hindle, 1982)

> ...once the taste has been established it has an almost inexhaustible supply of food—the only problem is the number of spoons to be plunged into the same dish. (Hollindale, 1974, p. 153).

> Any success in popular culture will draw out a mixture of ready-to-hand substitute foods, brightly coloured, fatty sweet; and bad for you. (Inglis, p. 188)

Martin's work contains a curious mixture, calling Blyton's books both 'nauseatingly sugary' and 'veritable milk-and-water' (Martin, 1990, p. 27). But Barker's food analogy is even stranger, moving Blyton away from junk food analogies and into the healthy eating of the '90s:

> It is a pity indeed that we do not know the effects of popular reading on the recipient. Perhaps if we did, we could show a connection, however slight, in the recent growth of interest in health and whole foods and the

descriptions of home-grown, home-baked, home-bottled food in Enid Blyton's books. (Barker, 1982b, p. 11)

33 There are even more pronounced examples of good and bad mothers in Blyton's *The Six Bad Boys* (1951; see also Barker, 1982b).

34 It is of note that it is Dick who is most obsessed with food, who says that he longs to be hungry simply so that he can indulge himself satisfactorily, for Dick is also one of the most sensual in other ways (there is also a Dick in the 'Faraway Tree' books who is hedonistically inclined (*cf.* Jones, 1991; interestingly, Dick—or 'Richard'—was also the name she liked to be known by when young - Stoney, 1974, p. 36). Unfortunately, Blyton, at least in later life, was not at all interested in food —or cooking—as the 'good' mother should be.

35 This sign - :-) - is commonly used on the Internet (see also the quote on p. 199). It is actually iconic, as can be seen by tilting your head to the left, revealing a smiling face. It is a common method of communicating good-humour, indicating that something was meant to be taken lightly.

36 See also chapter 4, pp. 143-4.

37 Though Dick is clearly the most sensual, he does not have all the lines on this topic; witness Anne's comment in *FGIF*: "We've a nice wood-fire again, and I shall undress in front of it" (p. 64).

38 See chapter 3, where I comment on Blyton's toying with the genre conventions of adventure stories.

CHAPTER SIX

GOLLIWOGS, RACISM AND BLYTON - FROM PREFERRED READINGS TO CULTURAL EFFECTS

INTRODUCTION

Ray says that Blyton is the only children's writer to be included in the *Sunday Times* 'The Thousand Makers of the Twentieth Century' series—a series that was concerned with 'every person who had coloured the imagination of the twentieth century' (quoted in Ray, 1982, p. 65). Ironically, in Blyton's case, this was just what many of her critics accused her of doing—as in Dixon's provocatively titled article 'All things white and beautiful' (1974a). Nevertheless, this was not an explicit issue until the 1960s. There was no defence of Blyton along these lines because there was no attack: it simply was not a discourse that existed in the mainstream. Jeger's 1966 comment on *The Little Black Doll* illustrates this. Dixon's social criticism of her work is the most extensive, and I shall consider his position below, together with others who take a similar stance. However, on the other side are those like Inglis and Cullingford, who, whilst admitting the charges of racism, deny its effects. 'These are innocent gestures; children are unaffected by them. They are not conscious of the implications', says Cullingford (1979, p. 291). Dixon's comments on remarks of this sort seem a suitable rejoinder:

> 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. People exposed to infectious diseases don't always catch them. Also, of course, we don't have to take their word for it when people say a book never did them any harm. (1977, p. 121)[1]

Of course, by Dixon's own logic, neither do we have to take the word of those who claim that certain books *do* do them harm (otherwise, *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *Catcher in the Rye*, and *Of Mice and Men*, are but three of the

books that would have been banned - Simmons, 1990). However, if we just stick with Dixon's own taste, there are still problems: he praises Paula Fox's *The Slave Dancer* (1974), which others have found reprehensible for its racism. He also praises Leila Berg's *The Hidden Road* (1958), particularly its treatment of class, though Camilla Nightingale (1972) finds its middle-classes oppressive, and its treatment of children sexist. I say this not to undermine Dixon, but to point to the lack of agreed criteria in this area; also, to indicate the dangers of looking solely at the text, rather than its relation with the reader; and, lastly the dangers of ignoring the views of certain readers whilst privileging others— Dixon's own, in this case; hence the importance of seeing what *children* make of the texts. Nevertheless, I think Dixon's general point stands. It is no good saying, on the one hand, that children 'are not conscious of the implications' of such texts, whilst admitting, on the other hand, that the implications are undoubtedly there. If the latter were indeed the case, one would want to know how children *do* become conscious of them? at what age does such consciousness start? and what of the unconscious part of the process? might this not be more significant, and thus more worrisome?

Unfortunately, such questions are rarely addressed in the thrust and parry of the respective camps. I shall approach the issues using the theoretical insights of Foucault and Vološinov, showing how Blyton has been caught up in the construction of this discourse. In fact, 'hi-jacked' might be a better term, for in some ways I see this chapter as a diversion. But the fact that Blyton herself now stands as an active signifier of racism, in a strong if convoluted discursive thread, necessitates that the matter is given thorough analysis. To my cost, I have had many discussions about Blyton shut-down exactly round this one issue. So, in order to avoid just the sort of superficial debate outlined above, I have taken the issue further back, looking at the central terms used—race, colour, blackness, stereotype—and how their own meaning has changed over time. I have also traced the chequered history of the golliwog, the central protagonist, but about whom most writers have been strangely silent. After clearing the ground, I shall then return to Blyton to take another look at the contentious texts.

First, though, it is worth pointing out just how rife what we now term 'racism' was, pre-World War II (setting aside other *isms* for the present). Blyton is frequently singled out for such accusations, but, as Colin Watson has pointed out, 'Foreign was synonymous with criminal in nine novels out of ten, and the conclusion is inescapable that most people found this perfectly natural' (Watson, 1971, p. 123). Many are anti-semitic; for example, in Sapper's Bulldog Drummond *The Final Count*, one of Bulldog's colleagues is described as disguised as a 'nasty-looking little Jew' (*ibid.*, quoted p. 66); and John Buchan saw world rulers epitomised by 'a little white-faced Jew in a bathchair with an eye like a rattlesnake' (*ibid.*, quoted p. 43). Blacks are criticised as a matter of course, and Sax Rohmer is renowned for depicting the 'yellow peril' in his *Dr. Fu Manchu*. But the more general point is that foreigners *in toto* are 'other', whether 'stinking Italianos' (Sydney Horler's phrase, *ibid.*, p. 134), the Soviets, the French, the Germans (as 'the Hun'), or even the Scottish (Watson quotes a Dorothy L. Sayers character: 'You know Glasgow, where the accent's so strong that even Scotsmen faint when they hear it', *ibid.*, p. 200). Though Watson deals predominantly with popular writing, such prejudices are endemic to more highbrow culture too—and are readily found in Conrad, Greene, Huxley, Pound, Eliot, and Chesterton, to name but a few.

This is not in any way to condone such attitudes, but to point out that it was not particularly Blyton who was a racist writer: rather, there was a readily available discourse which 'naturally' foregrounded this way of speaking; thus to write that Blyton is worse than neo-fascism (as does Jeger) would seem to devalue such terms.

RACISM

In order to investigate the charge of 'racism' less emotively it seems necessary to start with the terms commonly used in the debate—for they are so often used loosely, hence the amount of unhelpful labelling and name-calling. A remark by

Robert Miles provides an apposite place to begin: "races", he says, 'are either 'black' or 'white' but never 'big-eared' and 'small-eared'" (Miles, 1989, p. 71). This comment was clearly written without Noddy's brownie companion in mind![2] However, the point is a serious one, for by collapsing the notion of race into colour distinctions, one is assisting in the very process of making colour the determinant factor. As Colette Guillaumin notes (1995)—a writer whom Miles also credits—'yellow' did not designate a human group till this century, when people first found that they were this hue (Guillaumin, 1995, p. 45). She also points out that this labelling is somewhat arbitrary—noting that South Africa designated the Chinese non-white, but not the Japanese (*ibid.*, p. 66).

Blyton, it should be noted, uses the term 'race' not in the restricted colour sense, but with an earlier inflection, to designate a nation:

> I am, perforce, bringing to them [other cultures] the ideas and
> ideals of a race of children alien to them, the British. ... in
> particular, I hope, with the German children, who, oddly enough,
> are perhaps more taken with my books than any other foreign race
> (and this applies to the German adults too!). (Blyton, 1950, p. 3)

This is an important point, for collapsing race into a black/white dualism actually helps foster a particular 'racist' discourse. In other words, the terms used to discuss the phenomenon themselves help generate the framing of that phenomenon; and this process of typification itself helps forge the stereotype. This is clear in Dixon's article, where he makes exactly this slide from 'racism' to a black/white dualism in his opening paragraphs (1974a, p. 70).

Guillaumin also looks at the history of the term 'black', demonstrating that it was only used to designate a people when they had already been identified as a social group; that is, after they were enslaved, whence their skin colour suddenly took on significance: they were *black* slaves. Today, these particular social and economic relations are glossed over, and colour is pre-eminent—but we should not thereby hypostatize it.

Before we move on to look at this in more concrete terms, let us also be clear about the terms 'stereotype', and 'cliché'. Both, significantly, derive from printing, the process of setting things down in 'black and white'. 'Stereotype' originally referred to the metal plates made from a relief printing surface, which, when inked, could be used to produce endless copies of the original. This meaning was then extended to refer to the way people might be seen as all the same, because of some mental stereotype that 'fixed' people's perceptions and conceptions. 'Cliché' is similar, referring to a single stamp used in printing, and subsequently extended to indicate a hackneyed, time-worn phrase (the word itself is reputedly onomatopoeic, from the sound of die striking metal).

The slip into the easiest way of saying something, with a ready-made phrase or depiction of character type, can, on the one hand, be seen as a basic tool of the storyteller, helping him or her convey shared meanings instantly.[3] On the other hand, it is also a way of obscuring individual differences, nuances and subtleties. Returning to the Miles quotation above, we can see how things come to be expressed in black and white terms, with subtler shades of grey lost. Attempts to reverse this process are very difficult, because of the institutional weight behind such a discourse (of enslavement, economic dependence, colonial rule, manual labour, etc.). Forster explores this in *A Passage to India*, where an Indian and a Britain manage to break the polarisation by speaking of 'coffee-colour versus pinko-grey' (Forster, 1961, p. 254), both of which have other associations. Clearly, though, 'pinko' would not be acceptable even leaving aside its political connotations. For to be 'pinko-grey' is to be coloured, whereas whiteness is supposedly neutral, transparent—the norm, in fact, from which others deviate. Therefore, dependent on the relations of power between groups, whatever terms are used for 'non-whites' will develop negative associations over time.

This can be seen in another novel, *The Lonely Londoners*, by black writer Samuel Selvon, where the character Galahad addresses his own hand, bemoaning

its blackness as the cause of all his problems: 'Why the hell you can't be blue, or red or green...' he says (Selvon, 1979, p. 88). Two key points arise from this statement. On the one hand, one could say that colour has very little to do with things. Had he been blue, then we would simply have a different set of terms—negative, doubtless—for this state of affairs. Obviously it is the whole colonial history of slavery, of economic oppression and discrimination that counts—as Guillaumin persuasively argues. To blame this on colour is therefore a subterfuge, a scapegoat. From this perspective, the obsession with colour in children's books can be seen to be a diversionary tactic; that is, in leaping on every occurrence of the word 'black' or 'dark' (e.g. rewriting 'Baa Baa Black Sheep'), the very discourse that is abhorred, solidifies—albeit unintentionally. Each usage of the term then becomes suspect and taboo. The result is a term that has even more of a negative stamp (literally 'stereotypical'). Thus the writer Malorie Blackman found she had problems getting her book *Elaine, You're a Brat!* published because the heroine was not only black—but naughty—and 'black children shouldn't be shown in a negative light' (Macaskill, 1991, p. 21).

On the other hand, because people will kill because of skin colour, or almost kill themselves in trying to remove it[4], one could argue that blackness has everything to do with the issue. Here we come to one of Vološinov's key insights, about the struggle over the sign—a struggle which has been played out over favourite words of Blyton like 'queer' and 'gay', with the male homosexual community recently seeking to replace the former with the latter, giving 'queerness' a positive, 'gay' spin (since which time, 'queer' itself has developed a more positive connotation). Likewise, in the 'sixties, the potentially derogatory term 'black' was adopted by American-Negroes as a positive term, captured in the slogan 'Black is beautiful' (though, as suggested above, this was somewhat undermined by the witch-hunt against all other usages of 'black', thus making the word itself taboo).

So, there seem to be two options open to any oppressed group. The first is to object to a term and argue for its boycotting. As it is usually those in power

who control the sites from which discourses are officially given voice (the media, church, education, etc.) this can be a very slow and problematic process. As a telling example, let us take the term 'golliwog', which anti-racists have fastened on as one of the key symbols of racism, thereby immediately elevating its status. This, in turn, has had differing effects on two other groups: one has been roused to anger, arguing that it genuinely does not see the golliwog in these terms, whilst another finds the association attractive, precisely because of its racist potential.

A concrete instance should help show how such discursive practices have material effects. Thus a writer in *The Guardian* marks out an anti-racist view: 'There is not much doubt in my mind that the golliwog ...with its goggle eyes, spiky hair, and banana lips is in fact a distorted representation of a black person' (Matthews, 1984). This description not only helps formulate/perpetuate the stereotype of what a golliwog should be, but also, the qualities that constitute the stereotype of a black person. The trouble is, we are so caught up in this discursive thread that it is hard to see things otherwise. However, compare this supposedly 'natural' description with that of some of my younger subjects, those not familiar with the stereotypical associations of a golliwog: 'it's like a ... a sun shape, and it has, like, like cotton things sticking out of its head' (F, 6, white)[5]. On the other hand, some Asian and white 7 year-olds weren't quite sure how to describe it:

Barbar:	Are they clowns? [...]
Matilda:	Teddies? [...]
Barbar:	Are they bears?

Others descriptions included 'a raggy doll' and 'a scarecrow'.

So, there is no 'natural' description, any more than there is for seeing the Chinese as 'yellow', or Negroes as 'blacks' (Guillaumin, above)[6]. We are simply embedded in a discourse of racism that naturalises certain ways of

220

speaking; and, however politically correct we think we may be, we may be perpetuating—as with *The Guardian* reader above.

So, resolving the problem is not as simple as an anti-racist might imagine.[7] As I said above, there are two other groups involved. On the one hand, there are those who declare that the golliwog is simply an innocent toy (as many have protested, both white and black, mounting such campaigns as 'Save the Golliwog'[8]). On the other hand, there are those who also support this campaign, but for the opposite reason: they wish to exploit its racist potential. Thus we find that Harvey Proctor, a conservative MP who wanted to disband the Commission for Racial Equality and repatriate immigrants, also supported it (Anon, 1986). Likewise, Lady Birdwood, who stood as a BNP candidate for Dewsbury in the 1992 General Election, and was prosecuted for distributing racially offensive literature, was interviewed by the press in a room where, we are told, 'propped jauntily in a corner, is a small but conspicuous golliwog'—a fact which is given more prominence in the title, 'Lady Birdwood at home, with her golliwog' (Davies, 1994).

There can be no innocent discussion about golliwogs: not only does this word drag a long chain of signification in its wake, but in following through the threads of the debate one is also caught up in a discursive practice with marked material effects. It is for this reason that many, as above, want to make both the word and image taboo. Yet there is need of caution here. There seem to be many otherwise astute theorists of popular culture, well-versed in semiotics, who, when it comes to the golliwog, take an uncharacteristically simplistic line. There is a sudden lack of recognition of the arbitrariness of the sign, of the relational nature of language, of the Bakhtinian struggle over meaning; instead we find dogmatic disavowals of the word, as though its power were in-built, much as a vampire might quail at two crossed sticks, regardless of their constructedness. In fact, this constructedness has already been exemplified, with the above *Guardian* reader's supposedly naturalistic description of a golliwog as

goggle eyed, spiky haired, and banana lipped, as opposed to the children's alternative descriptions.

Looked at in this way, then, rather than the unsuccessful attempt to ban the golly, a re-lexicalisation of the term might prove more successful, as has already happened in Blyton, of course, with the word 'gay'. However, such a strategy should not be seen in a voluntaristic way: it is still very much a *social* struggle over the sign, which will only have real purchase given more general shifts in power relations between black and white (just as the gay movement has mobilised extensive resources for its achievements).

THE UNNATURAL HISTORY OF THE GOLLIWOG(G)

'Golliwog', like most terms, is always being given fresh inflexions, though particular groups (both racist and anti-racist) always seek to re-accentuate its usage in a racist discourse. However, it has been used with other connotations, particularly as a term for a hairstyle. Here are some recent examples found in the press: Andrew Lloyd Webber called a girlfriend, endearingly, the 'Golden Golliwog' (Mantle, 1989); the furniture designer Tom Dixon is described as having 'a golliwog haircut' (Glancey, 1990); Alan Brien described his wife Jill Tweedie as having 'hair like a golliwog' (Brien, 1994); lastly, Carlos Valderrama, the Colombian footballer, is described as 'the ginger golliwog' (Powell, 1994). These all point to a non-insulting usage of the word—a usage which I also found amongst schoolchildren; in fact, for many it was the only referent that the children had. It was a term, I was informed, to depict someone with longish hair.[9] For example, Shahid and Waqas, two 14 year-old Asians, had this to say. They knew the golly from jam-jars:

Shahid:	Yeah, on jam, on Robinson's [sic] jam. We take mickey out of people like that.
DR:	They're still on jam-jars.
Shahid:	Yeah, and we still call people golliwogs....curly hair.
DR:	Who? You call them that?

Shahid:	Yeah, we call them that. For a laugh. Everyone calls ... that name, and everyone knows that name.
DR:	Anyone with curly hair you call that?
Waqas:	No, someone with long hair. (see also appendix V)

This was confirmed by other children, though the name, it should be noted, is here still derogatory—

| Natalie: | [...]If they see people with this hairstyle, they're gonna, take that name up for 'em. |
| Sadia & Emma: | [laughter] Call them 'golly' in the street! (13-14 year olds)— |

and one (white) girl, who had been on the other end of such a name-calling, commented, 'when I was at primary school, I had me hair permed, and I got called a golliwog [...] 'Cos it was like permed.'[10]

However, even if it is granted that the word has some polysemic potential, many would still object that this move is unacceptable, in that it 'whitewashes' the term's history; that is, it ignores the term's origins in a cruel, repressive, colonialist culture (albeit a different logic applies to the word 'Caribbean'[11], or the ancient religious symbol of the swastika, also used by racists, and more innocently, by Kipling). This being the case, let me now review the history of the golliwog, to see whether the equation 'golliwog = black' is such a natural signification, along with the related, supposedly derivative term, 'wog'.

Blyton once said that she had depicted bad teddies as well as gollies (Stoney, 1974, p. 166), and they certainly are of similar vintage, though the former have had a far happier history. The teddy dates from 1907, appearing in a popular political cartoon which showed 'Teddy' Roosevelt refusing to shoot a bear-cub whilst out hunting. An enterprising New Yorker, Morris Michtom, made a soft-toy based on the bear in the picture, and received Roosevelt's permission to call it a 'Teddy Bear'. It has rarely been seen as anything but cuddly and innocent, with famous exemplars like Rupert, Winnie-the-Pooh and Paddington[12].

Interestingly, soft-toy bears existed before this time, with longer, thin arms, but it was the patented name that gave the bear its added appeal.

The golliwog was different, right from the start, losing its creator a substantial revenue because it was never patented. It was the product of the artist Florence Upton, a young American, who was having problems with a story she was composing. While visiting relatives in London, her English aunt reminded her of a doll she had left at the house some years before. This doll immediately brought her story to life, according to Florence (Peet, 1950). The resultant tale, with text by her mother, Bertha Upton, had little success with publishers till an employee at Longman took it home and, as with so many children's books, the employee's own children showed their appreciation. Published in 1895, the book was an immediate success. There were twelve sequels, with the golliwog always the central figure. This is of note, for, in the first book, the late entrance of the golliwog is still apparent in the title. On the cover it is simply called *The Adventures of Two Dutch Dolls*, though the title page is fuller: *The Adventures of Two Dutch Dolls and a "Golliwogg"*. As in its composition, the 'golliwogg' (the original spelling) was a late-comer to the story.

Certainly others found it hard to accept the golliwogg as a central figure. Davis quotes the first substantial review of the book in *The Bookman* (1899), which shows this ambivalence: 'terrible as it must be to be his foe, it must be almost as nervous a business to be his friend'. Yet, by the following year, the character had become established and was no longer seen as 'terrible' but described by a reviewer as having a 'placid beauty' (quoted in Davis, 1992, p. 34). This initial aversion to the character is important to keep in mind, and it is certainly reflected in the story itself, where, on first seeing him, the Dutch dolls[13] react:

> E'en as she spoke,
> Peg Deutschland broke
> Into a piercing scream.
>
> Then all look round, as well they may
> To see a horrid sight!

The blackest gnome
Stands there alone,
They scatter in their fright

With kindly smile he nearer draws;
Begs them to feel no fear.
        "What is your name?"
        Cries Sarah Jane;
"The 'Golliwogg' my dear"
Their fears allayed—each takes an arm,
While up and down they walk;
        With sidelong glance
        Each tries her chance
And charms him with "small talk" (Upton and Upton, 1995, pp. 23-4)

He then disappears from the story till there is a ball, at which he reappears:

While in their midst the artist head
Of "Golliwogg" appears,
        With Peg beside,
        Whose graceful stride
No criticism fears. (*ibid.*, p. 45)

They follow him out onto the ice, where they slide and throw snowballs 'At "Golliwogg's" kind face' (*ibid.*, p. 53). They then go skating, and Golliwogg, with 'kind forethought' goes to try out the ice for them. It cracks and he has to be rescued and carried back to the shop.

So, though he starts out as fearful, he ends up endearing, and is shown to be a gallant and reliable friend, with a sense of mischief. Upton's story shows how appearances can be deceptive, and it also illustrates the general appeal of the grotesque. Clearly, Upton remembered this from her own experience as a child with the doll: 'Oh! We knew he was ugly! But his words and deeds ...just seemed the inevitable expression of his personality, as I see it, and no one believes in his good humor, his gentleness, his genuineness, more than his so-called creator' (quoted in Peet, 1950).

This ambivalent reaction to the golliwog can be followed in many children's encounters. For instance, Lady Mary Clive speaks about the golliwog which threw her brother 'into paroxysms of terror' (Clive, 1964, p. 31). Tom Sharpe

(1995) also records a strongly negative reaction. On the other hand, both Eric Bligh (1946, pp. 164-74) and Kenneth Clark are fulsome in their praise of Upton's creation ('I identified myself with him [Golliwogg] completely, and have never quite ceased to do so' - Clark, 1974, pp. 6-7).

I have found a similar ambivalence with children, who could often be observed moving from an initial repulsion at the creature, to an affection for it (see below). Fraser also notes this ambivalence, and also uses the term 'grotesque' (Fraser,1966, p. 190). It clearly possesses qualities that the teddy bear never had: the stark, staring eyes, the hair standing on end (as hair does with fright, or an animal's does to scare others) and the engorged lips, giving perhaps an erotic or 'engulfing' emphasis. As one adult wrote, 'As a result of reading the Noddy books, many of my childhood nightmares involved golliwogs. However it never occurred to me that there might be any connection between golliwogs and black people ...'(f).

The golliwog's power as a figure derives precisely from this straddling of cultural categories; he has an inveterately transgressive, ambivalent nature: black and white, bright yet dowdy, colourful and monochrome, human and animal (he often has paws rather than hands and feet), cultural and natural, friendly yet frightening. Like other such figures, it is this ambivalence that makes him potentially disturbing, but also fascinating. However, his power is something that even defenders of the golliwog tend not to highlight, being worried about the reaction.

With this in mind, let us now look at the relation of the golliwog to black people—another topic that is often side-stepped, with denials of any association by certain groups, while others try to make the two almost coterminous: golliwog = black person. The unnamed doll, from which Florence Upton conceived the 'golliwogg' can be seen to have links with the minstrel figure—which was usually a white person mimicking a stereotyped black: colourful clothes, frizzy black hair and over-emphasised mouth and eyes.[14] However, the signifier

'golliwogg' is much more open than this in the original creation, and there are other elements that run counter to the Negro, or minstrel stereotype. Thus the two Dutch dolls also encounter an African (depicted as a female black doll, Upton and Upton, 1995, p. 42) and, more interestingly, 'Sambo', who 'sings a song' (*ibid.*, p. 45). The latter is depicted as much closer to the traditional minstrel, with banjo, striped pants, tails, top hat, and a more traditionally blacked up face. Moreover, Golliwogg is not given the artificial dialect often used in minstrelsy— though in a later story, *The Golliwogg at the Sea-side*, a negro waiter features, who does speak in this manner. Golliwogg also has a thin 'beaky' nose, besides lacking other stereotypical associations: for instance, being musical, lazy, savage or superstitious (Davis, 1992, p. 106; see also Walvin, 1983). Lastly, it is worth noting that the original Golliwogg is a singular figure—not a type: he (and he is male) is a one-off, unlike the Dutch dolls.

So, the golliwog has an ambiguous status; certainly, he seems to have some elements of the minstrel figure, but he is not simply this. Over time, his appearance has changed too, becoming less hirsute and losing the sharp nose that he had in Upton's work. As for his behaviour, Golliwogg is frequently mischievous, but never an evil character. He is an explorer, an adventurer—in fact, more like the coloniser than the colonised, discovering the North Pole (long before Winnie-the-Pooh!), going to a desert Island (where he plays the 'Robinson Crusoe' figure, having his own 'Friday' called 'Monday') and venturing to Africa, where he meets some cannibals (Bligh, 1946).

This said, it would be wrong to deny that this signifier is all too readily linked to black people—particularly given the attempt by blacks in the 'sixties to re-lexicalise the term 'black'. Thus the *OED* quotes from *A British G.I. in Vietnam* (1969), in which the author describes a Negro 'whose appearance reminded me of one of those golliwogs that decorate the labels of Robertson's marmalade jars' (*OED*, 1989, vol. vi, p. 662). However, it should be noted that the author reaches for this association—just as do those above in describing hairstyles: it is not automatic. Thus this usage does not seem racist, unlike, say, the report of

Pik Botha telling an ANC member to 'stop jumping up and down like a golliwog' (Walker, 1995), where a racial slur seems intended (especially given other remarks of his). There is no doubt that it is a term, given its powerfully transgressive nature, that lends itself to such abuse. Equally, there is no doubt that the features of the doll have been distorted for such effect, just as the Nazis manufactured exaggerated semitic features in their propaganda literature.[15]

The crucial point, however, is that it is not the term *per se*, but the relations of power that exist between the respective parties—just as Guillaumin demonstrated with the term 'black', becoming significant only after certain social relations had been established. It is when the term is used *against* a people who are already seen as a socially distinctive group—usually because they are disadvantaged in some way—that the term becomes abusive. But then, so do many terms—like the term 'boy', once used for Negro men in general, regardless of their age or profession. And yet, such terms manage to maintain their semiotic looseness. It is only when this 'play' is shut down, when a term becomes naturalised that it becomes problematic. And, obviously, once such a move occurs, then the disadvantaged group can complain about the use of such a term, or image.

Moving away from the golliwog as a doll, let us now look at the derivation of the word, and its associated terms, 'golly' and 'wog'. Once again, we are immediately in the realm of folk etymology, though Florence Upton's views would seem a natural place to start. She maintains that the word just came to her when she picked up the doll. However, it may be that certain associated terms made her alight on this particular choice (few words are completely unmotivated). A favourite suggestion is 'pollywog', a word for a tadpole dating back to the fifteenth century. It crops up in E.M. Forster's *A Room with a View*, where the men are swimming ('Hee—poof—I've swallowed a polly-wog' - Forster, 1955, p. 138). Also, Hilaire Belloc, in his poem 'Frog' has the following lines:

Be kind and tender to the Frog,
    And do not call him names,
    As "Slimy skin," or "polly-wog" (Belloc, 1979)

This term, common in America, might have been associated in Florence Upton's mind with 'Gullah', the term for the Negroes who inhabited the islands off S. Carolina. It could also have been seen as a variant on 'dolly', or, perhaps, associated with words like 'scallywag', which certainly captures Golliwogg's character. I even wonder about John Newbery's eighteenth century 'Woglog the giant' as a potential candidate! (Townsend, 1976, p. 31).

Pieterse (1992, p. 156-7), however, a key authority, thinks the 'pollywog' etymology dubious, but supports the independent derivation of the abusive term 'wog'—commonly thought to be a shortened form of golliwog. Pieterse lends voice to 'wog' being an acronym for 'Western Oriental Gentleman', making the line of association run the other way. Though it seems that the independence of the two words is likely, Pieterse's particular acronym, it should be said, is only one of many: Worshipful, Worthy and Wily are all contenders for the first word, while others have suggested separate acronyms: 'War Office Ganger', and 'Working On Government Service'. In a letter to *The Times* in 1945, it was claimed that 'the letters W.O.G.S. were worn on the armbands of the native workmen in Alexandria and Port Said' (quoted in Davis, 1992, p. 11). This derivation was then retrospectively tied to 'golliwog', in that, because these workers were so thin, wealthier Egyptians called them 'ghul'—an Arabic word for desert ghosts—which the British troops turned into 'golly'.

Note that this explanation reverses the usual chronology. It is not 'golliwog' that was shortened to the insulting 'wog'; rather, it is the independently derived wog which was extended to 'golliwog', in line with the existing word[16]. Whilst the *OED* finds no evidence for an acronymic origin, it does see the term 'wog' as having an independent existence. The *OED* notes that it is applied more to 'one of Arab extraction' (*OED*, 1989, vol. xx, p. 478), only later becoming more

generalised (to the extent that the United Nations secretary-general, Boutros Boutros Ghali, referred to himself as one - Howard, 1992).

Though it has been necessary to provide this detailed account of the word and the concept, I hope it has actually demonstrated the flaw of arguing from origins. Etymology, at its best, only shows what a word originally meant, in *langue*; not what it subsequently means, nor how it is actually used, in *parole*. This is the essence of Vološinov's argument, that language is always in the hands—or mouths—of its users, and that there is usually 'a struggle over the sign' (Vološinov, 1973). Pointing to the dictionary definition unfortunately leaves out this social struggle, besides the network of relations a word has with other terms, thus linking it discursively into a web of expressions with, for example, a racist connotation.

Such is particularly the case with terms that develop connotations through interpersonal use, as do terms connected with race or sexuality; dictionaries prove unreliable, mainly because these terms operate in the oral rather than the written realm.[17] This said, even if we could point to dictionary origins, what would this prove? For example, what if it were proven that 'wog' did originate independently of 'golliwog'? or if 'golliwog' really did derive from 'pollywog'? It seems to make the term 'golliwog' neither more nor less offensive. What matters, of course, is its social connotation, and this is where—once the term becomes abusively linked to a minority—one must defer to the wishes of that group (and not speak, or prejudge, that group's reaction).

However, following Guillaumin once again, because it is the *material relationship* that is crucial, it is likely that any new term for a socially oppressed group is itself likely to develop negative connotations over time. Rumer Godden records her disappointment that her novel about travellers, *The Diddakoi* (1972) which she hoped would present travelling people in a more positive light, simply seemed to give children a better vocabulary with which to castigate this minority. Likewise, seemingly neutral words like 'Zulu', 'chief' and 'boy', can become

racially tainted in certain contexts.[18] The confusion that arises unless this semiotic latitude is realised can be seen in the widely reported news of the withholding of a child-minder's licence because she had a golliwog in her antique-toy collection, coupled with the fact that she read her charges Noddy books. The visiting council inspector, a Rastafarian, insisted that the offending doll was a 'golliwog'—not a 'golly', as the minder called it— commenting that 'he didn't see himself as having big white eyes and a red mouth'. And, of course, there is no reason why he should. We have here two people with very different notions of the term 'golliwog', each seeking to impose their meaning on the other (Vološinov's 'struggle over the sign'). Without wishing to sound in any way superior, there is a certain irony here, in that the inspector clearly did *not* see himself as like this doll—any more than did the minder—yet had to insist that it signified him, otherwise the objection would be without substance, just as he felt it necessary to assert that it was a 'golliwog', not a 'golly' (Nelson, 1993; Payne, 1993).[19]

So, I have suggested that the golliwog is, in many ways, irrelevant to the racism issue, apart from the fact that it has become symbolic of it—indeed, has become a rallying call, as though ridding the world of this doll might foster racial equality. Ultimately, though, this is not some abstract discussion in which one stands on the sidelines; a white, adult, middle-class voice can only speak from a privileged position—which is why I wanted to hear the views of contemporary multi-ethnic children, not that they should be seen as a site of truth, either, but they are, in Foucault's terms, muted and marginalised voices.

THE GOLLIWOGS AND NODDY

Before this, though, let us look at the Blyton texts most closely associated with accusations of racism: the Noddy books and 'The little black doll'.[20] The former is so closely associated that the mere mention of the word 'Noddy' is enought to prompt a ban, as occurred with a theatrical production of David Wood's play, *Noddy*, which ran into promotional problems when Hampshire County Council simply caught sight of the title; this despite the fact that it was a socially reconstructed version (Preston, 1993; predictably, the newspaper report begins, 'Golly! Noddy and Big Ears are in trouble again'). Clearly, we can see here another link in the chain of signification, with not only 'Blyton', but 'Noddy' signifying 'racism'. It is therefore, all too easy to *do* a 'racist' reading of the series, but I think the books should be read in wider social terms, as I have demonstrated in chapter 4, where the homelessness of the post-war period is reflected in the displaced toy, Noddy.

First though, 'The little black doll', which produced the earliest written comment I have found on Blyton's racism (Jeger, 1966), though this was already too late for Blyton to respond meaningfully. Dixon, and later Druce, give the book more detailed treatment. It concerns a doll, Sambo, who is disliked by the other toys in the nursery because he is black. He therefore runs away and meets a pixie who is kind to him. Sambo, in turn, is kind to the pixie, going out during a thunderstorm to fetch some medicine when the latter is ill. However, the rain washes the doll's blackness away, leaving him with 'the dearest, pinkest, kindest face' (*Enid Blyton's Jolly Story* Book, 1944, p. 72). Sambo thus returns to the nursery and, no longer different, is accepted: 'No wonder he's happy—little pink Sambo!' (*ibid.*, p. 73).

The story is characteristic of its time and is, without doubt, unpalatable now. It was certainly insensitive that such a book should continue to be published into the 1970s (Dixon draws on a 1965 edition, still on sale in the '70s), and yet it still warrants consideration. For Dixon goes on to claim that in a 1976 edition of *A Story Party at Green Hedges*, 'a very confused attempt has been made to give

this story a face-lift ...the racism ...has been toned down' (1977a, pp. 111-2); likewise, Druce speaks of it being 'silently changed' in the 1976 reprint (Druce, 1992, p. 43). In this supposedly revised version, the pixie episode is omitted and it is the toys who see the error of their ways: they come to fetch Sambo back, but when they find him no longer black, they are sorry and re-ink him, commenting

> "We don't like you because you are black or because you are white," said the golly. "We like you because you are kind and friendly and good. You can be any colour you like. We don't really care." (Blyton, 1949, p. 19)

This story, it should be noted, is asked for by a girl who owns the doll,

> "He's so sweet, and I like his black face, don't you?"
> "Yes. He's a dear little doll," I [EB] say. (*ibid.*, p. 12)

As the date of the above quotation indicates, both Dixon and Druce are in error. The 1976 edition was not a confused attempt to rewrite the story: the version in *Story Party* is simply a separate story, with a different history (though the two, like many of Blyton's tales, are very close). It goes back, unchanged, to the first edition of *Story Party* (1949), though it was first published even earlier, in *Sunny Stories* in 1943. The other story with this title had first appeared in that magazine six years earlier, in 1937, and was collected in the *Enid Blyton's Jolly Story Book* (1944) before its later incarnations—the ones noted by Jeger, Dixon and Druce[21]. Wrong as they are, though, this doesn't alter the likely reception of the book in the 1960s and '70s. And yet, neither does it warrant Druce's claim that '*The Little Black Doll* displays a deeper dislike of blackness, and so does her frequent casting of golliwogs, along with monkeys, as the wrongdoers in the Noddy stories' (1992, p. 230).[22]

The story is actually a variant on the ugly duckling theme (as Druce notes)[23] which Blyton uses repeatedly. Thus there is another story where a golly is set to run away, thinking that others have forgotten him at Christmas, till he opens a suitcase and discovers some presents addressed to him. 'So the toys liked him

after all! In fact they must like him very much. He was their "dear, dear Golly.'"[24] Unfortunately, it is those stories featuring 'black characters' that have been highlighted, whereas the blackness is usually incidental. Thus, in another variant, it is a bird who laments, 'I am a queer, odd little bird. Nobody wants me' (p. 88).[25] Likewise, in that precursor of 'Noddy', 'Tales of Toyland' (see chapter 4), both the sailor-doll and the fairy doll are rejected by the other toys, and leave for Toyland, despite being 'white'. In many stories it is actually tails that mark difference—remarkably like the Lacanian phallus, in fact!—so, in 'Michael's Tail', a party is held, but only for those with tails.[26] But most famously, this theme is used in the first Noddy book, when he cannot find a home (see chapter 4). And the similarities between him and the little black doll actually go much further. Sambo, too, wears 'a red coat, and blue trousers', and runs away till he meets a pixie with 'big pointed ears' who has a toadstool house with a door cut in its stalk, and windows in the top part (Big-Ears was a pixie in Blyton's original conception, of course). Like many other Blyton creations, Sambo is simply trying to find acceptance: in one variant the doll becomes white and acceptable; in another it becomes black again[27], which suggests to me that Blyton was using this signifier far less pointedly than others have claimed[28]. This also seems to be supported by the golliwog in the story being *persona grata*; in fact, the golly is actually party to the black doll's banishment; yet, if we follow the social critics' argument that it is blackness itself which is unacceptable, this would be nonsensical.

Dixon actually states that the golly's face is '(just) acceptable'—though there is no such equivocation in the story. I should also say that he does offer an explanation of the golly's acceptability, which is that 'black people at the level of the golliwog, the merry coon and the 'nigger' minstrel were assimilable to white racist sentiments', whereas 'Sambo has some pretensions to being a recognisable human being' (1977a, p. 111). But this is nonsense; many of the other toy characters explicitly mentioned as rejecting Sambo are surely even less recognisable as human: 'a clock-work mouse' and 'a humming top'! Dixon, however, seeks to bolster his case by referring to the pixie as 'a distinct blond,

Nordic type' (*ibid.*). Certainly, the illustration in Blyton's text does not support this (see fig. 6-1) : the pixie is smaller than Sambo and seems to have dark hair, where it is discernible. The text simply describes her as having a 'little pointed face, with big pointed ears that stuck up through her shining hair' (*Enid Blyton's Jolly Story Book*, p. 66). Closer to a stereotypical Vulcan than a Nord, I would say![29]

Let us now look at the connection with Noddy more carefully, for the golliwogs are (or were) an integral part of Toyland, appearing from *N1* onwards. There is a specific Golliwog Town, which I have commented on before. However, although there are separate towns and villages for a number of the Toylanders (the bouncing balls, the rocking horses, wizards, the goblins, etc), the golliwogs are actually far more integrated, in that they—unlike, say, Goblins, Wizards or Rocking

Figure 6-1 The 'Nordic' Pixie with Sambo, in 'The little black doll' (Blyton, 1944, p. 67)

Horses—are regularly seen amongst other Toy Villagers. Aside from Beek's industrial picture mentioned earlier, the only other linking of golliwogs with a more urban world comes in *N7*, where Gilbert Golly, in the school concert, is to recite a poem about a sweep (but then Noddy also sweeps chimneys in *N2*).

One other point worth making, again concerning the illustrations (i.e. unsupported by the text), is the 'Wanted' or 'Reward' poster that we glimpse whenever we see inside the police station (*N10* p. 40; *N19* p. 50 and *N22* p. 34). Those eager to pounce on the infamous episodes of *N4* frequently miss these. In each case, the person 'wanted' is a golliwog. These are all post-Beek illustrations, and as there was a 'dictionary' for the various illustrators of the series, I would presume that after the first appearance, this became part of the iconography of the police station. It is an unfortunate depiction, suggesting that the golliwog might be a criminal type. But, as I said earlier, there are obviously problems with concentrating on the illustrations, especially when they receive no

235

textual support (e.g., at the end of *N7*, when Noddy and Big-Ears return to Toyland, there is a party which includes Mr. Golly, so the text tells us, yet he is not represented in the illustration).

Let us look more closely at the texts, then, which need to be examined in the context of Blyton's own comment that she wrote more stories about good than bad golliwogs, as opposed to critics' claim that they are 'habitually presented by this author in evil and menacing roles' (Fryer, 1989, p. 81). Certainly, it is easy for the person seeking a quick headline to pounce on such phrases as Noddy's comment, "But what a BAD golliwog to find someone's new hat and wear it" (*N3* p. 40).[30] Isolated like this, such statements can 'fan' an incipient discourse of racism, but if we look at the whole book, we see that the 'bad golliwog' is only one of several 'bad' characters, including a "very naughty little mouse" (*ibid.*, p. 44) who has taken a handbag, and Sally Sly—'a naughty little doll if ever there was one!' (*ibid.*, p. 45)—wearing a cat's tail as a stole. Besides, for every negative instance, there is usually a positive remark elsewhere; as, for example, in *N11*, where Father Christmas singles out the golliwogs for praise: "I've had very good reports from boys and girls about their golliwogs—they love them very much. I want to give some praise there." (*N11* p. 40).[31]

So, let us be sure that all golliwogs are considered, first by way of some basic content analysis (which is necessary given comments like Dixon's, that 'in the 'Noddy' stories ... the golliwogs are invariably 'naughty' and constitute a threat to Noddy'- Dixon, 1974a, p. 71; also Druce, 1992, p. 230). Textually, the golliwogs are 'bad' characters in only one story (*N4*). In other stories the 'bad' comprise the following: bears (Tommy and Bruiny, who steal Noddy's car), Sammy Soldier, Sammy Sailor-Doll, and two other 'white' humanised figures (Mr. Tootles and Mr. Honk)—each featuring in one story. It is the goblins and monkeys who are the more persistent villains, featuring in three stories each.

If we look at characters who are naughty, cheeky or mischievous, rather than actually bad, does this picture change? In this categorisation the golliwogs

would receive four mentions (three from Gilbert Golly), but they still lag behind the bears, with seven. If we look at the issue from the other side, with mentions of characters being 'good' in some way, the golliwogs still score better than the bears, even though, overall, bears feature more than golliwogs (Mr and Mrs Tubby Bear being neighbours, and Tessie being one of Noddy's closest friends). Excluding mentions where characters fall into any of the above categories (bad, naughty, or good), bears receive twenty-four mentions while golliwogs get only twelve. It should be said that the golliwogs also get two collective mentions, in Golliwog Town, whereas bears tend to be seen more individually, although a Teddy-Bear Town is mentioned (N22 p. 57). But if we look at named characters, as opposed to mentions as part of a collective (a criticism that might easily be seen as detrimental to the golliwogs), then the gollies and teddies are more or less even with nine each. Lastly, if one were to look at the class representation of each, there seems also to be a fairly even spread: there is a bear doctor, but bears are also barrow-boys; likewise with golliwogs. Clearly, such content analysis is fraught with problems: if something is mentioned more than something else it might indicate prominence, but prominent characters can be either good or bad, stereotyped or individualised. However, because such comments as those of Dixon and Druce are so readily advanced, it has seemed necessary to be more precise.

Let us now give closer attention to N4, which flags up its theme on the cover: the standard train motif is changed here, with gollies and police replacing the usual carriage occupants. The gollies are clearly under police control, too, subtly indicating their containment within the book.[32] The action starts in chapter 5, 'The Golliwog comes', with a golliwog entering Noddy's house without knocking. He asks Noddy to take him "to a party in the Dark Wood at midnight" (N4 p. 34) for a bag of sixpences. The offer of money is sufficient to allay Noddy's fears about 'bad goblins' being there (ibid.). So, that night, in the dark, Noddy goes to meet the golliwog, although he doesn't see him initially because he is 'so black' (ibid., p. 36).

In the next chapter, 'In the Dark Dark Wood', Noddy is told that there isn't a party: "This is a trap, Noddy. We want your car for ourselves. Get out at once!" (*ibid.*, pp. 39-40). Then 'Three black faces suddenly appeared...'. They decide his clothes are worth having too, and he ends up naked—the only time in the series apart from when he is initially found by Big-Ears (see fig. 6-2) After this ordeal Noddy crawls aimlessly through the wood, eventually coming to Big-Ears' house. Noddy arrives with a cold, tells his story and the two of them then go and wake the policeman (the as yet unnamed Mr. Plod). Big-Ears then moves into action, thinking, 'There must be some way. There always was a way to do something, if you wanted it badly enough' (*ibid.*, p. 48).

Big-Ears' idea is to display a notice which asks anyone hearing a bell jingling to contact him. Soon two small clockwork mice report that they've heard jingling inside an old hollow tree. Big-Ears, the policeman and Bongo, the largest toy dog in Toy Town [sic], set off, with a sack. When the dog barks at a hole in the bottom of the tree, the golliwogs come out of the top. The dog comments, amidst many barks, "I'm hungry and I want a golliwog" (*ibid.*, p. 55). Then the policeman drives to Noddy's house, returns Noddy's clothes, and they have a party.

NODDY WRIGGLED AND SHOUTED AND WAILED

41

Figure 6-2 Noddy being attacked in the Dark Wood by Golliwogs in the original edition (*N4*)

The story is certainly menacing, and I can vouch for the impact it had on me when I was young (one of the very few I can remember at all!), although—I have to say it—I personally never equated the golliwogs with blacks.[33] However, the power of the story was very real, which is why the golliwog can be such a key signifier—unlike the goblin (see below). But its appeal is also what has led it into such trouble. Let us now turn to the revised editions, to see how they compare.
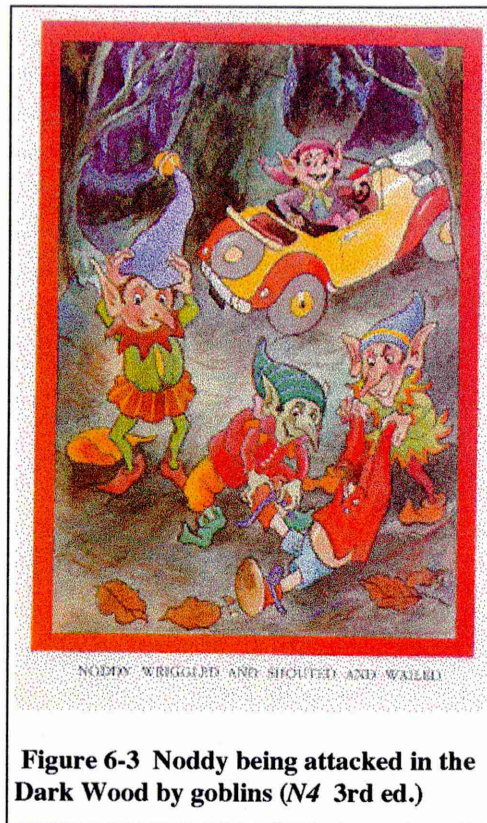
Figure 6-3 Noddy being attacked in the Dark Wood by goblins (*N4* 3rd ed.)

NODDY DE-GOLLIFIED

A 'de-gollified' edition first appeared in 1986, although a sanitised television version had appeared more than ten years earlier (see above). There must have been reservations about this edition even then, for the first edition was kept in print, and it continued to sell in equal numbers to the revised one. This second edition (fig. 6-4) has now been almost completely forgotten, such that what is really the third edition is simply known as the 'revised edition', without mention of its predecessor. The third edition involved far more
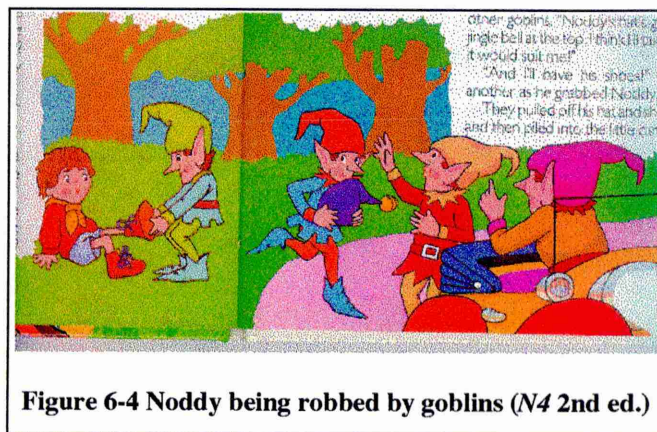
Figure 6-4 Noddy being robbed by goblins (*N4* 2nd ed.)

scrupulous attention to the style of van der Beek's original artwork; in fact, the first seven books still declare 'Pictures by Beek' on the cover, despite the fact that over seventy of his illustrations have been doctored (but then again, the

239

same applies to even more of Blyton's text). In this revised edition the golliwogs have, once again, all been replaced (see fig. 6-3). The bad ones have become goblins, Gilbert Golly has become Martha Monkey (the remnants of his name just survive in an illustration in *N6** p 38) and Mr. Golly (owner of the garage) is now Mr. Sparks, 'a kindly-looking doll' (*N2* p. 21). Golly Town itself has become Monkey Town.

It is certainly the case that corporations like the BBC would not have touched the books without such an updating, thus bringing Noddy to many new generations of children. We find Japanese, Asian, Mexican, Negro and other multicultural images here, although none are main characters.[34] But the question still remains as to whether erasing the golliwog from history was appropriate. Indeed, it might bring to mind other texts where 'the past was brought up to date' so that there was no 'expression of opinion, which conflicted with the needs of the moment, ever allowed to remain on record' (Orwell, 1954, p. 35). So, let us now turn to today's children, to see what they make of the whole issue.

CHILDREN READING THE GOLLIWOG

Taking on board Dixon's point that what matters is what children in general—rather than the isolated child—have made of the golliwog, I asked a fairly representative cross-section from four schools for their views. However, caution is still necessary. I had one reporter ask me if I'd now proved definitively that Blyton was not racist, as though such a straightforward answer were possible. Obviously there are no definitively innocent texts: all language is spoken in the context of previous discourses; likewise, there is no privileging children as a site of innocence and purity, so it should not be thought that we can turn to them to get some unsullied reading of the books' *real* meanings.[35] Many children are now themselves aware of the discourse of 'racism'—though sometimes they see it in quite different terms. Consequently, they will draw on this when asked about the books. So, some I spoke to were clearly aware of a discourse about the golliwog's involvement in racism; some would simply trot out that 'Blyton is

racist', while others seemed oblivious. Nevertheless, there is no way that 'control groups' could be mustered to repair this situation, for these discourses are themselves part of society. Control groups are thereby artificial. My concern in involving children was more straightforward. Though control groups are inappropriate, it is certainly the case that children themselves have been 'controlled' to the extent that their views have not been solicited, being regarded as too immature, or too innocent. Yet being the main readers of this literature, it seemed right to try to redress this.[36]

What I can say is that, of the children who were not previously aware of the association golliwog = black, none made it. Older childen could only speak retrospectively, making the usual comment:

Sandra:	I never associated that at all.
Claire:	I didn't.
Rebecca:	No, not till now.
Sandra:	I just thought of the golliwogs as like ...the golliwogs.
Others:	Yeah. [16-17 year-olds]

They seemed genuinely confused at this association:

Claire:	So I don't see why ...?
Rebecca:	As long as it's not encouraged that you're- you're not saying golliwogs represent these?
Sandra:	I mean, was there a purpose, is that why, was [stumbling] Enid Blyton racist, I mean, was that what she thought??

Predictably, a number expressed their affection for the character having had their own golly dolls, though this too had sometimes led to problems and confusion: 'I used to have a golliwog and I got it thrown away, I got it taken off me [...] My mum wouldn't let me have it' (F 13). For several, the negative associations had come from parents, sometimes to Noddy, or to Blyton in general: 'I didn't really read them because my mum said they were racist, and so I wasn't prone to read them.'

GOLLIWOGS VS GOBLINS

I then showed the children the 'goblin' replacements and asked them why they thought the texts had been changed (see fig.6.2). I have outlined these responses elsewhere; briefly, it was suggested that it was because: the characters were simply old and out-of-date; they wanted to plagiarise Blyton's 'brilliant ideas'; or, economic factors—'Maybe it's because they've been taken over by the jam-jar golliwogs'(f, 8). But a more distinctive explanation was that the characters had been changed to goblins to make the books 'more scary', as Sadia (14) put it, or 'more evil', in an 8 year old's terms. Thus the golliwog versions were seen as 'for the younger children' (the view of a group of 9 year olds). Several groups elaborated on this:

Daisy:	I don't like the idea of the goblins, really. It makes them more.... Those [goblins] look wicked. Those look wicked and evil. They [gollies] look mischievous.
Valerie:	They [goblins] look evil and a bit mean and horrible.

'Mischievous' was a term often used: 'I think that golliwogs look like they're giggling, mischievous. They're nicking off with his clothes but find it funny, but they're [goblins] doing it nastily, sort of thing: "Give me your clothes [indistinct]" (F 13).

Natalie:	When I think of the golliwogs I think of mischief, but when you're thinking of goblins you're thinking of evil...magic.
DR:	[gist: Do you think that that changes the story overall?]
Sadia:	It does, it makes it more serious, it makes it more scary.
DR	Why Sadia?
Sadia:	Before it was just like, mess about thing, like, you're just being naughty and that, but that makes it more scary. Children could have nightmares and things like that 'cos they don't understand what it is properly ...when they're little.

What is interesting is that these views were all expressed by older children, who were more likely to have had experience of golliwogs. The younger ones were

far more ambivalent, often changing their views in the course of discussion. When I asked why they had shifted their opinion the youngest (4-5 year olds) would only indicate particular features (e.g. the goblins have 'got big sharp noses' or 'big nails'). The slightly older ones (9 year olds) were more forthcoming, but, because of the nature of the issue, the changes only emerged over some time:

Hassan:	Those [gollies] look a bit scarier.
Sufia:	Because they're black, and in the night.
Qasim:	And they've got spiky hair.
Hassan:	Spiky hair like, they think they're ghosts.
DR	So these are more scary than the goblins in the new ones?
Hassan:	Sir, yeah, these look a bit scarier.
DR	You think *these* are a bit scarier?
Hassan:	Sir, ghosts have like big ears [...brief interruption to interview]
Sufia:	Yeah, and long nose, like witches.
Hassan:	Old witches, and they have big-ears, long nose
DR:	So which ones do you think are scarier now?
All:	Them [goblins]
DR:	You actually think these? You did before these [gollies] but now thinking about it, you think the goblins?
Aksa:	'Cos them [gollies] look a bit like clowns ['clowns' said by two children, simultaneously]. They look funny.
Hassan:	Sir, yeah, they've got clown clotheses on.
Qasim	These [gollies] are not scary.

Here is another 9 year-old's shift in opinion:

Margaret:	I think the golliwogs are scarier, 'cos they've got like, black faces, and they look a bit more ... only both look evil, but the golliwogs look sort of like, really... They just look at you really awful and they've got like really, really like evil eyes. [others agree]
DR:	So you think they've actually changed them to make them maybe less scary, with the goblins?
Margaret:	[indecisive] I think, I think other people probably think that the goblins were more scary, but ...
DR:	Why do you think that, Margaret? Although you think ...
Margaret:	[interrupting] I'm not sure because like, the golliwogs, like normally nice in the stories, and the goblins are normally naughty, so they probably think that goblins are

more like naughty and fierce like, and they're ugly
because they've got really long noses and really big ears,
like.

There are a two points to be made here. Methodologically, we can see the
dynamics of how topics are discursively constructed: they are not static, but
frequently change over time, often prompted by the discourse itself (Billig,
1996). This, therefore, makes it more problematic in making truth claims from
particular statements; in fact, a questionnaire response would have missed this
dynamic entirely.

Substantively, the second point, it is clear is that there is a general uneasiness
about the golliwogs when first encountered, which often diminishes over time.
This may have been the case with other groups, too, but I have simply failed to
capture it. Only in one group (6 year olds) did I note that it was the one child
with previous knowledge of golliwogs who immediately found the goblins
scarier. The other three, for whom the golliwog was new, found this more scary.

This, of course, is exactly the reaction that Florence Upton captures in her
original book about the character: an initial fear, followed by a tender affection,
which is also what various owners of golliwogs have recorded. In fact, what
makes it such an effective grotesque.

The ambivalence of the golliwog, as compared to the goblin, also made a reading
of the revised edition more problematic for some groups. As they pointed out, it
is only because the golliwog is generally trustworthy in the stories that Noddy
can be excused for going off into the Dark Wood at night with one. But to go off
with goblins, who are always bad, makes Noddy a far less discerning character.
These are the responses of three groups to the question, 'Does changing the
characters make the story different?':

Naomi: [Yes] Because Noddy would sort of, know.
DR: What would he know, Naomi?
Naomi: Because it, er, that they were actually bad.

DR:	He should know that the goblins are bad, you're saying?
Edward:	Yes [endorsed by all][indistinct words follow] ...And he wouldn't know if the gob- if the golliwog was good or bad.
Maurice:	Yeah, because there's one good golly and one there—a couple of bad gollies, so he doesn't know ... (7 year olds)

<div align="center">* * *</div>

Diana:	Yeah, it does actually, 'cos I think he'd trust a golliwog but I don't think he'd trust a goblin unless it was dressed up.
DR:	Right, so does it make ... Noddy...?
Diana:	Well, it makes no sense actually 'cos the goblins look the most scary but the golliwogs are the most likely to let him go off with. (9-10 year-olds)

<div align="center">* * *</div>

Lucy:	Yeah, because like, he doesn't know the goblins, but he knew golliwog.
[...]	
Patrick:	He's silly going off with a goblin because ...
Lucy:	You can't trust them.
Patrick:	Yeah, you can't trust them, never. (9 year olds)

Patrick had earlier remarked that 'If they [golliwogs] behaved and were nice to Noddy, I'd really like them.... But...goblins, you can't have them nice, else they're not really a goblin'. So, with this change, Noddy effectively becomes a more stupid—in fact, a more 'noddy'—character. After all, in the original it is the very thought of goblins being in the wood that causes Noddy to hesitate about taking a golly there in the first place.

Whilst the reactions to these changes were varied, just as they have been to the other alterations, they could be broadly grouped around those who endorsed the revisions, and those who took issue with them, either because they thought the golliwogs innocent in the first place, or because they thought the changes introduced other 'racist' issues. In relation to this last point, one of the strangest conversations I had was with two Asian boys (14 year olds) who were incensed at the changes (see appendix V for more detail):

DR:	What I'm trying to do is trying to unpick it all. Because, why do you say they're racist? or why have you heard that?
Waqas:	Because they deliberately [stumbles over word], deliberately removed the black character...
Shahid:	What- what's the reason, what's their reason for moving that character?
DR:	That's what I'm asking you, in a sense, because I know all the answers to that, but I'm interested in getting people's fresh perceptions, you know, fresh views...
Shahid:	I think it's because, if they want to change a character, they could have changed a different one. Why they have to deliberately remove that golliwog, or whatever?
DR:	Right, the one that, let me show you now the one that...
Waqas:	He's one of the main characters
DR:	Let me...sorry, let's go through this slowly, 'cos, are you saying, that it's like a black character?
Shahid:	Yeah.
DR:	And that they shouldn't remove that one?
Shahid and Waqas: Yeah.	

Though more extensively developed here, this 'reverse racism' was quite a common response. It came either from those who already knew that the golliwogs were said to represent black people, or from those so informed during the progress of the interview, leading them to object to the removal.[37] 'Who's changing these books? Who's got the rights to change these books?' as Shahid said, with passion. This becomes explicit at another point in the interview:

DR:	Does it make Noddy seem any different if he agrees to go with a goblin...?
Waqas:	Yeah!
DR:	...as opposed to going with a golliwog. Why Waqas?
Waqas:	It shows that he's racist. He's not going with a black character, he's going with a white character instead.
DR:	I wasn't actually thinking of that, but, I mean that's a good point...
Waqas:	But it makes it worser, changing it, makes it like, makes the controversy higher, because, like, people start talking about it more, when they find out that it used to be like this, so if they keep it like that there'd be less of it, less people talking about it...

It shows how the discourse of racism develops its own volition, disrupting the very open-mindedness it is meant to foster.[38] For example, some children suggested a rigorously systematic revision: 'Or they should have half the black ones bad and half the white ones bad as well...[yeah] and half the black ones good and half the white ones good....so it's just they're equal'. Others suggested a complete reversal: 'you make Noddy black and the ...Noddies [sic—i.e. gollies] white'. This is reminiscent of the logic in Joe Orton's *What the Butler Saw*:

> Mrs Prentice: What's Miss Barclay doing downstairs?
> Prentice: She's making white golliwogs for sale in colour-prejudice trouble-spots. ...I hoped it might promote racial harmony' (Orton, 1976, p. 387).

Others again, seeing the problematic nature of falling into a black-white dichotomy, opted for more neutral colours: 'They could have done the colouring schemes like green or purple, then it wouldn't come across as people black or white', to which his colleague perceptively responded, 'Seeing it's Toyland they could have done it as anything' (14 year-olds).

Let me bring this together now. I have discussed the golliwogs in depth, and shown that in Noddy they are not the baddies that is usually claimed. They are only so in the one infamous story. I have also looked at ten other Blyton collections of stories, randomly selected, to see how golliwogs are treated there. From these, there emerged two 'bad' golliwogs and eighteen 'good' ones.[39] There do actually seem to be more 'naughty' teddy stories than gollies, often explicitly, as in 'The naughty teddy bear' (*The Magic Knitting Needles*, pp. 129-37) and 'Teddy Bear is naughty' (*Sleepytime Tales*, pp. 115-24)—bearing out Blyton's own claim. In fact, the golliwog is often a character who comes up with solutions to problems, again harping back to Upton's original Golliwogg. This said, there are also some who are in a subservient role—yet no more than other characters.

I would now like to relate this to more theoretical issues, by noting similar moves made by other writers. Walkderdine's work is interesting in this regard, for, she starts by being repulsed by *Rocky II*, a film that was being watched on video when she visited a working-class home whilst conducting some research; it was not only 'on', but the favourite moments were being replayed continually by the father. However, when Walkerdine later viewed the film for herself, she confesses: 'No longer did I stand outside the pleasures of engagement with the film. I too wanted Rocky to win. Indeed, I *was* Rocky' (Walkderdine, 1986, p. 169; 'I'm Julian' declared Morag Styles' 7 year-old son, in similar fashion, after his first Five book - Styles,1994, p. 43). Rather than the violence and sex-role stereotyping, it is the escapism that works, which, Walkerdine argues, is the only way to explain why blacks, too, call for Rocky's victory over his black adversary, Mr. Big. She concludes: 'Although it is easy to dismiss such films as macho, stupid and fascist, it is more revealing to see them as fantasies of omnipotence, heroism and salvation' (*ibid.*, p. 172; see also Zipes, 1992, pp. 119-23). A similar move is made by James Donald, in trying to explain the appeal of *Dirty Harry* to minority ethnic groups.[40] Lastly, Barker has powerfully argued against knee-jerk reactions to each and every occurrence of a 'stereotype', usefully citing Propp's admonition that 'everything drawn into a tale from outside is subject to its norms and laws' (quoted in Barker, 1989, p. 127). In other words, we need to look closely at the context of a story before making glib pronouncements. As Barker notes, stereotypes are frequently present, but they are there to be played with, not reified; so each story offers opportunities for fresh reworkings of signifiers (as has been shown with sexist readings of the Five - see chapter 5): not to allow this is to deny much of the power of fiction in favour of a highly reductionist social realism; it is also to deny any freedom to the sign; as though all signs, as in some pre-Saussurean Eden, have only their one true meaning.

I am aware that this is a dangerous argument, but it seems the only way to explain the fact that children do not generally read Blyton's books in a 'racist'

manner; rather, the tales seem to be working at a rather different, fantasy level; but—and this is the real problem—only for children, and even they outgrow the fantasy. For adults, who tend to see these tales—as so much else—in terms of social realism, it is the colour, the class and the sex that obtrude.

CONCLUSION

As I said at the outset, in some ways this chapter has been a diversion, but the centrality of racism in general, and the golliwog in particular, to any discussion of Blyton has necessitated its inclusion. I have tried to show the complex history of the issue, pointing to problems with the various terms, where fake etymologies are rife. I have suggested that a racist reading of Blyton is misguided—a selective construction, in fact—which is not to deny that she came from an age in which white people (male and middle-class especially), saw themselves as naturally superior (something that I do not think should be erased from history, any more than the inequities of slavery); nor is it to deny that Blyton's books can all too easily be threaded into a racist discourse. I have also suggested that the golliwog is an inherently ambivalent, or transgressive figure, which is what gives him (and the golly is usually a he, taking us into other, murky waters) his fascination. He is not coterminous with the Afro-American, although 'black' elements undoubtedly inform his appearance[41], particularly elements from minstrelsy. Those who deny any such association, despite the existence of such characters bearing the name 'Sambo' or 'Nigger' are, at best, subconsciously deceiving themselves. Lastly, the insulting term 'wog' was also seen to have a separate history from the original 'golliwogg', though the etymologies have obviously been run together (just as we have seen with other terms in this history, like 'noddy' and 'plod').

I have also refuted the related notion in Blyton's books, that the golliwog is always the bad character. More often than not, he plays a leading, innovative role. The fact that the opposite has been thought the case, even amongst 'scholars', is itself of note, suggesting a deeper undercurrent of racist thinking in

society. As I have shown, a variety of characters function in the role of villain in Blyton's work, depending, as Propp said, on the exigencies of plot; occasionally—but only occasionally—as in the notorious *N4*, this has been the golliwog.

So, what about the practical implications? Clearly, the golliwog is a powerful character, one that seems to intrigue children, and it is a shame that it has had to be banished. However, the racial accusations around the figure make it 'too hot to handle', though I think the situation might have been resolved in less draconian fashion. From evidence quoted earlier, the term golliwog does seem to have been recuperated to some extent, frequently being used of a hair-style. Yet, as I also said, the reworkings of a sign depend on the oppressed group itself taking an interest in its signification—not some institution with an established power base, which can only underwrite the oppression (or be seen to do so). Thus it may be that this is a period when its withdrawal has been wise. Though a toyshop like Hamley's might claim that golliwog sales thrive amongst both white and black people (Ezard, 1987), the doll is still too readily re-appropriated by racist groups to be used equably. Discourses undoubtedly have a material effect, but without a change in the real power base of society, any reworkings are limited.

Personally, I think an opportunity was missed in the 'Noddy' revisions: rather than try to erase the golliwog from history—which, as indicated, results in a reverse racism in many cases—it could have been re-worked slightly, and I would therefore take seriously the suggestion, above, of making the gollies a more neutral colour—blue, for example. Though such a change might not have worked for Selvon's hero, Galahad, it certainly could for a doll, thus maintaining some of the potency of the figure while removing its 'black' signification. It might well be that, in time, a fourth edition reintroduces the golliwog; though this would depend on a society rather different from today's.

But again, the golliwog has moved centre stage when, important though he is, he *is* actually a diversion. The 'racism' of Blyton's books—if we mean the assumed superiority of colonial whites—is, I think, far more overt in the 'Adventure' and 'Secret' series, which seem to me to have dated to a greater extent than the more parochial Five, Seven, Barney Mysteries and Find-Outers[42]. Once again, though, I am slipping into an adult discourse: for the children, there is a more primal fantasy at work here, of hero versus outsider—a theme I shall expand on later.

NOTES

1   This is not in the original 1974(a) article, where Dixon resorts to personal anecdote, thus leaving himself more open to attack. Nevertheless, this style of argument is used by those on each side of the debate; hence Alibhai-Brown [mis]quotes *FFIA*: ' 'The face has nasty gleaming eyes and it looked very dark. Perhaps it was a black man's face. Oh I was so frightened' ... . Incidentally the Blyton passage was pointed out to me by a mother of a young Black boy who had tried to rub off his skin with a brillo pad' (Alibhai-Brown, 1994, p. 66).

2   See chapter 2, and the recommended p.c. change to Big-Ears' name. One group of children (13 year olds) almost echoed Miles' comment:

        Pam: Now it's [i.e. the revised Noddy] not racist.
        Charles:[aside] Unless you've got big ears and a big nose![referring to
                Big-Ears and the goblins]

3   In fact, some talk about storytellers using 'archetypes', Jung's term for what he considered to be universal figures who appear in myths and stories. Propp's paradigmatic analysis of Russian folk tales also claimed to find universal types, though more schematically (Propp, 1968). However, there is always a problem of one person's archetypes being another's stereotypes.

4   See above, note 1.

5   See the child-minder case, p. 231.

6   'Blacks' have also been brown, of course—hence 'negro', 'brownie' (a word with a different connotation in Blyton) and 'nigger', the last now being one of the most offensive words in English (Cohn, 1988), though here too there has been some re-appropriation of the term recently, especially in America. There has also been recent disagreement amongst Asians, many of whom resent being called 'black', as it categorises them with Afro-Caribbeans:

        As many as 83 per cent of the West Indians and 43 per cent of the Indians and Pakistanis said they had most in common with the English. However, a further 31 per cent said that as far as they were concerned they had nothing in common with either. No more than 8 per cent of West Indian and 20 per cent of the Indians and Pakistanis felt that they had more in common with each other than with the English. (James, 1993, p. 267, quoting Daniel Lawrence's study in Nottingham).

7   Clearly, to speak of an 'anti-racist' is just as much a stereotype. There is a wide variety of perspectives here. My typification, as I reflect on it, is

obviously of someone more concerned with the surface features of racism at the expense of the underlying power relations; what is now often seen as a 'p.c.' outlook. However, I do not wish to denigrate the excellent work of all those seeking to expunge 'racism' in all its forms.

8   Or the one for the Beltane Festival in Peebles. In this, children parade dressed up as toys, including, traditionally, golliwogs. However, media attention made the issue a 'hot potato', resulting in a greater golliwog presence, with shops doing a booming trade in golliwog dolls (Massie, 1991).

9   Interestingly, 'golliwog' is not in Cohn's main text as an abusive term at all, though 'wog' is, alongside 'nigger' and others. It is listed in the appendix, though, alongside terms like 'Hindu', Jew'—and 'big ears'—but only for the over 13 age group (Cohn, 1988).

10   This usage was also current earlier. Blyton has the following piece of dialogue in *FOHT* (1951):

> "He looks like a gorilla or something with his broad hunched-up body. And WHY doesn't he cut his hair?" [Anne]
> "His surname ought to be Golliwog. Or Tarzan." [George] (p. 127)

Even earlier, James Joyce had the line 'Madcap Ciss with her golliwog curls' in *Ulysses* (Joyce, 1969, p. 351).

11   From the same Spanish root as 'cannibal', or human flesh-eater.

12   Though Rupert has also been criticised for featuring golliwogs, causing *Express Newspapers* problems with their facsimile editions. Whilst the 1936-41 volumes are 'true facsimiles', the 1942 and 1943 volumes are labelled 'Reproduction Annuals' because the text has been amended. In the 1942 volume the 'wog' was erased from 'Golliwog', leaving gaps in the text; in the 1943 volume, 'Golly' is used as a replacement, avoiding the gaps. Shirley Reeves, of 'The Followers of Rupert' society (personal communication, 25 June 1996), who kindly provided me with the above information wonders what they will do when they get to 1946 and 'Rupert on Coon Island'.

But generally, Rupert has attracted far less attention than Noddy (Noddy actually appeared in *Rupert Weekly* in the early 1980s - H. Wright, 1994). Alfred Bestall, the main artist and writer of 'Rupert', also illustrated Blyton's work, and some of Milne's, too, including some of the latter's incredibly popular children's verse. In Bestall's illustration to 'Forgotten', a precursor of Pooh stands next to a golliwog (Thwaite, 1992, p. 51). Even in Shepard's better known illustrations to the poem (Milne, 1965, pp. 95-8) there is what might be considered a highly-suspect black-figure standing

beside Pooh. It is fascinating to speculate on what might have been the fate of the 'Pooh' books had a golliwog infiltrated the Hundred-Acre wood.

13   They are cheap German dolls, 'Dutch' being a corruption of 'Deutsch'; also known as 'penny woodens'.

14   'They looked like golliwogs, like white people pretending to be black for the laughs they could get' as Kurt Vonnegut (1972, p. 105) puts it. This was certainly a common practice, expressing America's fear of the Negro—of the other. It is interesting to note how cross-dressing—men dressing as women (and vice-versa)—has been theorised, using notions of transgression, but whites dressing as blacks, or blacks imitating whites, is seen in far more negative terms.

15   The Working Group Against Racism in Children's Resources have provided me with a handout (Racist Spotlight Group, 1984) which has an illustration of what they claim is an 'anti-semitic Edwardian gollywog' [sic]. It has a larger nose, but little else that signifies such a description, so I must presume that their labelling is based on other knowledge.

16   Yet another derivation is suggested by James Robertson & Sons, the preserve manufacturers, who began using the golly in 1920 to promote their products. They claim that, just before World War I, on a visit to the backwoods of America, James Robertson's son noticed some children playing with some white-eyed, black, rag dolls. The doll was called a 'golly' by the children, their rendering of 'dolly'. Robertson thought it would make an appealing mascot. To make him more attractive, 'he was dressed in a very colorful [sic] suit' (Davis, 1992, p. 104, quoting Robertson's anniversary publication, *Fifty Golden Years - Robertson's Golly: 1920-1980*). Robertson's were forced to stop using their golly logo for a period in the 1980s, but now use it again.

17   Which is not to say that dictionaries are impartial. They frequently promote particular discursive constructions of a topic by foregrounding certain meanings and etymologies rather than others.

18   I am thinking of a particular example here, of an army instructor ordering other Territorial Army soldiers to taunt new coloured recruits with just such terms (Anon, 1988).

19   This relates closely to the supposedly neutral description of a golliwog given earlier, as opposed to the children's descriptions (p. 220).

20   The other text frequently mentioned is *The Three Golliwogs* (1944), which is nowadays most unacceptable with its three heroes, Golly, Woggie and Nigger (amended in the late 'sixties to Wiggy, Waggy and Wolly). However, at the time when they were first written (1939), these terms were

far more common—and all Blyton's names, of course, are deliberately basic, frequently based on the generic name: hence, a goldfish is called 'Goldie', a nodding man is 'Noddy', and a golly would be 'Golly' or 'Wolly'. However, the term 'Nigger', though common in its day, is more revealing, showing an association with black people, even if only at a subconscious level—though those liberals who deny any association rarely face this fact. It is also said that the humour of these three golliwogs is offensive in that much of it is based on the fact that they are always mistaken for each other—as people from other races are often portrayed ('they all look the same'). This could certainly be offensive, but there seems no malice in this, despite what some assert. Again, looking at other Blyton works, such mistaken identity—usually of twins rather than triplets—is a common device (see chapter 2).

21 *Snicker the Brownie and Other Stories* (1985) is, in effect, *Enid Blyton's Jolly Story Book*, without the offending 'The little black doll'. The only other change to this volume seems to be in 'The bad Cockyolly bird', where a prominent, quick-witted golliwog has been replaced by a 'baby doll'.

22 Linking blackness to monkeys is a particularly insidious move, textually unwarranted, yet discursively powerful.

Surprisingly, George Greenfield, Blyton's long-time literary agent, also repeats the orthodox view about black characters: '...she was hurt by the somewhat far-fetched attacks on her because her naughty characters were almost always black in hue ...'(1995, p. 113)!

23 'The ugly duckling' has itself come in for criticism—not only because of the obvious desirability of whiteness in the beautiful swans, but over a line about the stork, 'jabbering away in Egyptian, which was the language he had learnt from his mother' (Oulton, 1995). The translator, Wynne Jones, a Professor of Scandinavian Studies, asked for his name to be removed from the volume because, 'The publisher, Chronicle Books, had expunged every reference to race, as well as softening militarism, tough mothers and tragic endings' (Foster, 1992a; see also Hardyment, 1993).

24 'I shall run away' p. 55 (*Enid Blyton Easy Reader: book four*, 1955, pp. 50-55 [orig, *Sunny Stories*, 1949]).

25 'The Odd little bird' from *The Three Naughty Children*, 1974, pp. 84-90.

26 'Michael's Tail' in *Fifth Tell-a-Story Book*, pp. 144-59; orig *Sunny Stories*, 1945.

27 Blyton used this notion elsewhere, though it has not attracted the same attention (*Mandy, Mops and Cubby and the Whitewash*). Here the

golliwog comes to be appreciated in his own right, after being rejected by two pixie dolls ("Hallo, Blackface?" they said. "Don't you ever wash?"). After experimenting with the whitewash, and finding himself even more rejected, it rains, and he returns home to Mops' hugs: "'You're our own black-faced golly once more!" And dear me, Mops was pleased.' The story, though still unacceptable today, seems to be less about a dislike of blackness than about the small-mindedness of the two dolls.

The same is true of 'Old black face' (in *Tales About Toys*, 1950), another variation on this theme. Here, the other toys, after showing an initial dislike of Sambo, are covered in a fall of soot from the chimney. Sambo cleans them up, and, again, they come to see how bigoted they have all been.

28   It should be noted that Dixon's whole analysis refers to the story where the black doll stays pink at the end. Dixon does draw mention the other story, but, as already noted, he sees it simply as 'a confused attempt ...to give this story a face-lift' with its racism 'toned down' (1977a, pp. 111-2). He still finds it objectionable, but as his earlier analysis turned on the fact that the doll is pink in the end, thus 'no longer different', it is difficult to see how such a change could be insignificant.

29   This might seem reminiscent of the *Guardian* reader's description of the golliwog: interpretation is clearly in the eye of the beholder. However, Dixon, given his ignorance of the original texts, is probably referring to the illustration in the later, separately published edition: this certainly seems closer to his description, a leggy blond creation—but far from Blyton's conception. Finally, Dixon seems confused when talking about the medicine given to the pixie as 'the ancient instrument of change, the magic potion' (1977a, p. 111). The potion, of course, has nothing to do with Sambo's change, for which only the rain is responsible.

30   Gibbons (1997) does just this, isolating references to blackness and golliwogs. I'm surprised no one has yet objected to the sentence, 'Blacks or no blacks, he meant to stay where he was' (*FGDTS* p. 14) - which refers to Timmy getting smuts in his eye from sticking his head out of the window on a train! See also my comments on the Lenoir family, chapter 5.

31   Of course, critics can say that this is a token gesture, or merely patronising. But given when it was written (1954), it is hard to see how or why. There is no evidence of any social criticism at this time.

32   There are two other books (*N8* and *N11*) where this standard motif has been altered, though these are far smaller changes than in *N4*. Both the others are also post-Beek alterations.

33   I have always wondered whether Blyton was influenced by *Pinocchio* here.
      This wooden puppet also goes at night to meet the Cat and Fox, for
      monetary gain.. They too had organised a rendezvous, then, disguised, try
      to mug Pinocchio: 'in the dark he saw two awful black figures, all
      enveloped in coal-sacks' (Collodi, 1996, p. 42). He runs through a wood
      and after many hours knocks at the door of a cottage, where he meets his
      eventual rescuer, and is put to bed to recover. However, it is a far more
      brutal tale, his 'muggers' having tried to stab and hang him before this.

34   It would be easy to comment here that the main characters are still all
      white, but this would be facile, and show how constructions of colour are
      socially derived. To call Mr and Mrs Tubby Bear—*brown* bears—'white'
      is making the concept rather too elastic! Big-Ears, the Brownie, is less
      problematic: he certainly looks white, despite his name. It should also be
      noted that in the Cosgrove Hall BBC series there is a slightly more
      prominent black character, Dinah Doll.

35   This is what makes Foucault's notion of 'regimes of truth' so apposite.

36   This said, I am aware of an absence of Afro-Caribbeans in my sample. I
      have very few, simply because there are comparatively few around Bolton.
      There are more in Manchester, where there is also a far greater 'awareness'
      of, or, familiarity with the discourse of racism. However, this also makes
      Blyton more taboo, and it would have been unlikely that I would have been
      allowed to use the texts openly in schools there; the children would not
      have been allowed to speak. (I should make it clear that I did not approach
      Manchester schools, following some 'insider' discussions advising that it
      would not be well received. I have had no official word on this, though).

37   Dyer and Romalov (1995) point out that the rewrites of the 'Nancy Drew'
      books similarly excluded blacks and other minorities. Likewise, it was
      insisted that no blacks appeared in Hergé's 'Tintin' stories in America,
      though they existed in the originals (Thompson, 1991).

38   The Burnage enquiry makes similar points (see Gillborn, 1995).

39   'Badness' is a vague word, but I looked for behaviour that was naughty or
      anti-social. 'Good' golliwogs were ones that either made some positive
      contribution (e.g. helping others, suggesting ideas), or, ones who were
      simply named alongside other characters (i.e. as being part of the chorus).
      The volumes are as follows (see next page):

Titles	Good gollies	Bad gollies
Naughty Amelia Jane	1	
The Red Story Book	1	1
Bedtime Stories	1	
Chimney Corner Stories	1	1
Enid Blyton's Storytime Book	3	
Enid Blyton's Happy Hours Story Book	2	
The Three Naughty Children and other Stories	2	
Enid Blyton's Fairy Stories	1	
The Magic Knitting Needles and other stories	3	
Sleepytime Tales	3	
A Picnic Party with Enid Blyton	1	
Totals =	**19**	**2**

40   Eco (1979, pp. 144-74) also makes such a move, but more problematically, in discussing the innocence of 'blackness' amongst the villains of the James Bond books.

41   A similar case might be made against Felix the Cat, who shares many of the same features.

42   Most of these series receive mention elsewhere, but two deserve comment. The 'Find-Outers' are also known as the 'Mystery' series. There are fifteen, commencing with *The Mystery of the Burnt Cottage* (1943), featuring the popular Fatty (i.e. Frederick Algernon Trotteville - fourth overall most popular character in my survey) and P.C. Goon; the books as a whole were seventh in popularity. The 'Barney' mysteries are less well known, though a personal favourite when I was young. Barney was thirteenth most popular character, with the 'Barney' books, overall, in eleventh place. These are also known as the 'R-Mysteries', as all the six titles begin with an 'R', commencing with *The Rockingdown Mystery* (1949).

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE MYSTERY OF BLYTON UNVEILED,
PART I - PERFORMING AT THE ORAL STAGE

INTRODUCTION

Although most suspense writers say that a dénouement should be swiftly

executed, I have spread this one over two chapters, the first of which is largely a

social explanation, the second, a more psychoanalytical one. First, let me briefly

review the evidence so far, before I reveal where exactly I think the 'secret

mechanism' is located.

When discussing earlier approaches to Blyton, I pointed out how they could not

but seem to belittle her, because of the tools they used. But we also saw how

contradictory were the statements made about her: whether her writing, her plots,

her characters, her vocabulary, or whatever. The only thing that none dispute is

her ability to relate a story (even if there are arguments about how different these

stories are). What really seems to perplex the critics is that a writer they thought

so ephemeral, should be so persistent. Despite what the gatekeepers seem to say,

her stories continue to be passed down the generations, across the classrooms,

playgrounds, and from friend to friend. This oral transmission of Blyton seems

to give us an insight into her success, and, conversely, to explain why the literary

tradition has such a problem in dealing with it.

It is worth noting that Blyton herself was always unhappy about being described as a 'writer', preferring the term 'storyteller' (Blyton, 1959)—which seems to fit her far more appositely. She certainly always closed the feedback-loop with her audience, by encouraging them to write to her—and she would always write back. She also listened to children's own stories, which she would refashion. Like Mother Goose of folk tale tradition, Blyton seems to celebrate the female teller, associated

Figure 7-1 An invitation to *A Story Party at Green Hedges*
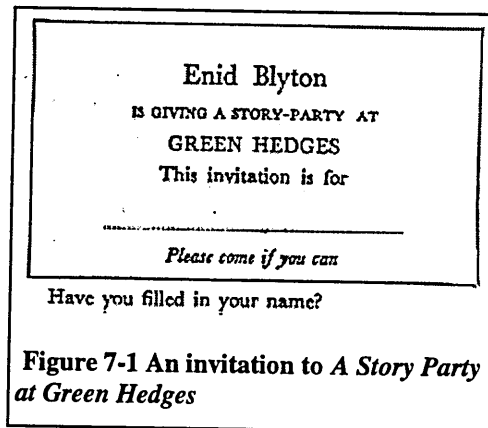
with hearth and home, as in titles like *Chimney Corner stories*, *Fireside Tales* and *I'll Tell You a Story*. In fact, I know of no author who so endorses their home. Some, like Hardy and Trollope, are known for a region, but Green Hedges is known world-wide as the epicentre of a storytelling phenomenon. In *A Story Party at Green Hedges*, there is an invitation on the first page for the owner of the book to fill in (see fig. 7-1), in order to attend the story party— which perfectly captures this notion of sitting round a hearth, feasting in the twilight, while tales are spun.[1] It should also be remembered that Blyton began as a teacher who taught through story, running together then, what it now seems should be taught separately: story, history and nature (as did one of her own favourite writers, Arthur Mee—whom she was to emulate in many of her own educational writings, besides her magazines).[2]

I have already drawn attention to some of these elements earlier: the animism, the clumsy constructions, the authorial presence—much of which has been toned down in the newer editions. But I'd like to return to them now and examine them by counterposing various characteristics of literary writing with the oral[3].

- *Style is paramount.* At one extreme we have James Joyce, spending all day on a single sentence, whereas Blyton, at the other, can have a whole book written in the same period. Clearly, the storyteller has the audience in front of him or her, and is forced to compose 'on the hoof'—something that Blyton had practised as a teacher. The storyteller cannot revise, except retrospectively. This, of course, accounts both for the rate at which she and similar writers managed to produce material—and for its lack of revision. Interestingly, as she herself confessed in her correspondence with McKellar, when it came to writing non-story material, she found herself in the situation that most others experience: she had to 'think hard —deliberate—write a sentence or two—erase one—rewrite—think again, and so on' (McKellar, 1957, p. 138).

Composing in this way also gives an immediacy to the stories, of them unfolding before the audience's very eyes—which of course, they were— with Blyton learning about events at the same time as the reader. There are a number of tell-tale traces of this. For example, when Julian says, "push that huge, high chest or wardrobe or whatever it is ..." (*FHMTS* p. 166)—it is clear that Blyton herself was undecided! In *N18*, where Noddy goes to sea, the Captain tells him that they will 'land on an island somewhere'. Blyton does not name it till later in the story—clearly, when she needed to think of a name. But whereas many writers would go back and amend the earlier text, Blyton leaves it. It is only in the revised version that it is named 'Shell Island' from the beginning (*N18** p. 30). On the other hand, the island in *FHMTS* gets three names ('Whispering' 'Keep-Away' and 'Wailing' Island, p. 63), presumably because Blyton had not yet decided which she liked best—'Whispering Island' only emerges as the chosen one later.

- *A novel, or story, is unique, existing in one polished form* according to the literary tradition, whereas, for many oral tellers, there are only versions, drawing on basic plots and characters. The latter would therefore tend to re-

tell a story, changing its emphasis as necessary, depending on the audience and time available   Blyton certainly did this, reworking material for different age-groups, different markets, and different word-length requirements—as we have seen many times in earlier chapters. Her stories, therefore, were more pragmatically developed, often lacking the unity of more considered works. Again, this is reflected in the titles: *Five Minute Tales, Ten Minute Tales, Tales after Tea, Tales after Supper*, and so on.

- *Literary works tend to be more causally and thematically integrated than the oral.* In technical terms, literary tales tend to be 'hypotactic', highlighting causality, nesting information, having character traits motivate action, and so on (Fisher's complaint—see chapter 3—that the red coloured rocks in a Five story having no further significance, would be an instance of this). Oral tales, on the other hand, like speech in general, tend to be more episodic and 'paratactic', with elements given equal status alongside each other, often linked with connectives like 'and' and 'also'. This is clearly so with many fairy and folk tales, which frequently have 'loose ends' and unexplained events. Many of Blyton's tales also have a loose, episodic structure, like *Adventures of the Wishing-Chair* and the 'Magic Faraway Tree' series. This paratactic appeal is also apparent in individual sentences. For example, in the remark, 'How lovely to wake in a strange place at the beginning of a holiday—to think of bathing and biking and picnicking and eating and drinking—forgetting all about exams and rules and punishments!' (*FGDTS* p. 37). Here all sense of subordination is removed: everything is levelled out with nothing taking priority over anything else. Notably, the revised editions of Blyton have tended to move away from the paratactic; for example, the following, 'He would sing it loudly, and ...', has become, 'He thought he would sing it loudly, so...' (*N6/* p. 17)

- *Literary Tales are Imaginative rather than sensory.* This is a somewhat nebulous distinction, but one which has been upheld since Plato's negative attitude to sensory information (see below); the inference is that by being tied

to the world of appearances, the material world, one thereby misses higher, imaginative realities. This is most clear with Leavisite critics, such as Holbrook, with their wisdom 'felt in the blood and felt along the heart' (Holbrook, 1961, p. 52). Visualising is particularly suspect, and both I. A. Richards and William Empson speak of its 'special danger'.[4] Even Nell, in his influential *Lost in a Book* (1988), states that imagery is not generally used by readers. However, Esrock, who has reviewed this whole area, points to the contradictions in Nell, drawing on some of the latter's other work, which actually demonstrates the opposite: that vividness of imagery correlates with reading involvement, and, significantly, that imagery is 'an important contributor to reading pleasure' (Esrock, 1994, pp. 40-1). Blyton's use of the senses certainly puts her in the sensory camp, writing for an audience who is almost literally 'there'—as instanced in her frequent exhortations for us to 'Look' or 'Listen'. In this way we become complicit in witnessing a scene; 'you get the picture in mind' as a 10 year-old girl put it. Thus, if there is a notice, Blyton is likely to say, 'Here it is' (N13 p. 33), 'Have a look at it' (N9 p. 28), rather than 'It said'—as each has been amended. When a crab seizes Noddy's toe, she writes, 'Look at it, holding on with its claws' (*N7* p. 42).[5] And when Blyton describes a song being sung, she tells us all, 'I'll pop my head in at the window and hear it for you. Listen!' (which has been amended to 'I think it might sound a bit like this', *N8/** p. 60).

Not only does Blyton involve her readers' senses, but she uses other conventions of the oral teller, to suggest her presence—just as an oral teller uses body movements and voice to convey information. In fact, the last example in the above shows how she suggests her physical existence. Likewise, various typographical devices convey her voice. She uses upper-case and italics to stress a word, or indicate its loudness (just as ethnographic transcription uses the 'upper-case = loud' convention). Generally these emphases have been kept in the revisions, but whereas Blyton would often accentuate only one syllable, this has been amended to stress whole words. Thus, whereas Blyton wrote '*any*thing', the revised has '*anything*' (N 12/* p.

21); similarly, 'EVERYbody' has become 'EVERYBODY' (N 8/* p. 31). She also, famously, uses exclamation marks for this, runs words together to indicate haste (e.g. "couldyoulook-aftertheponyhereforme?"[6]) and spells onomatopoeically (e.g. "EEEE-ee-OOOOO-oo-EEEEEEEEAH-OOO!" - *FHMTS* p. 140).

- *Character is central, action secondary, and deriving from the former*, in the literary tradition. However, the oral story tends to reverse this, with action coming first. Thus, the behaviour of characters, rather than driving the plot, tends to be a function of it. This is an accord with Propp's model, where there are a number of functions which a variety of characters can perform. They need to be swiftly drawn for the audience to visualise them, so there is a tendency to rely on traditional figures, whether archetypal or stereotypical, rather than exact and subtly drawn Jamesian individuals.

- *Plagiarism is taboo* in literary culture, whereas the oral tradition has a completely different outlook on it. In the latter it is *de rigueur* to draw on the culture's stock of legends, stories, and characters, and to rework them in new contexts. It is not surprising then, that Blyton uses nursery rhyme, fairy tale, myth and legend as her well-spring, aside from a number of literary sources (Andersen, Ballantyne, Bunyan, Carroll, Collodi, MacDonald, Milne, Nesbit, Potter, Rider Haggard and Dornford Yates, among others). Moreover, she frequently draws attention to these links:

> "You look like Tom, Tom the Piper's Son," said Julian, ruffling the yellow curls. "He stole a pig and ran away, carrying it under his arm." (*FGTBH* p. 71)

> "It's like the Open Sesame trick in Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," thought George. (*FGOTC* p. 152)

> "Put that pig down, Anne, you must be tired of carrying it," said Dick. "You look like Alice in Wonderland. she carried a pig too!" (*FGTBH* p. 181)

264

Nor should it be surprising that she reworked her own stories according to the occasion (despite Druce's horror[7]). This was particularly noted in connection with Noddy. Once again, Blyton can be seen as surprisingly modern in treating everything as an intertext—sometimes, perhaps, less than wisely. I have already commented on one story of hers about Mickey-Mouse (see chapter 1).

- *The Verbal Icon*—the notion of a work standing coherent and unified, on its own, is also part of the literary tradition, whereas the oral tradition emphasises open-endedness. Blyton's work is inveterately open—'to be continued'—either because it is part of a series, or because the story itself is likely to be reworked in a different context. In this respect, of course, it is very like today's 'soaps'. This notion causes some critics problems, in that it is the works of popular culture that they would like to define as 'closed', in that these works are said to dictate interpretation and ideological stance, leaving little imaginative space for the reader. But, as many have argued, the opposite is actually the case, with readers importing more of their own local culture and interests, and, to some extent, co-authoring the texts. Figurative language is therefore avoided, deliberately. It is the reader that provides the metaphorical resonances from her baseline words, each importing their own, local associations. Figurative language would only pin down the image too precisely, or confuse with unwanted associations.[8] As one woman put it, 'when I re-read the Faraway Tree this year I was extremely disappointed because half the scenes and people I'd remembered didn't exist—except in my imagination'.

- *A certain definable corpus of texts is intrinsically valuable*, as celebrated in the notion of the 'great tradition'. The oral tradition, on the other hand, tends to be forever modifying its texts to suit circumstances, so there are more likely to be celebrated performances (i.e. meetings of text and audience), rather than texts *per se*. This is something that clearly comes across with

265

readers, who tend to remember distinctive reading occasions, often associated with particular, favourite texts, even though the content of the text can itself be hazy. What they remember, is having enjoyed it. Again, this seems to fit with Blyton's work, which is part of a larger territory, of fantasies, games, and further storytelling; indeed, of a whole culture. To try to separate out these elements seems thankless, and the reason for the lack of purchase of much Blyton criticism.

- *Language is precise and logical* in literary works. They prize *le mot juste*, and economy and variety of diction, whereas the oral tradition flaunts this—frequently because of practical considerations: the teller needs a space in which to think of what is going to happen next. Thus repetition and use of vague 'filler' words, are common. Blyton uses many of these techniques, though they are often the very things that revisers tone down. Thus, in the following, the revised edition has dropped the second sentence: 'He couldn't believe his eyes. He really couldn't' (*N2* p. 56).

Blyton also uses a simple, straightforward, albeit functional lexis. Her language is deliberately transparent, one that is worn to familiarity with use, so that the story 'goes without saying' (which is why words like 'gay' and 'queer' now obtrude). Figurative language is therefore avoided, as I've noted above. Also, as in Homer, we find a variety of stock phrases used; for example, whereas for Homer the sea is always 'wine red', for Blyton it is 'cornflower blue'. I find it interesting that Blyton herself mentions Dickens and Homer as writers she not only admired but also found parallels with (McKellar correspondence, Stoney, 1974, p. 207), for both writers are also intensely visual. Dickens was, like Blyton, also a good mimic, and renowned for becoming totally involved when composing, seeing his characters enact scenes before his eyes. He, also, was capable of producing a vast daily output—though he found this more difficult in later years. Lastly, Dickens, like Homer, was someone who also relished his contact with an audience.

- *The literary tradition tends to approve of authorial detachment, 'showing' rather than 'telling'*, whereas, in the oral tradition, the author is more closely involved—in fact, strictly speaking, he or she would have been physically present. There is a sense of involvement in the stories, with both narrator and narratee being close to the action, complicit in it, which gives the stories a vitality. On the one hand the storyteller had to conjure up a vivid picture for all concerned, but on the other, the audience had to visualise it; the latter thus feeling part of its construction. In fact, the audience was literally 'at the pictures', which is exactly Blyton's image for what happened when she wrote, seated at her private 'cinema screen', watching it unfold.

This ties in with how Blyton uses deixis, that is, words which 'point' (to give it its root meaning) to particular locations in time and space. Blyton uses both temporal and spatial deixis to sustain this sense of immediacy in her work. Thus there are frequent leaps into the present tense as the narrator comments on something. For instance, in *N6*, when Noddy puts on inappropriate headgear, the narrator says, 'But, oh dear, it isn't a hat, it's the little lamp-shade ...' (*N6* p. 44; in the revised version, this is rendered in the past, distancing both action and narratorial voice). Likewise, Blyton liberally uses spatial deixis to indicate that events are happening in the 'here' as well as the 'now'. Related to this is her extensive use of pronouns, creating potential ambiguities as to the referents (e.g. "We'll take him with us and say we'll set him on to them if they don't clear out" - *FRAT* p. 130). Not only has she been criticised for this, but many of the revisions have sought to disambiguate such sentences. However, if one is visually 'present', there is, of course, less ambiguity. This, in turn, is related to Vygotsky's notion of 'inner speech', which is often described as 'disconnected and incomplete' (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 139), because the material discussed is already known; and, as Vygotsky notes, such abbreviated language frequently occurs in intimate groupings (just as Bernstein talked about a 'restricted code' being used amongst more closely knit groups - see chapter 3). It may

well be, then, that Blyton's pronouns are more ambiguous for adults than children

The closeness of the narrator is also shown in Blyton's 'metadiscursive comments'—i.e. her narrative gloss on what's happening. Thus, the example of 'oh dear' above, where Blyton gives an evaluation of what's going on. Another key metadiscursive feature that Blyton uses is apostrophising—the turning aside and addressing a character; for instance:

> If danger was about, he [Julian] could deal with it better than George could. After all, she was only a girl!
> Yes, Julian, she is - but, as you've often said, she's just as brave as a boy. Don't be too sure about tonight! (*FATA* p. 129)

Labov (1972), looking at urban storytelling, particularly notes the presence of evaluative devices such as these. He also notes what he calls 'codas' at the end. Whereas during the tale, these metadiscursive elements help shape the tale, and give a sense of currency, at the end they are used to signal a return to 'real time'. This, of course, is very like the oral situation, where the audience would obviously be aware of the storyteller's presence, often with the latter's interjections; and the teller would finish with something like, 'my tale's done'—the very phrases, 'telling a tale', or 'telling a story' being synonymous with fabrication.

There is a blatant example of this at the end of one Five story—which one, is soon apparent:

> "How did you find out all this?" said the sergeant.
> "It's too long to tell you now!" said Dick. "We'll write it all down in a book, and send you a copy. We'll call it - er -we'll call it - what shall we call it, you others?"
> ...
> "Shall we really send the sergeant a book about this adventure?" said Anne. "Did you really mean it, Dick?"
> "Rather!" said Dick. "Our fourteenth adventure - and may we have many more! What shall we call the book?"

"I know!" said George, at once. "I know! Let's call it 'FIVE HAVE PLENTY OF FUN'!"

Well, they did - and they hope you like it! (*FHPOF* pp. 188, 190)

Another technique which Blyton uses to create this notion of the story unfolding in one's head is 'Free Indirect Discourse'[9]. The following, also quoted earlier, demonstrates it well. Mr. Plod's helmet has just blown off:

> "Come back helmet!" But the helmet took no notice. It was having a lovely time, bumping and bouncing and rolling along. Ha - this was better than sitting still on Mr. Plod's head! (*N6* p. 44).

We can see here how the narrator slides from telling what's happening, to giving the thoughts of the thing spoken about. As in daydreaming, Blyton slides between thought and speech effortlessly. But she also has the characters do this:

> "I wish I was like George," she [Anne] thought. "She wouldn't really mind that toad. I'm silly. I ought to try and like all creatures. Oh my goodness, look at that enormous spider in the corner of the sink! It's sitting there, looking at me out of its eight eyes! Wilfrid, Wilfrid—PLEASE come and get this spider out of the sink for me!" (FHMTS p. 49)

It might be argued that this intermingling is merely sloppy writing (or sloppy copy-editing), but its persistence, I think, is indicative of the more dreamlike feel of Blyton's narratives. They are truly like 'narrative monologues' (Cohn, 1978). Here are two more examples, one in Noddy, where Big-Ears speaks for the car, the second from the Five, where we have Dick answering himself:

> "Sorry to frighten you, rabbits," called Big-Ears, "but we're in a hurry. Parp-parp!" (*N3* p. 40)

> "I never liked Willis or Johnson much," said Dick, as they walked out of the school grounds. "Awful swotters they were—never had any time for games or fun. But I take my hat off to them today! Because of their swotting they've won medals and scholarships and goodness knows

what—and we've got a week-end off in celebration! Good old Willis and Johnson!"
"Hear hear," said Dick. (*FOHT* p. 16)

This is an egocentric way of writing, one that conveys a sense of the dreamlike, or the fantasy, in which the dreamer would create and speak all the parts him- or herself. In reading this, as I've suggested earlier, readers feel part of the process. Certainly, this is how many saw her stories:

[I] Imagine myself there with the characters, but just invisible.(m, 17)

When I read them I escaped into them and became one of the gang. (m)

...I feel like I'm there with them. (m)

It might be thought that first-person narratives would achieve this more readily, but, in practice, they don't. This is because they funnel perceptions through one particular consciousness, so one witnesses a far more partial view of events; first-person narrative also requires more empathy by the author, which, as I shall suggest in the next chapter, Blyton was not really capable of. Hence there are hardly any first-person stories by her.[10]

Let me now link in two other facets, trailed from earlier. First, I have suggested that qualities of Blyton's writing make it more like a form of inner speech— qualities such as its easy lexis and its belief in a shared, communally visualisable world. It may be, then, that Blyton's work is particularly productive in facilitating the shift from outer to inner, from reality to fantasy—to what I shall later explore as the 'time-out'. Secondly, one outstanding quality of the oral tradition is its present-centredness: it strives to create a sense of a story happening here and now, as does any daydream, of course: its *raison d'être* being immediacy. Several of the features mentioned above are particularly related to this, like Blyton's flagging up of her presence, her proximal deictics (literally 'here' and 'now'), and her exhortations to look at particular things. This seems to give an interesting twist to the notion of her being 'ephemeral' (see chapter 3). She is this, certainly, but this does not mean that she'll go away.

Paradoxically, it is her ephemerality that contributes to her longevity, in that the 'ephemeral' is about being 'for the day', and Blyton is exactly that: a story for the moment.[11]

I have summarised the elements of the oral tradition, in contrast to the literary in Table 7-1, but let me explore this link with the oral more closely. With Blyton, her audience was that huge tribe of children, sitting round listening, having their deeds celebrated, whilst the adults are seen as what Kenneth Grahame disparagingly called 'the Olympians'. One is initiated into Blyton's stories by password—to the heroic deeds of characters like the Famous Five and Secret Seven—to a shared world, in fact. And my research indicates that Blyton is indeed part of children's culture, even today, in that her tales and characters are reworked in games (15.7% of the children engaged in these), fantasies (14.5%), clubs (16.7%), story-writing (31.8%), emulating the characters (11.4%), and so on.[12]

This analogy is worth pushing further, for storytelling not only celebrates its heroes, but it also unites its audience with them, in fantasy, through identification[13]. The audience is captivated, metaphorically spellbound. And while the stories are told round the light and warmth of the fire, the teller's task is to make sure that the minds of the listeners are equally warmed and enlightened. Certainly Blyton saw herself in this role, as moral guide (cf. Benjamin, 1973), cultivating it assiduously by maintaining that proximity with her audience, soliciting feedback, writing columns, editorials and letters, setting up clubs, and personal contact. In the clubs, of course, like the Famous Five, children could wear badges to show their sense of community[14]. But her stories were the main method of promoting it, making children the centre of things, sometimes overtly pointing to the faults of adults, like Mr. Lenoir, who 'always irritated the children because he spoke to them as if they were small' (FGTST p. 89). From Blyton's central hearth, then, whether 'Old Thatch' or 'Green Hedges' her stories extended out to that world-wide tribe gathered round this imaginary centre, warmed by her sunny stories. Enid used this conceit

repeatedly, building on the traditional link of feasting and listening, both inside the story and out (see my comments on *Chimney Corner Stories* and *A Story Party at Green Hedges*, above).

HOMER VS PLATO ON STORYTELLING

I would now like to draw on another line of research, which not only connects Blyton's oral style with the Homeric tradition, but also with its critics. It is now relatively well-known that our brains consist of two hemispheres, and that these work in quite different ways. The left hemisphere, usually the dominant one, works in a logical, piece-by-piece fashion. It is analytical, and the seat of language. In contrast, the right-hemisphere is much more artistically inclined, tending to work by seeing 'wholes', by working with patterns. It is intuitive rather than logical, and far less likely to rely on hard evidence for its claims. It is not only artistic, but musical too, being the seat of song. Some researchers have suggested that this right-hemisphere, which is far more in evidence in young children, becomes gradually overruled by the left as we age, and analytical skills are called upon to a greater extent. Researchers have also suggested that this right hemisphere might be the location of Freud's Unconscious, with the left constituting our more conscious self (e.g. Blakeslee, 1980).

Of particular interest here is Julian Jaynes' work (1976) which, drawing on this evidence, makes some startling claims about our ancestors. In particular, Jaynes points out that in Homer's time poets claimed to visualise and hear material delivered to them, hence their belief in being inspired by Muses. What they were really 'hearing' was their own right-hemispheres, which literally took them over, delivering powerful imagery and sounds. This certainly was the case with Blyton, who claimed, 'I am a visual writer, conveying what I *see* (*and* hear—for my private mind-television set has sound, too). While I write I live completely with my characters— I can even see if one of them needs a hair-cut!' (Sykes, 1962, p. 21)[15]. (Other senses are involved, too: 'My simile of a 'private cinema screen' is the best I can think of. But it's a 3-dimensional screen, complete with

sound, smell and taste—and feeling! This is why I can describe things so
realistically in my stories, 'as if I had been there'. I *have* been there—but only in
my imagination!' (McKellar correspondence, Stoney, 1974, p. 210).

Thus, these early writers, of whom Homer is the most famous, would compose
'off the cuff', frequently singing their material—something that Noddy and other
characters are prone to do. Blyton actually writes about hearing some twenty-
five songs while writing her Noddy play, songs that 'burst out spontaneously
from the characters ... I saw them dancing to it, and heard them singing it'
(McKellar, 1957, p. 139). Although most of us have lost this ability to readily
access the right-hemisphere, many artists still seem able to do so. As Blyton put
it, she found it easy to 'open the sluice gates of ...imagination, reach down into
...[the] "under-mind"' (Blyton, 1950, p. 3); it was 'easily-tapped' (*ibid.*, p. 4),
and her photographic memory was probably very much tied up with this.

So, to conclude this aspect, the oral tradition seems more apposite in talking
about Blyton's way of writing, getting away from the supercilious sneering of
earlier criticism, whilst giving some indication of why Blyton holds such
attraction. It shows not only how she composed, but how her readers were likely
to receive her compositions—'Feeling that EB spoke directly to me'(F),'I <u>was</u>
there as I read' (F).

Having noted some similarities between Blyton and Homer, it is also worth
noting the corresponding criticism. In *The Republic*, Plato criticises Homer's
work for being, at best, frivolous, and, at worst, dangerous (Havelock, 1963, pp.
3-4); it is seen as a 'crippling of the mind', a disease, 'a species of mental
poison, and is the enemy of truth' (one thinks of Margery Fisher's accusations of
'slow poison'). The Homeric bard is also troublesome because of his 'superior
memory' and encyclopaedic knowledge. He encourages listeners to aspire
beyond their station and gives them a personal code of values and attitudes.
Such power is particularly worrying given Homer's influence over children:
'Shall we therefore allow our children to listen to any stories written by anyone

273

...? ...our first business is to supervise the production of stories, and choose only those we think suitable, and reject the rest' (Plato, 1955, pp. 114-5).

Table 7--1 Literary vs. Oral Qualities of Texts	
LITERARY QUALITIES	**ORAL QUALITIES**
Style is paramount - polished	Style is secondary - 'first draft' stories
A novel/ story is unique, a masterpiece for all time	Story changes to suit circumstances, time, audience
The work is thematically integrated: organic, hypotactic	The work is more linearly organised: open and paratactic
Imaginative	Sensory (visual, aural, tactile, etc)
Character is central, rounded and motivated; emphasis on individual qualities; psychological, introspective	Character is secondary to action; schematically drawn; stock figures; archetypes, stereotypes; external perspective
Plagiarism is taboo, originality a premium	Draw on 'the tradition', derivative, intertextual
The 'Verbal Icon' is celebrated; text not context	Series oriented, open-ended, audience involvement, work as springboard for other activities (games, rituals, feasting, etc.)
Definable corpus of texts is intrinsically valuable - the Great Tradition, the canon	Performance (i.e. individual reading) is valuable in its own right
Language precise, logical, metaphorical	Language simple, repetitive, formulaic, clichéd; 'degree zero' writing
Authorial detachment - showing rather than telling;	Authorial involvement - telling, evaluative comment, proximal deixis
Privatised activity, cerebral	Communal activity, affective, visceral

But behind these criticisms of Homer—all of which have been levelled at Blyton—there is the enduring concern with his 'power to make his audience identify almost pathologically and certainly sympathetically with the content of what he is saying' (Havelock, 1963, p. 45), 'putting the whole community into a formulaic state of mind' and exercising 'cultural control' over them (*ibid.*, p. 76). From the storyteller's side this required that, 'He sank his personality in his performance. His audience in turn would remember only as they entered

effectively and sympathetically into what he was saying and this in turn meant that they became his servants and submitted to his spell' (*ibid.*, p. 160). They did this by re-enacting the story with 'lips, larynx, and limbs, and with the whole apparatus of their unconscious nervous system' (*ibid.*), and Plato saw such identification as most easily evoked when words themselves described actions. The language of the storyteller was thus deliberately visual, 'a piece of language so worded as to encourage the illusion that we are actually looking at an act being performed or at a person performing it' (*ibid.*, p. 188). This was Plato's central worry, that we, the audience,

> ...are seduced into identifying with its doings, its joys and griefs, its nobilities and cruelties, its courage and its cowardice. As we pass from experience to experience, submitting our memories to the spell of the incantation, the whole experience becomes a kind of dream in which image succeeds image automatically without conscious control on our part, without a pause to reflect, to rearrange or to generalise, and without a chance to ask a question or raise a doubt, for this would at once interrupt and endanger the chain of association. (*ibid.*, p. 190)

Ironically, Plato recommends arithmetic, instead of story, as the key subject, since it requires 'personal separation' rather than identification (*ibid.*, p. 210). Mathematics was, of course, the one subject that Blyton herself found impossible.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that looking at Blyton in traditional literary terms is not only to miss her appeal but precisely to highlight her negative qualities. She is far more productively seen in terms of the oral tradition, where her appeal stands out. This tradition has a number of notable features: first, it binds teller and audience very closely; second, it also, content-wise, extols the deeds of that audience, or its representatives—'it was thrilling to read about other children as heroes', as one reader put it; in other words, children's own fantasies of power and honour are addressed. Third, process-wise, the audience feel very much a part of the action (thanks to the visual, sensual qualities of the tales, and their present-

centredness). Lastly, it was seen to be not only participatory, but dreamlike and egocentric, too—terms that bring to mind Freud's notion of creative works being like daydreams, fulfilling the wishes of their owners. But Freud added a *caveat*, that these wishes rest on a repression, and 'are only allowed to come to expression in a very distorted form' (Freud, 1959, p.149). (We shall consider this aspect in the next chapter, where I move into the psychological dimension of Blyton's popularity.)

There are two other points worth recapping, though. It was suggested that this participatory quality is at the heart of adult concerns about Blyton, and I showed how concerns about the oral writer's powers of 'identification' go back to Plato. There is a concern of children being controlled, becoming mindless beings, slaves to the Blyton text, from which some were presumed never to escape. Blyton was thus a modern Pied Piper of Hamelin. Of course, the gatekeepers had their own agenda for children, which was another set of texts, but ones they felt moved the children on, 'stretched them' in some way, towards adulthood. There is no notion of children having their own pleasures in the text—in celebrating having tales told about them, themselves at the centre. The last point I would make, again to be picked up later, is that the celebration of the in-group—the children—must be at the expense of an out-group: the adults whom the piper leaves out in the cold.

NOTES

1   As in the follow up, *A Picnic Party with Enid Blyton* (1951).

2   Arthur Mee's *Children's Encyclopædia* first appeared in fortnightly parts between 1908 and 1910, when Blyton would have been aged 11-13. We certainly know that she thought highly of his work, even annotating it (Stoney, 1974, p. 17), and that Mee himself wrote to her, encouraging her to write (*ibid.*, p. 25). There seem to be several parallels in their approach, in that both wrote works in parts, maintaining regular contact with their readers (Mee also had a weekly *Children's Newspaper* and a monthly magazine); also, that their works unashamedly mix fact and fiction in what Crago (1989), speaking of Mee, terms an 'organic' way. Crago also notes that Mee believed that 'a child is largely its own teacher' (quoted p. 58), which Crago ties to the philosophy of John Dewey, but it was also very much the view of Froebel. Finally, Arthur Mee also liked to include his name in his titles (e.g. *Arthur Mee's Wonderful Day, Arthur Mee's Book of the Flag*).

3   In a *Guardian* interview (Ward, 1996), I happened to mention 'Homer' as a good example of the oral tradition. It was then reported that Blyton was 'Homeric', a fact which exercised the media considerably. In fact, the *New Statesman & Society* held a competition challenging people to rewrite Homer in Blytonese, or retell Blyton in Homeric verse (Ross, 1996). However, Blyton was there first: she actually retold some of Homer's tales for young readers *The Adventures of Odysseus*, 1934), though she did not rise to the classical levels reached by some of the winners:

> Recount, O Muse, the story of blue-helmeted Noddyssseus,
> Who wand'ring far from Troyland's streets laments his silent hat.
> Behold the bearded Bigeus consoling his companion...etc (later
> featuring the 'Cyclops Gollyphemus'!) (Silverman, 1996)

4   Bourdieu (1984) has usefully drawn attention to this traditional 'distinction' between popular culture's association with sensory gratification in contrast to high culture's respect for distance. It is captured in the double meaning of 'taste', which was initially something orally experienced, but later came to be a more value-laden term for the ability to discern quality.

5   The revised edition is most curious here: 'It held on with its sharp sharp claws' (*N7** p. 42); thus it is rendered in the past, but 'sharp' has been added, and repeated—contrary to the usual policy.

6   *The Children at Green Meadows* (1968, p. 94). This might remind readers of Grahame's line in *The Wind in the Willows*, which begins, "coldtonguecoldhamcoldbeef..." (Grahame, 1925, p. 5).

7   'In *Sea of Adventure* (1948), Enid Blyton wrote a text so close to the text of *The Adventurous Four Again* (1947) that, had another author published it, the book could not have escaped the charge of plagiarism' (Druce, 1992, p. 125). See Druce's comments about other works on p. 54, and corresponding note 9.

8   It is of note that many writers of children's fiction have worried about metaphorical language, fearing its profligacy, generating its own meanings in something of a quasi-sexual, reproductive way. Mrs Trimmer was of this opinion, as was Lewis Carroll, who, as Sewell (1952) powerfully argues, therefore sought to undo figurative language by making things as literal as possible ('as mad as a hatter' = a real hatter, etc); or to construct lists of objects that could not possibly be run together, e.g. a bat 'Like a tea-tray in the sky', or 'shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—/ Of cabbages and kings': things completely non-transferable. Carroll, of course, also thought Bowdler's Shakespeare too suggestive, and wanted an expurgated version!

9   Wall defines the term thus:

> The narrator briefly recounts an action and then slides imperceptibly into the thoughts of the character, so that it appears as though the narrator is commenting on the action in the voice of the child characters. This has the effect of causing the narrator to appear to be confiding in the narratee. (Wall, 1992, p. 191).

It is of note that Wall prefers the term 'narrated monologue', because 'it places emphasis upon what the narrator is doing rather than upon what the character is thinking' (*ibid.*). In one way this is an unnecessary shift—as the term 'free indirect discourse' is suitably neutral—but in another way Wall's revision is most apposite, for it points to the notion of storytelling being a more personal activity, almost like daydreaming. The beauty of free indirect discourse is that it is specifically neither narrator nor character that we hear, but both, and the term, 'free indirect discourse' seems to capture this neutrality. They seem to speak in a sort of compressed dialogism. 'Free indirect discourse' is often used as a general term for both the thoughts and the speech of characters, whereas 'free indirect speech' is used more specifically for the latter. There is some controversy over the term, however, especially as direct speech is taken to be the standard from which other forms deviate, whereas there is no such standard in the representation of thought (see Fludernik, 1993 for detail).

10   There are only two that I know of: sixteen linked stories called *Let's Pretend* (1928), narrated by one of the children (Summerfield, 1996), and a short story called 'The Secret Cave' (1929, in *Chimney Corner Stories*, 1963, pp. 68-81).

11 Much of the above is similar to what Anne Wilson has called 'magical thinking', which she distinguishes from 'imagination', arguing that the former is much more like daydreaming; being 'free from the laws and realities of the external world ...it does not reason, calculate, work out strategies or exercise discriminating judgement'. It also tends to 'consider another person, or the world, wholly in the light of our own feelings or wishes, thus 'making them up' rather than examining evidence or engaging in an imaginative effort to see points of view other than our own'; further, 'the language in which it expresses itself is not primarily verbal: it is primarily pictorial—as is apparent in dreams, which are creations of magical thought'; thus it 'does not itself struggle for precision of expression through diction' (Wilson, 1983, p.15); imagination, conversely, is concerned with this, and uses metaphor and symbolism to explore 'otherness' (*ibid.*, p. 16). However, Wilson does not consider Blyton.

All this applies to the right-hemisphere, too—itself reminiscent of Freud's 'primary process' thinking.. One might add the sense of timelessness characteristic of the right-brain, which could be linked to the notion of the 'time-out'.

12 Most of these activities were more popular with yesterday's children, however—if the recollections of my adults are trustworthy. Only writing is more prevalent today, but fantasising about her characters is far less so (47.5% of adults said they did this). The same is true of forming clubs (37.4%), playing games (28.1%), emulating the characters (28.1%) and re-enacting the stories (8.8% of today's children, compared with 13.8% of former children). See appendix III for more detail.

13 See chapter 9 for further discussion of 'identification'.

14 One woman respondent bemoaned the fact that this never happened: 'I also joined the FF club but I don't recall ever spotting anyone else wearing a similar fuzzy blue badge to whom I could claim instant friendship (as the club literature exhorted you to do I seem to remember)'. Perhaps she wasn't using Virginia's V-sign (see chapter 5, note 11)!

15 A reference, one would imagine, to the Famous Five story, 'George's hair is too long!' (*FHPT*).

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE MYSTERY OF BLYTON UNVEILED, PART II -
PSYCHIC SPACE TO LET

'Writers cannot keep reality and imagination apart for long; but perhaps that makes
books all the more interesting to read' (Enid Blyton, 1952, p. 124)

I mentioned earlier that, contrary to some critics' views, Blyton did not end

chapters on cliff-hangers—any more than I have done here.[1] However, I have

trailed several 'threads' from earlier: briefly, I have noted the egocentric,

dreamlike quality of Blyton's work; I have also suggested that there is a

mirroring of what is happening *within* the text—descriptions of security, nest-

like structures, sensual consumption, and generally taking a 'time-out' from the

everyday world—with what happens *without*, in the reader's local environment;

lastly, I noted similarities with the wish-fulfilment of fantasy, but suggested that

this pleasure hung on a repression. I'd now like to explore this side, both as it

affects the writer, and the reader.

NODDY, THE DARK WOOD, THE DEATH DRIVE ...

There have been a few hints at psychoanalytic approaches to Blyton's work, but

usually at the level of innuendo. For example, Tucker quotes an irresistible line

about George wishing she had a light-house (Tucker, 1971, p. 100). Saunders

(1995) bemoans Blyton's 'vast wardrobe of Freudian slips', and cites 'a Blyton

series about an oversized elf named Mr Pinkwhistle [sic] (oh yes), who was

given to suddenly materialising in children's playgrounds. You will not find the

BBC hurrying to dust off that shocking old pervert', she concludes.[2] Druce,

meanwhile, picking up on Noddy's spring-mounted head, which the milkman

enjoys nodding, writes: 'the underlying phallic symbolism is made virtually

transparent. It is difficult to understand how Blyton could have been unaware of

what she was suggesting...' (Druce, 1992, p. 257).[3] Unfortunately, *he* cannot seem to articulate what she was suggesting, either. His final statement is little clearer, where he speaks of Noddy as 'the disembodied penis of psychoanalytically oriented literary theory, the phallic trickster whose naughtiness motivates the plot ...'(*ibid.*).[4] We would all do well to bear in mind Freud's own admonition, that sometimes a cigar is just a cigar. Elizabeth Schneider's witty comments on this sort of reading are also instructive, although she is here discussing romantic poets:

> If rounded mountains always in human experience must mean breasts and caverns always mean wombs, one might write an illuminating essay on infantilism and regression in romantic poets, provided one can prove that they describe more mountains and caverns than other poets do. ...[but] it is difficult to see how this kind of interpretation can throw light on any given poem unless it can show something special in the use of caverns and mountains that is not present in other cavern-mountain poems ... [e.g.] the precise degree of the angle moving from obtuse to acute that might be found to transform a mountain from a breast to a phallic symbol, or the determination of a dome as breast or womb according as the poet is outdoors or in. (Schneider, 1953, p. 10)

This said, there is, no doubt, much to explain in Blyton that a social reading cannot account for. There are an exceptional number of tails, often detached from their owners—far more than in other writers, taking Schneider's point.[5] What are we to make of them? Clearly, we need to go beyond a knowing nod; they need to be related to other aspects of Blyton's work. And it seems to me that the key lies in Blyton's surface sanguinity, coupled with her aversion to unhappy and unpleasant matters; ultimately, in fact, to death. All this has led me to a psychoanalytically informed reading of her work, initially via Freud's later ideas, where that disturbing area 'beyond the pleasure principle' is explored: this is the area of the death instinct, where images of castration and dis-memberment abound (Freud, 1961). This, in turn, led me to Lacan's reworking of Freudian ideas.

In this section, therefore, I want to show how a deeper pleasure experienced by readers of Blyton's books lies in their resolute celebration of a sunny Gestalt.

The key elements in this are: the initial 'mirror phase' when the unity of the Imaginary is experienced, followed by the oedipal crisis, and finally, the acceptance of the Symbolic, the Law of the Father.

The mirror phase marks the child's first coming to see itself as a whole, either in a mirror itself, or as reflected in the eyes of a significant other—usually the mother. This person confers 'identity', a notion of one being a complete person. This is what Freud called the narcissistic stage, for a number of reasons. A key one is that this image of wholeness is precisely that: an image, not a reality. Hence it is a mis-identification. However, it does prove very attractive in that it offers the child a sense of completion, of being entire unto itself, thus lacking nothing; in other words, the child has a visual image of its immortality, even though it may still lack bodily control. It glorifies in its power, and yet, is dependent on others to have this power realised (i.e. its desire is that it is desired by others). It is during this stage that the ego is formed, which seeks to preserve this sense of unity, of immortality, false though it is.

Unfortunately, this perception of wholeness is challenged, both from within and without. From within there is the simple fact that the Imaginary is only a partial snapshot of the subject, based on a false notion of wholeness, of separateness, and of omniscience—which can, therefore, be undone by all that has been excluded (that which Kristeva (1982) terms the 'abject'). From without, there is the oedipal challenge. Whilst the child wants to be the sole desired object of the mother, the presence of the father disturbs this: he is bigger, more powerful, and the possessor of the phallus (not, note, the penis; Lacan deliberately moves away from Freud's sexual, biological reading to a symbolic, linguistic one). The phallus is, therefore, that which disturbs unity in that it signifies difference: to be with (+) or without (-) the phallus. This structural opposition therefore serves to position one in language, as either male or female.

Let me clarify this notion. The main point about this oedipal struggle is that one is forced to take up a position within language—in this case, a gendered

positioning. One is no longer a whole in that one has to be either male or female, 'he' or 'she'; henceforth, parts of oneself are excluded (the female parts of a male, and vice-versa). This is worth reflecting on, however much one might be resistant to the 'phallic' terminology. The main insight, deriving from Saussure, is that language is not based on unity—on separate words mapping on to distinct entities in the world—rather, it is structured on difference. One can only *mean* by dividing, by indicating what is *not* in the very instant one indicates that something *is*. Hence the oedipal struggle is a useful trope for the divisiveness of language in contrast to the unity of the Imaginary. And, as noted earlier, because language cannot fully map onto things, because it can only express them indirectly, in a relational manner, there is always a gap between what one wishes to say and its realisation: a lack persists, a residue, albeit there exists the desire to fill it. So the speaker moves on, along a chain of signifiers, forever falling short of that complete meaning, that immediacy of being, yet forever aspiring to it.

However, it is also the case that language gives us glimpses of 'the real': that which has never been caught in the false Imaginary, nor in the divisive partiality of language. Language itself cannot represent the real, but the gaps and slips that are exposed through language, can. Through slips-of-the-tongue, nonsense words, rhythmic sounds, repetitions, and so on, we get a glimpse of the Other; as Freud put it, the ego finds it has to face 'the return of the repressed'. It is here that Lacan reworks Freud's notion of the 'death drive', not as an actual drive towards non-existence, so much as towards the death of the unitary ego. It is a driving of unvoiced, unfocused energies against the boundaries of the ego, energies that wish to deconstruct it, and which the ego therefore wards off.

Freud had inklings of the death drive when he observed his grandson rehearsing, symbolically, the absence of his mother. The child played with a cotton reel, to which some thread was tied. Each time he threw the reel away—which then disappeared from view over his curtained cot—the child said a sound like 'fort', or 'gone'; he would then pull the reel back into view (though he did this less

often) saying 'da', or 'there'. Why the child should persist in an activity that represented his mother's absence, perplexed Freud. He linked it to the compulsively repetitive behaviour of war victims reliving their traumatic experiences. Freud surmised that they were all seeking mastery over the experiences, trying to incorporate them into the unity that had been fractured (whether by war or a mother's absence). They were also making a move from being passive victims to active participants, seeking to repair a disturbance of ego equilibrium by binding the energies of the disturbing elements.

Story, it is argued (most eloquently by Brooks, 1984; 1994), can be seen in similar terms, as moving one from a quiescent state into the machinations of plot, with its repetitions, delays and stirrings of suspense; striving, across a pattern of signifiers, for some unifying signified (a plenitude of meaning)— striving, in fact, for mastery. Whereas the only real coherence in life comes with death (when we have not only a beginning but an ending too), story allows us a safe way of playing this out, one in which we can participate time and again, just as Scheherazade warded off death in her nightly stories (Blyton, of course, retold *Tales from the Arabian Nights* (1930) too). As Benjamin pithily wrote, 'Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell' (1973, p. 94).

The suggestion here, then, is that Blyton, a compulsive storyteller if ever there was, and relatedly, someone who could not endure the darker aspects of life, was striving to shut-out the threat of the death drive; that is, she was striving to keep the unity of the Imaginary at all costs—and the costs were, ultimately, great. Let me now review the evidence for this in her life, before moving on to consider it in relation to her fiction.

LIFE

One of Blyton's own favourite stories, that she liked to hear again and again when she was young, was of how her father had refused to let her die when she had whooping cough as a baby. He had cradled her all night, keeping her warm,

refusing to accept the doctor's prognosis that she would die (Stoney, 1974, p. 16). We have here an example of a story where the teller is also the hero, and where the narratee is closely involved and celebrated; clearly, an oral tale of great appeal. It is also one that, in the above terms, wards of death. Her father, as we have seen earlier, seems to have been a highly significant influence on the young Blyton, perhaps helping to create in her a strong and early sense of self-worth; mirroring, in fact, an imaginary unity. Thus it must have been a tremendous blow when she found out that the person who had 'storied' her own existence, had had his own so suddenly terminated. Of course, we know of these stories only through Blyton herself. Even Stoney's work draws primarily on these, the only other sources being people who would also have been familiar with Blyton's versions. But whatever the case, it seems that the young Blyton, maybe as a result of this early near-death experience, had a more highly developed 'thanatophobia' than most.

Reflecting on her own childhood reading, it is of note that Blyton 'couldn't bear most of Grimm's fairy-tales'; as she said, 'I thought some of them were cruel and frightening' , and goes on to generalise that, 'Ordinary, normal children don't like reading cruel or too-sad tales, and I was very normal ... I hated anything cruel or miserable. I didn't like reading about frightening things ... any more than you do' (Blyton, 1952, p. 49).[6] She tells us how she used to lie in bed and experience 'thoughts'—stories that came to her. Some of these were about bears coming to eat her. These she found terrifying, till she determined to take charge of her dream and actively approach and recognise the bears. This, she says, dispelled what she termed her 'night-fears' and she vowed to "do that with everything that frightens me" (ibid., p. 63).

Once again, we have here the process of mastery, warding off the death drive. And deaths were repeatedly denied by Blyton, like that of Bobs, her smooth-haired fox-terrier. In her autobiography, as in her fiction, she preferred to cheat death:

285

'If I said "Die for the King, Bobs!" he would at once roll over and pretend to be dead. And there he would lie, perfectly still, till I said "Come alive!" Then he would jump up...' (*ibid.*, p. 30).

This is almost exactly the toying of the Fort/Da game, discussed above: 'Gone/ There!' However, Blyton's striving to hold on to the Imaginary seems to have been more intense than most, so that when Bobs was in pain, she refused to accept that he needed putting down; and when, finally, he was destroyed, she refused to see him interred or have his grave marked; this, of course, would conflict with the ideal, wherein Bobs lived on—'coming alive' in story, not only for her readers, but for herself, too: 'Gone/ There!'

It was not only animals that she felt this way about. She attended the funeral of neither her father nor mother. In fact, the entire tenor of Blyton's work is to deny death, as we shall see later. But returning to Blyton's own disposition, it is interesting that she, though a keen animal-lover, confessed that there was one animal it was right to 'thoroughly dislike': the rat. 'I make war on him relentlessly. He is a cruel, savage pest, bringing disease with him, and I don't want him anywhere near me' (*ibid.*, 1952, p. 40 - this passage has been omitted from the 1986 ed.). The rat, of course, has always been a symbol of the hidden terror that gnaws away at our existence: a destructive, undermining, pestilential part of the world (e.g. Zinsser, 1935). In fact, in an early work, *The Animal Book* (Blyton, 1928), Blyton speaks of how the rat 'sometimes destroys man himself' by carrying disease, so that 'this is the one animal above all that we really cannot have'; indeed, Blyton expresses a worry that if the rats' predators disappeared, 'The rats would multiply so rapidly that there would soon be a fight as to which was master of the world— rat, or man!' (*ibid.*, p. 50).

The rat symbolised the abject, all that Blyton couldn't handle. Thus these things threatened her home, entering not by the proper channels but by tunnelling up through floors and walls—which is exactly what happened at Old Thatch, where a horde of rats invaded, running between the walls and up into the roof space. It needs to be noted that home for Blyton was far more than a place to live: it was

the centre of her fantasy, whence she created her persona, which she then celebrated in her writings. Thus she could not bear to countenance the rats' existence, depending on her husband and gardener to dispose of them. She, meanwhile, in her writing, pulls the teeth of this undermining creature:

> My adult cats earn their keep well, for no rat is ever allowed to creep in under the thatched roof, as often happens in old cottages. Even a kitten will kill a rat as large as itself. ('Country letter' in *The Nature Lover*, quoted in Stoney, 1974, p. 98).[7]

And, in so doing, the Imaginary once again reigned supreme. Death, and harbingers of it, like illness, which Blyton found hard to bear either in herself or others, were dispelled (or 'dis-spelled', to maintain the story metaphor).

Stoney includes two other telling pieces in her appendices. One is on 'Things I don't like', which suggests Blyton's aversion to things outside her control:

> ...I don't like thinking about eternity. You think about time, and the end of time, and then you think what's beyond the end of time, and it gives you a sort of gasping-for-breath feeling. ...I don't like it, it's too big and overwhelming. ... I don't like hearing sad stories if I can't help to put things right. ...The feeling of impotence that comes when a story of suffering is related, is one of the hardest things to bear, that I know. If you could go straight off and put things right, it wouldn't matter— but you can't in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. (*Teachers World* 24 Feb 1926, p. 205; quoted in Stoney, 1974, p. 193)

The second is from a letter to the psychologist Peter McKellar, where Blyton shudders at his experiments with mescalin, confessing that she would be terrified: 'I dread the feeling of losing my identity, of not being able to control my own mind!' (quoted in Stoney, 1974, p. 215).

To reiterate, Blyton, it seems to me, was concerned primarily with holding on to the Imaginary: to that stage which for her was also an image of childhood, whole and unsullied. Threats to this were fiercely contested, as in her concern over the Grimms' tales being 'cruel and frightening', or in her wanting to keep the death

penalty for child murderers (Stoney, 1974, pp. 199-200). This is the aggressive obverse of the anxiety experienced by the ego-ideal: it not only fears attack, but will itself attack all would-be threats to its wholeness. So, when Blyton says, 'I do not write as I know some authors are forced to do, to express some side of myself repressed in ordinary life' (Blyton, 1959), I think she is right. She wrote for the opposite reason; which we might rephrase as, 'to avoid that side of myself *also* repressed in ordinary life'; in other words, to paper over the cracks, to deny the repressed. For, as Blyton also notes, 'Writing *is* my ordinary life' (Blyton, 1959), and, she had earlier written, implicitly, that she didn't seem to exist until she had created herself as 'Enid Blyton' ('How I began' in *The Story of My Life*).

FICTION

Although Blyton claimed to write all types of books for children, there are no ghost stories, despite this being a popular genre with children. Nevertheless, she was quite aware of what her books offered, and what they withheld: 'They give children a feeling of security as well as pleasure—they know that they will never find anything wrong, hideous, horrible, murderous or vulgar in my books, although there is plenty of excitement, mystery and fun...' (Letter to S.C. Dedman 1949, reproduced in Stoney, 1974, p. 202). Let me now explore this notion of security and pleasure in more detail.

I would suggest that the image of the storyteller in command of her audience, explored in the last chapter, is a useful metaphor for the psychic process: the ego sitting cosily at the hearth, telling both itself and its audience reassuring stories, whilst the cold and dark lie without. The ego thus seeks to secure itself against that which lies beyond, which it sees as a threat. In this scenario the storyteller literally 'binds' us with his or her spells and images, just as Freud spoke of 'binding' energies.[8] Freud also, interestingly, used the image of a screen on which we 'project' our fantasies, convincing both ourselves and others that we are in control.[9] Let me probe this in greater depth, using 'Noddy' as an example, and thereby tying together much of the material mentioned earlier.

At the beginning, it will be recalled, the little nodding man is going through the woods when he bumps into Big-Ears. The former is described literally as a fragmented body, an assemblage of bits of wood, cat fur and blue bead. With his nodding head, there is also a sense that, like the young child, he is not yet quite in control of this body. Big-Ears, I suggest, becomes this nodding man's significant other, someone who provides Noddy with that initial sense of coherence (the Imaginary)—a role usually provided by the mother mirroring the child's activities, hence conferring wholeness on the child. Certainly, when Big-Ears meets him, Noddy is naked and nameless. It is Big-Ears who gives him both identity and a place in society. He even genders Noddy, to the extent that he finds him appropriate clothing.

In general, it seems to me, the Noddy books celebrate this narcissism of childhood, when the ego is first formed. Almost all the books thus end with a communal recognition of Noddy, often at a party, in a most ego-centric way (see fig. 8-1): 'Now they are having a wonderful tea-party, and Noddy and Big-Ears are as happy as can be. ... No wonder everyone is clapping him and calling for more' (*N7* p. 60). 'His majesty the ego' is duly celebrated, as it is in other ways: with Noddy's identifiable outfit and its self-proclaiming bell—'It was the bell jingling that made us think it was you' (*N8* p 57); even his name—especially in the French version, 'Oui-Oui'—emphasises his role as affirmative yea-sayer. This sense of the Imaginary is further suggested in Noddy's lack of firm gender identity, discussed earlier, suggesting that he is not fully locked into the realm of the symbolic. I have already mentioned Noddy's supposed effeminacy, cross-dressing and snuggling up with Big-Ears.

Not only is Noddy an optimistic yea-sayer, but everything in the books is affirmative, the antithesis of the death instinct. Thus anything inert is liable to be animated (see chapter 4). Likewise, the leaps into the present tense also add to the vivacity of the books, suggesting an immediacy to the action, an on-goingness. Other elements also fit into place, like those puzzling passages where

Blyton gently lowers a character into unconsciousness, all the while stressing their continuity of identity. The fear of nothingness, of one's identity dissolving as one loses consciousness—'What is happening to me when I am not conscious of myself? Where do I go? Where have I been? Who watches over me when I am gone to make sure I do get back?' as a Joseph Heller character puts it (Heller, 1990, p. 172)[10]—is carefully countered.[11]

It also helps account for the inordinate number of characters who lose their tails, especially by having them cut off. Such images of dismemberment are read by

Figure 8-1 Noddy receiving characteristic adulation from the community (N2, pp. 58-9)

Lacan as markers of a more symbolic oedipal crisis: that is, as threats to the wholeness of the Imaginary order.[12] But though such threats are present, at the end harmony is always restored, usually through the praise of significant others. Thus Big-Ears and Mr. Plod frequently lead the party celebration in praise of Noddy's goodness.

The same applies to Blyton's other fiction, where all is, ultimately, 'sunny stories'.[13] The words 'happy', 'merry', 'jolly', and, of course, 'gay', crop up with amazing frequency. For Blyton, fiction provided a realm where the happy ending could always be sustained. And in her retellings of Biblestories, she could even re-animate the dead, admitting that these were her favourite stories (Blyton, 1952, p. 104).[14]

But the point needs reiterating that all this sunniness is sustained only by covering up a darker side—as revealed in the quotation from *Teachers World*, above,

above, where Blyton confesses to feeling impotent at any 'story of suffering', where you can't 'go straight off and put things right'[15]. Freud's notion of the 'uncanny' or the *unheimlich*, is pertinent here. As he puts it, quoting Schelling, '*Unheimlich* is the name for everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light' (Freud, 1985, p. 345). Freud explores the origins of the term, which is rooted in the word *heimlich*, for 'home'—that hearth which should define safety, a *Dunroamin'* ideal—but one which often harbours disturbing elements. Certainly this was Blyton's experience as a child: a supposedly happy home life, but one which was disrupted by rows and, eventually, the departure of her father, whose activities, of course, were also to be kept secret from the outside world.[16]

Blyton's texts seem to play around with this notion, which is often not so straight-forward: sometimes home *is* away, and away *is* home. Let me elaborate. It has already been stated how Blyton always sought to celebrate home, whether Elfin Cottage, Old Thatch, or Green Hedges. These homes are symbols of security, magic islands where lives a storyteller who will never let any child worry or have a bad dream. And yet, as we also know, her islands are riddled with underground passages; they are set amidst rocky waters that have to be very carefully navigated. Within the *heimlich* there are always *unheimlich* elements, whether it be a childhood denied, an abandoned family, rats, an alcoholic husband, or whatever.

So, while Blyton might celebrate the homely, it is a homeliness that is continually subject to rupture. Many of her most well known characters only really establish themselves *apart* from their families, as did Blyton herself. In her very first full-length adventure novel, *The Secret Island*, the children set up a separate house on an island, after running away from their guardians (their parents are away—a theme revisited in *FRAT*). Noddy, of course, lives alone, having left his maker[17], whilst the Five are always shown happiest as a unit away from parental view; as the narrator puts it in *FGTMM*, 'They just wanted to be off and away by themselves—just the Five and nobody else!'(p. 99). The Five

are forever drawing attention to the holes in the homely fabric, literally 'gaps', frequently leading to tunnels and passageways. The Five inhabit these interstices, as houses are shown to open out into more primitive spaces, caves, underground streams, pools, and sea shores. Repeatedly, Blyton points to the breaches in adult knowledge and behaviour, and it is these fractures which the initiated—the children, through password and solidarity—can both see and overcome: it is they who, magically, repair the breaches that adults have caused (something Blyton couldn't effect in her own life). I say 'magically', because any darkness is very soon dispelled in Blyton. If there are any dark corners, they are very soon illuminated by the torch-beams of the heroes, so that, once again, we have a celebration of wholeness, with no troublesome openings.[18]. But the fact is, though these ruptures are cleared up in each story, they continue to open; there is an excess of openings: the adult fabric is flawed, such that Blyton's heroes are continually papering over cracks.[19] It is notable, too, that so many of these are around Kirrin itself: apart from the main underground chambers and dungeons in *FOTI*, there is the underwater passage from Kirrin Island to the mainland (*FOKIA*), and the one that links the farm to the cottage in *FGAA*. And yet these earlier passages are never revisited—never used to solve later problems.

So, in Blyton's books, it is the clash of 'home and away' that provides both safety and fear; in fact, the two are like different faces of the same coin: safety/fear (one is tempted to express it *s/f*). The *heimlich*, or homely, is continually displaced, whether through simple disaster—as in a tree crashing through the roof and shattering the safety of home, a quarantine which prevents the Five from even getting home—or through what we might call issues 'closer to home'—like at the start of the first Five, where the parents quite abruptly assert their right to holiday alone:

> "Mother and I won't be able to go with you this year. Has mother told you?"
> "No!" said Anne. "Oh, Mother—is it true? Can't you really come with us on our holidays? You always do."

"Well, this time Daddy wants me to go to Scotland with him," said
Mother. "All by ourselves!" (*FOTI* p. 7)

This is before the Five exist as a unit, of course. They are a Thwarted Three; but, once together, the Five establish their own, if displaced home: home is away (something celebrated in the titles, like *Five On a Hike Together*). It is for this reason that Anne plays such a crucial role, with her portable hearth, carrying home wherever they go; thus, away is home, too:

> "This shall be our house, our home. We'll make four proper beds. And we'll each have our own place to sit in. And we'll arrange everything tidily on that big stone shelf there." (*FRAT* p. 110)

But for all that Anne is teased, the others enjoy this nest-building activity too. In fact, George responds with,

> "We'll leave Anne to play 'houses' by herself ...We'll go and get some heather for beds." (*ibid.*)

They all in fact, celebrate this, reveling in their communal meals, snuggling up in sleeping bags, wallowing in the sun, and so on. And, secure in their wholeness, their unity, the holes in the social fabric can be repaired.

There is always a play then, a tension between going into the realm of adventure and wallowing in the security of sun and food. And, even when the adventure is under way, food is kept nearby as a comforter, frequently sustaining the reader at least with a sense of physical repletion.[20]

The Five can magically repair holes in the social fabric because they are whole—even though they too experience tensions: between the intrepid and the timid (George v. Anne); the adult and the child (Julian v. Anne), the rational and the intuitive (Julian v George/Timmy), and of course, male and female. But, as a team, they can overcome all ills: and it is not just four children against crooks, of course, but crooks—parents and guardians, often—who maltreat children and animals, who assume power over children in some unacceptable manner.

There is one more twist to this tale, but first, let me draw in the experience of others, who confirm this centrality of Blyton's play on safety/fear, the *unheimlich*, an in-between-ness, inhabiting a realm between home and away:

Figure 8-2 Adventuring in the Faraway Tree

> ...I think people like them because they're safe ... it sounds a bit funny, but they're not as ... they're not scary, they're not boring, they're just in-between, they're nice and safe and just ... how you want them.(f,12)

Whilst 'adventure' was by far the most frequently mentioned response to a question about the popularity of Blyton's work (see appendix IV), for many it was closely linked with safety: 'For me, EB's books filled a need for security and escape from the stresses and boredom of life as an intelligent, but emotionally insecure working class child growing up on a council estate' (f). 'Security and escape'—as this 12 year old girl also emphasises: 'Interesting, and exciting, and you know it can't happen, and that makes you feel safe.' This is also
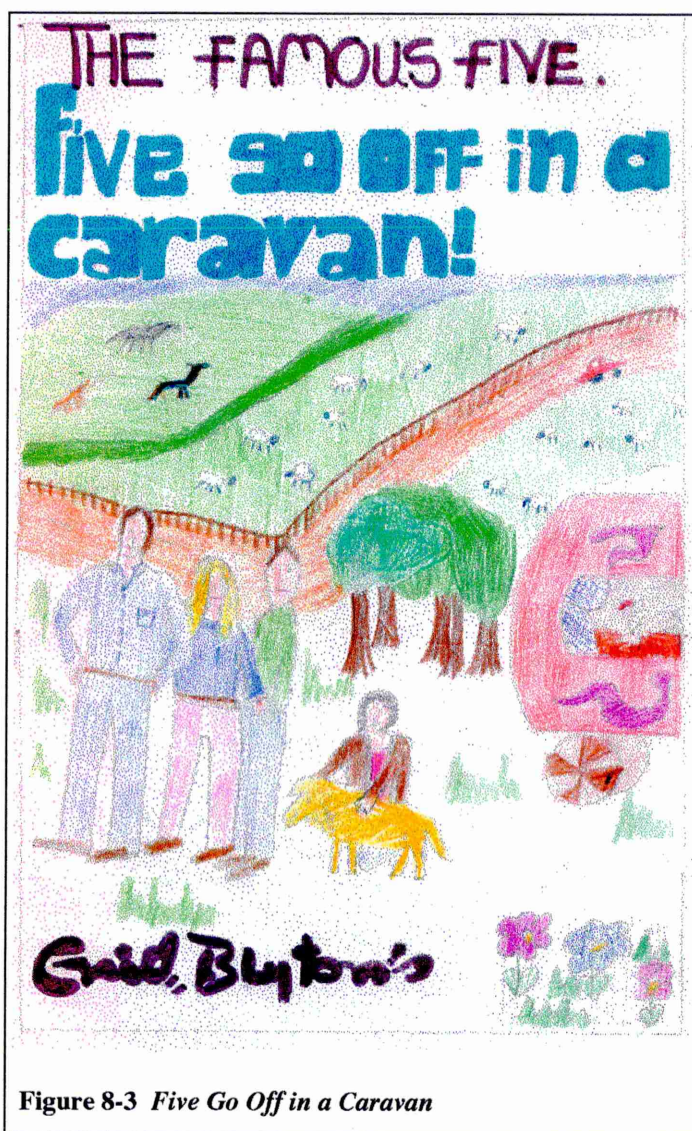
Figure 8-3 *Five Go Off in a Caravan*

apparent in many of the illustrations that the children did, like these two (figs 8-2, 8-3), where we see the adventure space, but 'home' is there too. The children's favourite illustrations from a selection of representations of the Five, too, are of note. The overall favourite has already been reproduced in chapter 5 (fig. 5-1), but a close second was this one by Betty Maxey (fig. 8-4). Together they make an interesting contrast, of adventure and safety, though they also share similarities, both showing the Five together, and being mutually supportive, 'going together, working as a group' (f, 14), 'doing it all together' (m,15), 'all involved' (m, 15) (see also chapter 5, note 2).

Figure 8-4 Betty Maxey's 'Five' (*FGOTC*, 1967 ed., p. 11)

Hugh Crago, in a very interesting paper, movingly recounts how he 'compulsively re-read' *FGTST*, long after he had grown out of Blyton's other books. The reason was that its landscape and images—with the warren of secret tunnels—echoed his own family situation (Crago, n.d., p. 16), which seems to me to capture the *unheimlich* exactly. Other readers, some with their own particular problems, have also found Blyton intensely comforting. One, for example, read and re-read a passage from *Mr. Galliano's Circus* to help her get to sleep at night. It is the passage where a caravan is fitted out as a 'home on wheels', with curtains and carpet. As she put it in interview, it is 'a community, everyone dead happy, camp fire ...'. Another 'abused' child, read *Hollow Tree House* almost obsessively, for the security it offered. She writes,

> As an emotionally disturbed child, coming from a socially deprived and violent background, Enid Blyton stories, where [sic], in many ways an escape route. Her stories took me totally out of a very grim reality; they offered me a safe retreat. The Hollow Tree House was personally very significant because the characters would often visit a hollow tree that was large enough to adapt into a temporary home. They furnished this hollow and it became a retreat for the characters when they needed to escape the adult world. I also lived in this hollow tree house, imaginarily—at times of violence.[21]

A third reader, who has a degree in English, told me of a breakdown she had suffered at 18: 'to comfort me my sister brought all the F F O [Five Find-Outers] again and we had a superb time re-reading and enjoying them.' Other, more famous readers, have also recorded their dependence on Blyton's texts in times of stress—like the writer Alice Thomas Ellis, or Liz Hurley, who, when the media eye was upon her after the débâcle with Hugh Grant, retreated to her

Blyton collection. More generally, it has been observed that Blyton's books are the ones reached for when exams are on the horizon—this is not just school-children, but university students, too (Gilligan, 1995).

So, Blyton's life and fictions—if that is not a tautology, in that she strove to make the two coterminous—not only helped her construct a realm of security (an Imaginary identity) but also provided her audience with an equally safe realm. 'Buying a Blyton book, in this sense, was buying a good image of oneself and the world, where exciting things could happen almost to order, and where nasty repercussions could be kept well under control', as Tucker (1976, p. 194) puts it. However, in that very process Blyton's audience gave her back the very thing that made it all make sense. I have already linked the social and the psychic above, but here we can see how her audience, in effect, acted as the significant other for Blyton herself: mirroring back to her, in exactly the Lacanian sense, her existence and worth. In other words, it seems that Blyton needed her audience as much as they needed her—'I for one cannot imagine childhood without Enid Blyton'(m)[22].

Their approbation, first and foremost in book sales, but also in letters, club membership, fund-raising and general support, all reflected back the very persona she sought so hard to maintain as a reality—that persona which can be seen narcissistically reclining by a pond. It is also apparent in her magazines and in stories like *A Story Party at Green Hedges*, where, after the story, the fictional child praises Blyton's ability, actually addressing her as 'Enid Blyton'. The inclusion of her name in so many of her titles likewise, though a most useful marketing ploy, was, for Blyton, also of personal importance.[23] . For Blyton, writing was itself an existential act, whether in her fiction, her autobiography storying her life, or even in comments which tied these two activities together more explicitly. Her literary agent, George Greenfield, thus records her saying, 'turning as if to embrace the bookcases on the wall ... "These are my children"'(Greenfield,1995, p. 133).[24] And, in claiming never to listen to a critic

over the age of 12, she strove to ensure that nothing too threatening would intrude.

Several other elements should now fit into the jigsaw. First, it seems apposite that her stories, being vehicles of wish-fulfilment, are intensely ego-centric. This follows from the fact that a narcissistic, Imaginary persona is being celebrated. Basically, it is what Freud called 'His Majesty the Ego, the hero alike of every day-dream and of every story'(Freud, 1959, p. 150), which will also defend itself against all attack. This is why most of her books celebrate the protagonists so openly at the end, whereas anyone or thing that is against the heroes will be summarily dealt with. In many ways it is irrelevant whether they are black, white, working-class, middle-class, foreign, or whatever (and I have given instances of villains from each): they are simply 'other'—outside that magic ring of faces round the egotistical hearth. And 'other', of course, is subject to the summary justice of primary process thinking; as Blyton herself said to Trease, 'Right should always be right, and wrong should be wrong, the hero should be rewarded, the villain punished' (Trease, 1964, p. 116). This is the justice of the fairy tale, which can be quite severe (see Wilson's 'magical thinking')—just as it is in other popular literature (e.g. comics, cartoons and nursery rhymes, and films like *Rocky II*— see chapter 6). It is the 'immanent justice' that Barthes sees at the heart of the wrestling match:

> The idea of 'paying' is essential to wrestling, and the crowd's 'Give it to him' means above all else 'Make him pay'. The baser the action of the bastard, the more delighted the public is by the blow which he justly receives in return. ...Justice is therefore the embodiment of a possible transgression; it is from the fact that there is a Law that the spectacle of the passions which infringe it derives its value. (Barthes, 1973, pp. 22-3)

Its nature is not to see the world from another's viewpoint, to be altruistic; the *raison d'être* of wish-fulfilment is precisely ego-centrism, not altru-ism.

Second, I think we can now deal more satisfyingly with this notion of Blyton being a child—which I first considered in chapter 3. Rather than childish, I

would suggest that she had an intensely egocentric nature[25] which is often read as childlike (indeed, Piaget sees it as definitive of childhood)—though the two are by no means the same. As Rose says, 'childhood is something in which we continue to be implicated.... It persists as something which we endlessly rework in our attempt to build an image of our own history' (Rose, 1984, p. 12). For Blyton, the 'Enid Blyton' persona provided both an early protective shell, but also, ultimately, a restrictive carapace (shown, for example, in her inability to write for adults, despite a number of attempts; e.g. the play *The Summer Storm*, written under the *nom de plume* Justin Geste - see Stoney, 1974, pp. 203-4).

Third, and relatedly, as Blyton is a marker of childhood, we can see why so many children find that they measure their growth in Blyton serials. Readers progress through the different series, often violently rejecting earlier ones, and, sometimes half-regretfully, finding themselves growing out of Blyton. 'I almost didn't want to grow up because I didn't want to get too old to read Enid Blyton', as Pat McLoughlin, of *Woman's Hour* put it (Kirby, 1992). Crago has also documented his experience of mastering Blyton's format, hence experiencing 'a sense of being constricted by it' (Crago, 1990, p. 103), and earlier I recorded my own sudden and dramatic ending of reading Blyton. Others, I note, similarly marked the spot:

> I had a Blyton phase of my childhood and then it stopped, and ...it was dramatic, in fact I can identify a pre and post Blyton era in my life, which surprises me because I don't remember that being true of other authors. (f)

> I have discovered that my own personal insight gained into my childhood and adolescent experiences and emotions are partly due to her books acting as a marker. (f)

> At the age of 12 my sister (who was 6) said that she had grown out of EB books and that they were 'childish'. I remember this because I was hurt at the time that she had said this about my fave author and made a promise that I would never grow out of these books. At the age of 13 going on to 14 I did grow out of the books, when I tried to read one I found it babyish. (f, 15).

Blyton thus marks a *rite de passage*. She herself said she wanted children right through their childhoods, but she also stated that she never listened to a critic over the age of 12—the age at which childish things are put away, though they remain a vivid memory for many. So, while the child audience moved on, replenishing itself, having been temporarily nourished by her fiction—'a literary security blanket' (f) as one put it—Blyton herself was doomed, endlessly, to repeat her sunny stories.

CONCLUSION

Bringing this together, we can see Blyton seeking to deny any intrusion into the safe, unitary world of the ego. Not that such intrusions will go away, for the ego is a false, partial construct, repressing that which lies beyond it—things beyond the warmth and light of the hearth, lurking in the shadows. Freud, of course, suggested that we coped with anxiety by seeking to overcome it, by creating a fantasy in which we have mastery, as in the 'Fort/Da' game, and that such actions are repeated till, once again, we feel in command.

Lacan, and critics like Peter Brooks, have taken this further, suggesting that story itself, or rather, plot, is a way of gaining control over the flux of experience, of mastering it, showing how all the bits cohere, so that nothing is contingent. Blyton, I have suggested, was herself 'a master' of this denial in her storytelling, which she extended into the 'storying' of her life. Solitude, lack of identity, rejection, gaps and unexpected openings—all these are the stuff of her tales, but only briefly, only, in fact, to be resolved through the uncovering of plot, sometimes literally, as when, in *FGOIC*, it is a network of tunnels beneath a plot of ground—itself beneath their portable home— that reveals all.

And yet, such celebrations of the unitary ego cannot survive forever. As Lacan would put it, desire is not satisfied by such false closures. Hence, like Scheherazade, Blyton's obsessive need to tell more tales (thirty-four books in

1951, during which time she was also writing a fortnightly magazine) till, in her 60s, the process of denial finally began to break down, and the disturbing elements could no longer be so neatly fictionalised, so readily made 'happy ever after'. This was also a time when public criticism of her persona was mounting, when some of her 'innocent' creations were being criticised—Noddy, the Famous Five, and, most publicly, the gollies. In her last years the cracks in the persona became overwhelming, unable to be papered over however many stories she told.[26] Her husband, Darrell Waters, wanted her to take things easier, but he did not realise that telling stories *less* would only make life harder. The chinks in the persona grew, and the *unheimlich* became more a reality. She talked repeatedly about returning home, going back to her parents. Several times, it seems, she even attempted the journey, walking off into the night. This return to origins, I would suggest, was not only a return *of* the repressed, but also a realistic return *to* the repressed, her last words reputedly being, 'I am going to my Father! At least I think I am'(Smallwood, 1989a, p. 152): ultimately, going home for her was a going away.

Of course, the children do not experience this. The woman from *fin de siécle* England, a time renowned for its lurking shadows, managed to conceal these beneath the sunny surface. For the children there is simply the sense of wholeness, of nastiness uncovered and dismissed in a satisfying fantasy in which each is the projected hero.

NOTES

1   See chapter 5, note 1.

2   *The Scotsman* is obviously following the same source. They refer to 'the
     unfortunately named Mr Pinkwhistle [sic], an unusually large elf given to
     materialising in school playgrounds', but take it further, telling us that he
     has been 'expunged' (Anon, 1995d). This is untrue: he was still in print in
     1995 (e.g. *Mr Pink-Whistle stories*, 1994), which is fortunate for readers,
     amongst whom he is still quite popular (the twelfth most popular character,
     according to my research—albeit exclusively to females!).   As one young
     girl expressed it, 'I liked the books of Mr Pink-Whistels books, he was a
     charactre that fixed everyones problems and helped them' [sic]. Older
     readers also remembered him with affection, if a little shame-facedly: 'I
     fantasized (a little embarrased here) that Mr. Pink-Whistle could one day
     come and save me from this horrible childhood of mine. I wanted to go
     where fairies lived and magic prevailed not this dump mundane world'(f).

3   Some of the children (12 year olds here) were clearly on a similar
     wavelength:

William:	Which one is it?
DR:	This is number four.
Daisy:	Here comes Noddy again
Dan:	I love that title [sniggering]

     It was only later that it dawned on me what the sniggering was about!

4   Noddy is hardly ever 'naughty'; he seeks to be helpful; it is not he that
     motivates the plot: he is usually put-upon by others, then has to prove
     himself.

5   I have mentioned the many 'tail' related stories in 'Noddy' earlier, but they
     crop up everywhere—even in the 'Famous Five': "I wonder his tail keeps
     on," said Anne, looking at it. "One day, Timothy, you'll wag it right off."
     (*FOTI* p. 81).

     Here I list some where the tail is more central, almost a character in its own
     right! For instance, in 'Amelia Jane and the plastercine' (orig. 'Oh, Amelia
     Jane!', 1938, in *Naughty Amelia Jane!*, 1939), there is a teddy bear who
     complains 'that he had no tail' (p. 78). So Amelia Jane sticks a plastercine
     one on him while he sleeps. 'He would think he had grown a tail, and what
     fun it would be to see him walking about proudly, showing off his beautiful
     tail! What would he say when it came off?' (*ibid.*). She makes it and 'The
     clockwork-mouse loved it, and the yellow duck said it was the longest she
     had ever seen' (p. 81). Then, when teddy is not looking, 'with her clever

had ever seen' (p. 81). Then, when teddy is not looking, 'with her clever fingers she made the end of it into a snake's head! Fancy that! It looked exactly like a snake now, with its mouth open and two little holes for eyes' (p. 82). In 'Michael's tail'(1945) a party is held, but only for those with tails. The bear is disappointed, so his owner sews him on a tail of white fur, with which he wins a prize. Thereafter, he doesn't 'want to part with his beautiful new tail ...He still wears it...' (p. 159) ('Michael's tail', *Good Night Stories* pp. 144-59)

A related 'tale' occurs in 'Snicker the Brownie' (1937) (*Snicker the Brownie and other stories* pp. 39-47). Snicker ties a witch's two cats' tails together. When they wake up, they try to run off, but can't—until their tails come off. 'Yes, they really did—and what is more, those tails wriggled away like snakes, out of the garden gate, past Snicker, and slid off into the wood' (p. 43). He has to retrieve them, under threat from the witch, and eventually, finds them, only to have them wriggle after him. As he runs away, 'those tails fastened themselves to the back of him as he ran—and there was Snicker with two long black tails!... He couldn't get them off! They were growing on him!' (p. 47).

In 'Cubby and the Cats' (in *Mandy, Mops and Cubby and the Whitewash,* 1955), Cubby, a bear, likes pulling the cat's tail, so a girl, Mandy, attaches a fur to the end of it, so when Cubby next pulls it, he thinks it's come off. He then compensates the cat by buying it some cream, so all the other cats then come wanting him to pull off their tails. In 'The Little Sugar-Mouse'(1941) (*Enid Blyton's Storytime Book* pp. 16-21), the eponymous character ends up dissolving in the rain, leaving only its tail. And so on!

6   She also told Sykes (1962, p. 21) of 'the distress of a child who suddenly came across Struelpeter [sic]. The book disappeared forthwith from her bookcase'. Blyton's almost photographic memory (she could recall whole pages from texts) could have made her mind more at the mercy of disturbing images.

7   As George says of Timmy, who's being kept within the secret walls and passages of Smuggler's Top, "...he's excited and pleased ...I expect he's chasing a rat" (*FGTST* p. 87). Blyton was thus a Pied Piper in another way—not only captivating the children, but magically ridding the world of rats, too.

8   Freud discusses this process throughout his work, but it comes to the fore in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1961). As Boothby says, 'the concept of binding is relevant first and foremost to the genesis and functions of the ego. It was in terms of unbound versus bound energies that Freud distinguished between the psychically unmastered instinctual forces of the id and the more organized and differentiated processes characteristic of the ego' (Boothby, 1991, p. 81).

9 Christian Metz's notion of the 'imaginary signifier' is also worthy of note, though flawed. He used it to describe that feeling of control we have as a cinema viewer, wherein all the discourses cohere round our gaze (Metz, 1982).

10 'Where am I, then, when I am not?' as Heller's hero says elsewhere, also using the image of Lazarus rising from the grave (1990, p. 172). See also note 14.

11 The passage, also quoted in chapter 4, is as follows:

> "It's dark and it's quiet,
> I'm going to sleep;
> My eyes are tight shut,
> They can't even peep;
> I'll dream of old Big-Ears,
> And dear Tessie Bear;
> I'm going to Dreamland,
> And now—
> I—
> am—
> THERE!"

And so he was, fast asleep, dreaming of having tea with Big Ears and little Tessie Bear. (*N17* pp. 8-9)

Note that he is not only asleep, but dreaming that he is not alone.

12 Likewise, the stories where tails are added are attempts to foster a sense of completeness, of an 'image' that fits.

13 Blyton began *Sunny Stories for Little Folks* in 1926; they were described as 'cheap books for Newnes'. It seems likely that she thought up the name, though there is no firm evidence. Though others also edited the magazine, as Stoney says, the magazine was destined 'to be forever associated with her name' (1974, p. 73), especially when it was retitled *Enid Blyton's Sunny Stories* and appeared weekly from 1937 to 1952. (In 1953 she founded her own *Enid Blyton's Magazine*, which ran till 1959.) The association was further cemented in 1992 with Ken Howard's BBC2 'Bookmark' special, called *Sunny Stories* (Lipman, 1995, pp. 94-102).

14 Significantly, the only Bible story that Blyton published separately was *The Little Girl at Capernaum* (1948), in which a girl is raised from the dead. This story is also included, in less embellished form, in her volume *The Children's Life of Christ* (1943), and in the significantly titled *Before I Go To Sleep* (1947), under the equally noteworthy title, 'The little girl who

slept' (pp. 59-60). In this same volume we have 'The Nobleman's Son'—about restoring life to a boy—and 'Jesus meets a funeral', where a boy is again restored to life. As Blyton says, out of the many 'wonderful things that Jesus did' this was 'one of the most wonderful of all' (p. 87). In her companion volume, *Tales from the Bible* (1944), she also chooses to relate the similar tales of Elijah and Elisha restoring life to two children. These tales, of course, might have particularly appealed to Blyton given that she believed her own father had all but resurrected her.

15   *The Put-em-Rights* (1946) was another one of her books.

16   Perry Nodelman (1992) has argued that children's literature is often about 'Home and Away'. Basically, home is secure and cosy, but boring; away there is adventure, yet it is dangerous and insecure, hence the return home, and so on—though Cawelti (1976) had expressed this notion somewhat earlier (see next chapter).

17   Never to return, unlike Pinocchio. Again, this was Blyton's own experience, abandoning her mother for almost thirty years.

18   Blyton's universe, though, is never really magical. Everything is presumed to work according to some Newtonian scheme, however ill-understood. Thus the walls and doors that secretly open onto these areas are based on 'mechanisms' of some sort. Even in magical works like *Adventures of the Wishing-Chair*, a character 'twisted a piece of the bark and a door slid open' (p. 69)—it did not just happen. The Comic Strip (1982) captured this perfectly, having Dick twist a random twig with similar result.

19   In Rosemary Jackson's typology of different modes of fiction, Blyton's books would constitute the 'marvellous' as opposed to the 'fantastic'(or uncanny); that is, in the former, wishes are fulfilled and contraries united, whereas, in the latter, reality is punctured, making it inherently unstable; there is no safe resolution in the fantastic (Jackson, 1981).

20   One might be tempted to make other links between the social and the psychic, following the 'object-relations' school of Klein. The intimacy of the dyadic unit, of mother, or father, telling the child a story at bedtime, where, traditionally, the child would drift into unconsciousness as the storyteller spoke (and books like *Before I Go To Bed* (1947) certainly play on this, with advice to both mother and child at the beginning). This, of course, is also the image of the child at the breast, being succoured, usually also, till sleep supervenes. I think this is a credible fantasy, but it was only that for Blyton, in view of her own aversion to both food and suckling (Smallwood, 1989).

21   Personal communication. She goes on to say how the 'Famous Five' stories developed this, she seeing herself 'merged with Georgina; not only

did I begin to vocalise but actually organised the children from nearby into the famous five with myself as leader—the boys always holding a subordinate position.' However, unlike most middle class readers, she records that 'The majority of people where we lived ... were renowned for villainy, therefore, we assumed that we should have no problems rounding up a few', and relates how she got herself into trouble as a consequence!

22   This is just one of many, saying things like: 'They enriched my childhood so much' (f); 'I lived for EB as a child...'(f); 'My childhood (from about 7 years old to 15/16 years old) are synonymous with Enid Blyton'(f).

23   She was known as 'Enid Blyton' at a time when many authors were known far more formally—E. Nesbit, W.E. Johns, J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, P. L. Travers, and so on. Though Blyton did try writing a few books as Mary Pollock, using her original married surname, together with her second forename, and although the limited company formed in 1950 was known as Darrell Waters Ltd, she generally opted to be known by her childhood name. It was a name that she celebrated, incorporating it into her very first book of stories—*The Enid Blyton Book of Fairies* in 1924—long before she was famous. It subsequently appeared in about 300 other titles (Stoney, 1974, only lists approximately 190, but Tony Summerfield has far more in his more complete database, on which this figure is loosely based). However, it was not till 1942 that she used her distinctive signature in a title.

As I've outlined earlier, this fictional identity—'Enid Blyton' of the mythical Elfin Cottage, Old Thatch and Green Hedges—was consolidated over many years in her columns in *Teachers World* and other journals. Here she reported events from her life in a highly idealised form—as Stoney has noted—either using her own voice, or the persona of Bobs. This persona was further elaborated in *The Story of My Life*, where her imaginary history as happy child, devoted wife and good mother are central. And her readership endorsed this. Anything that threatened this ideal portrait was summarily dealt with, often abetted by her husband; for instance, in the radio comedy *Take It From Here* (January 1952), a character has the line that 'her little boy was never happier than when "curled up in front of the fire with Enid Blyton"', to which comes the retort, '"Ah, now that whacks reading any day"' (Stoney, 1974, p. 137). A 'disgusted' letter from Blyton's husband resulted in an apology and the deletion of the offending lines. But it has often struck me that this is a particularly apt image of the child 'imbibing' Blyton (see my earlier comments)—which is what may have given the joke more bite in the Blyton household.

Druce, although coming from a different perspective, makes a similar point about Blyton needing her audience, suggesting that the letters she received from children, 'were not merely of value to her in planning her future

projects ...but, far more important, they provided the existential confirmation she needed' (1992, p. 34).

24   This is a wonderful story, often repeated by Greenfield, though she could have meant it metaphorically. After all, such a claim is frequently made by authors. Hergé, apparently said the same of his books: 'All are my children, of course' (Thompson, 1991).

25   Some might take issue with this, arguing that part of Blyton's skill is the way she lets her readers imagine life from a variety of perspectives, anything from a little animal to a pixie. But, I would suggest, rather than a Keatsian 'negative capability', in Blyton's work, every animated being always speaks with her voice. She was, it was said, a good mimic. Thus other creatures are not simply anthropomorphised, they are 'Blytonised'.

26   In a surprisingly late interview on *Woman's Hour* (c1966), she was heard to make some very confused remarks, like the following: '... I first started writing for children when I was about 10 or 12 years old, writing for my young brothers and sisters.' She also said that she had always meant to write, never anything else, adding, 'My father was a writer and I wanted to be a writer, too'; and she talks of the Famous Five as 'five children'.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

As I write this (April 1997), Enid Blyton's Centenary Year is well underway, having been launched in September, 1996 (Blyton was born 11 August 1897) to catch the Christmas 1996 market, thence to extend events through 1997. I am therefore aware that the comparative obscurity of Blyton in 1992, when I started this study, is now itself history. This is a factor recognised by others who have studied popular figures and their works: that reputations and interpretations are dynamic.[1] Thus, to the earlier constructions of Blyton must now be added an inchoate, postmodern one, symbolised by the pink neon signifier—Enid Blyton—appearing unqualified above Regent Street last Christmas. My study therefore represents but a particular intervention at one point in time (although it did try to capture a longitudinal perspective by involving past readers). In some ways I was fortunate to do the study when I did, before the new Famous Five TV series and Blyton-mania really took off. This allowed me to see how the books fared in a period of relative obscurity. Obviously, to do the study now, one would find that the Five were far better known. Also, much of the textual knowledge would derive from the TV series rather than the books; hence, no doubt, the 'sexism' would be seen as far less an issue (Anne, in particular, has been empowered in the TV series); also, the children could not have avoided seeing the series as 'old-fashioned', in that this is how the new version has presented it (it is set in 1952, the year of Elizabeth II's accession). This said, as I noted in an earlier study (Rudd, 1992), children do not compartmentalise texts nearly as much as we do; they happily run-together books, comics, cartoons, films, videos and computer presentations—which is what defines multi-media, of course. Some critics are even in the same situation, like the journalist who queried Timmy being turned into a mongrel from a 'rough bouncy collie' (Brown, 1996a)!

In this last, shorter chapter I shall try to summarise the main points made, and to join them to some larger debates around cultural studies. First, as I have just indicated, the different constructions of Blyton over time are themselves significant. It may be that we are now moving towards a more tolerant attitude—for instance, in a recent Oxford Union debate, they voted three to one in favour of the motion that 'Enid Blyton is still a writer appropriate for today's child' (Brennan, 1997)—but, from the late 1950s to the 1980s, Blyton was generally viewed negatively. As I have shown though—a second point—much of this criticism is actually contradictory, suggesting that it is only their *anti*-ness that unites critics. Third, it has become apparent just how much her critics are implicated in the very crimes of which they would accuse Blyton. Thus her outdated, élitist attitudes are criticised, but by envisioning the future Blyton reader as ending up as a shop-assistant in Woolworths, reading Mills and Boons, as opposed, for instance, to sitting the Cambridge English Tripos exams. Eleanor Graham's comment that the Puffin imprint would not feature Blyton because 'It was not intended for that kind of public' (quoted in Ray, 1982, p. 28) sums this up well. As I also showed, this notion extends to readings of her texts, with working-class characters being stereotypically derogated in a far more blanket fashion than ever occurs in Blyton. This same practice was shown to be at work in constructing a racist reading of Blyton, with mischievous extrapolation from isolated examples. The commentators, then, are caught up in unusually similar discursive practices—practices which I have tried to unpick in the course of this work.

Fourth, approaches to Blyton, whether for or against, are remarkably untheorised. They are generally just asserted, even by critics well-versed in the relevant theoretical areas (e.g. Mullan, 1987a)—and, fifthly, tend to be based on glaring misreadings of Blyton's work, often not even drawing on her own, original texts. This said, I have also suggested that to study the texts in abstraction is counterproductive: the whole context of reading needs to be considered.

Sixth, as a consequence, I rejected earlier educational and literary approaches because their agendas seemed inappropriate to works of popular culture. Instead, two more productive ways of reading the Blyton *oeuvre* were explored. In the former, Blyton was located in the oral tradition, which makes sense both of her storytelling style, and of its reception by a child audience, which is keen to hear tales about the deeds of their tribe's heroes. In the latter, this was linked to a psychoanalytical perspective, which suggested that, in fulfilling children's wishes to be significant beings, Blyton's stories were psychologically satisfying, akin to personal daydreams. But it was also noted that the stories only worked in this way because the world wasn't really like this: children are not really powerful; they cannot resolve the world's problems. Thus the stories represent magical, or fantasy resolutions, in which holes in the homely fabric are drawn attention to, made 'whole'—and, frequently, during the 'hols', that magical time-out period. Lastly, it was suggested that Blyton's way of writing actually united the social and the psychic: because her stories are essentially sensory (pictorial in particular), rather than literary, they prompt the projectionist in each reader's head to show the ego in action.

Let me now move on to explore some of these issues in more depth, framing them in terms of the key question asked about Blyton—a question which has, accordingly, been given much space in this thesis: is her *ism*-ridden work actually bad for children? However, key question though it is, I would suggest that the way it is usually phrased is itself dubious, based on an untenable notion of how any cultural product affects an audience. It suggests that Blyton deliberately encoded certain unsavoury discourses into her texts (e.g. of sexism, racism), which readers then 'decode', and, lastly, embrace and uncritically internalise. Such a notion is flawed both conceptually and empirically. Blyton certainly came from an age that was inherently more racist and sexist than today's. So the discourses around these issues undoubtedly form part of the weave of her texts (in that ultimately, power lay with white, middle-class men— not women, not other races, not other classes, and certainly not with children—

as, of course, it still largely does). But each story plays on these elements, reworking and refashioning them, though always in recognition of the parameters of society. It is this 'play' that gives the stories their appeal. Thus, it is only because adults are ultimately in charge that there is the fun of children being empowered. Likewise, it was, and still is, a world where boys are the more privileged sex, so the fun turns on a girl like George challenging this, refusing to accept the more traditional, domesticated role represented by Anne. Without these 'norms', I would suggest, their challenging could not work successfully.

The issue of racism is more complex, and was separated into two areas, based on previous critiques of Blyton. First, if racism is seen in terms of the English being superior, then Blyton is 'racist'; very much a product of her time. Her English heroes are superior to all others, blacks, Orientals, Asians, and other whites (French, Americans and the rest). But there is no active encoding of racism, this is simply the way things were seen; and, as I indicated, it is hard to find a writer of her generation—popular or classic—who escapes this charge. It certainly does not warrant trying to erase such works from history. In fact, to do so signals an equally intolerant attitude to anything 'other', anything different from today's myopic perception of rightness. In criticising works of this time, though, Blyton seems to have been particularly singled out as culpable. Secondly, if racism is seen in terms of golliwogs and other black dolls, there seems less of a problem. If the golliwog was intentionally encoded as a black person by Blyton, or decoded as such by the child reader, things might be different—but this was not the case amongst the readers I talked to, apart from those who were aware that this was 'what they had heard said' (though even then, some 'reversed' the racist slur). They were, however, intensely fascinated by the golliwog 'grotesque'. Aside from this, though, it was also disputed that the golliwog was consistently bad or stereotyped; in fact, in Blyton it is not usually the case; the teddy bear, for one, outnumbers the golliwog in 'naughtiness'. However, it was also suggested that the tenacity of such an erroneous claim shows the 'power/knowledge' that such a discourse can

311

command, and the way that anti-racism is itself implicated in constructing such a discourse.

So, returning more directly to the question of Blyton 'harming' children, let me now clarify the wider issues by probing two main areas of obfuscation: those of 'ideology' and 'identification'.

First 'ideology'. The above question seems to posit that ideology is a 'thing' that 'gets' its audience. Readers are envisaged as being blindly hit by it, such that the simple act of reading these texts itself constitutes the effect.[2] And children are seen to be particularly vulnerable, imbibing ideology before they are rational enough to realise what it is. Such a notion is unacceptable for several reasons. First, precisely because it sees *reason* as the solution; talisman-like, reason can ward off the ideology attack, rather than itself being ideologically inflected (i.e. as a particularly male, unemotional and abstract pursuit of truth—see the earlier criticisms of the Piagetians, chapter 2). Second, on this model, certain texts are seen as ideological, whereas others are not; and generally, it is works of popular culture that fit the former bill, whereas 'artistic' works rise above it. But again, numerous cultural studies works have shown that this is not so—that this, again, is an élitist, ideological construct. Third, if children are as passive and prone as this model suggests, then presumably the effects can't be too serious anyway, for another text can just as easily come along and 'hit' them in a different way. Only an unrelenting diet of Blytons, with no other input (TV, comics, education) would therefore be problematic. Fourth, why would children worldwide, over several generations, choose to read and re-read texts that, if the adult view were to be believed, undermined half of them for their gender, and insulted many others for their nationality and ethnicity? (As one Chinese adult said, 'It genuinely never occurred to me at the time that most people did not have cooks who made ginger ale, nor that there was not one Chinese character in it.'[3]) To subscribe to such a view would seem an insult to all children. One would have to argue that children are particularly unreceptive, or, that the text is not doing its ideological work very well, or—a third option—that the text is doing its work

312

too well, hence the children do not even realise it. This undoubtedly happens, but then I would suggest that the same will be true of adults too (as stated above with regard to the naturalised racism of colonial England). On this reading, Blyton's works would have been at their most ideologically effective when they were first written, and likely to become less so as time moves on (albeit, always open to ideological appropriation, as we have seen).

More significantly, all the criticisms so far are based on the view that the text is the active element, and the reader passive, whereas I have suggested above, as indeed most of the evidence indicates, that children are not passive, malleable lumps. They are actively involved in constructing their world. Thus, to fall back on the notion of children being hypnotised by the text, in the manner of Plato's fear of 'identification', simply will not do. Let me now concentrate on this second obfuscation, which persists in being wheeled out, though subject to incisive criticism by Harding (1962), who demonstrated its woolliness: does it mean that we empathise with a character? does it mean that we simply see likenesses between a character and ourselves, or is it that we wish there were likenesses? or, do we actually take it further and seek to imitate the behaviour? More recently Barker has also criticised the term, seeking to replace it with Bakhtin's notion of a 'dialogue': "'Identification' suggests that we are spoken for. 'Dialogue' suggests we are spoken to' (1989 p.260). I would certainly endorse this: readers of Blyton weren't being attenuated by slow poison; rather, they actively chose her texts—often rejecting some titles in favour of others— and re-read their favourites, again, often choosing particular, favourite passages. Of course, in consuming these texts, children obviously seek to savour them, to maximise their pleasure.[4]

This we have seen, with readers 'homing in'—revealing phrase—on certain elements. It suggests that the texts are providing children with deeper pleasures than adults normally allow. It is also to deconstruct any inscribed ideological power of the text by reading it 'against the grain'. As Barthes says, 'Rereading draws the text out of its internal chronology ...and recaptures a mythic time'—

what I have called a 'time-out'—'reading in this way is no longer consumption but play' (Barthes, 1975, p. 16). It is a way the reader appropriates the text for him- or herself, teasing out particular discursive threads of concern. Whereas the esteemed texts of childhood are the ones which the child is taught to respect (Inglis' claim that *Tom's Midnight Garden* and *Puck of Pook's Hill* are wonderful books whoever you are, and that judgement stands whether or not your child can make head or tail of them' - Inglis, 1981, p. 7), Blyton's are there for use, for pleasure—texts in which personal investment is repaid with interest: a mix of adventure and domesticated comfort, of homes away from home. Home in fact, is itself a deictic shifter in Blyton.

So, in identifying with Blyton, children are not somehow imbibing the views of a rather upper-middle-class, latter-day, home-counties, Victorian woman; rather, they are engaging with texts which they find pleasurable and empowering.[5] In an obvious way, her books celebrate childhood by centring on children, showing them as both competent and capable, but they also show that grown-ups are frequently less than fair. However, by probing the context of reading, I have suggested that Blyton's books do more than this. The time-out is established both within and without the text. In the text, this period is usually established near the beginning, with the ending of school.[6] The holiday period is then proclaimed, often in celebratory fashion. Further markers of it being a special realm are given in the settings, which involve going away, to the seaside, the fair, or the circus, often to realms known for their 'time-out' status (what Bakhtin calls the 'carnivalesque'). And its status is then further endorsed: in lingering descriptions of picnics, leisurely cycling or hiking, feasting, taking a nap, and so on. For many readers, this sense of an empowered, child-time is then affirmed beyond the text, being celebrated in the very act of reading: in curling up with a Blyton the reader is, literally, on a time-out (as many of her titles also emphasise: *Just Time for a Story*, *Round the Clock Stories*, etc.). The mere opening of a book's covers marks this transition from one world to another, and this is a world that one is initiated into by knowledge of special passwords and local knowledge. I have also noted how this is frequently reinforced by certain props:

creating secure hideaways in which to read, having a store of food and drink for the duration.

Ironically, when adults protest about such notions, they are often adding to a child's pleasures. They underwrite the child's justification both for reading the texts, and for being secretive about it (Blyton's books were supposedly banned in South Africa 'because of the impertinence her young characters were alleged to show towards their parents' - Tucker, 1970a). The more adults seek to control and define what children should be doing, the more that groups such as the Five will appeal. From the other side, Blyton's books are frequently disliked by adults because the adults feel shut out of them. Unlike the classics, these are not texts that many adults feel they can share with their children, not only because of the content, but the plots, the characters, the writing—all effectively distance the adult reader precisely because he or she cannot see that world beyond the rather threadbare words. Blyton's books would thus seem to challenge Auden's famous comment that 'there are good books which are only for adults ...there are no good books that are only for children'(Auden, 1972, p. 11).

This recognition that there are some texts which might be good only for children, without stretching them, has been slow in coming.[7] Whereas adults have long indulged themselves in their own pleasures, drinking, having sex, reading, eating or watching 'junk', it is often considered that children, as apprentice grown-ups, should have a diet only of material that advances them cognitively. Blyton, of course, provides a point of retrenchment, of consolidation and emotional satisfaction. The sorts of play that children spontaneously engage in, their daydreams of being victorious, all powerful, and honoured, Blyton makes into stories. This area seems to have been neglected in the past, essential though it is, for there can be no other development unless a child feels secure and is given space to take stock. Blyton offers precisely this, her books nourishing the ego, fostering a sense of identity. Carol Fox's comment, though related to children's own storywriting,[8] seems apposite: 'The children can achieve mastery of their own existential problems, simultaneously mastering the story discourse, and

taking on all the powerful roles they do not have in their real lives' (Fox, 1993, p. 34).

Let me reiterate though, that children are not 'losing' their identity when they do this (this was an older orthodoxy of cultural studies, that once 'hailed' by a text, one was ideologically 'nailed' - Althusser, 1971). In line with post-structural thinking, identity is seen not as some internal essence, but as a collection of subjectivities, established through engagement in particular social practices (which are also discursive practices, involving discursive threads). It is also a dynamic thing, such that children are frequently trying on different selves. This is certainly apparent in the way that children can be totally absorbed while reading the books, but, at other times, quite removed from them, discussing them in relation to sexism or racism, or enjoying making fun of the texts and their investment in them. Thus, in discussion, children would frequently adopt artificial, 'posh' voices for the Five. Others wrote amusing parodies of the stories, some, no doubt, inspired by the Comic Strip versions. (This is similar to Buckingham's finding, where child watchers of *EastEnders* frequently turned from deep involvement to irreverent mocking (Buckingham, 1987, p. 200). Ang calls this 'emotional realism', which indicates its personal significance, whilst separating it from traditional conceptions of realism. In other words, however far-fetched some stories might be, there is a fantasy investment in their truths.

To round off this discussion of the supposed 'poison' of Blyton's texts, let me now draw in wider cultural studies issues,[9] which turn around the dualisms of reality/fantasy, realism/escapism, mimetic/formulaic, élite/popular, and high/low culture. First, it is worth noting that I have not added the opposition written/oral. There is obviously an area of overlap between this last dualism and the others, but there are also differences: written culture also includes much that is 'low', just as oral culture is not necessarily a popular, or 'mass' form (e.g. family history). This said, many of the qualities of popular culture are those that I have characterised as being part of the oral. One of the key areas is the sense of 'immediacy' or participation, which is distinct from high culture's celebration of

distance and separation. Whilst Bourdieu (1984) has probed these class differences in conceptions of 'aesthetics', he says nothing about the adult/child division.

Others in cultural studies have sought to find a new term which recognises the pleasures of popular works. Lesley Fiedler suggests the term 'ekstatics', which, he says, will let us talk less of 'theme and purport, structure and texture, ideology and significance, irony and symbolism, and more of myth, fable, archetype, fantasy, magic, and wonder'. Ekstatics seeks to catch this notion of escape from 'the boundaries of the ego and the burden of consciousness'(Fiedler, 1989, p. 16). Cawelti writes similarly, saying that, 'In these imaginary worlds we come temporarily nearer to our hearts' desires and escape from the limiting reality around us by imaginatively identifying with characters who have an unusually great ability to deal with the problems they face, or who are so favored [sic] by luck or providence that they eventually overcome their difficulties and "live happily ever after"'(Cawelti, 1976, p. 38). Rather than rejecting it as an inferior form of high culture—which, for instance, is Q.D. Leavis's ploy (Leavis, 1932)[10]—these writers try to define it as a separate type, which

> ...involves recognizing two rather different psychological needs, both of which play an important part in shaping the kind of imaginative experiences we pursue for relaxation and regeneration. First of all, we seek moments of intense excitement and interest to get away from the boredom and ennui that are particularly prevalent in ...[our] relatively secure, routine, and organized lives .... At the same time, we seek escape from our consciousness of the ultimate insecurities and ambiguities that afflict even the most secure sort of life: death, the failure of love, our inability to accomplish all we had hoped for, the threat of atomic holocaust. (Cawelti, 1976, pp. 15-6)

This might ring bells with my earlier discussion of home and away. Cawelti here seems to capture both impulses, which I have argued are so central, and so ambiguously interlinked in Blyton's work.

The notion of escaping to 'something better', is also, as Dyer (1981) argues, a utopian impulse, which is what writers on the romance, like Radway (1987) and Modleski (1988) have also emphasised: 'the romance functions always as a utopian wish-fulfilment fantasy through which women try to imagine themselves as they often are not in day-to-day existence, that is, as happy and content' (Radway, 1987, p. 151). This is a strand of thinking that has a long history in cultural studies, but is often neglected. It is to be found in Bloch (1988), Jameson (1979) and Zipes (1992), amongst others, but the main point about it is that it is an emotional, or personal utopianism, rather than a social one:

> the utopianism is contained in the feeling it embodies. It presents, head-on as it were, what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organised. (Dyer, 1981, quoted in Geraghty, 1991, p. 117)

Thus the story establishes its own utopian elements which are, precisely, an escape from the constraints of the social formation into a personal realm.[11] To an outsider these might seem very reactionary and dubious. We have noted several examples: Clark with his heroic Golliwogg, Walkerdine watching a stereotypical white male beating-up a black opponent, ethnic minorities cheering the white policeman, or, from the other side, white middle-class youth championing black bluesmen like the convicted murderer Leadbelly. Such pleasures are seldom talked of for various reasons: first, because they are often personal; second, because the theoretical vocabulary is underdeveloped, and thirdly, because even cultural theorists are wary of such pleasures: they are what occur out of office hours, when theorists are off the job—in fact, are themselves in the realm of the time-out. But only to study such pleasures in others, not ourselves, is to reinforce the élitist/populist divide, of which the adult/child division is a significant part.

In speaking to many adults, past readers of Blyton, this split was clear: one discourse of remembered pleasure would surface, often conveyed in terms of facial expression and tone of voice, whilst another discourse contested such

pleasures as being now questionable, neither to be endorsed nor indulged. One can, however, give voice to both, as Ang says, speaking particularly of women:

> Fiction and fantasy, then, function by making life in the present pleasurable, or at least livable ... . It does not follow that feminists must not persevere in trying to produce new fantasies and fight for a place for them. ... It does, however, mean that, where cultural consumption is concerned, no fixed standard exists for gauging the 'progressiveness'of a fantasy. The personal may be political, but the personal and the political do not always go hand in hand.(Ang, 1985, pp. 135-6)

This is certainly appropriate when we think of how reactionary much of Blyton's work appears, seeking to produce, in many cases, quite an orderly, well-regulated child population.[12] But, as I've already said, such identification does not occur in such a passive, realistic way. It is a fantasy relation that is engaged in. Therefore—to return to the initial question of Blyton's harmfulness—we are presented with this paradoxical answer. On the one hand, those that read her in social realist terms—from which perspective her works might appear quite reactionary and worrying—will find little to enjoy; such readers are therefore unlikely to persist in reading her. Those that read her and enjoy the fantasy, on the other hand, are doing so in a way that is, by definition, not realistic: the enjoyment depends on the reader engaging in the play of the text, thus making it their own. This is so because fantasy can only work by meeting *personal* desires; not someone else's, by proxy; in which case, the reactionary discourses in Blyton are not an issue *for the initiates* (any more than is Arthur Ransome's communism). When these reactionary discourses do start to obtrude, that is when the fantasy ends—often with a bang, as in my own case. This is not to deny, of course, that readers can derive 'undesirable' meanings from Blyton's work, whether about colour, boarding schools, gorging, or whatever, but such meanings will be part of the wider discursive repertoires in society.

This brings me to an interesting, recent twist in the Blyton story, related to the more recent softening of attitudes towards her. The change is partly due to the fact that there are now more grown-ups who read Blyton as children, but it is

also to do with the way our past has been reconstructed in the burgeoning heritage and nostalgia industry. It has been argued that the Conservatives, especially under Thatcher, succeeded in allaying anxieties about the ills of contemporary society by re-appropriating the past, especially the period from the 1920s to the 1950s (stopping dramatically at the 'sixties which, in their permissiveness, are held responsible for most of today's problems). By emptying this past of its lived significance, it can then be packaged and commodified, and re-presented to us as an ideal time—as a world we have lost in some edenic sense (Bromley, 1988, Hewison, 1987). Blyton's texts, appearing throughout this period, readily fit the image. Thus what I have portrayed as dissident reading for children, in that it empowers a marginalised group by quelling their anxieties in an imaginary wholeness, could be seen as a reactionary reading for adults.

The latter, at the level of the social formation, also cover their anxieties about the state of the nation: their Imaginary (similar to Althusser's appropriation of the Lacanian term) is of a Tudorbethan Merry Olde England, one of heroic deeds and events, where islands (this time the Falklands) are won back from wicked foreigners, and where old wrecks (the *Mary Rose*), products of our glorious past are, like the Kirrin galleon, brought to light, to help change the fortunes of a nation fallen on hard times. For Thatcher, as for many tabloid headline writers, all this was just cause for celebration. (It is of note here that the Five series is being sold to America on the heritage ticket, with a trailer in which the actors who play the Five state where they live in relation to the residences of the Royal Family—i.e. Windsor Castle, Buckingham Palace.) This, I think, is a less happy situation, with Blyton's works being used to endorse that mythical middle-England of Major's Mansion House speech (see chapter 3). In itself, of course, such a construction is innocuous, but what it seeks to divert attention from (homelessness, unemployment, poverty, crime, etc.) is less so. However, this is not the children's fantasy, but an adult one.[13]

In turn, this relates to one other issue: the attempt to update Blyton, either by using Blyton's own texts or the Blytonesque 'formula'. The former is an issue about which there is much ambivalence, many of her audience remembering the original texts with affection, yet dubious about its continued appeal. Blyton, I am sure, would have been far more pragmatic in her attitude to revision than many of her champions. The precious stance towards every word written is, in fact, far more characteristic of a literary culture (see chapter 7). But Blyton, as a storyteller, was always refashioning her stories to fit a particular audience. She would have been the first to retell her stories without golliwogs—in fact, I have indicated that she often did use other characters, despite the golly's unique features—just as she would have updated her language from those rather passé days of 'queer' and 'gay' abandon. She was, after all, always concerned not to upset her readers.[14] What is often forgotten is that this is common practice amongst writers (e.g. Roald Dahl, Raymond Briggs and Graham Greene). Even amongst the classics, the published versions of texts are often far from artistically pristine, whether it be Shakespeare, Keats, Twain, or whoever (see Dollimore and Sinfield (1994), Stillinger (1991) and Lowry (1996) respectively).

This said, had Blyton been responsible for new editions they would, in effect, have been new texts—not the fractured works we now have. I have already drawn attention to this superficial updating, which makes the anachronisms of a computer- and car-free rural environment ever more prominent. A number of readers commented on this, drawing particular attention to the less successful French Voilier 'Fives' (e.g. Voilier, 1981, 1987). But more significantly, there is the danger of weakening the power of Blyton's stories by taking away the very elements that gave them their distinctive voice. This was most brutally done with the abortive second edition of 'Noddy', but I have also indicated its weakening in the more sensitive third edition, playing down precisely those oral elements in the interests of a more orthodox 'literary' style (i.e. removing the leaps into the present tense, the authorial intrusions, the exhortations to the reader, and so on). The same has occurred in the 'Fives', where George's fierce individualism has lost its edge, all having had their consciousnesses raised. It is

of note that one of Blyton's own, least successful texts was *The Six Bad Boys* (1951), where she attempted something closer to social realism.

The latter approach, mentioned above, is to appropriate the Blyton formula. I have quoted critics on this earlier, who recognise Blyton's power 'to captivate children, but [want it] minus the snobbery, suburban prejudice, acquisitiveness, golliwog-racism ... ' (Leeson, 1985, p. 163; also Hincks-Edwards, 1982 - see chapter 3). I can see the attraction of this, but, based on what I have argued earlier, I would suggest that many of the works of popular culture that are successful in their embodiment of utopian solutions work precisely because they counterpose this with an existing state of things which is clearly dystopian. Well-intentioned attempts to write texts that install p.c. values often founder because they lose this tension between reality and fantasy, by trying to make the reality utopian (with no sex discrimination, no inter-group tension, no violence, and so on);[15] whereas the more successful, but often more criticised texts not only recognise the need for contraries, but are themselves written by people with a personal investment in such issues, which gives their tales a deeper edge.

In short, Blyton's texts, in creating this close-knit group seated round the hearth, celebrating 'Her Majesty' the Ego, can only succeed in defining that in-group by counterposing it to an out-group: the Other. I have discussed this earlier, arguing, in Proppian terms, that for Blyton this Other could be anything: particular nationalities, races, classes, age-groups, toys, goblins, gollies, teddies—whatever suited the particular machinations of the plot.[16] I also showed that, contrary to popular belief, no particular group is vilified (though if one were to quantify instances, Americans, goblins and rats are high on the list). Blyton is fairly indiscriminate in creating this other, but 'other' it must be, simply to delineate more clearly the heroic identity: to create that temporary feeling of completeness, wholeness and invulnerability, both for the tribe, and the individual; for, as Kristeva puts it, 'the foreigner challenges both the identity of the group and his own' (Kristeva, 1991 p. 42).

Blyton's texts, then, both in social and psychic terms, are all about finding a place, about feeling temporarily fulfilled, experiencing a sense of plenitude in a world where children are inevitably seen as lacking, as being incomplete, underdeveloped, forever becoming. It is a concern from Noddy on, and involves that crucial play around difference. To become an individual one must be differentiated (whether as a Nodding Man fitting into Toyland, a tomboy alone on her island, a girl freshly arrived at boarding school, a black doll in a white nursery, or, in her most basic and repeated tale, to be literally with or without tail (the Lacanian trope).[17] However, to be differentiated is also to move away from wholeness, thus to be alone, insecure; hence one seeks recognition by the social group: to fit, to be part of the same, whether it be in finding one's place in Toyland, to be part of the Five, or of a 'world of girls'. I have argued that this play around same and different is central to Blyton, and that its markers (size, colour, type) are more incidental movers of plot. Same/different is, of course, another working of home/away.

This brings me back, finally, to my title—*Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children's Literature*—just as I have quoted the Five frequently returning to their titles, following the dénouements. In this thesis I have explained Blyton in a way which, I think, does justice to her immense appeal, avoiding reducing it to crude commercialism, or dismissing it in blanket fashion Apart from a wider, cultural studies stance, the chief difference of my work from earlier studies lies in the fact that it consults this readership.[18] The real mystery of children's literature, I would suggest, is that it is kept mysterious—its appeal 'felt in the blood and felt along the heart' by what Leavis calls the 'sensitive minority'(Leavis, 1932, p. 67); its qualities being precisely those learned after long apprenticeship, when one, in fact, has a fully developed, adult sensibility. Thus anything that is not seen to move the reader directly towards this—which, contrarily, celebrates a child-centred culture, where wholeness is expressly conceived at the level of the child, often as a group, and working against the fractured world of adults—must be belittled.

It was Blyton's refusal to endorse this that gives her work its appeal. We, as adults, might only see bare words, outmoded and problematic discourses, but that is exactly our position as the arch-Other. If, however, we do not try to understand her appeal, we are engaging in just the sort of arrogant colonialist discourse of which Blyton stands accused: of being dismissive, of belittling quaint superstitions. (Dixon's criticism of Blyton for her banal choice of place-names, for instance (see chapter 3), would be a good example, when many of the names, like Green Hedges itself, came from the children.) And, in the very act of doing this we are solidifying the discourse that re-makes children's literature in our own image: one that celebrates the adult as the site of wholeness: rational, worldly-wise, experienced—Piaget's pinnacle of creation, in fact. At the other end of this binary see-saw set up by us, sits the child; and, of course, the scales are heavily weighted against it, given that it must be that which the adult is not: incomplete, helpless, dependant—a site of becoming, in fact. In Foucauldian terms, I have sought to unmask this power-knowledge coupling.

It is ironic that a woman who was, in many ways, committed to circumscribing and controlling children should provide a landscape in which they could roam so freely, indulging themselves, celebrating their world, while frequently turning the tables on the adults. Forever saying the same, Blyton's works thus celebrate *being* rather than *becoming*, the timelessness of 'round the clock stories', rather than the regulated time of growth and development. For ultimately, being/storying is life, the realm of the time-out, whereas becoming can only end in death. In true Blyton fashion, I shall leave the last word to George, reputedly Blyton's alter ego, and the one who most successfully repudiates the latter:

> "I don't want to grow up ... There can't be anything nicer in the world than this—being with the others, having fun with them. No—I don't want to grow up!" (*FGTBH* p. 42).

NOTES

1   For example, Davis (1990) on Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, or Bennett and Woollacott (1987) on James Bond. As the latter put it, 'there is no place—no cultural space—in which the individual texts of Bond can be stabilised as objects to be investigated 'in themselves', except by abstracting them from the shifting relations of inter-textuality through which their consumption has been regulated' (1987, p.90).

2   Barker has written extensively about this topic, and his work has helped me think my way through the issue (see Barker, 1987, 1989).

3   Ngugi wa Thiong'o has written similarly about the power of Biggles, which he enjoyed at the same time that his older brother was fighting with the Mau Mau guerrillas in a war that was eventually won by RAF bombers. 'The Biggles series [had]... a very simple morality of right against wrong, angels against devils, with the good always triumphant. ...The books did not invite mediation; just the involvement in the actions of the hero and his band of faithfuls....' (quoted in Dawson, 1994, p. 280).

4   Again, Barthes' essay on wrestling puts it well: 'The public is completely uninterested in knowing whether the contest is rigged or not, and rightly so; it abandons itself to the primary virtue of the spectacle, which is to abolish all motives and all consequences: what matters is not what it thinks but what it sees' (Barthes, 1973, p. 15). This is very similar to Laurie Taylor's comment (see chapter 3).

5   I can only presume that Walkderdine (1986, p.169) meant something similar, when she wrote 'I was Rocky' (see chapter 6).

6   The school stories are an interesting variation (or inversion) of this, where it is the patriarchal world that is set aside by entering a protected, walled and turreted realm.

7   In saying that Blyton does not 'stretch' the child I would not want to suggest that there is nothing of educational value in her work. Clearly, there is much natural history, there are the unusual words, like 'stentorian', and there is a great deal about how stories work. Also, Blyton seems to have been a very successful teacher, and many of her non-fictional works contain much that would stretch any child satisfactorily. However, this is aside from the main purpose of her fiction.

8   Many Blyton readers—almost one-third—also engaged in writing their own stories, as noted earlier.

9   Children's fiction has been generally neglected by work on popular culture, apart from set areas, like girls' comics, teenage horror, children's television, cartoons and computer games. Mullan (1987a), whose background is in cultural studies, proved a missed opportunity.

10   Leavis is merciless on the 'self-indulgence' of day-dreaming stories, claiming the 'habit of fantasying will lead to maladjustment in actual life' (Leavis, 1932, p. 54).

11   Other elements of utopia are also present in Blyton: such as abundance, in terms of food, and a sense of community.

12   The self-regulatory role of children's fiction would need to be the subject of a whole new thesis. It is certainly prevalent in Blyton, many of whose stories are precisely about bringing the untoward child into line—obviously the bully, but also the talkative, the sulky, the babyish, the proud (Gwen, in 'Malory Towers' being most of these!). In Blyton's work, Bentham's panopticon is certainly far-seeing. Its spies are other, more enlightened children or, frequently, beings from the fantasy realm—normally unseen brownies, pixies and wizards who suddenly appear to regulate the unruly child. This might be thought antithetical to the general notion of Blyton empowering children. However, as I have tried to show, children are as much concerned with regulating their tribe as are other groups, and eager to pounce on any malefactor. As I have also been at pains to demonstrate, it is often not the 'ideal' child that is foregrounded: Noddy, Amelia Jane, Georgina (rather than Anne or Julian) Susie in the Seven; and so on. And respondents had their own favourites, sometimes quite surprising ones, like P. C. Goon; for example, in the Malory series, there was a range of characters that attracted readers: not only Darrell, but Alicia, Felicity, Bill, and even Gwen (some responded to her antipathy for games).

13   This is what is unsatisfactory about Eales' (1989) critique, reviewed in chapter 2: its target is awry, disempowering the already marginalised child, not the adult who tries to turn the fantasy into reality, hiding history in 'sunny stories'. Unfortunately, in taking this stance with Blyton's *oeuvre*, Eales is himself engaging in this practice.

14   David Lane claims that Blyton herself 'wrote the golliwogs out of Noddy before she died; or at least started to do so. I have a manuscript in my possession that shows, in her own handwriting, she had started to do that' (Lane, 1996, p. 29). His back-tracking from his initial statement is interesting, for certainly, in the last published 'Noddy' volume, *N24*, golliwogs still feature. But I'm also sure that this is what Blyton would have done had her child audience expressed concern or distaste.

15   There are some works which do manage to create successful fantasies by breaking the mould. L. Frank Baum's 'Oz' books are a notable example

(Baum, 1982), as, more recently, are Terry Jones' fairy tales (Jones, 1983). However, I agree that this 'utopian solution' is a vexed issue. Bridget Fowler (1991), in particular, is more critical of the utopian impulse because it so frequently encodes so many features of existing relations—patriarchal, classist, racist—which then become part of the envisioned future. However, I have suggested that this is misguided. It is precisely those 'futures' which are grounded in a more recognisable present that seem to have more appeal (*cf.* Davies, 1989); also, Fowler is still reading these texts through a social realist lens, which is exactly what I argue that readers are not doing (as Ang says, the realism is 'emotional', it is in feeling rather than content). This, of course, is apart from the point made in the main text, that there is no consistent endorsement or condemnation of any particular group or class, albeit there is undoubtedly an overarching, white, middle-class ethos.

16 The Other can be anything in cultural theory, too. It is another much overworked term, used extensively both in social terms—as by Said (1985)—and psychologically, as by Lacan (1977), who has two distinct usages, but these are simply two theorists amongst many. Here I would like to draw attention to Miles' usage, for he provides a most productive way of viewing racism, which also gets closer to what I feel Blyton was about. In a chapter entitled 'The civilisation and racialisation of the interior' (Miles, 1993, pp. 80-104), he broadens previous conceptions of racism by showing that it is not simply about an insider distancing the other as an external, or foreign threat; rather, it also involves that insider (the in-group, the civilised) distancing itself from perceived threats from within (i.e. the 'interior'), whether in the form of the poor, the peasantry or the working class (or, one might add, women and children). One finds all such groups frequently derogated as 'not civilised' and 'dirty'. Blyton, I would suggest, creates 'others' on this level.

17 I have quoted many such tales/tails in the course of this study, but 'The Swallow fairy' (orig. 1945, in *A Picnic Party at Green Hedges*, 1951, pp. 83-90) usefully brings them together. It concerns a fairy who misses the swallows when they migrate, so she goes to find other places to stay, ending up 'cold, hungry and lonely' (p. 89), when she meets a friendly squirrel. He asks,

> "Where is your home?"
>   "I haven't one," said the fairy, and she told him how she had tried to find someone to live with in warmth and friendliness." (p. 89)

They go back to his hole and curl up together 'He wrapped his bushy tail round them both, and they slept cosily together' till the warmer weather. And—dare I say it straight-faced?—'when a warm spell comes they both wake up and look for the squirrel's nuts' (p. 90)!

18   Q. D. Leavis's work is an interesting, early exception, of course, being based on responses to questionnaires. However, these hardly 'get a look in', and when they do, her respondents' judgements are immediately disregarded. Thus, she quotes a reader of popular literature stating, 'All the people who live in the pages of your work are so intensely real. One knows them as friends'. Leavis surmises from such statements 'that fiction for very many people is a means of easing a desolating sense of isolation and compensates for the poverty of their emotional lives' (1932, p. 58)! Interestingly, Leavis also harps back to an earlier golden age when there was more of a sense of community. Whereas today the masses impinge on the 'sensitive minority ... menacing the standards by which they live' (ibid., p. 67). They 'work upon and solidify herd prejudice and ... debase the emotional currency by touching grossly on fine issues' (ibid.).

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There are two main reasons for adding a bibliography. First, because there are so many of Blyton's own texts quoted in the thesis that it is very confusing finding them in the Harvard format (abbreviations used in the main text are given alongside each of the three main series). Secondly, as much of the material uncovered for this research was not explicitly referred to, it seemed useful to have this material gathered separately, especially as much is in 'ephemeral' fanzines and non-book format.

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Noddy Books (originally published by Samson Low)

No.	Title	Abbrev.
1	*Noddy Goes to Toyland* (1949)	*N1*
2	*Hurrah for Little Noddy* (1950)	*N2*
3	*Noddy and his Car* (1951)	*N3*
4	*Here Comes Noddy Again!* (1951)	*N4*
5	*Well Done Noddy!* (1952)	*N5*
6	*Noddy Goes to School* (1952)	*N6*
7	*Noddy at the Seaside* (1953)	*N7*
8	*Noddy Gets into Trouble* (1954)	*N8*
9	*Noddy and the Magic Rubber* (1954)	*N9*

10 *You Funny Little Noddy!* (1955)   *N10*

11 *Noddy Meets Father Christmas* (1955)   *N11*

12 *Noddy and Tessie Bear* (1956)   *N12*

13 *Be Brave, Little Noddy!* (1956)   *N13*

14 *Noddy and the Bumpy-Dog* (1957)   *N14*

15 *Do Look Out Noddy!* (1957)   *N15*

16 *You're a Good Friend Noddy!* (1958)   *N16*

17 *Noddy Has an Adventure* (1958)   *N17*

18 *Noddy Goes to Sea* (1959)   *N18*

19 *Noddy and the Bunkey* (1959)   *N19*

20 *Cheer Up, Little Noddy!* (1960)   *N20*

21 *Noddy Goes to the Fair* (1960)   *N21*

22 *Mr. Plod and Little Noddy* (1961)   *N22*

23 *Noddy and the Tootles* (1962)   *N23*

24 *Noddy and the Aeroplane* (1964)   *N24*

<u>Note</u>

Where a new, 1992 edition has specifically been referred to, an asterisk has been appended to the number, as *N3**. Where both editions are being considered, I have added a solidus: *N3/**. The Macdonald Purnell second edition (1986) is not quoted specifically. Only the first eight of these are dated, and it seems that only twenty of the original twenty-four books were rewritten. They were all illustrated by Edgar Hodges.

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No.	Title	Abbrev.
1	*Five on a Treasure Island* (1942)	*FOTI*
2	*Five Go Adventuring Again* (1943)	*FGAA*
3	*Five Run Away Together* (1944)	*FRAT*
4	*Five Go to Smuggler's Top* (1945)	*FGTST*
5	*Five Go Off in a Caravan* (1946)	*FGOIC*
6	*Five on Kirrin Island Again* (1947)	*FOKIA*
7	*Five Go Off to Camp* (1948)	*FGOTC*
8	*Five Get into Trouble* (1949)	*FGIT*
9	*Five Fall into Adventure* (1950)	*FFIA*
10	*Five on a Hike Together* (1951)	*FOHT*
11	*Five Have a Wonderful Time* (1952)	*FHWT*
12	*Five Go Down to the Sea* (1953)	*FGDTS*
13	*Five Go to Mystery Moor* (1954)	*FGTMM*
14	*Five Have Plenty of Fun* (1955)	*FHPOF*
15	*Five on a Secret Trail* (1956)	*FOST*
16	*Five Go to Billycock Hill* (1957)	*FGTBH*
17	*Five Get into a Fix* (1958)	*FGIF*
18	*Five on Finniston Farm* (1960)	*FOFF*
19	*Five Go to Demon's Rocks* (1961)	*FGTDR*
20	*Five Have a Mystery to Solve* (1962)	*FHMTS*
21	*Five are Together Again* (1963)	*FATA*
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No.	Title	Abbrev.
1	*First Term at Malory Towers* (1946)	*First*
2	*The Second Form at Malory Towers* (1947)	*Second*
3	*Third Year at Malory Towers* (1948)	*Third*
4	*The Upper Fourth at Malory Towers* (1949)	*Fourth*
5	*In the Fifth at Malory Towers* (1950)	*Fifth*
6	*Last Term at Malory Towers* (1951)	*Last*

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A weekly publication till wartime paper-shortages made it revert to fortnightly format - otherwise we might have had even more material!

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Blyton withdrew from this magazine, despite its close association with her, because the publishers, Newnes, would not advertise her other publications; even

after her own magazine had begun, Newnes chose not to announce her departure from *Sunny Stories*, hence Blyton's disclaimer in her new venture (see below): 'the only magazine I write for'. The magazine continued after Blyton, with Marion Crawford (known as 'Crawfie') as the next named editor, then in 1957, Malcolm Saville took over. The magazine was given a larger format and annuals began appearing. It was published by Newnes till 1968, when IPC took over. The last holdings in the Renier Collection are 1971.

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APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRES

On the following pages are copies of the Questionnaires sent out to potential respondents, predominantly in 1993. The first is the adult version, the second, the children's, which is slightly re-worded and simplified. This said, many children got hold of the adult version, and completed this. Also, some parents were so keen to participate that they filled out their children's questionnaires!

1

ENID BLYTON QUESTIONNAIRE

I am undertaking some research into Enid Blyton's enduring popularity. I would be grateful if you would complete the following questionnaire. All responses will be treated with strict confidence and respondents remain anonymous. Please tick on the dotted lines to the right of the appropriate responses, or write in the spaces between questions. Feel free to add extra information on a separate sheet.

1. How old do you think you were when you first discovered Enid Blyton's books?

2. How did you discover them?

    by yourself   .....   present from adult   .....   other (please specify) .....
    through friend.....   adult reading to you .....

3. What was the first Blyton book you remember reading, or having read to you?

4. What was your favourite Blyton book, or series?
   (If your views have changed, please add your current favourite.)

5. Who was your favourite Blyton character?

6. Which book or series of hers did you like least (if any), and why?

7. Why do you think you liked Enid Blyton's books so much?

8. Did you re-read Enid Blyton's books?

    never .....   sometimes   .....
    rarely .....   frequently   .....

9. Where did you do most of your reading?

   in bed   ......   in a 'secret place' (please specify) ...... other (please specify) .....
   in a chair ......   anywhere you got the chance   ......

10. Which of the following words best describes the time you spent reading as a child?

    briefly   (1-7hrs a week)   .....   abundantly (15-21hrs a week) .....
    regularly (8-14hrs a week)   .....   persistently (21hrs + a week).....

2

11. Did you discuss Enid Blyton's books with others?

       never ......   sometimes ......
       rarely ......   frequently   ......

12. Did you do anything more than read Enid Blyton's books ?

       fantasise about them   .....
       play games around them   .....
       re-enact them   .....
       have clubs, passwords, badges, etc   .....
       emulate characters (speech, dress, etc) .....
       write similar stories   .....
       other (please specify) ....

13. What were your other favourite authors/books as a child? (Please indicate if you preferred any of these to Enid Blyton.)

14. What adult authors/books do you like reading?

15. What is the formal level of your education?

       left school at 14/15/16   ......   have first degree   ......
       left school at 18   ......   have higher degree   ......
       went on to higher education ......

16. Please indicate your age group:

6-14 yrs	.....	25-34 yrs	.....	45-54 yrs	.....	65-74 yrs	.....
15-24 yrs	.....	35-44 yrs	.....	55-64 yrs	.....	75-	.....

17. Sex: Female .....   Male ......

18. How would you describe yourself (national/ethnic background)?

19. Your occupation (or, if retired, your former occupation)

20. Your father's/mother's occupation:

21. If you would not mind further enquiries, please add your name and address (otherwise leave blank):

Please feel free to expand on any of the above questions. Also if you'd like to add anything else that I've not asked about, you are most welcome to do so. Please enclose on a separate sheet. Many thanks for your time and help.

Please return to:

David Rudd, 22 Meadow Way, Edgworth, Bolton BL7 ODE

ENID BLYTON QUESTIONNAIRE

I am trying to find out what makes Enid Blyton's books so popular. I would be most grateful if you could answer the questions below. Some of them only need ticks, while others ask you to write more. But whatever you write will be kept secret, so please be honest. Even if you no longer read, or even like, Enid Blyton's books, I'd like you to try to think back to when you did enjoy them. (If you never enjoyed them, I'd still be interested in your views. Just tell me why you didn't like them.)

1. How old do you think you were when you first discovered Enid Blyton's books?

2. How did you discover them?

    by yourself   .....   present from adult   ..... other reason (please give details)   .....
    through friend.....   adult reading to you   .....

3. What was the first Blyton book you remember reading, or having read to you?

4. What was, or is, your favourite Blyton book or series?
    (If your views have changed, please list your favourites at different times.)

5. Who was, or is, your favourite Blyton character?

6. Which book or series of hers do you like *least* (if any), and why?

7. Why do you like Enid Blyton's books so much?

8. Have you ever read Enid Blyton's books more than once?

    never   .....   sometimes   .....
    rarely   .....   frequently   .....

9. Where do you do most of your reading of her books?

    in bed   ......   in a 'secret place' (can you say where?)   ...... other (please give details).....
    in a chair   ......   anywhere you got the chance   ....

4

10. How much reading do you think you do each week?

    1-7 hours a week (ie. 1 hr a day)   .....   15-21hours a week (up to 3hrs a day)   .....
    8-14 hours a week (up to 2hrs a day)   .....   over 21 hours a week(more than 3hrs a day).....

11. Have you discussed Enid Blyton's books with others?

        never   ......   sometimes   ......
        rarely ......   frequently   ......

12. Have you done anything more than read Enid Blyton's books ?

        fantasised about them   .....
        played games around them   .....
        re-enacted them   .....
        had clubs, passwords, badges, etc   .....
        copied characters (their dress,talk,etc) .....
        written your own stories   .....
        other (please give details) ....

13. Who are your other favourite authors/books? (Please underline any that you
    preferred to Enid Blyton.)

14. How old are you?

15. Are you male or female?

16. How would you describe yourself (your national/ethnic background)?

17. What do your father and mother do for a living?

18. Please add anything else about Enid Blyton's books that you think might be of
    interest:

APPENDIX II

INTERVIEWS

Four schools, two primary and two secondary, were involved in looking at contemporary attitudes to Blyton. The primary schools each had populations of approximately 200 pupils, though from very different catchment areas: Barney School is in a predominantly white, commuter-belt, middle-class district, whereas Amelia Primary is a predominantly working-class, urban school, with 50% black English (predominantly Asian). The two secondary schools were similarly juxtaposed: Whyteleafe Secondary is a suburban church school, with predominantly white, middle-class children (1200 in number), whereas St. Rollo's Secondary is, again, a predominantly working-class urban school, with mixed ethnicity (about 1000 pupils, one-third Asian—mostly Muslims, but with some Hindus too, and a few Afro-Caribbeans). Questionnaires (appendix I) were distributed to classes in each of these schools, with either teachers or parents helping the younger age groups complete them.

An Interview schedule was then drawn up (see next page) and submitted to the schools, to give them an indication of what I would be asking pupils (see below). Interviews were conducted with 170 pupils, in groups of four (with two exceptions, of five), ranging in age from 4-17 year olds. There were mixed sex, single-sex girl, white, mixed ethnicity, and Asian groups involved. The interviews were taped then transcribed, in recognition of the theoretically-laden nature of transcription (Ochs, 1979). Clearly, from the very moment that the flow of speech is segmented into sentences, one is re-fashioning the source. I have by no means sought the complex 'Jefferson style' transcription, as used by Conversation Analysts (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984). Transcriptions are verbatim, however, except where a passage was unintelligible, in which case the

'drift' has been indicated. Prosodic features have been ignored, except where they are dramatic (shouting, for example), or pertinent to the matter in hand.

Transcription conventions are as follows:

DR   David Rudd

...   speaker ceases speaking, despite their utterance being incomplete

[...]   material omitted, for various reasons (e.g. irrelevant to point in my text, confused, incomprehensible).

[ ]   other material in square brackets is for clarification - e.g. of tone, context, non-verbal elements.

The sex of the speaker, or writer, has been added in brackets—i.e. (m), (f)—and, for children, the age has been added (despite being an ageist move!)—e.g. (f, 10).

Question Schedule

1. Do you like reading? How many books have you read? What sort of books do you like?

2. Do you own a lot of books? Do you borrow them from the library?

3. Who are your favourite authors?

4. Which Enid Blytons do you like?

5. Which is your favourite book/series/character?

6. Why? What do you like about it/them?

7. What are your favourite bits?

8. Are there any bits you didn't like?

9. Follow ups (who's the hero/heroine? who made things work? who's the cleverest? who's the stupidist? who has ideas? How many characters can you name? Can you describe them? How many are boys/girls/men/women?

10. Have you read any with 'gollies', or 'golliwogs' in? (Do you know what a golly is? Could you describe one?)

11. Are anyone else's books like Enid Blyton's?

12. Do you know if she's still writing books? (Is she still alive?)

13. Do you know how long ago that this book/her books were written?

14. Are there of her books you don't like?

15. Suppose someone said you shouldn't read books like this, what would you think?
    (follow ups: Have you heard anyone say this? Can you think why they might say such a thing? (Do you think her books might be bad for you in any way?)

16. Do you read her books yourself, or does anyone read them to you?

17. Do you talk about the books to other people? (Do you play any games after reading her books? Do you imagine yourself in stories like ...?)

18. Do you think the stories could be real? (Could that sort of thing happen in real life?)

19. Are her books more for girls or boys, do you think?

20. Which character would you most like to be? Do you ever imagine yourself as any of the characters?

21. Are there any things in the book that don't make sense to you?

22. What are your favourite TV programmes?

23. Have you seen any of Enid Blyton's works on TV? (follow ups: Which? What did you think of them? Were they like the books?)

David Rudd, May 1994

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS FROM QUESTIONNAIRES

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS AND THEIR READING HABITS

Table A3--2 Total Percentage of Respondents, by sex

	Whole sample	Adults	Children
Females	62.6	69.1	57.6
Males	31.7	29.4	33.5
Unknown	5.7	1.6	9.0

Females outnumbered males by almost 2: 1 (62.6% to 31.7%), but then females do read more than males in any case, especially fiction. The modal age for beginning reading Blyton was 7 years, though it was 5 for the adults alone, suggesting that previous generations of readers met her earlier in their reading lives. However, this was simply the commonest age: there were some who were introduced to her books before they were 1 year old. At the other extreme, one respondent discovered Blyton's books aged 48! (Auchmuty (1992) also found adults reading the school stories for the first time as adults.)

I say 'introduced' to Blyton's books, because this was the commonest form of discovery: being given one of her books by an adult (29.5%) or having an adult read to you (27.3%). However, quite a number (18.9%) discovered her by themselves, and, with one in ten, it was through a friend. A sizeable proportion (13.4%) did mention being read to at school or finding her books in the library (Other)—so, she was not quite the pariah that is sometimes made out. Interestingly, more adults mentioned this form of discovery than children, so perhaps the National Curriculum has helped displace her—or, the huge variety of alternative authors.

Table A3--3 Percentages of different ways of discovering Blyton's books

	Whole sample	Adults	Children
Present from adult	29.5	33.8	28.0
Adult reading	27.3	26.5	26.1
By yourself	18.9	14.8	22.0
Other	13.4	15.3	11.8
Through friend	9.9	8.8	10.8

For these respondents—an admittedly biased population—Blyton was the favourite author of almost three-quarters (72.1%). However, the responses of the schoolchildren are less loaded, in that any that had read Blyton supposedly completed a questionnaire.[1] Even here, 64.3% said they preferred Blyton (for the adults *per se*, the figure was 82.1%).

Bed was by far the most popular place for reading (45.9% read there; it is noteworthy that *Bedtime Stories* is one of the most popular titles), though a sizeable number would read 'anywhere' (34.1%). Quite a few (4.0%) also said they had a secret place to read, which some revealed to me, but others, true to its nature, simply said 'not telling'! Whether this is particularly characteristic of Blyton's books is unknown, although anecdotally, this seemed the case. There was a notable sex difference in readership patterns, with more females saying they read anywhere (38.1% as against 29.2% of the males). This might suggest that, for girls, reading was an expected leisure activity, therefore engaged in more widely; or, that girls had to read as and when they could.

Table A3--4 Time spent reading a week, in percentages

	Whole sample	Adults	Children
Briefly (1-7 hours)	36.9	8.1	59.6
Regularly (8-14)	28.6	32.7	25.3
Abundantly (15-21)	17.0	27.8	8.6
Persistently (21+)	16.3	30.9	4.9

Time spent reading is another area where there are and age differences. Whereas one third of the readers spent no more than an hour a day reading, this was largely accounted for by today's children - 60% of whom read this amount. Only 8.1% of adults had read this briefly, though: almost a third read up to two hours daily, with almost another third claiming to have read more than three hours a day (only 5% of today's children did). One would obviously anticipate this, given other activities that now compete for a child's time (The last Assessment of Performance Unit study reported that children watched about three hours TV a night, whereas they read about three hours a week (11 year olds - Bates, 1991). However, caution is needed, for among the children are many who have only just started reading; also, though both groups might inflate their figures, the adult figure is probably far more of a guestimate (the W.H. Smith survey found that children today are reading slightly more than they were in 1971, but also, that the biggest readers watched TV least (Hall and Coles, 1996)). It would, of course, be a very useful finding to say that those who read Blyton as children turned out to be more fluent and natural readers—and I think there is something in this claim—but there are too many uncontrolled variables for this study to make the claim.

Table A3--5 Percentages re-reading Blyton books

	Whole Sample	Adults	Children
Sometimes	38.4	35.3	40.8
Frequently	34.7	49.6	23.1
Rarely	15.0	6.5	21.6
Never	11.5	8.3	14.1

On the question of re-reading her books, again there are generational differences, with 85% of the adults re-reading her books (frequently or sometimes), whereas 64% of today's children claimed to. This said, these are still very high percentages. I have no comparative figures for other children's authors, but, based on discussions and research by others, Blyton's books do seem to be re-

read more than most—obsessively, some would claim. One respondent claimed to have read *The Secret Island* about fifty times (Frith quotes a girl who read the school stories about twenty-times each - 1985, p. 117).

Table A3–6 Percentages discussing Blyton's books

	Whole sample	Adults	Children
Sometimes	40.8	47.3	35.7
Rarely	23.8	18.4	28.0
Never	22.6	13.0	30.2
Frequently	10.7	18.2	4.9

When it comes to discussing Blyton's books with others, something that 40.8% did some of the time, there are again interesting differences between adult and child populations, with the latter far less likely to engage in this activity. Perhaps books are just less central to child culture than they used to be, with TV and computers taking over. This said, Blyton's books seem more likely to be discussed than most, especially as they often formed the basis for other activities (see below). There are also interesting sex differences, with females being far more likely to discuss the works (58.4% of females discussed them sometimes or frequently, as opposed to 40.1% of males; 31.8% of males said they never discussed them, whereas only 17% of females said this).

Table A3–7 Percentages doing other things than reading Blyton's books

	Whole sample	Adults	Children
Write	30.9	29.6	31.8
Fantasise	29.0	47.5	14.5
Clubs	25.8	37.4	16.7
Games	21.1	28.1	15.7
Emulate	12.5	15.8	11.4
Re-enact	11.9	13.8	8.8

There are substantial differences when it comes to doing things other than reading the books. Though writing is overall the most popular activity, this conceals vast differences in two other categories: fantasising, which was far more frequently pursued by adults (47.5%) than children (14.5%). There are many possible explanations for this, either connected with wider society (e.g. the influence of TV; changes in permissible leisure activities for children) or with other books (more choice nowadays)—or, of course, an interaction between the two (e.g. fantasizing about *Star Wars*). It is also possible that the adults' recollection is inaccurate. The other activities—as might be expected—were also less practised by today's children, perhaps a reflection of their datedness. Writing was the only activity that had increased over time—though only minimally; whether this could be a result of educational practices, or leisure, is unknown, though instances of each were discovered.

The first books read seem not to have changed very much over the generations—the first five titles being the same, with 'Noddy', predictably, first, but only just pipping the 'Famous Five' and 'Faraway Tree' series (i.e. this includes the three 'Faraway Tree' books, and *The Enchanted Wood*; if these were taken separately, the Faraway Tree would still be in third place (8.8%), with *The Enchanted Wood* in sixth (2.9%)). After this, things change more. The whole sample mentioned eighty-nine different titles, but five were not by Blyton. The consistency of numbers mentioned between adults and children was remarkable: adults named fifty-six, children, fifty-five (eighty-nine titles in all), although six of the latter were not by Blyton. *Peter Rabbit* scored best in this non-category, coming equal tenth in popularity!

Table A3--8 First books read, in order of popularity, in percentages

	Title	Whole sample	Adults	Children
1	Noddy	22.1	24.2 (1)	22.7 (1)
2	Five	20.0	16.6 (2)	20.4 (2)
3	Faraway Tree +	11.7	8.0 (3)	14.5 (3)
4	Secret Seven	8.6	7.3 (4)	9.6 (4)
5	Wishing Chair	3.9	4.2 (5)	3.7 (5)
6=	Adventure	2.1	3.4 (6)	1.0 (10=)
6=	Amelia Jane	2.1	1.0 (12=)	2.9 (6)
8=	Brer Rabbit	1.7	3.1 (7)	
8=	Bedtime Stories	1.7	1.6 (10=)	1.8 (7)
10	Findouters	1.5	2.1 (9)	
11=	Mr. Meddle	1.3	1.0 (14=)	1.4 (8)
11=	Mr Pinkwhistle	1.3	1.6 (10=)	1.0 (10)
13	Malory	1.1	1.0 (12=)	1.2 (9)
14	Sunny Stories	1.0	2.9 (8)	
	Three Golliwogs		1.3 (12=)	
	Secret Island		1.3 (12=)	
	Enid Blyton Story Book		0.5 (16)	
	Mr. Galliano's		0.5 (16)	
	Naughtiest Girl		0.5 (16)	
	Pip		0.5 (16)	
	'R' Mysteries		0.5 (16)	
	Mr Twiddle		0.5 (16)	1.0 (10)

FAVOURITE CHARACTERS

Table A3--9 Favourite Characters, whole sample, ranked by percentage, with comparisons according to Sex

Whole sample	Name	F	M
1 (21.5)	George	1	3
2 (8.8)	Noddy	5	2
3 (8.4)	Timmy	3	1
4 (5.5)	Fatty	7	4
5 (5.2)	Moon-Face	2	10
6 (4.5)	Julian	7	5
7 (3.9)	Darrell	4	25
8 (3.2)	Big-Ears	11	7
9 (2.7)	Elizabeth	6	12
10 (2.6)	Dick	15	6
11 (1.8)	Saucepan	9	17
12 (1.5)	Meddle	15	12
13=(1.4)	Anne	10	-
13=(1.4)	Barney	21	9
13=(1.4)	Brer Rabbit	23=	7
16=(1.3)	Amelia	12	-
16=(1.3)	Pinkwhistle	12	-
18=(1.2)	Kiki	18	16
18=(1.2)	Scamper	12	-
20 (1.1)	Quentin	29	10
21=(0.9)	Bessie	17	-
21=(0.9)	Peter	23	12
21=(0.9)	Snubby	18	17
24=(0.8)	Goon	29	12
24=(0.8)	Susan	18	-

Overall George is the most popular Famous Five character, chosen by one in five respondents. In second place, but a long way behind is Noddy (8.8%), who is only just ahead of George's canine companion, Timmy (8.4%). Perhaps even

more surprising are the positions of the next two: Fatty from the 'Five-Find-Outers' in fourth, followed by Moon-Face from the 'Faraway Tree' books. All these are ahead of Julian (4.5%), who, himself was ahead of the other two Five members: Dick in tenth place (2.6 %), and Anne in thirteenth (1.4%). Note that Quentin himself creeps in in twentieth place. Pets are definitely popular, with two others (Kiki and Scamper), besides Timmy, in the top twenty-five. In the case of Kiki, the parrot is the only one of the 'Adventure' series mentioned; also Scamper seems to be more popular than the only Seven member mentioned—Peter; but note that he himself is only just ahead of Susan: though always banished by the Seven, she is looked on more favourably by readers. A similar position obtains with the Find-Outers, where the only other member mentioned is not one of the gang but 'Goon', their adversary, the buffoonish policeman.

The sex-differences are particularly interesting here. First, the males mentioned only half as many characters as the females (42 as opposed to 83). George, understandably, is less popular with males than females, but she is still very popular—with one in ten males nominating her as their favourite—ahead of either Julian or Dick. However, Timmy was more popular with males than any human character. Noddy, though, is the males' favourite. To show the differences between the sexes more clearly, below are tabulated their respective orderings, with percentages.

Certain characters were more popular with particular age-groups. Thus George is most popular with those in the 55-64 group (who would have been children in the 1940s when George first appeared). She is least popular—comparatively speaking—with today's children. Many of this group, interestingly, have grown up with the revised Fives, where all join in the washing-up. It may be that George's subversiveness has been weakened, or, that, for today's children, her tomboyishness is less unorthodox. Julian's popularity follows a similar pattern, whereas Timmy's is the reverse—being most popular with the youngest readers. The same was true of Noddy and Moon-Face, both very popular with the younger children.

Table A3--10 Favourite Characters, in order of preference by Females

F	Name	M
1	George	3
2	Moon-Face	10
3	Timmy ·	1
4	Darrell	25
5	Noddy	2
6	Elizabeth	12
7=	Julian	5
7=	Fatty	4
9	Saucepan	17
10	Anne	-
11	Big-Ears	7
12=	Amelia	-
12=	Pinkwhistle	-
12=	Scamper	-
15=	Dick	6
15=	Meddle	12
17	Bessie	-
18=	Kiki	16
18=	Snubby	17
18=	Susan	-
21=	Barney	9
21=	O'Sullivan	-
23=	Brer Rabbit	7
23=	Fanny	17
23=	Joanne	-
23=	Peter	12
23=	Sally	-
23=	Silky	-
29=	Bobby	-
29=	Golliwog	25
29=	Goon	12

[Table A3-10 cont.]		
29=	Mollie	-
29=	Patricia	-
29=	Quentin	10
29=	Twiddle	25

Table A3--11 Favourite Characters, in order of preference by Males

M	Name	F
1	Timmy	3
2	Noddy	5
3	George	1
4	Fatty	7=
5	Julian	7=
6	Dick	15
7=	Big-Ears	11
7=	Brer Rabbit	23
9	Barney	21
10=	Moon-Face	2
10=	Quentin	29
12=	Elizabeth	6
12=	Goon	29=
12=	Jack (Adventure)	36=
12=	Meddle	15=
12=	Peter	23
17=	Fanny	23=
17=	Jack (Seven)	50=
17=	Janet	36=
17=	Miranda	50=
17=	Philip(Adventure)	36=
17=	Pixie	36=
17=	Saucepan	9
17=	Snubby	18=
25=	Darrell	4
25=	Golliwog	29=

18

Table A3--12 Favourite Characters of Adults, ranked by percentage

1	George	29
2	Fatty	9.6
3=	Darrell	6.0
	Julian	6.0
5	Noddy	4.7
6=	Dick	4.2
	Timmy	4.2
8	Elizabeth	3.8
9	Moon-Face	3.3
10=	Barney	2.0
	Kiki	2.0
12=	Brer Rabbit	1.8
	Quentin	1.8
14	Snubby	1.6
15=	Anne	1.3
	Big-Ears	1.3
	Mr. Goon	1.3
	Mr. Saucepan	1.3
19=	Amelia Jane	1.1
	Jack	1.1

Table A3--13 Favourite Characters of Children, ranked by percentage, with Adult comparisons

Pos'n	Name	Children	Adults	Pos'n
1	Noddy	13.5	4.7	5
2=	George	13	29	1
3	Timmy	13	4.2	6=
4	Moon-Face	7.3	3.3	9
5	Big-Ears	5.0	1.3	15=
6	Dick	3.3	4.2	6=
7	Julian	2.8	6.0	3=
8	Scamper	2.5	-	-
9	Mr. Saucepan	2.3	1.3	15=
10=	Amelia	1.5	1.1	19=
	Darrell	1.5	6.0	3=
	Elizabeth	1.5	3.8	8
	Fanny	1.5	-	-

FAVOURITE BOOKS

Table A3--14 Favourite Books, Whole Sample, ranked by percentage

Pos'n	Title	%
1	Famous Five	31.8
2	Faraway Tree Books	11.1
3=	Malory	8.5
	Seven	8.5
5	Adventure	7.5
6	Noddy	5.6
7	Find-Outers	4.5
8	Clares	4.4
9	Wishing Chair	3.3
10	Naughtiest Girl	2.3
11=	R-Mysteries	1.2
	Amelia Jane	1.2
13	Brer Rabbit	1.0

(64 titles mentioned, 4 not by Blyton (e.g. Peter Rabbit, Pingu, Magic Finger) = 60]

Whereas the positions of 'First books read' have not changed much over the years, the favourite books have been less static. Only the Five stay in pole position, with adults putting 'Malory', the 'Adventure' and 'Faraway Tree' series in fairly quick succession behind, but for the children, the 'Faraway Tree', 'Secret Seven' and 'Noddy' are all fairly closely grouped. The figures certainly show that the range of Blyton's books is popular, not just one category: thus, we have adventure, school story, fantasy for both young and older children all in the most popular titles.

Certain titles seemed more popular with different age-groups; thus the 'Adventure' series is more popular with those in their late thirties and over, whereas the 'Fives' are most popular with those in their late forties, who might have read many of the books when they first came out in the 1950s. This said, there was very little difference in the figures for younger age groups.

Table A3--15 Favourite Books of Adults, ranked by percentage

Pos'n	Title	%
1	Famous Five	30.5
2	Malory	11.2
3	Adventure	10.8
4	Faraway Tree books	9.7
5	Secret Seven	5.7
6	Clare's	5.6
7	Wishing Chair	3.7
8	Noddy	2.7
9	Naughtiest Girl	1.9

Table A3--16 Favourite Books of Children, ranked by percentage, with adult comparisons

Pos'n	Title	Children %	Adults	
			%	Pos'n
1	Famous Five	33.5	30.5	1
2	Faraway Tree Books	13.1	9.7	4
3	Secret Seven	12.2	5.7	5
4	Noddy	9.3	2.7	8
5	Malory	5.0	11.2	2
6	Adventure	3.1	10.8	3
7=	Naughtiest Girl	2.9	1.9	9
	Wishing Chair	2.9	3.7	7
9	Clare's	2.7	5.6	6

LEAST LIKED BOOKS

Table A3--17 Least liked books

Pos'n	Title	%
1	Secret Seven	16.2
2	Noddy	8.5
3	Famous Five	8.4
4	Find-Outers	1.1
5=	Adventure	1.0
	Malory	1.0

[50 titles, 3 not by Blyton = 47]

Table A3--18 Least Liked books by sex

Title	Female	Male
Secret Seven	35.8	26.1
Famous Five	20.1	17.2
Noddy	18.1	18.9

Table A3--19 Least Liked Books of Adults and Children, in percentages

Pos'n	Title	Adults %	Children	
			%	Pos'n
1	Secret Seven	35.3	35.8	1
2	Noddy	19.5	17.9	3
3	Famous Five	14.9	23.1	2

There was substantial agreement on the least liked Blyton book, with the 'Secret Seven' twice as unpopular as its nearest rival, 'Noddy'. But Noddy was only just ahead of the 'Famous Five'. Others trailed far behind these. When I first started collecting these figures, the 'Fives' appeared to be the only books not in the 'least liked' category. However, these responses were from Blyton fans, for whom the 'Five' seem to hold a special place. When I started looking at a wider population many did not share the view that this series were sacrosanct. It is interesting that the 'Seven' were more disliked by females than males. This could be because the group itself lacks a strong female character, and Peter definitely dominates (unlike the Five)—a point captured in the title Stones used for her criticism of sexism, *Pour out the Cocoa, Janet* (1983). It was also made by one group of 12 year olds, who imagined George and Peter meeting. She 'would not stand his bossiness', probably giving him a 'Slap ...in the face', a comment approvingly assented to! The strong character in the Seven—Susan, of course—stands outside the group, and was also popular as a disruptive influence (see above).

It is also of note that adults and children are agreed on their dislike of 'Seven' and 'Noddy' books, but the children are far more critical of the 'Five', again, a position I expect may recently have changed. When broken down by age group, it is clear that the 15-24 year olds are strongest in their dislike. It is only speculation, but this group—and the younger ones to a lesser extent—would have been the main audience for the 1978 television series (with its repeats and videos), which has badly dated. Perhaps these influenced their view. Finally, the subgroups themselves also differed considerably in their views. At one end,

no 'Blytoneers' found the 'Five' least likeable, and only one librarian did, whilst, at the other, almost one third (32%) of Whyteleafe Secondary put them in this category, as did over a quarter of St. Rollo's (26.8%) However, the librarians disliked the Secret Seven more intensely (47%). This can be linked to the favourite books of particular groups—especially at the schools. Thus the Five were particularly popular at Barney Primary (the favourite of 46.5%) but not at Amelia (8.3%); here Noddy was the popular choice (44.4%), whereas at Barney only 7.0% opted for this series as favourite (one could ascribe this to differences in reading ages). At the secondary schools, it is also noteworthy that the easier read, the 'Secret Seven', was more popular at the working-class, multi-ethnic St. Rollo's (16.6%—whereas the average was 8.5%)

Table A3--20 Least liked Books by age-group, in rank order

Title	Age-group	%
Secret Seven	35-44	42.2
	15-24	37.5
	45-54	37.1
	0-14	35.8
	25-34	31.3
Noddy	35-44	33.3
	45-54	22.9
	25-34	22.4
	55-64	22.2 [2 responses only]
	0-14	17.9
	15-24	4.7 [3 responses only]
Famous Five	15-24	29.7
	0-14	23.1
	25-34	13.4
	35-44	6.6

1.   There is a caveat here, however. Though the children were largely school-based, not all were. Some were simply fans who contacted me, or were the children of keen adults. There obviously needs to be some explanation, for amongst children in general, Blyton, though still in second place with 6% naming her favourite, has been surpassed by Dahl (23%) (Hall and Coles, 1996). However, this large survey was only of older children, 10-14 year olds, who are more likely to have grown out of Blyton.

APPENDIX IV

REASONS FOR LIKING BLYTON'S BOOKS, BASED ON QUESTIONNAIRES

Below I have tabulated the responses people gave as to why they liked Blyton's books. There were some 1, 178 responses altogether, some respondents obviously giving more than one reason. I have given examples of the way I have categorised responses, below. Clearly, some of the categories I have separated out were run together by some respondents. Thus 'escapism' could be run into 'fantasy', 'wish-fulfilment' and 'imagination', giving this composite category an overall total of 21.3%. Likewise, 'safety', 'happy endings' and 'friendship' could go together (=6.4%), as could 'readability' and 'good storytelling' (13.9%). This said, the categories were created in the first place because it was felt that there were separable concepts in the data.

Certain one-line responses were not coded, as they were felt to be either meaningless, or tautological (e.g. 'because she's the best', 'she's brilliant', etc.). In some ways, the most popular category is quite vague: adventurous and exciting—which could mean that she tells a good story, can create suspense, provide escapism, and so on. Given a more sophisticated qualitative data analysis programme, such as NUD.IST, it might have been possible to make more of the data. As it is, more extensive analysis will have to wait.

The first thing that strikes the reader about these responses is their variety: apart from adventurousness, which was mentioned over three times as much as any other reason (28.9%), there is quite an assortment proffered. And even within the category of adventurousness, there are differences: thus this was a response far more commonly given by children—almost one in two mentioned it (48%)—whereas only one in five adults did (19.6%). The next three reasons are all fairly close—that her books transported readers, were an easy read, and were humorous. However, again, there are differences across age groups. The children actually cited Blyton's humour as the second most popular facet (15%), with easiness and escapism far lower (fifth and ninth,

25

respectively).   More significant for them was the fact that she was a good storyteller, with a powerful imagination.

There are also some sex differences here (see Table A4-5), with males in general enjoying the adventure more (31.5%, compared with 27.4% for females)—a difference that also applied across age groups (see Tables A4-2,3,4), though again, it is more pronounced with children (53.1% of boys named it, compared with 45% girls). Females preferred the escapism, the easy-readability, the storytelling ability, wish-fulfilment, happy endings, the books' familiarity and the ready supply of sequels (for other factors, see table A4-1). For males, other qualities of more importance included the humour, the descriptions of food and place, the books' imagination, moral code, style, the capturing of childhood, and the treatment of animals and nature.

Table A4--21 Reasons for liking Blyton's work, ranked in order of popularity

No.	Category	No. of mentions	% of whole
1	Adventurous, exciting, mystery	340	28.9
2	Transporting/ identification/ lose self, escapism	96	8.1
3	Readable - easy read	91	7.7
4	Humour, funny	89	7.6
5	Good read, storyteller, un-put-downable	73	6.2
6	Fantasy, magic	72	6.1
7	Children empowered, free of adults	54	4.6
8	Imagination	53	4.5
9	Characters	49	4.2
10=	Safe, secure	31	2.6
10=	Wish-fulfillment, dreams come true	31	2.6
12	Happy [endings], positive, affirmative	25	2.1
13	Descriptions of food, places	22	1.9
14	Friendship, relations, group identity	20	1.7
15=	Ideals, morals, instructional	18	1.5
15=	Well-written, good style	18	1.5
15=	Variety	18	1.5
18=	Repetitive, familiarity, predictability	12	1.0
18=	Sequels, endless supply, availability	12	1.0
20=	Essence of childhood, reminder	10	0.8
20=	Englishness, British	10	0.8
22	Animals, nature	9	0.8
23	Attractive books - illustrations, jackets	8	0.7
24	Suspense, puzzles	6	0.6
25	Learning, instructional	4	0.3
26=	Re-readable	3	0.3
26=	Collectable	3	0.3
	Total	**1 178**	

INDICATIVE RESPONSES FROM EACH CATEGORY, IN ORDER OF POPULARITY

Many of the responses quoted below are from past rather than contemporary readers of Blyton. The latter are certainly there, but as their responses tend to be shorter ('adventures'), monosyllabic ('brill'), and sometimes tautologous (e.g. 'Because they're good'), they are simply less quotable. The children were more eloquent in discussion, constructing their responses in groups, and in their pictures, which have been incorporated into the main text at relevant points. Please note, written responses have not been corrected for grammar or spelling, except where any ambiguity is likely.

Adventure, exciting, mystery [340 - i.e. no. of responses]

'...a world of adventure and mystery.' (m)

'Because they were adventures for girls as well as boys, good always triumphed.' (f)

'Because they had adventure in' (m, 10)

'They're thrilling' (f, 10)

'Spirit of adventures right prevails.' (m)

'Tremendous sense of adventure that appealed directly to children.' (m)

'The adventures and the sense that anything might happen (even to me!).' (f)

'Super, simple, adventurous and exciting stories, all the ingredients.' (m)

'...you couldn't (usually) work out the ending in the mystery books.' (f)

'Lots of exciting adventures and no interfering adults.' (f)

Transporting/ identification/ lose self, escapism [96]

'Her way of transporting the reader into a world of adventure and mystery which one always longed to be involved with.'(m)

'When I read them I escaped into them and became one of the gang.' (m)

'It was easy to identify with the characters and imagine oneself having the adventures they did.' (f)

'Because I feel like I'm there with them.' (m)

'Let's see... I had a fairly mundane and routine childhood, especially once I moved back to Pakistan, and her books provided an escape route into a romantic world of secret and intrigue with characters my own age that I could identify with.' (m)

'I fantasized (a little embarrased here) that Mr. Pink-Whistle could one day come and save me from this horrible childhood of mine. I wanted to go where fairies lived and magic prevailed not this dump mundane world.'(f)

'She created a sort of private world for me that I could escape into.'(m)

Readable, Easy read [91]

'They were easy to read, exciting and interesting.'(m)

'Easily readable.' (f)

'Easy to read.' (m)

'Easy and quick to read.'(f)

'Excitement - fantasy - and so easy to read' (f)

'... you could read them without too much effort.' (m)

'Exciting, easy to read, got me used to reading books easily and quickly, attraction of having lots more books to come.' (f)

Humour, Funny [89]

'...they were fun to read (many of them were pretty humourous)' (f)

'The humour of putting one over on the bumbling village policeman was funny then and excrucatingly embarrasing to me on a late re-read.' (m)

'i know they made me laugh so much.' (m)

'Funny stories.' (f, 10)

Good read, good storyteller, good plots, un-put-downable [73]

'They were addictively readable.'(f)

'As a child once I had started reading any of her books I got so absorbed into the story I couldn't put the book down until finished reading. I was never bored with any of her work.' (f)

gripping reading (m)

'Easy to read, exciting, unputdownable.' (f)

'Plot is good keeps you wanting to read till the end.' (f)

Fantasy, magic [72]

'They left reality for dead.' (m)

'The situations which the characters get into are quite surreal in parts (borrowing the wheel from a friendly toy bear who needed his growl repaired as a spare for Noddy's car for instance) and quite removed from real life. I think it prepared me for Vonnegut (who I moved on to later).' (m)

'Pure fantasy...' (m)

'It was a complete fantasy world, a secure world.' (f)

'Pure fantasy adventures.' (m)

'Creative, exciting and appealed to my imagination. Fantasy, not reality.' (f)

'They stimulated the imagination, allowing one to live in a fantasy world.' (f)

'I liked any books that involved the fantasy of 'magic' even the idea of toys coming to life.' (f)

'A sort of magic.' (f)

'Pure magic.' (f)

Children empowered/ Free of Adults [54]

'World without adults interfering.' (f)

'Parents never featured at all.' (f)

'Lots of exciting adventures and no interfering adults.' (f)

'Because the children were so much in control of their daily lives; at school, on adventure holidays, adults were grey characters even though they were often nice or horrible. The children were really colourful.' (f)

'I think they were the first 'proper' books that I read i.e. full length stories of my own choice rather than teachers choice.' (f)

'Excellent escapism; presented children as mini-adults, which made one feel grown up.' (f)

'They depict children facing up to challenges that normally adults would encounter, and yet they win through. They do this by being intelligent, brave, loyal and well organised.' (m)

'Adventures, wildlife, children doing things, adults "in their place".' (f)

'They were about children having fun away from their parents and in charge of their own lives.' (f)

'I liked the idea that kids can outdo adults like in many of the books.' (m)

'Simple! As a child it was thrilling to read about other children as heroes.' (m)

'She used to transport her readers into a world where the kids were in control.' (m)

'The children in them were incredibly competent.' (f)

'Reading them was to enter into a different world, a more exciting world, a world in which children were important, more important than the adult figures who were in charge of real life.' (f)

Imagination [53]

'Mainly it was a great spur to my imagination. I was brought up in Liverpool and we never 'got out' much, and the Enid Blyton books gave me romantic notions about the countryside and joining circuses and living on farms and being at boarding schools.' (f)

'There was enough info and description to fuel the imagination but not so much that you didn't have to picture it in your mind. For example, when I re-read the Faraway Tree this year I was extremely disappointed because half the scenes and people I'd remembered didn't exist— except in my imagination.' (f)

'Growing up in India as a kid, there was no TV. Books were it for entertainment— and Enid Blyton was the perfect fantasy escape for a kid with a lot of imagination.' (f)

I like EB's books because you get the picture in mind.' (f, 10)

'...she lets you imagine things in the book, the books without pictures.' (f, 12)

Characters [49]

'I found the characters believable— and a lot more interesting than my friends in everyday life!' (f)

'Pure magic and could associate with characters and feel part of their companionship overlapping into my life.' (f)

'Escapism - could emerse myself totally and identify with the characters.' (f)

'Escapism and believable characters.' (m)

'Good adventure stories, good characters.' (f)

'Many of the characters in the EB books were, to me, like old friends.' (f)

'They were full of adventure and mystery and the characters seemed so real.' (f)

'Characters were so easily relateable to...' (f)

Safe, secure [31]

'Just magic, and safe. Mother died when I was 10 and I needed a safe world.' (f)

'I have discovered that my own personal insight gained into my childhood and adolescent experiences and emotions are partly due to her books acting as a marker. For me, EB's books filled a need for security and escape from the stresses and boredom of life as an intelligent, but emotionally insecure working class child growing up on a council estate. [parents disapproval about reading them- For several years I read anything by Blyton I could lay my hands on, this persisting until I was at least fifteen, secretly and guiltily reading Blytons alongside such as "Cider with Rosie" and "1984". I distinctly remember discovering "The Folk of the Faraway Tree" in the toy box at 11 years old when in hospital having my appendix out, and loved it so much that I was sorely tempted to steal it when I was discharged home ...' (f)

'Thus children "grow up" with her as a literary security blanket. The world changes, but her books remain.' (f)

'I lived for EB as a child particlularly 'The Five Find OUters'. I suppose she's very class biased particularly the treatment of Goon and his nephew but she was tremendous fun. Who can forget the pantomime cat?...It was a world far removed form our neat bungalow in 1960s Chorley. When I was eighteen I had a breakdown. By this time my sister and I had thrown away our paperbacks. ...Yet to comfort me my sister brought all the F F O again and we had a superb time re-reading and enjoying them. I have O, A and degree level English she never in any way affected my ability to read and enjoy literature of a higher level. Far from it she stimulated me to read more in the extreme.' (f)

'I can remember feeling frightened and excited by her adventure stories, but was never frightened after putting the book down.' (f)

'Seemed comfortable and safe tho' adventures.'

'Looking back, although obviously I didn't realise at the time— it was the whole middle class ideal— big houses in leafy suburbs, mummy who didn't have a job, daddy with a

study, tennis-court in the garden etc more than the actual mysteries/stories. I mean their essential cosiness and safety. But of course I enjoyed the mystery too.' (m)

'Everything was cosy and homely and the adventure stories covered everything you wished to do yourself.' (f)

They were safe.' (f)

'Easy to read - universal appeal, safe, to know you're not alone...' (f)

' ...their essential cosiness and safety.' (m)

Wish-fulfilment, dreams come true [31]

'The adventure, FF, and Mystery stories, and schoolgirl characters were as I would like to have lived my life. I used to read about all those characters full of envy.' (f)

'They represented the kind of life I would have like to live.' (f)

'Inspires day-dreaming.' (f)

'...the children did all these things that you couldn't do and had all these adventures that you dreamed about.' (f)

'Good adventures - dreams come true - magic.' (f)

'Because these children could do things that most children could only dream of.' (f)

' Wishfulfillment (wishes answered, fantasy worlds explored, brave things done).' (m)

'I think wish-fulfilment plays a large part in the appeal of her stories.' (f)

'Lots of exciting adventures and no interfering adults. Wish fulfilment, esp because George had a dog! (f)

'...the promise of a wonderful world to live in.' (f) [cf. Fred Inglis' *The Promis of Happiness*]

'Idyllic (sp ?) paradise for children, to get lost into excursions and bicycle trips you never undertook!' (m)

'A sort of magic - and a kind of wish fulfilment.' (f)

'Easy reading, exciting, all the thing I wish I could do but couldn't, e.g. go off in a caravan on my own with some friends.' (f)

Happy [endings], positive, affirmative [25]

'They were exciting and imaginative and not <u>too</u> real. They were reasssuring and safe—you knew the ending would be happy.' (f)

'Probably because, unlike books today, they all happy and thing turned out right in the end and they gave a nice/good view of the world.' (m)

'I think I liked their light-hearted approach. There was nothing dark in them (no death or sorrow or terror).' (m)

'Each novel had a happy ending so it always me glad inside.' (m)

'Family life seemed so ideal. Brothers and sisters, and friends all got along so well. Life seemed so +ve [positive] after reading Blyton's books.' (f)

'A safe, happy world with a happy ending.' (f)

'They were reasssuring and safe - you knew the ending would be happy.' (f)

Descriptions, of food, places [22]

'Easy to read— fast moving— and usually there were sequels ie. fresh adventures with 'old' friends.' (m)

'Atmospheric— loved the discription [sic] of the island, sea, countryside, meals, etc. Wonderful!' (m)

'The one thing which remains most valid in my mind next to the tension of each mystery is the food scenes. In every book there was at least three mouthwatering descriptions of the feasts (always with ginger ale). It makes me hungry just thinking about it now.' (f)

'Also enjoyed descriptions of the 'picnics' (f)

'Finally, she made mundane things like fresh bread and butter sound so mouth watering. For years i lusted for hot buttered scones, treacle tart, blackmange pudding (without having the slightest clue as to what they were). I got the chance to taste the stuff years later when i spent some time in england. I don't think i've ever been so disillusioned.' (m)

'Her books had an amazing ability to transport me to a different place. Her descriptions of even the most trivial events made them seem so real. I especially remember the book, "Demon's Rock" in the Famous Five series. When she described the stormy conditions near the lighthouse, I actually shivered <GRIN!!> (f)

Friendship, relationships, group identity [20]

'She created a 'cosy' secure world of adventure and friendship.' (m)

'About children and adventure; also friendly relationships = escapism.' (Adult, unknown)

'They took you into a world that you would have liked to live in. One of friends, excitement, and happy endings.' (f)

'I liked the friendship between characters...' (f)

'Adventure— group feeling.' (f)

'The characters became my friends, I am an only child.' (f)

'The main characters were important to their friends and, in the case of the boarding school books (the series I described at number 3 and the one with the twins who go to boarding school), also important to their school ... . Everybody got on much better with each other than the children and adults I knew. ' (f)

'I am ashamed almost to say that the protective attitude of the males towards the females struck a chord— I came from a family of three boys and no sisters, and I suspect the brother-sister relationships portrayed in the books filled something I may have felt was lacking. (m)

'...the prevalence of friendship over evil.' (f)

'...one relates to the camaraderie of the main characters.' (Adult, unknown)

'Pure magic and could associate with characters and feel part of their companionship overlapping into my life.' (f)

Ideals, morals, instructional [18]

'Also, I think the "near perfect" children who appeared in her books gave me a standard to aim for.' (m)

'Good moral standards, and promotion of family values and healthy friendships and intelligence, thoughtfulness and politeness between the characters generally.' (f)

'Definately because "Right" and "Wrong" where [sic] so easily and clearly set down, also good people did certain things and were rewarded, and visa versa.' (f)

Well-written, good style [18]

'They were beautifully written, and gave me a glipse into a fairytale world I did not know in real life.' (m)

'Despite criticism I think they are well written.' (f)

'Because she wrote well, and wrote stories that children could relate to. My 2 boys read a lot of them in middle childhood. The younger one enjoyed having Noddy books read to

him at age 4 (approx). This led me to re-evaluate Noddy. I actually think they are exceptionally well-written! I've got the set.' (m)

Variety [18]

'I could pick and choose my type of book with her. "Malory Towers" if I wanted a school story, "Adventure" or "Secret books for adventure, etc.' (f)

'She was so versatile and all her books interested me.' (f)

'They were the BEST.....there was a lot of variety— school stories, mysteries, etc. And as you grew up you could go From basic Mr. Muddle , Billy-Bob kind of stories to mysteries etc.' (f)

Repetitive, Familiarity, Predictability [12]

'I know EB is frequently criticized for repetition. But I think this probably endears her to children as they like the familiar lay out of the books. I certainly did.' (f)

'Comfortable, predictable characters.' (f)

'Many of the characters in the EB books were, to me, like old friends.' (f)

'Exciting, but also characters became familiar to me.' (f)

'Because the same characters recurred in so many books within a series - got to know them.' (f)

Sequels, endless supply, availability [12]

'Because there seemed to be a never ending source of them.' (f)

'Easy to read— fast moving— and usually there were sequels ie. fresh adventures with 'old' friends.' (m)

'Good for all ages— there are always older books to move on to.' (f)

'Exciting, easy to read, got me used to reading books easily and quickly, attraction of having lots more books to come.' (f)

Rudd, D.H. 1997 - App.4

'Also the fact that there were so many series. Being such a fast reader I always preferred series to single books as I could carry on with the same characters.' (f)

Essence of Childhood, reminder [10]

'They bring back memories of happy childhood days.' (f)

'They enriched my childhood so much.' (f)

'They captured the joy and spirit of childhood very well.' (m)

'Can relate to them as part of my childhood.' (f)

'I have discovered that my own personal insight gained into my childhood and adolescent experiences and emotions are partly due to her books acting as a marker.' (f)

Englishness, British [10]

'Because of the illustrations and the image of England they conveyed (1950s editions).' (m)
'Because they were "English" books featuring "English" children. As we lived in S.Africa we feasted on "English" books. I learnt about snow and robins and "bobbys" and leafy lanes, etc. from my reading. Blyton did help to make that more real especially as we were encourage to think of ourselves as English, not colonials...' (f)

'My parents are English and as a Canadian—living in Toronto—her books were everything "English" sup As I explained, my parents are English and I grew up on stories about ... the beautiful countryside and green of England ... EB's books to me confirmed what my mom had told me.' (f)

'I could see through her eyes, the brook, the villages, the surroundings of an old English garden.' (f)   .

'And they gave me a deep desire to visit England (which I have never done yet, but I still have the desire).' (m)

'Yes, we related to "chin up", "play the game" and saying "blow" when things were not going too well. Many of us have been disappointed on visits to the UK because it is not Enid-Blyton'ish at all.' (m)

'I think she wrote some brilliant fantasy books that she really managed to bring to life.' (f, 16)

Animals, Nature [9]

'Because there [sic] brilliant Animals (f, 8)

'The nature stories taught me so much.' (f)

'Nature books etc very informative and interesting.' (f)

Attractive books— illustrations, jackets [8]

'Attractively marketed with good illustrations and dustjackets.' (f)

'Because of the illustrations and the image of England they conveyed (1950s editions).' (m)
'The illustrations— in a very unillustrated world.' (f)

Suspense, Puzzles [6]

'...they always had an element of surprise, excitement and mystery, and kept you guessing

what would happen.' (f)

'Parents never featured at all; you couldn't (usually) work out the ending in the mystery

books.' (f)

Learning, instructional [4]

'They were fun, easy to read, ADVENTUROUS, and a great way to learn/improve English

vocabulary painlessly :-).' (f)

'The nature stories taught me so much.' (f)

Re-Readable

'Yes, I frequently read her books again. I probably read The Secret Island 50 times.' (f)

Rereading? 'frequently when I was in my teens. I think teenagers need to fall back on

things that are associated with their childhood, because they imply security/safety/comfort.'

(f)

Collectable [3]

'EB books to me, as a child, were the "creme dela creme". Birthdays and Christmas always

ment [sic] another book for my bookshelf. Enid's books were more appreciated (if only to

have them on my bookshelf).' (f)

AGE AND SEX DIFFERENCES IN REASONS FOR POPULARITY OF BLYTON'S BOOKS
Table A4--22 Reasons for liking Blyton's books, Adult vs Child, with percentages

	Category	Children	Adults
1.	Adventurous, Exciting, Thrilling	172 (48.0)	149 (19.6)
2.	Transporting self, identification, escapism	8 (2.2)	88 (11.6)
3.	Easy Read, Promotes reading	15 (4.2)	76 (10.0)
4.	Humour, Funny, Amusing	54 (15.0)	23 (3.0)
5.	Good Read, Un-put-downable	28 (7.8)	44 (6.2)
6.	Fantasy, Magic	15 (4.2)	56 (7.4)
7.	Imagination	17 (4.7)	35 (4.6)
8.	Children empowered	4 (1.1)	50 (6.6)
9.	Characters	11 (3.1)	37 (4.9)
10.	Safe, Secure	3 (0.8)	28 (3.7)
11.	Wish-fulfilment, Dreams come true	2 (0.6)	29 (3.8)
12.	Happy Endings, Positive, Affirmative	6 (1.7)	29 (3.8)
13.	Descriptions of Food, Place	-	22 (2.9)
14.	Friendship, Relationships	-	19 (2.5)
15.	Ideals, Morals, Instructional	-	18 (2.4)
16.	Well-written, Good style	8 (2.2)	10 (1.3)
17.	Many sequels, Good supply, Availability	-	12 (1.6)
18.	Repetitive, Familiar, Predictable	-	12 (1.6)
19.	Variety of types	9 (2.5)	7 (0.9)
20.	Childhood reminder, Captures essence of childhood	1 (0.3)	9 (1.2)
21.	Nature, Animals	2 (0.6)	6 (0.8)
22.	Good Illustrations, Attractive jackets	1 (0.3)	7 (0.9)
23.	Englishness	-	8 (1.1)

Child responses = 359, Adult - 761

Table A4--23 Children's ranking of qualities that make Blyton's books popular, with adult comparisons

	Category	Child %	Adult Ranking
1.	Adventurous, Exciting, Thrilling	48.0	1
2.	Humour, Funny, Amusing	15.0	12
3.	Good read, Storyteller, un-put-down-able	7.8	6
4.	Imagination	4.7	8
5.=	Readable, Easy read	4.2	3
5.=	Fantasy, Magic	4.2	4
7.	Characters	3.1	7
8.	Variety	2.5	
9.=	Transporting, Identification, Escapism	2.2	2
9.=	Well-written, Good style	2.2	18
11.	Happy Endings, Positive, Affirmative	1.7	10
12.	Children empowered, free of adults	1.1	5
13.	Safe, Secure	0.8	11
14.	Wish-fulfilment, dreams come true	0.6	9
15.	Animals, Nature	0.6	23
16.	Essence of childhood, reminder	0.3	19
17.	Attractive books, good illustrations	0.3	22

Table A4--24 Adult ratings of reasons for popularity of Blyton's books, with child comparisons

	Category	Adult %	Child Ranking
1.	Adventurous, Exciting, Thrilling	19.6	1
2.	Transporting self, identification, escapism	11.6	9=
3.	Easy Read, Promotes reading	10.0	5=
4.	Fantasy	7.4	5=
5.	Children empowered	6.6	12
6.	Good Read	6.2	3
7.	Characters	4.9	7
8.	Imagination	4.6	4
9.=	Wish-fulfilment	3.8	14
9.=	Happy Endings	3.8	11
11.	Safe	3.7	13
12.	Humour	3.0	2
13.	Food	2.9	-
14.	Friendship	2.5	-
15.	Ideals, Morals	2.4	-
16.	Sequels	1.6	-
17.	Repetitive	1.6	-
18.	Well-written	1.3	9=
19.	Childhood reminder	1.2	16
20.	Englishness	1.1	-
21.	Variety	0.9	8
22.	Good Illustrations	0.9	17
23.	Nature, Animals	0.8	15

APPENDIX V

Extracts from a discussion of Blyton's work with four 14-15 year old school-children

The following discussion involves two Asian boys, Shahid and Waqas, one white boy, Joseph, and a white girl, Ann-Marie.   It is a very interesting text from the point of view of discourse analysis, showing the way that the discourses themselves help position speakers, and the dynamics shifts in view during the discussion. I present the passage first, after which a brief discussion follows.

DR	[I have just asked them to name their favourite characters]
Shahid	That dog.
DR	The dog. Can you think of his name? ... Can anyone help?
Ann-Marie	Timmy.
Joseph/Waqas	[together] Timmy.
DR	Why do you like him the best?
Shahid	'Cos it's like, they're all human there. But it's got different. It's different to all the others so it can find out ... that's the one that, the dog like, helps them out, and he finds out things, you know.
DR	What about you Waqas - what's your favourite character?
Waqas	Peter in the Secret Seven.
DR	Why do you like him?
Waqas	Because he's the leader of them all...bossy.
DR	You like bossy people, do you?
Waqas:	Yeah.
DR	You like bossing people around?
Waqas	[laughing] No.
DR	No? Joseph, what about you?
Joseph	I like Dick ...
DR	In the Famous Five? Why do you like him?

Joseph	He says interesting things and he's funny, like.
DR	Right, ok. Ann-Marie?
Ann-marie	George - Georgie, in the Famous Five, 'cos she, she's got a dog, and it's, the dog's quite intelligent and everything ...[becomes steadily more indistinct]
DR	Right. Why do you like her, apart from the fact that she's got a dog? Can you say?
Waqas	[whispered] Because she's female.
DR	Because she's female? Because George is female?
Waqas	Yes.
DR	But so is Anne. Why do you like George, do you think?... Is she better than Anne? Why would you say she is better?
Waqas	Because ... a better role, is it.
DR	Mmm? [directed at Ann-Marie]
Ann-Marie	Um. [indeterminate noise]
DR	Yes?
Ann-Marie	Yes. [very quiet]
DR	Right. Who would you say was the leader of the Famous Five...? Is there one, in fact?
Shahid	Mmm, he's not exactly the leader but ...
Ann-Marie	Timmy
Joseph	No, not Timmy the dog.
Shahid	...thingy, but thingy - Oh, what's he called?
Waqas	Peter, yeah!
DR	That's Secret Seven, isn't it?
Shahid	Secret Seven - Secret Seven, yeah.
DR	Famous Five, there's ...?
Shahid	Famous Five there's ...[Joseph whispers 'Dick'] There's Dick and what's the other one [Joseph whispers 'Jack']- Jack? Oh no, Jack's not in it. [Others whisper 'Julian'] Dick, I think Dicks is...is the leader... Is he the one who, who makes, he the one who leads them all on.
DR	It's Julian actually ...

44

[...]

DR   Other criticisms were of 'sexism'. Are you familiar with that term? ['yes' all round]..Can you think how that might be related to her books? Do you think her books were sexist at all?

Waqas No. 'Cos there were at least two females in the group.

DR   What people have said is that the boys do the main adventures and the girls wash up-

Waqas [interrupting] Yes, well they do, actually.

DR   So you think that's, that's alright?

Waqas [interrupting]Yeah.

DR   Yeah? What do you think, Ann-marie? Do you want to disagree with that?

Waqas Yeah, the boys *do* do, like, the most adventure and things like tracing the ...person, because boys more braver than girls are.

DR   (So you think it reflects the way things are.

Waqas (That's the way it is.

Shahid And I think boys tend to like this sort of stuff more than girls.

DR   What, adventure stuff?

Shahid Yeah, adventure stories and like that.

Waqas Girls just help to...writing and all that, instead of going out and tracing people..

Shahid They're not into adventure that much, girls.

Waqas I reckon there'd be more, rather more boys interested in these books than girls. [Ann-marie makes vague interjecting noises during the above, but gets no further]

DR   Okay, I'm going to ask Ann-Marie what she thinks now. [silence] Do you agree with that?

Ann-marie No. [shyly] [silence]

DR   I thought you might not. What do you think? [silence]

DR   I mean, do you think that the girls did do just the washing up, and not the adventures ... for a start? ...No?

Ann-Marie   No. In Famous Five, they all help each- one another in everything, and

...[indistinct]... girls didn't just stay in and wash and do everything, they just

went out... tracing ...[fades away into indistinctness]...

DR   Are the girls the same, in that? Are Anne and George the same?

Waqas   When there's something to climb, a tree or sommat, the boys doing it, not

the girls.

Shahid   And if you on streets you see little kids, boys, mainly boys, doing things like

that - not the girls.

Waqas   It's not like girly-ish things, like that.

DR   But that's why I'm asking because there's the character George in the

Famous Five, if you think, who doesn't accept the way girls behave, does

she? Would you say?

Shahid   [lowered voice] You get very masculine, like that, though.

Ann-Marie   Ah, no.

DR   I mean, does George actually ...I mean, why is she called 'George'?

Waqas   Because she acts like a boy. Her name's Georgina, in'it, really.

DR   That's right, yeah. So does she accept being a girl?

Waqas   No.

DR   Does she do just things that girls do?

Waqas   No.

Shahid   No, she does more like boys.

Waqas   She plays football and things like that.

DR   Yeah, ok. So, are they sexist, coming back to that now?

Waqas   No.

DR   Do you think they are? [directed at others]

Waqas   No, no.

[...]

DR   The other change relates to this character here [show golliwog]. Do you

know what this character is?

Shahid   Jack...Jacko...? [...]

DR   They used to be quite common , but if you read them all now, that person's

gone.

Shahid	Why? Is he coloured, that's why?
Joseph	No. [said in disbelief]
DR	It's related to that, yes. Well that's the argument, anyway. [Show endpapers of 'Noddy' book] Everything else is the same but this person's changed.
Shahid	Who's changing these books? Who's got the rights to change these books? [said with passion]
DR	I'll tell you about that at the end. This is called a 'golly', or 'golliwog'.
Shahid	Yeah, that's it. Golliwog. [laughter, word 'golliwog' repeated]
DR	Is that the name you were thinking of?
Shahid	Yes, that's it, on the jam-jar.
DR	Have you ever seen them before?
Shahid	Yeah, on jam, on Robinson's jam. We take mickey out of people like that.
DR	They're still on jam-jars.
Shahid	Yeah, and we still call people golliwogs....curly hair.
DR	Who? You call them that?
Shahid	Yeah, we call them that. For a laugh. Everyone calls ... that name, and everyone knows that name.
DR	Anyone with curly hair you call that?
Waqas	No, someone with long hair.
DR	With long hair. It doesn't have to be sticking on end or curly, or...?
Waqas	But then, on them jams it's like, curly like, and that's - that character's called golliwog as well...
DR	It used to be called golli*wog*, now it's just called golly. It *is* on the jars, anyway. [...] Any idea why they might have got rid of those?
Waqas	Racism? Can be.
Shahid	That's white people, that's the main one, the main point, I think, racism.
DR	Of her books? why adults thought they weren't suitable?
Waqas	Yeah, I heard that as well. Somebody told me that, as well. One of my mates, I think. When I went to the library to get a Secret Seven, they told me that you shouldn't read her books, she's racist, or something like that.

[...]

DR   What I'm trying to do is trying to unpick it all. Because, why do you say
              they're racist? Or why have you heard that?

Waqas   Because they deliberately [stumbles over word], deliberately removed the
              black character...

Shahid   What, what's the reason, what's their reason for moving that character?

DR   That's what I'm asking you, in a sense, because I know all the answers to
              that, but I'm interested in getting people's fresh perceptions, you know, fresh
              views...

Shahid   I think it's because, if they want to change a character, they could have
              changed a different one. Why they have to deliberately remove that
              golliwog, or whatever?

DR   Right, the one that, let me show you now the one that... [reaching for the
              controversial *N4*]

Waqas   He's one of the main characters

DR   Let me...sorry, let's go through this slowly, 'cos, are you saying, that it's like
              a black character? [Shahid - Yeah] And that they shouldn't remove that
              one? [Shahid and Waqas - Yeah]

[Discussion moves on to *N4*, where the golliwogs 'mug' Noddy, and the new edition, where
the golliwogs have been replaced by goblins. I ask them whether the changes are a good
thing.]

Waqas   Well, if , like, say for Asian people, black person reads that, and just finds
              out that the changes, it will make them think a bit, won't it? Why they think
              they've changed it from the golliwog to the goblins.

Joseph   And a black person might change it back to that [indicates golliwog version]

[I point out that they're all dolls, and they have tried to include multi-racial characters
elsewhere]

Waqas   But that's a black, main character, innit, that one? [indicating golly]

[...]

DR	Does it make Noddy seem any different if he agrees to go with a goblin...
Waqas	Yeah!
DR	...as opposed to going with a golliwog. Why Waqas?
Waqas	It shows that he's racist. He's not going with a black character, he's going with a white character instead.
DR	I wasn't actually thinking of that, but, I mean, that's a good point...
Waqas	But it makes it worser, changing it, makes it like, makes the controversy higher, because, like, people start talking about it more, when they find out that it used to be like this, so if they keep it like that there'd be less of it, less people talking about it...
[...]	
DR	Why do you think Enid Blyton has been such a successful writer? What is it about her?
Shahid	He knows what the kids will think, you know [Waqas whispers 'She'], knows what the kids will like. He knows what sort - He can get into a kid's ['she' prompt from two others]
DR	Interesting - did you actually think Enid Blyton could have been a man?
Shahid	Yeah, that's what I think ...and the way the book written, if you read it you probably think it's a man.
DR	Why do you think that? Is it what you said earlier?
Shahid	It's like, it's like - yeah, because it makes you think it's more of a boy's story than girls'.

Discussion

I deliberately gave this passage minimal contextualisation before presenting it. When I presented a version of it to the 'Discourse Analysis' Network at Bolton Institute, I even withheld the ages of the children, which most people guessed as being about 10. The way the children sat was also interesting, and instructive. It reflects a power relationship that I hadn't thought about the time. The two dominant Asian males sat closest to the microphone, Joseph next, alongside me, and Ann-Marie was furthest away: so Waqas and Shahid established themselves as central from the beginning, whereas Ann-Marie set herself up as marginal. Obviously I could have prevented this, using my own 'power'—as I do

elsewhere in the interview—but, on the other hand, I was interested in how they interacted in discussion. 'Power,' as Foucault wrote on the Panopticon, 'has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies ...' (Foucault, 1977, p. 202)

Where the extract kicks off, I have just asked them about the Blyton books they know. The conversation is in no way normal, or naturalistic. I'm interrogating them—although I had no question sheet present. In fact, I ask sixty-nine questions in this extract, which they generally answer in a stimulus-response pattern. Only two of the subjects ask any questions—and these are the two more dominant characters. Shahid asks ten, and Waqas three. The number of words spoken is also of interest—Waqas - 430, Shahid - 386, Ann-Marie - 54, and Joseph - 38—which, to some extent, reflects their respective dominance in the group.

Let me now go through and pick out some key elements. Shahid responds first—partly because he volunteers himself, being nearest the mike, catching my eye, and responding. He unexpectedly names the dog as his favourite Blyton character, but then seeks to inflate its importance, emphasising its crucial status. One might have expected Shahid to pick 'Julian'—the oldest, and 'leader' of the Famous Five. But, as it emerges elsewhere, Shahid doesn't choose Julian because he doesn't know the character's name. In fact, he doesn't know 'Timmy's' name either, but there is only one dog, so he can nominate it less ambiguously than others (i.e. 'the boy' or 'the girl'). In fact, Shahid hasn't read any Famous Five at all, only Secret Seven. Waqas, on the other hand, has read not only the Five, but the Seven, too—and can use this opportunity to point out to Shahid and the others, his association with a significant character like Peter, commonly agreed as one of Blyton's bossiest 'leaders'.

Joseph then opts for Dick—a male character from the Five, but not the lead role—though no one else has chosen the lead, either. But Joseph opts for the generally less important, more background figure, one who is usually deferential to the leader, Julian. And yet, Dick is also the joker of the Five—as Joseph himself flags up: 'He says interesting things and he's funny, like.'

Ann-Marie chooses George—the tomboy in the Five, the owner of the dog and, the only character who ever challenges Julian's leadership. George is also someone who, for many girls, is an empowering figure—a proto-feminist, as I've had her described. But Ann-Marie doesn't refer to any of this, in fact, she can't seem to draw on George's power at all—though girls have managed to do this in other groups. She only manages to indicate that 'George is 'Georgie', a female, before falling back on the fact that George has a dog—the character that Shahid has already opted for. From this point on Ann-Marie proceeds to praise the dog's qualities—not even calling it 'Timmy', though she knows its name well enough. In other words, she seems to defer to Shahid.

When this extract was discussed by the Discourse Analysis Network, some felt that when I say 'Right' I was being dismissive, denying Ann-Marie a voice, when I was actually trying to support her against the pressure she was experiencing from the two Asian males.

Nevertheless, Ann-Marie becomes silent, so that when I ask her the next question, it is Waqas who replies, repeatedly. He is not replying 'on her behalf', I would suggest, but instead he is engaging in what Liz Stanley (1990) calls 'doing sexism'. In other words, he is not just saying 'Because she's female' for information; rather, he is demonstrating what being female is, or should be, in his terms: it is being in the background, being spoken for. Words here are very effectively reproducing social relations.

There's a lot more in this, but I'd like to move on to the next section, where Shahid takes the lead in telling me who the leader is. Unfortunately, he just doesn't possess the information. Again, we have Ann-Marie supporting him by suggesting 'Timmy'—the character he chose earlier, which she then went on to praise. Waqas tries to bring in his favourite character, the leader of the Seven, Peter, which gives Shahid a chance to correct Waqas, and to move away from my initial question—but I bring it back.

Joseph's interjections here are particularly interesting. He seems to be acting out Dick's role—that of joker—most adeptly. Though he might only say a few words, they are effective. Whilst Joseph cannot directly challenge the power of the Shahid and Waqas, he

can undermine it with some superior knowledge (a good example of why Foucault always linked 'power/knowledge'). So, we find Shahid coming up with the name 'Dick' first, in response to Joseph's prompting. Shahid then responds to Joseph's suggestion of 'Jack'—who is in the Secret Seven, not the Five—as Shahid realises. But he doesn't pick up on their whispers of 'Julian', surprisingly, even though this eventually becomes quite a sustained chorus. The reason Shahid ignores them is, I think, that he is now suspicious of a 'wind-up', knowing that he has already been fed the name 'Jack' wrongly. So, he sticks with the one character he knows is in the Five.

The next section discusses 'sexism' more explicitly. It is certainly here in the content, but it is also implicit, being demonstrated chiefly by Waqas. Interestingly Waqas denies any sexism in the books, simply because there are two girls to the two boys—unlike, of course, this interview, where Ann-Marie is on her own. However, when I move on to the issue of washing up, Waqas asserts that it is appropriate that girls do this. I try to bring in Ann-Marie, but again, Waqas blocks her, answering my questions on her behalf. Shahid then joins in. Waqas even tries to appropriate the books that Ann-Marie has read and enjoyed more than any of them, with his comment, 'I reckon there'd be more, rather more boys interested in these books than girls.' (This is also something to which Shahid returns at the very end of the transcript, after he'd started talking about Blyton as a male.)

When I finally insist on some space being made for Ann-Marie, and after much prompting, she makes a statement, only to dry up again. At my next question, again addressed to Ann-Marie, Waqas leaps in, supported by Shahid. Waqas even uses the term 'girly-ish' to downgrade certain activities even further. This leaves me to support George as a strong, independent character. But Shahid suggests that such behaviour is dubious in a girl. And Waqas continues to field my questions ('No')—effectively closing off the subject.

Before moving on from this issue, it is worth noting that this group, like others, should have had two girls to two boys—as the other groups did—but one girl was absent, so a boy took her place. (I only learnt this later from the teacher, when telling her about this interview. Apparently Ann-Marie, an expert and keen supporter of the Five, had pleaded with an Asian girlfriend to accompany her, but the latter had refused—a fact also of note.)

I then moved on to discuss 'golliwogs'. This group is particularly interesting in that the children knew that there is some connection between Blyton and racism—as Shahid flags up, much to Joseph's disbelief, and also, as Waqas admits he has been told, though he isn't sure why. Waqas suggests that they are so because the black character has been removed. This is repeated in the following lines, but as is clear, I don't really register this till my double-take. The conversation continues in this vein—which I've edited—till it is made explicit by Waqas.

The other point of note is that the term 'golliwog' did not signify quite the same meaning for these children: it can still be used as an insult, but it is the *hair* rather than the *colour* of the doll that has become the key signifier.

This brief discussion of a very rich text should demonstrate a number of points, the main one being that words are not innocent purveyors of underlying meaning. They are always, in Bakhtin's terms 'answering words', part of an ongoing dialogue. The power relationships here are more explicit than in most texts, and there are several instances where the words vividly mirror the discursive practice itself (sexist put-downs, in particular). Lastly, the extract shows how important it is to go beyond the text itself. For example, the knowledge I gained from the teacher regarding the way this particular interview situation had arisen; plus, the knowledge that Ann-Marie was actually a devotee of the Famous Five—something that would certainly not be gleaned from the text itself.

INDEX OF NAMES & TITLES

Please note, the index, commencing on the next page, covers the
main sequence of chapters only, not the Appendices. As the
latter are separately paginated, this would only lead to
confusion.

INDEX OF NAMES AND TITLES