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Bob Dixon

The nice, the naughty and the nasty: the tiny world of Enid Blyton

Enid Blyton is less a writer than a whole industry, a phenomenon without parallel in the world of children's literature. Throughout her lengthy writing life books bearing her name poured out unendingly and even now something like two hundred titles are more or less constantly in print. Altogether she published around four hundred titles. Sales are correspondingly large: in 1968, the year of her death, the 'Noddy' books had sold more than eleven million copies and the 'Famous Five' titles totalled a sale of about three million in British editions alone. In the same year she was also the twelfth most-translated author in the world, with three hundred and ninety-nine translations, coming ahead of authors such as Dickens, Zola and Hans Christian Anderson, and has recently risen to third place behind Lenin and the Bible.

Attempts to evaluate Enid Blyton's work have, so far, and in the main, not gone very far beyond the level of criticism of language and structure in the stories. Certainly, a study of such elements is very revealing but here I wish to concentrate mainly on attitudes and values in the content of this writer's work.

Enid Blyton, unlike most of her adult supporters and apologists, has no doubt whether she exerts any influence in her work. In her foreword to a complete list of those of her books which had been published up to about 1951, she makes her views quite plain:

I do not write merely to entertain, as most writers for adults can quite legitimately do. My public do not possess matured minds – what is said to them in books they are apt to believe and follow, for they

are credulous and immature. Therefore I am also a teacher and a guide (I hope) as well as an entertainer and bringer of pleasure. A best-selling writer for children (particularly the younger ages) wields an enormous influence. I am a mother, and I intend to use that influence wisely, no matter if I am, at times, labelled 'moralist' or even 'preacher'. And my public, bless them, feel in my books a sense of security, an anchor, a sure knowledge that right is always right, and that such things as courage and kindness deserve to be emulated. Naturally, the morals or ethics are *intrinsic* to the story – and therein lies their true power.

In her own commentaries upon her work, Enid Blyton repeatedly assures us that she loves children. It follows, she has asserted more than once and perhaps rather defensively, that she must therefore write for every age group and write every type of book. Therefore, there are books, if not series of books, in every conventional category: adventure, school stories, mysteries, circus tales, nursery stories and so on. The fact that the stories can be categorized in such a way, however, tends to suggest that the adventitious and trivial elements are uppermost. It is worth noting here that Enid Blyton did not believe in including material in her stories which would, in her estimation, be painful or disturbing to children.

Enid Blyton
*The Story of
My Life*

In her autobiography written for children and published around 1952 Enid Blyton further elaborates upon her aims and objectives in her work:

. . . all the Christian teaching I had, in church or Sunday school or in my reading, has coloured every book I have written for you . . . most of you could write down perfectly correctly all the things that I believe in and stand for – you have found them in my books, and a writer's books are always a faithful reflection of himself.

At the end of this book Enid Blyton feels able to state:

I am sure that you know exactly what I stand for, and the things I believe in, without any doubt at all.

To complete the picture of Enid Blyton's aims and intentions in her work we have to look again at her preface to the list of books already referred to. Here, she sees herself as having a mission to spread the word abroad on an altogether grander scale:

Quite apart from my millions of English-speaking readers, I have to consider entirely different children – children of many other races who have my books in their own language. I am, perforce, bringing to them the ideas and ideals of a race of children alien to them, the British. I am the purveyor of those ideals all over the world, and am perhaps planting a few seeds here and there that may bear good fruit; 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!). These things, of course, are the real reward of any children's writer, not the illusions of fame, or name or money.

It is not perhaps too difficult to see why Enid Blyton has been taken up in former British colonies where the ideology is, broadly, the same as in Britain itself, even though it is one that has been imposed and indoctrinated through the administrative structure and through the education system. At first view, it is strange to find colour-racialism amongst black people but the sad fact is that many have learnt, or have been taught, to despise the colour of their own skins. With other countries, Enid Blyton's success is more difficult to understand though it rather depends upon which of her books have been translated into the languages in question. It is certainly difficult to imagine how the 'Famous Five' books, for instance, would come across to a Russian reader.

This series is, in fact, typical of Enid Blyton's writing for older children and it will repay us to consider it in some detail. There are twenty-one 'Famous Five' adventures and all the stories have the same basic characters. *Five Fall into Adventure*, from which the following extract is taken, was the ninth in the series and was first published in 1950. Along with all the others, it is still in print, after numerous editions and impressions, though the Famous Five Club, which children once could join, seems now to have lapsed. The 'Five' are: Julian, aged 12; Dick, his brother, aged 11; Anne, their sister, aged 10; Georgina, aged 11, who is cousin to the other three and who only answers to George as she insists on being thought of as a boy; and Timmy, George's dog.

In this particular story, the Five are drawn into an adventure when some unspecified 'papers' are stolen from George's father's study. He is a famous scientist, though we never find out exactly what his line is. It turns out that Jo, a circus- or gypsy-girl (we are given to understand that they are more or less the same) whom the Five meet on the beach was used by her brutal and unlovable father in this robbery. Later she is

used in a successful attempt to kidnap George and Timmy. Jo's father is in league with various unspecified foreign agents who have names such as Markhoff and Red. However, motivated by love for Dick, Jo helps the Five and is (almost) accepted by them after she has been given a good scrubbing by Joan, the cook, and is wearing some of George's old (but clean) clothes. It is largely through Jo's agency that the gang, including her father, is rounded up and carried off by the police. At the end of the story, she is to be adopted by the cook's cousin and is to see the Five sometimes, if she's a good girl.

The extract is from early in the book when Jo first meets the Five. Both Jo and George look like boys and, furthermore, resemble one another. This turns out to be convenient, in view of the development of the plot:

Two people came slowly along the beach. Dick looked at them out of half-closed eyes. A boy and a man – and what a ragamuffin the boy looked! He wore torn dirty shorts and a filthy jersey. No shoes at all.

The man looked even worse. He slouched as he came, and dragged one foot. He had a straggly moustache and mean, clever little eyes that raked the beach up and down. The two were walking at high-water mark and were obviously looking for anything that might have been cast up by the tide. The boy already had an old box, one wet shoe and some wood under his arm.

'What a pair!' said Dick to Julian, 'I hope they don't come near us. I feel as if I can smell them from here.'

The two walked along the beach and then back. Then, to the children's horror, they made a beeline for where they were lying in their sandy holes, and sat down close beside them. Timmy growled.

An unpleasant unwashed kind of smell at once came to the children's noses. Pooh! Timmy growled again. The boy took no notice of Timmy's growling. But the man looked uneasy.

'Come on – let's have a bathe,' said Julian, annoyed at the way the two had sat down so close to them. After all, there was practically the whole of the beach to choose from – why come and sit almost on top of somebody else?

When they came back from their bathe the man had gone, but the boy was still there – and he had actually sat himself down in George's hole.

‘Get out,’ said George, shortly, her temper rising at once. ‘That’s my hole, and you jolly well know it.’

‘Findings keepings,’ said the boy, in a curious sing-song voice. ‘It’s my hole now.’

George bent down and pulled the boy roughly out of the hole. He was up in a trice, his fists clenched. George clenched hers, too.

Dick came up at a run. Now George — if there’s any fighting to be done, I’ll do it,’ he said. He turned to the scowling boy. ‘Clear off! We don’t want you here!’

The boy hit out with his right fist and caught Dick unexpectedly on the jawbone. Dick looked astounded. He hit out, too, and sent the tousle-headed boy flying.

This and the following illustrations in this article are by Eileen Soper from *Five Fall into Adventure*.



'Yah, Coward!' said the boy, holding his chin tenderly. 'Hitting someone smaller than yourself! I'll fight that first boy, but I won't fight *you*.'

'You can't fight him,' said Dick. 'He's a girl. You can't fight girls – and girls oughtn't to fight, anyway.'

'Ses you!' said the dirty little ragamuffin, standing up and doubling his fists again. 'Well, you look here – *I'm* a girl, too – so I can fight her all right, can't I?'

George and the ragamuffin stood scowling at one another, each with fists clenched. They looked so astonishingly alike, with their short, curly hair, brown freckled faces and fierce expressions that Julian suddenly roared with laughter. He pushed them firmly apart.

'Fighting forbidden!' he said. He turned to the ragamuffin. 'Clear off!' he ordered. 'Do you hear me? Go on – off with you!'

The gypsy-like girl stared at him. Then she suddenly burst into tears and ran off howling.

'She's a girl all right,' said Dick, grinning at the howls. 'She's got some spunk though, facing up to me like that. Well, that's the last we'll see of *her*!'

Leila Berg
The Hidden Road

It will be interesting if we compare this extract with the following one which is taken from Leila Berg's *The Hidden Road*:

The ground in front of the new flats was thick clayey mud. It was to be made into a lawn one day, but in the meantime the spring rains had turned it into a mudbank. And right in the middle of it was a small boy in Wellingtons.

He had sunk in well over his ankles, and on his face was such a look of fright that Nico called over to him at once, 'My goodness, we'll have to get you out of that at once, won't we!' She used a brisk, firm, cheerful kind of voice that she didn't know she had; the sound of it surprised her, and she thought she must have remembered it from a nurse who had looked after her in hospital when she had her tonsils out.

The small boy was firmly stuck. He didn't know what to do about it. He kept wiping his eyes with his muddy hands.

Nico was picking her way across to him as quickly as she could, on her toes. She was almost up to him, when he suddenly fell over in the mud, and started to howl. When she stood him up again, the mud was smeared over both of them.

She took hold of him and tried to pull him out of the mess, but his Wellingtons held fast. 'We'll have to leave your boots behind for a moment,' she told him. 'I'll take you out of the mud first, and then I'll come back for the boots.'

He was too tired to argue. He wanted to argue, and normally he *would* argue, because he was very proud of his big boots. But he had been trying to get out of the mud for some time now, and he was very tired.

Nico half lifted him, but it was still too difficult for her. She simply couldn't get his feet out of the Wellingtons. His feet held fast to the Wellingtons, and the Wellingtons held fast to the mud, and that seemed to be all there was to it. She was covered with mud, and she was beginning to feel as if she was going to cry too.

But she did her best to smile at the little boy, to cheer both of them up. And she said, 'Well, we can't stay here for ever, can we? Let's see if there's someone who can help us.'

But someone else was already picking her way across the mud. Dressed, like Nico, in her weekend best, she was picking her way with the same care on the tips of her toes.

She grasped the little boy firmly, and took half his weight. Then she ordered him, 'Wriggle your foot now! *Wriggle it!*' He did as she told him, and wriggled. And eventually both his feet were free.

The girl carried him through the mud and sat down on a low wall. Nico pulled the Wellingtons out. They made a squelching sound, like a jelly cut with a spoon. She carried one in each hand, as far in front of her as possible, and brought them to the little boy.

The girl stared at them in disgust. 'You *are* a silly boy to go playing over there,' she said.

'You'd think his mother would stop him,' said Nicola. 'But the mothers here don't seem to care what their children do.'

The girl stared at Nicola. 'Of course they care. They care just the same as anyone else's mother,' she said. 'I suppose you're one of those stuffy kids who lives in one of the big houses.'

Nico went bright red. She hadn't realized the girl lived in the flats. She thought all the children who lived in the flats were dirty and noisy, and this girl seemed so nice and sensible. She was so upset at having been rude that now she got ruder than ever. 'All right, I *do* live in a big house! But that doesn't make me stuffy!'

'Well, I live in the flats, but that doesn't mean you can tell my mother what she ought to do! *You* try running up and down eighty stairs every minute to see what your kids are up to! *You* try leaning out of one of those windows high up there to see if he's still where you told him to stay! It's all right for you, you've got a big garden to yourself.'

'Well, why does he have to be outside!' interrupted Nicola. 'If she hasn't got a garden, why doesn't she keep him indoors where he's safe?'

'Keep our Dennis indoors! And not let him get any sun and fresh air! Keep him in the kitchen where there's just room for a table and four chairs – or in the scullery under the gas stove! What sort of rooms d'you think we've got – banqueting rooms like the Lord Mayor?'

This time Nicola said nothing. Secretly she was ashamed of herself. But she was still very angry. 'You might at least have said "Thank you",' she said at last. 'Anyone would think it was quite the usual thing to pull other people's children out of the mud.'

'It is here,' said the girl.

They stared at each other for a long time. Both of them were covered with mud. Their frocks were smudged and splattered, and Nico's nose had a black splotch on one side. The little boy wriggled off the wall, tearing his trousers a little, and went indoors.

'Thank you very much,' said the girl, in a very icy, haughty voice. 'Don't bother to do it again.'

'I certainly won't!' retorted Nicola. And she went home, furiously.

Here again, as in the Enid Blyton passage, children of different social status make one another's acquaintance and quarrel, but there are very important distinctions between the two extracts and these distinctions arise from the contrasting values of the writers. Apart from the contrived and unlikely device of getting the children together, in the first extract, by having Jo take over the hole in the sand, it is obvious why the Leila Berg passage is, simply, longer. Here, there is something happening at depth, in the minds of the two girls, particularly as far as Nicola is concerned. By the end of the passage, we feel that something has happened to the people involved. They have lived and grown, as human beings do, especially children. The ground is prepared for this with some degree of psychological verisimilitude and even the device of getting the strange children together – in this case, the little boy stuck in the mud – has been adequately prepared beforehand within the setting of a new building site.

It might be argued that taking *Five Fall into Adventure* as a whole, changes of the kind in question do take place. However, these are superficial because they are dictated by the exigencies of the plot rather than by organic, psychological necessity. Moreover, in the case of these changes, such as they are, we have to ask the vital questions of who, in fact, changes and in what direction. The Five never change, in any of the stories in which they appear, in any respect worth considering. In this particular story, it is Jo who makes the superficial change to enter *their* world. Readers are expected to align themselves with the Five and with the values which they represent. Here, Jo moves from being a 'dirty little ragamuffin' to becoming a 'forlorn little waif', motivated largely, and incredibly, by affection for Dick. She is also deserted by her father and thus gives the Five an opportunity to exercise their superiority and charity upon her. The scrubbing administered by the



cook and Jo's dressing in George's old (but clean) clothes is an initiation into the world of the Five on a symbolic level. It is very interesting to note that precisely the same ritual is enacted in Enid Blyton's earlier story, *The Castle of Adventure*. Here, Tassie, a 'gypsy girl' who is dirty and smells is given a good scrubbing in the bath and then an 'old cotton frock of Dinah's'. (Dinah and Philip, in this story, and their three associates, are the social equivalents of the Five.) Tassie takes a liking to Philip and follows him 'like Philip's dog'. We are told, 'She was more like a very intelligent animal than a little girl' and that she can climb 'like a monkey'. Jo, too, is constantly compared to an animal – a squirrel, a monkey, a cat and a weasel – and it scarcely seems possible to account for this solely in terms of her agility. She is 'gypsy-like' we are told, and Julian, on one occasion, 'wondered if she was Welsh'. At any rate, it is clear that she deviates from the norm of middle class, English humankind. Where some degree of affection is shown towards her it is such as we might feel for a pet animal.

Going back to the extract from *Five Fall into Adventure*, we should note that, when Jo and her father appear, it is a case of prejudice on sight, a prejudice with which we are expected to sympathize and which is never erased. Significantly, Dick *feels* as if he can smell the 'pair' before it could be physically possible to do so and, once the smell becomes actual, even Timmy seems disgusted. Although a mongrel, he is a dog of a certain breeding. Enid Blyton seems to have been rather sensitive to smell as she reveals to her young readers in her autobiography:

I have gone into smelly, picturesque bazaars in Casablanca, and held a bottle of smelling-salts to my nose while I bargained with a brown-faced, shrewd-eyed native for a jar I had fallen in love with.

Many people don't like dirtiness but to align it with depravity, crime or with particular races or groups rather than with a lack of the necessary facilities or, perhaps, with a lack of educational training is to miss the essential issues.

For the most part, the Five are scarcely distinguished as separate beings, certainly as far as their social views are concerned. Timmy is usually recognizable as a dog but he is just as narrow and prejudiced as the others. Amongst the other four, the only distinguishing feature is one of culturally conditioned male and female roles but here, as we shall see, there is a certain amount of confusion in the case of George. The boys, Dick and Julian, are scarcely nonentities – it is a single nonentity split



into two. They have a prep school background and are jolly plucky. They know right from wrong and their literary destiny is, clearly, to figure in the stories of *Woman's Own*. Anne is quite insignificant but George is, perhaps, (unless we exclude Noddy) Enid Blyton's most fortunate invention. 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. Male and female role stereotyping comes out very clearly in the extract already quoted.

The Famous Five stories illustrate very clearly Enid Blyton's method

of work. She has described this at considerable length, if not very closely, in her autobiography:

It is as if I were watching a story being unfolded on a bright screen. . . . I simply put down what I see and hear I do not have to stop and think for one moment.

Later, Enid Blyton refers to 'the extraordinary touches and surprising ideas that flood out from [her] imagination' and states that she uses 'imagination, as distinct from [her] brain'. This explains a great deal, for her stories abound in implausible and transparent stratagems. In *Five Fall into Adventure*, for instance, flaws occur at almost every turn in the story. For instance, twice in this story when people are locked up, the keys are left in the locks on the outside so that the prisoners can be easily released by others. If a wall has to be scaled ivy happens to be growing conveniently on it. Again, George, who is eventually kept prisoner in a fort-like place on the coast, is conveniently seen at a window; then, it is assumed that there is a room next to the one in which George is held; Jo assumes, further, that if she can get into the assumed room she can set George free (assuming that she can unlock the door). All of these assumptions, piled one on top of another, turn out to be correct. In this story, too, as already mentioned, George and Jo look alike and can be mistaken for one another.

This is the kind of thing that goes on all the time in Enid Blyton's work. 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. Almost the least a writer can do is to take care of elementary details of structure, and children have as much right to expect this as anyone else. To give them less is to treat them with something approaching contempt. The point need not be laboured here as we are not predominantly concerned with questions of structure and verisimilitude. It should be noted, however, that such aspects of a writer's work also carry implicit attitudes and values.

Language, of course, even more obviously and not only in a semantic or lexical sense, also carries values. In Enid Blyton, the language which we are invited to identify is, sociologically, middle class based. It is colourless, dead and totally undemanding. Considering, even, a list of names makes one wonder where the much-vaunted imagination can be: Appletree Farm, Buttercup Farm, Redroofs, Sunny Stories, Chirpy and Twitters (sparrows), Prickles (a hedgehog) and Bobtail (a rabbit). I

thought 'the sea shone as blue as cornflowers' in *Five Fall into Adventure* was a welcome touch, all things considered but, thirteen years and twelve books in the series later, it was still shining 'as blue as cornflowers' Compare this, for instance, with the image in *The Hidden Road* in the extract already quoted when Nicola pulls the Wellingtons out of the mud – 'they made a squelching sound, like jelly out with a spoon'. It is a vivid image and one perfectly appropriate to a story for children.

What overwhelmingly pervades every aspect of Enid Blyton's work, both fiction and non-fiction, is the insistence on conformity – and conformity to the most narrow, establishment-type mores and values. Enid Blyton never seems to have been troubled by any doubt and would not have appreciated that creative doubt is the necessary precursor to change – but then, she was not interested in any kind of change. We have seen, through the Five, the insistence, at a social level, on English middle class attitudes, by means ranging from the openly didactic to others more subtle, if less conscious. It is time to consider a wider context now and to look into the broader implications of a conformism that amounts to reaction.

Naturally, the stress on the middle class English (perhaps one should say upper middle class English considering the ambience of servants of all kinds, even governesses) carries with it the corollary that other people will be held in contempt, despised or hated to the degree that they deviate from the norm. Thus the English working classes, when they appear at all, are figures of fun, if deferential to their natural masters, and only disliked and portrayed as rather stupid if they are not deferential. Gypsies and circus-people, and even the Welsh, represent greater degrees of deviation while foreigners are, simply, criminals. They are all rather less than human, as we saw in the case of Jo. (It is the intensification of this kind of mental framework which, in political and economic circumstances that can be broadly specified, gives rise to the full-blown ideology of fascism, with its sub-human groups who have no claims to humane consideration.) We are not usually told which countries, precisely, the foreigners come from in Enid Blyton's stories. Specific details of all kinds are almost entirely avoided, probably because their inclusion would make writing too much like hard work. However, the names of the foreigners are often German or Russian. These, though, are white and racially related to the English. It is in the case of black people that the greatest degree of deviation possible is reached.

Conformity across the whole field here is, of course, basically ideological. The visual aspects we have noted, therefore, have symbolic value. The half-conscious belief that the closer the physical resemblance, the closer the ideological identity has some validity, especially when we take dress and appearance, as well as racial features, into account – even though such a belief is not very useful in a practical, day-to-day sense. However, the ideological identity has to be related, in the first place, to economic criteria. Ethical attitudes can only be related to basic economic circumstances though not in the simplistic and superficial sense we find in Enid Blyton's work where the implication is that greater affluence and status correlate, in direct ratio, with increasing degrees of 'goodness.' Although there are certainly exceptions and the matter is far from simple, a consideration, at more than surface level, might persuade one to a completely opposite viewpoint. The trouble is that children, in their reading, are almost never invited to consider this.

The common factor, underlying all questions of conformity, is a strong sense of hierarchy. With this in mind, we can see that the class allegiance, jingoism and racialism noted above are merely stops on the same line. What is fundamental is the sense of hierarchy. Further, underlying this strong hierarchical sense is fear, which is the emotional mainspring of the whole complex. The same attitudes have been analysed at length amongst communities of wild animals and we can see them for ourselves in any farmyard. In human terms, they can only be described as rebarbative.

What strikes one, in considering this mental outlook, is, notwithstanding what Enid Blyton has said, the desperate lack of imagination – in human terms the sheer lack of that empathy on which all really civilized manners and values are founded. This lack is bound up with fear which is the fundamental factor in the whole ideological complex – a fear of what is different or unusual, a fear of the nonconformist and the unconventional, a fear of anything that is new and threatens change.

The 'badness' of those who deviate and therefore menace the world of Enid Blyton is, since she works on such a superficial level, normally signalled in some obvious way as though we have to be advised that they are evil. Thus, they are often deformed or crippled (see the extract from *Five Fall into Adventure*). In *The Castle of Adventure*, we have 'a very dangerous spy' called Mannheim or Scar-Neck, and badness can be signalled by still more superficial nonconformity in appearance. As the illustrations to the stories often show, people of evil intent tend to be bearded or ill-shaven. We may note the 'straggly moustache and mean,

clever little eyes' of Jo's father in the extract quoted and which Dick, incidentally, seems to notice from an extraordinary distance. Smell, of course, as we have already noted, also acts as a signal.

Enid Blyton
*First Term at
Malory Towers*

Enid Blyton
*The Naughtiest Girl
in the School*

Enid Blyton
*Dame Slap and
Her School*

Enid Blyton
*The Story of
Our Queen*

Enid Blyton
*A Story Book
of Jesus*

Enid Blyton
The Six Bad Boys

Certain of Enid Blyton's stories are even more specifically about conformity. In *First Term at Malory Towers*, Gwendoline, a 'spoilt' new girl at public school, is gradually broken in and made to conform through a series of unbelievably petty and spiteful episodes. In one of these, hair, as is usual in schools, takes on a symbolic role and Gwendoline is forced to plait hers. *The Naughtiest Girl in the School* has precisely the same theme. In seeing schools as institutions with a principal function of compelling conformity Enid Blyton is not, perhaps, very far wrong. In seeing mindless conformity as a good in itself, however, and conformity, moreover, to the kind of ideology we now begin to distinguish, we may be unable to agree with her. In Enid Blyton's work, nonconformity in younger children is virtually the same as naughtiness and the usual remedy is 'spanking', especially in a school setting. The title of a picture-book for younger children, *Dame Slap and Her School*, as well as the contents, give a very clear indication of Enid Blyton's attitudes.

The non-fiction work of this writer is not our special concern here but it is worth remarking that in it we find represented those attitudes with which we are now familiar but in a rather more overt, if perhaps less powerful, form. The nauseatingly sycophantic book, *The Story of Our Queen* and the extremely conventional *A Story Book of Jesus* give a basic orientation.

In a wider social context, it is perhaps only fair to mention a story which seems to me to represent the most advanced stage Enid Blyton achieved in her writing, even though it is a stage which most writers of a reasonable degree of social awareness might well start from. It is entitled *The Six Bad Boys* and shows a recognition, albeit in a rather mechanical way, of the connections between some crime and social circumstances such as broken homes and overcrowded living conditions. This in itself represents a considerable advance but, even so, there is no idea of seeing crime in a wider economic and ideological context. Many of the usual prejudices are still found in the story. For instance, Patrick, 'a wild Irish boy', is the one who incites the others to crime and who informs on the rest of the gang when questioned by the police. Interestingly, however, he is not the leader of the gang. Here, presumably, Enid Blyton found herself in a quandary. The leader would normally initiate action but it was not really possible to have an Irish boy as leader; nor was it possible to have an English boy begin the move to deliberate

crime and inform on the others later. Of the six boys, Bob and Tom are (lower) middle class and, although it is clear that their family circumstances were to blame in the first place, they are represented largely as being led into crime by the boys 'down in the town', especially Patrick. These boys meet in a cellar and we are told that Bob is:

a bit above them in station. All four boys admired him and liked him, and because he was better dressed than they were and came from a better home they were proud to have him share their cellar.

The boys are variously dealt with by the juvenile court, and in the last chapter, which is one year later, we have reports on how they are getting along. The two middle class boys are getting along well and it seems fairly likely that three of the other four will be redeemed. However, there doesn't seem much hope for Patrick.

Throughout the work of Enid Blyton, the attitude to the police is interesting and here again we find some conflict of values. Conformity to law and order, understood in a purely conventional way, is strongly underlined but, cutting across this is the powerful sense of class allegiance. As the latter is paramount, it follows that ordinary policemen, who are working class, are neither feared nor respected and are often held in contempt by children who either go to public schools or are even provided with governesses. Normally, these policemen are deferential, addressing the children as 'Missy' or 'Sir' and they appear conveniently at the ends of the stories to carry off the criminals who have been tracked down by the 'Five', the Five Find-Outers and Dog or any of the other self-appointed junior vigilante groups which figure in the stories. Sometimes, however, as Mr Goon does in the series of stories featuring the last-named group, ordinary policemen fall foul of the children. Here, Mr Goon comes in for some contempt from the Five Find-Outers and Dog ostensibly because, in solving 'mysteries', they do his job better than he does. It is perhaps understandable that he is not very deferential towards them. In *The Mystery of the Spiteful Letters*, the fourth book of the series in question, we find that it is, however, a very different matter where Inspector Jenks is concerned. The children get on very well with him and he rather sides with them against the wretched Goon.

Enid Blyton
*The Mystery of
the Spiteful
Letters*

Enough has been said now, I feel, to establish the ideological framework of Enid Blyton's writings. Further reference to her vast output,

particularly as she wrote to very few, and very simple, basic formulas, only confirms the main thesis outlined here. As already stated, Enid Blyton is not only a literary phenomenon but a whole industry. She lent her name to all kinds of products, such as 'Noddy' soap, tooth-brushes and records and the Enid Blyton diaries. These, as also the books (in some editions), give information about the Enid Blyton clubs. Originally, there seemed to be four of these, all with a charitable basis and, for the most part, providing membership and badges for a subscription but in the 1972 diary only three are mentioned: the Busy Bees Club, or in other words, the youth section of the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals, of which Enid Blyton was 'Queen Bee' and which, at one time, had a stated membership of 300,000; the Sunbeam Society, a support group to the Sunshine Fund for Blind Babies and Young Children, of a stated membership (1972) of 35,000; and, related more directly to the literary front, the Famous Five Club, which provided funds 'to help sick children' and which had, in 1972, 183,000 members 'in every part of the world'. To many people, even if it is not consciously acknowledged, charity is a substitute for justice, as privileges are preferable to rights. To take the almost spontaneous altruism of children and channel it off in this way, I would contend, is a serious matter.

Enid Blyton has done her work well. If a parent knows the name of only one author of children's books, it is hers. If a shop sells books for children at all, it will probably have ten times as many Enid Blyton titles as those of any other author. There always seems to be a demand for stories written to a formula, stories which are totally undemanding and conventional, but while children undoubtedly feel a need for security and reassurance there is no need to suppose that it has to be provided in this way.

Editorial note

In writing this note I do not wish to dispute the facts of Mr Dixon's article, though not regarding them as indisputable, so much as to urge a separate point of view: that of the child reading Enid Blyton, or as near to this as one can hope to come from the vantage point of parent and teacher.

The first point to establish is that these books will be for some eight- and many nine- and ten-year-olds their first unaided raids into the

Elizabeth Goudge
*The Little
White Horse*

Rosemary Manning
Green Smoke

Clive King
Stig of the Dump

territory of personal reading for pleasure. The skills involved in listening and responding to *The Little White Horse* or *Green Smoke* enjoyed through the mediation of a grownup's reading aloud are, obviously, radically different from those needed when tackling *Stig of the Dump* for oneself. At this tentative moment there is a need for undemanding, vigorous stories of a predictable kind, and in the 'Five' series Enid Blyton is clearly sympathetic to it. In so far as *Five Fall into Adventure* is typical, the following generalizations may be risked:

The chief bar to progress in getting on with the story will be provided by the language it is written in. One which comes as close as possible to the expected words of everyday will be most helpful. Cliché which offends the discriminating critic turns out to represent security for the young reader who has no rooted objection as yet to 'smashing meals', 'the distant surge of the sea' or 'the shining eyes' which constitute typical Blyton observations.

The necessary familiarity in the feel of the words will frequently be used to convey the unexpected in the narrative. Children know the constraints of their everyday lives well enough and that the best parts go always to the adults. In their first fiction therefore it is small wonder if they revel in faces at the window (though not too many of these), underground passages leading through cliffs and helicopters parked in courtyards behind high walls. If it is straining credulity too far to see these as part of normal routine there is always Enid Blyton's awareness that the action often happens during the holidays when the unexpected is most predictable.

Adult interference with the children's adventures is skilfully confined to the villains who test the children's ingenuity, whilst the parents, who would normally deal with the problems, are away on holiday. Once the exciting problem is solved, adult authority can be allowed back to deal with its consequences, but that, as Enid Blyton knows, is another story.

Characterization comes under the same practical limitations as those applied to language. People should differ, but their differences should be recognizable at sight, and the categories divide easily between those who are well intentioned and those who are not. The latter may smell, walk with a limp and be foreign. These are aids to instant recognition and it is possible to become over serious about the long-term consequences of such descriptions.

Thus it might appear that the clichés, unlikely stories and character stereotypes which offend some critics are the very features which engage the young reader, and that Enid Blyton's recognition of this accounts for much of her popularity. But, again, it should be stressed that this holds good only for this early stage in a child's growth into reading, and that development from this into areas more congenial to critical taste comes about from within so that voracious reading refines itself. I had only to say to my children just now, 'Fetch me *Five Fall into Adventure*' for the book to be produced. Yet Blyton addiction in the past has not hindered them from reading Tolkien and William Mayne now – nor me from thinking that that addiction is one of the conditions for such development and its continuation.

Kenneth Sterck

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