

Loved by children and derided by the high-minded: Understanding Enid Blyton and her appeal

Jenny Byrne

University of Southampton

Abstract: The life and writings of Enid Blyton (1897-1968) will be examined through a psychoanalytical lens to illuminate the complexity of Blyton's childlike and childish personality and her authorial drive. Blyton's biographers describe her variously as being spiteful, selfish and given to tantrums. Most certainly her professed love of children was not echoed in the treatment of her daughters. But by entering into the world of the child she charmed her readers. This was not unusual for children's authors; for example, Lewis Carroll, A. A. Milne and Beatrix Potter exhibited the same facility and had elements of the childlike in their personalities. However, unlike the critical approval received by Carroll, Milne and Potter, Blyton has been disparaged by the critics and her stories regarded as banal, badly written and mediocre. She has been criticised for sexism, racism, xenophobia, class prejudice and snobbery. As an author it is the understanding Blyton has of the child's desire for pared-down, simple tales of tension and resolution that allows her stories to be adored by children and makes their gladdened appreciation impervious to the high-minded disapproval and petulant foot stamping of the literary critics.

Introduction

Anyone growing up in the middle of the 20th-century in Britain will have heard of Enid Blyton. Blyton's output was prodigious – she authored 600 - 700 books and has been translated into twenty-seven languages, with total average sales of ten million books a year. Despite her fame, thousands of adoring child fans from all over the world and wealth, she was a troubled person. This paper will examine her controversial life and work using a psychoanalytical lens to examine the impact of Enid's childhood on her adult self in order to illuminate the childlike and childish facets of her personality. Her childlike characteristics include naivety, innocence, transparency, curiosity, excitement, trust and wonder about the

world whereas, in contrast, the hallmarks of childish ways are petulance, pettiness, selfishness, uncontrolled anger and tantrums.

A biographical sketch

Enid Mary Blyton was born on 11th August 1897 at 354, Lordship Lane, East Dulwich that was at the time part of Kent, in a flat above a shop. She was the eldest child of Thomas Carey Blyton (1870–1920), a salesman, and his wife, Theresa Mary, née Harrison (1874–1950). She had two younger siblings, Hanly born in 1899 and Carey born in 1902.

Enid had a conventional education, attending St Christopher's School for Girls in Beckenham where she excelled in most academic subjects, sports including tennis and lacrosse as well as extra-curricular activities such as writing and performing in end of term concerts. She was popular and became head girl during her last two years at school. Despite her many talents she was expected to take up a career in music following in her Aunt May's footsteps and become a concert pianist. This plan for Enid's future never materialised when her already poor relationship with her mother deteriorated to such an extent that she decided to leave home and subsequently trained as a kindergarten teacher. Enid's brief career in teaching stopped when she met Major Hugh Alexander Pollock, DSO (1888–1971), the editor of the book department at Newnes publishing house. They had two daughters: Gillian, born on 15th July 1931 and Imogen Mary, born on 27th October 1935. Her marriage to Hugh ended in 1941 when she met Kenneth Fraser Darrell Waters (1892–1967), a London surgeon, with whom she had an affair prior to their marriage two years later. Enid's second marriage and family life was portrayed as extremely happy although this was far from the reality; mainly because of the exacting demands she placed on herself and those around her so that she could commit all of her time to writing. She wrote between 1000 – 5000 words every day and this colossal amount of work led to suspicions that she had a team of ghost writers churning out the stories which hurt Enid deeply. She not only wrote every word but also answered all her fan mail. It is almost impossible to comprehend how she did this but her industry was to the detriment of her personal relationships and eventually her health. Even though she was suffering with pre-senile dementia Enid continued to write and had four books published in 1968, the year she died.

Despite her popularity as an author, Enid's work has been the subject of much criticism. She was accused, of snobbery, class prejudice, xenophobia, racism, gender stereotyping, and literary inadequacy. The literary critics condemned her unchallenging stories, her limited and prosaic use of vocabulary, formulaic plots and liberal use of exclamation marks in place of dramatic prose.

When Hugh and later Enid tried to broadcast her work on the BBC the director of the children's programmes was unimpressed as an internal memo of 1938 indicates:

My impression of her stories is that they might do for children's hour but certainly not for schools department they haven't much literary value... (Sutcliffe, 1938).

It became official policy that Enid Blyton was prohibited from the BBC although presenter Lionel Gamblin was unaware of this when he invited Enid to appear on his programme *Hullo Children* in 1950. He was told unequivocally about the ban when it came to the attention of the head of *Children's Hour*, Derek McCulloch (Uncle Mac). Gamblin (1950) immediately replied, 'Have no fear, there will be No Orchids for Miss B, at any time'. A rather incongruous reference to a fashionable and very popular but dark, violent novel of the time that was diametrically opposed to Enid's fictional world of ice-creams and lashings of ginger beer.

Critics thought her stories would stultify children's reading ambitions and inhibit their development as sophisticated readers, thereby dooming them to forever read short, simple 'page turners'. The most pernicious tirade of literary criticism was reserved for her creation Noddy. In an acerbic article, the eminent political journalist, Colin Welch (1958) described Noddy as a, 'witless, spiritless, snivelling, sneaking doll' (p. 22). Welch's scathing condemnation was unsparing:

Her Noddy books also fail to stretch the imagination of children, to enlarge their experience, to kindle wonder in them or awaken their delight in words ...By putting everything within reach of the child's mind, they enervate and cripple it. "*Those children,*" says Miss Blyton, "*who find exams easier to pass and scholarships easier to win, are nearly always those who have been much read to in their earlier years.*" It is hard to see how a diet of Miss Blyton could help with the 11-plus or even with the Cambridge English Tripos. (Welch, 1958. p. 19-20).

Enid claimed, that her simple stories encouraged reluctant readers so that they gained confidence and developed as readers. As Barbara Wall (1991) noted 'Blyton's books are for children to grow out of not to grow into'. Certainly, Enid's stories were formulaic with terms and phrases such as 'The holls', 'hurrah', 'jolly good', 'top speed', or simple adjectives such as 'nice', 'sunny' and 'lovely' employed repeatedly. But she also used vocabulary and fashioned clauses that were more demanding and challenging than the 'Noddy/ baby talk' she was criticised for. A few

examples make this point:

The two boys hurried off jubilantly. (*Secret Seven Mystery*, 1965, p. 28).

George did not bear malice. (*Five Go Adventuring Again*, 1961, p. 188).

He called in a stentorian voice. (*River of Adventure*, 1956, p. 127).

The sky was low and leaden. (*Five Go Adventuring Again*, 1965, p. 140).

Ironically in a recent attempt to ‘improve’ her work changes have been made so that in one Noddy story ‘becalmed’ becomes ‘isn’t moving’! Nevertheless, criticism continued and during the 1960’s and 70’s many schools, libraries and bookshops refused to have Enid’s books on their shelves, blaming her for the deleterious effect she had on reading standards. Her writing was also under scrutiny for being politically incorrect and the damage it could do to children’s morals and attitudes. Noddy was particularly criticised. Enid’s golliwog characters featured as villains, thereby equating black with evil. Working class and gypsy characters were often portrayed as criminals, who were dirty and lived in squalid surroundings that ‘ponged’. Whilst the main protagonists in her stories were upright and law abiding middle-class characters. Housekeepers, cooks and gardeners were always servile, even to the children, reflecting class and gender divisions of the time, addressing the male children as ‘Young Sir or ‘Young Master’. Poor Noddy was again in the limelight as his relationship with Big Ears was ludicrously called into question because they shared a bed.

Many of these criticisms were levelled retrospectively, when attitudes had altered. Attempts have been made to sanitise the stories so that they are more acceptable to modern audiences and sensibilities. In the Famous Five Julian and Dick started to help Anne with the housework and the word gay was exchanged for happy, with queer being completely expunged. Naughty children were no longer spanked but scolded and names were altered so that Dick and Fanny became Rick and Frannie stories. *The Three Golliwogs* was renamed *The Three Bold Pixies* and goblins rather than golliwogs were the evil characters that played tricks on Noddy. Some of these changes were clearly necessary and long overdue but many appear to be pointless and for some such political correctness had become a caricature of that which it sort to improve. Later, publishers reverted to the extant text and it is pleasing to note that, ‘lashings of ginger beer’ remains in the revised publications.

Judging Blyton’s writing by late 20th and early 21st-century sensibilities and values these criticisms are understandable, and in retrospect her racist and xenophobic attitudes would now be unacceptable and regarded as

uneducated. However much of the criticism levelled at her is often anachronistic and at times merely smug - with the easy fault-finding of an unsophisticated presentism or from an attitude of temporal superiority (Hunt, 2002). There are criticisms to be made of past values but not in a manner where they preclude understanding or obscure the nature of the sociality they are supposed to be describing. Enid grew up during the Edwardian era where forms of criticism of social norms even among radical groups were not of the character they are in 21st-century Britain, and Edith (an educated woman) was in this regard an unexceptional person of her time (Greenfield, 1998).

A psychoanalytical perspective

Enid's biographers have tended to focus on the events of her life that have been summarised above but without much examination of her interior life. Reading these accounts it is puzzling as to why Enid was so driven, why she needed the adulation of the public, particularly her adoring child fans and why she behaved so badly to those close to her. The numerous biographies, documentaries and films about Enid acknowledge that she was troubled and complex. Her daughter, Imogen, describes her as insecure but the cause of her anxieties has not been fully explored.

Episodes from Enid's early life are relevant here and they lend themselves to a degree of psychoanalytic interpretation. As Jonathan Miller (2006) succinctly puts it, the relevance of psychoanalysis for auto/biography is that Freud:

...irreversibly altered our idea of what it is to be human. He pointed to something we didn't consider before – the notion of the importance of antecedent events which are forgotten: the fact that forgotten childhood experiences have profound influences on adult adjustments. (cited in Erben & Martin, 2008, p. 25).

These forgotten experiences (a combination of the disappointing and the gratifying) go to form part of our psyche and characterise the way in which we adjust to the vicissitudes and routines of adult life. It is in the manner of these adjustments that on occasion we can see the alarming results of unresolved unconscious conflicts. Our early dependencies are so great that it is no surprise that we so often unconsciously cleave to them. It is worth recalling that we as persons need scrupulous tending for many years:

We are animal so we have appetite and need nurturance. We can be contented infants, or - when our cravings are frustrated, absent or denied - little bodies filled with rage: these bodies (undifferentiated

sensuous regions) need constant care and attention. For months and years with large brains and sensitised bodies (centred on our mouths, skin, genitals and mechanisms of excretion) we live in a pre-linguistic, pre-classified world where we cannot rationalise the social context. And there, from early age to past babyhood we have intense experiences that become forgotten – be it those of rowing parents, lulling lullabies or sights and sounds of more dramatic and intense events. (Erben & Martin, 2008, p. 25).

It is thoroughly unsurprising that this journey can carry stresses and needs and compulsions that follow unconsciously into adulthood. In the case of Enid Blyton; her remembered and forgotten experiences are conflated and overdetermined in a complex that serves her writing, and her public persona and explains her uncontrollable callousness. The most important defining features of Enid's personality originate in the relationship she had with her mother but in particular with her father. Enid loved her father passionately and with equal intensity she hated her mother. I propose that she suffered from an unresolved albeit undiagnosed Electra complex (Jung, 1915). In using the term Electra complex I am not jettisoning the fact that Freud accounts for it under the Oedipus complex but as a way for the purposes of my argument of emphasising, as others have done, the exclusively female side of that complex (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973; Chodorow, 1976, 1989; Cater, 2001). For a girl to mature successfully, in which her sexuality is integrated into her core gender identity, satisfying relationships with both mother and father are essential so that, 'the whole triangular affective constellation, [is] to remain an ongoing part of her psychic world' (Chodorow, 1976, p. 461). In Enid's case, like Electra, she was unable to form an affectionate relationship with her mother and she developed an overly erotic one towards her father and this asymmetry of the family relationship caused Enid much distress (Chodorow, 1976). Enid's psychological reaction towards her parents with its simultaneous hatred of her mother as a rival and passionate love of her father may have precipitated some of Enid's future behaviour and her inability to have normal relationships with either sex.

The close bond between Enid and her father originated from an episode when Enid was about three months old. She had contracted whooping cough and was dangerously ill. Enid's father was determined that she should not die. He stayed up with her all night and kept her warm cradling her in his arms and willing her to live. By morning the crisis was over and Enid survived. Enid was too young to remember what had happened, but she loved having this story told and retold. It became embedded in her consciousness along with other later childhood memories of the delightful times she spent with her father. They spent many hours together planting

flower seeds, or roaming the fields and countryside where her father, an amateur naturalist, taught her the names of birds and wild flowers, as well as making up stories to amuse Enid. Later in life she referred to this period as ‘the happiest times’ (Stoney, 1974, p. 16). Enid was besotted with her father and he became her anaclitic object - the whooping cough episode made Thomas the preserver of Enid’s life but also the person who abandoned her. Thomas left the family for his long term lover in 1910 and Enid rarely met her father after that. In Enid’s mind Thomas became a lost lover, a lost source of nurturance, rather than an absconding father. Enid was 13 years old and reaching adolescence, a time of physical and psychological upheaval that was magnified by the loss of her beloved father.

When the anaclitic object is removed a person experiences intense feelings of abandonment and an



Fig 1: Electra mourning at the tomb of her father (Frederick Leighton, 1869)



Fig 2: Enid aged twenty-two

urgency to fill an inner emptiness (Freud, 1905). Electra the daughter of Agamemnon is overcome with grief by the murder of her father at her mother’s hand and this leaves her paralysed and helpless in isolated and erotic mourning for her father. Enid internalised the deep distress caused by her father’s desertion but she longed for him to return to care for, and protect her but, like Electra, she was to be disappointed.

The dysfunctional abandonment Enid experienced left her feeling hopeless and inconsolable. She never recovered from the psychological

damage it caused. The profound emotions that arose affected her relationships and work at different times throughout her life. In her biography of Blyton, Cohen (2018), intimates as much when she states that, 'the complex emotional damage he [Thomas] inflicted also left deep emotional scars that would never heal' (p. 9). The unformed superego consequential upon Enid's unresolved Electra complex caused her difficulty in acting in interpersonal and morally acceptable ways. Enid had difficulty in controlling such impulses and experienced a never ending battle between fragmentation and integration, blaming and reparation, hate and love, particularly at moments of crisis (Young, 2001). The anxiety or guilt that this causes is managed through a range of well observed defence mechanisms, including repression, denial, projection and sublimation. Failing to negotiate the Electra complex successfully meant that Enid's defence mechanisms were employed frequently and were manifested in her:

- preoccupation and obsession with her parents;
- physical and emotional immaturity;
- problems with her personal relationships;
- poor parenting skills;
- impulsive, angry and spiteful behaviour;
- denial of difficulties;
- fantasies, (Young, 2001).

Enid never got over her father abandoning her for another woman. Later in life when she was unable to conceive, gynaecological investigations revealed that the development of her womb had been arrested and according to medical records it was that of a thirteen year old girl. Psychosomatic trauma had left her in an immature physical state, but more significantly the psychological damage Thomas caused when he left the family home was so devastating for Enid that she never grew up emotionally. The vacuum left in Enid's emotional life together with her longing to be loved and protected by her father may be why she was attracted to both of her husbands who were older and more experienced than she herself - subconsciously replacing her father with another man. However, these men could never live up to the impossible standards she had set. Her first marriage ended acrimoniously. Hugh was divorced and replaced with Kenneth who Enid found overly controlling and they frequently clashed in bitter arguments especially at the beginning of their marriage, but the marriage to Kenneth lasted until he died 1967. It seems that they found a *modus operandi* that was successful as long as Enid got her own way. In her fiction men, fathers and uncles were either conveniently absent from the narrative, or were depicted as bumbling

buffoons such as Bill Cunningham in the adventure series and Mr Plod the policeman in Noddy. Whereas the children are the main protagonists with their own adventures that reflect Enid's wishes for her own independence. She enables the children in her stories, rather than the adults, to overcome difficulties and solve problems. In doing so Enid pandered to children's cognitive conceit and offered her readers an escape from reality by suggesting that they were superior to adults (Elkind, 1970). The children get their own way just as Enid wanted for herself in every area of her life.

To protect herself from the anguish of her father's abandonment Enid isolated herself physically and emotionally. At home she withdrew from family activities and she bolted the door of her bedroom so that no one could enter uninvited. She used writing as way to compensate for the emotional vacuum in her life, and as she wrote she entered a fairy-tale world that offered comfort and insulated her from reality.

She was to imitate this psychological escape technique throughout her life excluding everyone around her, even her daughters and loving husbands. Enid described her writing method, as using her 'under-mind', generated from her ability to tap into her subconscious (Stoney, 1974, p. 207). Enid never had a plan for her stories but before she began to write she closed her eyes and entered a trance like state; she explained, 'I am in the happy position of being able to write a story and read it for the first time, at one and the same moment.', (Stoney, 1974, p. 206). Her bizarre writing method allowed her to ignore reality by escaping into the fantasy of her creations (Greenfield, 1998). Enid's childlike personality preferred the fairy tale world of her imagination in which she creates the idyllic childhood that she remembers enjoying so much but was snatched away from her. To paraphrase Freud a child will always be left with the conviction that its first source of gratification, the mother's breast, was taken away too early (Freud, 1964). In Enid's case, her overdetermined psychic state created an alliance between this pre-oedipal sense of loss and the conscious features of her mind that mourned the loss of her father's unconditional love; also taken away too soon.

Writing became an addiction for Enid and like an addict she needed her 'fix' that came in the form of adulation from children. In her zeal to provide children with the stories they wanted she made her passion clear, stating that she would continue to write stories so long as one child says it brings her/ him pleasure, and therefore her (Cohen, 2018). But there was another more sinister motive as she confided to her daughter Imogen. Without writing to keep her busy, Enid said that her thoughts 'kept closing in' on her (Stoney, 1974, p. 172). It seems that ordinary positive relationships with her own children, husbands and friends could not assuage her need to satisfy the emotional void left by her father. The literary achievement Enid craved and eventually realised helped to

compensate for the loss of her father. She escaped from the challenging circumstances and troublesome thoughts by sublimating her emotions in her work. Writing channelled Enid's energies so that she was able keep psychologically harmful ideas in abeyance and avoid the suffering they might cause her; displacing them with writing gave Enid immense satisfaction (Gay, 1995).

Detaching herself, physically and emotionally, from others and living in a world of her imagination became for her characteristic behaviour. When circumstances dictated Enid would leave people behind, even those close to her, seemingly without any remorse or regret and move on to the next phase of her life with equanimity. Enid was ready to unconditionally abandon anyone, apparently careless of their feelings, who was not convenient to her in what appears to be an unconscious imitation of how she regarded her father's behaviour. She left home in 1916 and never returned, she stopped responding to letters from her mother and brothers and had no communication with them for many years. Despite exhortations from her brother Hanly to visit their ailing mother and pleas from Theresa to meet before she died Enid refused claiming she was too busy. The same excuse she gave for not attending her father's funeral. She readily dismissed her long term loyal friend and ally Dorothy Richards once she met Kenneth Darrell Waters. Despite the closeness that had existed between Enid and Dorothy, and the support Dorothy had willingly given this was not reciprocated when Dorothy needed help for herself and her family. Dorothy asked if Enid could accommodate them when they had been bombed out of their house. Only a few days after their arrival Enid wrote in her column for Teachers' World, complaining about the disturbance the family caused her work schedule. Enid's pathological behaviour showed no sympathy for the family and she was rude about them. Seeing the unfair grievances in print was the last straw for Dorothy; she and the family left. Dorothy did not speak to Enid for ten years.

However her most cruel abandonment and greatest betrayal was towards her first husband Hugh Pollock. Hugh and Enid's marriage had been in difficulties for some time but reached a climax when he became aware of her unconventional behaviour whilst he was away working for The Home Guard at the beginning of the Second World War. Left to her own devices Enid started entertaining at home, having drinks parties and some say, nude tennis parties. It was rumoured she was having a relationship with another man, prior to Kenneth Waters. She was warned that scandal was inevitable, and although this was averted her marriage to Hugh was irreparable and he asked for a divorce. It was agreed that Hugh would have visiting rights to see his daughters regularly and that there should be no recriminations on either side. But as soon as the decree absolute was complete, in an impulsive and spiteful whim, Enid reneged on

her promise and Hugh was never to see or speak to his daughters again. Enid also set about changing their name to Darrell Waters by deed poll and thereafter to all intents and purposes Hugh was expunged from their lives. It was as if he had never existed, lived at any of their three homes or was the father of Gillian and Imogen. There was further cruelty for Hugh to suffer at Enid's hands. Hugh's influential position at Newnes had been instrumental in promoting Enid earlier in her career but her later actions illustrate a malicious streak. After the war ended Hugh expected to return to his position, but he was bluntly told to leave. Enid had demanded that the publisher sack Hugh threatening to take her work elsewhere if they did not. Hugh lost his wife, home, family and job as a result of Enid's vindictive behaviour.

Despite the difficulties Enid experienced with her personal relationships, severing friendships, dismissing nannies, cooks and gardeners out of hand she was very assiduous in maintaining her public reputation whatever the cost to others and she frequently concocted stories to cover up the truth. The childish side of Enid's character was never far from the surface and she was often petulant and petty in her dealings with others. Like a child denied the breast Enid reacted with fury when the poor substitute, be it husband, friend or child was offered. No replacement could ever fulfil the idolisation she'd made of her father's love. If circumstances didn't suit her she responded with malice and spite to get her own way or appease her own bad behaviour by projecting it on to others. When Kenneth's wife accused Enid of having an affair with her husband she named the innocent Dorothy Richards as the person renting the flat in London where Kenneth and Enid were meeting. Dorothy, a devout Catholic, was horrified when she learned of this deception.

Enid was terrified of losing her fan base and popularity if she was discovered to be anything other than the perfect wife and loving mother. She was very diligent in preserving this façade, exploiting her children and husband in the process. Her public image was maintained with family photographs, newsreels of family life, children's parties and embroidered accounts of life at Green Hedges, in order to conjure up an idyllic family life. Enid and Hugh had longed for children but the reality of caring for a baby did not suit Enid as it detracted from time to write. Writing took precedence over her maternal duties and seems to have superseded her children in her affections. Towards the end of her life she disclosed to George Greenfield that she considered all her books were her children rather than her own daughters. Enid had appointed a nanny to take care of their daughter Gillian, night and day, within a month of her birth, and spent a mere hour each day with the baby. Despite this she wrote about Gillian in her column in *Teachers' World* as the 'new pet' at Old Thatch and how delighted she was that a baby girl had come to live with her

because, 'you all know how much I love boys and girls' (Cohen, 2018, p. 36). The birth of her second daughter in 1935 did nothing to enhance Enid's maternal instinct and again a nanny, Dorothy Richards, was hired to care for both little girls and thereafter a string of nannies were employed to keep the children away from Enid during her working day. They were allowed to visit her in the sitting room each evening prior to being taken away for their bath and bedtime story. However, Enid would fly into temper if the children made too much noise and disturbed her writing. She often became infuriated with the shrieks, screams and laughter emanating from the nursery, and would sprint up the stairs and into the room in a furious rage and slap the children. Imogen recalls in her book, *A Childhood at Green Hedges*, that most of her mother's visits to the nursery were hasty and angry ones rather than benevolent. Enid's tantrums and demands were more frequent and extreme than those of her children. Some of Enid's characters, for example Noddy and the peevish 'catty' girls in the school stories exhibit many of the same childish behaviours such as losing one's temper, bursting into tears, or being silly and selfish. It would seem that Enid projected her own childish behaviour onto them. However Noddy is an adult in disguise as a small boy, he lives independently, drives a car and earns his living as a taxi driver but he behaves like a child, doing whatever he wants without a thought for the consequences. Noddy I would argue is Enid's alter ego.

Enid was able to write about and for children with such feeling and insight and yet she didn't care for her own daughters. As an adult with a childish mentality it is unsurprising that Enid could not cope with being a mother. She did not have the emotional apparatus for the job. Imogen didn't think of Enid as her mother at all and comments, '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, almost never, a mother' (Smallwood, 1989, p. 12). Real children were a nuisance and Enid preferred the abstract idea of children, to be kept at a safe emotional distance. Nevertheless Enid did engage with real children such as holding tea parties at her home for her fans. On these occasions and in her other publicity stunts she exhibited a warm, carefree and loving persona and acted as a devoted mother, an image that her own children did not recognise.

Her hypocrisy knew few bounds, she even hectorated and blamed working mothers for childhood delinquency and the breakup of the family. She considered that a mother's place was in the home to be constantly available to meet her children's needs. The social order and moral code she extolled was far from her own family and personal life, and Enid could not pretend the artifice that she carefully crafted was true. Before deluding others Enid was in fact deluding herself with her neurosis straying into the pathological. But she needed to keep up appearances at all costs and therefore concocted an unreal life, living a childlike fantasy.

In other ways Enid was also unable to face up to reality and she would ignore or avoid unpleasantness. When her father died suddenly of a heart attack aged 50, Enid must have been grief stricken, but she chose to ignore the fact and in a cold hearted decision she did not attend his funeral. Similarly, Enid refused to accept that her favourite pet, Bobs, a fox terrier was gravely ill, and cruelly let him suffer rather than acknowledging the truth and agreeing to call the vet. When eventually Bobs died she continued to write her column, *'Letters from Bobs'* about his adventures for the next ten years. This was supreme denial but also showed Enid's unrelenting and obsessive ambition because Bobs and his adventures were very popular with her readership. Denying unpleasant events or facts meant that she hoped they would go away and that all would end well. She created myths and stories about herself, displacing the reality for a happier and sunlit world and reflected this in her stories that always had happy endings. Her childlike personality enabled her to create the magical world that children enjoy where fairy tale solutions to life's problems always happen.

Conclusion

It is now over 50 years since Enid Blyton died and yet her popularity as a children's author is undiminished. She was beloved by children and berated by adults. She was reviled during her lifetime, and after her death, by adults who questioned her literary prowess, criticised her values and attitudes and made slurs about her ability to write so prolifically suggesting that a factory of writers were responsible for the huge volume of work under the Blyton name. However her audience was not an adult one and children did, and still do, love reading Enid Blyton. The adults who read her when they were children have fond memories of Enid's stories, often reading them to their own children. Their nostalgia has been revitalised in the series of Blyton for Grown-ups, greeting cards, and recent Great Western Rail holiday adverts.

Her stories provide children with a safe and secure environment, despite impossible adventures and derring-do, in which there is a clear moral code between right and wrong, good and bad. Villains and bullies get their comeuppance and all ends well in the sunny uplands where her middle class child characters dwell. This arcadia developed over years of living in a fantasy world was Enid's escape and refuge from the harsh realities of her own tortured mind. And yet her life was far from this fairy tale wonderland. She led a double life in which she pretended to the outside world that her life was perfect but in reality she was an unkind and uncaring mother, a mean and ungrateful employer, given to tantrums and infidelities. Her moral compass was not as set straight as she pretended and she would avoid anything unpleasant as if it had never happened. She was hypocritical and wove deceits and lies so that the edifice of her life

remained secure and her public image was not torn apart. Enid's psychological disorder was unusual but is not easily assigned to one of the rare psychosocial disorders (Sharpless, 2017). Her complex is characterised by the intensity of her emotional responses caused by her father's unconditional nurturing being replaced by his unconditional abandonment. Enid's abandoning of others replicates her own abandonment which she elaborates with sadism. She was in agony but also a monster. Enid was tortured, plagued by insecurities and a dark past that left her emotionally immature (Cohen, 2018). No other relationship could displace Enid's longing for her father, and her last words epitomise this poignantly, 'I'm going to my father! At least I hope I am'.

Acknowledgements

My thanks to those at the BSA Auto/Biography 2019 summer conference for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

References

- Blyton, E. (1961). *Five go adventuring again*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Blyton, E. (1956). *The River of Adventure*. London: Macmillan.
- Bylton, E. (1965). *Secret Seven Mystery*. Leicester: Brockhampton Press.
- Cater, N.C. (2001). *Re-envisioning Electra: Jungian perspectives*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Pacifica Graduate Institute.
- Chodorow, N. (1976). Oedipal Asymmetries and Heterosexual Knots. *Social Problems*, 23, 4, 454-468.
- Cohen, N. (2018). *The Real Enid Blyton*. Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books Ltd.
- Erben, M. & Martin, T. (2008). Freud or Ferenczi, Sympathy or Empathy? In A. Sparkes (Ed). *The Auto/Biography Yearbook 2007* (pp. 23-39). Southampton: Clio.
- Elkind, D. (1970). *Children and Adolescents*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Freud, S. (1905). *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, The standard edition of the complete works of Sigmund Freud, Vol 7, 125-243*.
- Freud, S. (1964, 1940). *The standard edition of the complete works of Sigmund Freud, Vol 23*, London: Hogarth.
- Gamblin, L. (1950). Internal memo, Enid Blyton and the BBC, Retrieved, March 16th, 2019 from www.bbc.co.uk/archive/blytonandthebbc/8413.shtml
- Gay, P. (1989). *The Freud Reader*. London: Vintage.
- Greenfield, G. (1998). *Enid Blyton*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Ltd.
- Hunt, L. (2002). Against Presentism. Perspectives on History, Retrieved June 16th, 2019 from www.historians.org.

- Jung, C.G. (1915). *The Theory of Psychoanalysis*. New York: Journal of Nervous Disease Publishing Company.
- Laplanche, J. & Pontalis, J. (1973). *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. Trans: Donald Nicholson Smith. New York: Norton.
- Sharpless, B.A. (2017) (Ed). *Unusual and Rare Psychological Disorders*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Smallwood, I. (1989). *A Childhood at Green Hedges*. London: Methuen.
- Stoney, B. (1974). *Enid Blyton*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Sutcliffe, J. (1938). Internal memo, Enid Blyton and the BBC, Retrieved, March 16th, 2019 from www.bbc.co.uk/archive/blytonandthebbc/8413.shtml
- Tucker, N. (1981). *The Child and the book: a psychological and literary exploration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wall, B. (1991). *The narrator's voice: the dilemma of children's fiction*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan.
- Welch, C. (1958). Dear Little Noddy - A Parent's Lament. *Encounter*, Jan 1958, 19-22.
- Young, R. M. (2001). *Oedipus Complex*. Icon Boks Ltd: Cambridge.

Biographical note

Jenny Byrne is an Associate Professor at The University of Southampton where she lectures in Biographical Studies and Education. She is a convenor of the Auto/ Biography Study Group. Her publications on auto/biography include articles in the Auto/Biography Yearbook 2008, 2013, 2016, 2018 and a BSA Auto/Biography Monograph, *We just gelled – the story of 5/67: a biographical and Durkheimian analysis of a school reunion* (2012). Current projects include developing her work on The Ashington Art Group and Enid Blyton.

Address for correspondence: J.Byrne@soton.ac.uk

I loved enid blyton books growing up. I collected over 100 of them and own almost every title. The joys of second hand stores.

Comment. Guest 2 years ago. I love enid blyton books they are so adventurous great. Guest 2 years ago. And great. Comment. Guest 2 years ago. Children. Drama. Comedy. Children's writer Enid Blyton sitting in her garden in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, in 1949. (George Konig/Getty). Enid Blyton composed some 700 books between 1922, when she published her poetry collection Child Whispers, and her death in Hampstead on 28 November 1968, often rattling out 6,000 words a day at the typewriter. She has sold more than 600 million books, which have never gone out of print, been translated into 90 languages and enjoyed a loyal following among young readers for generations, her characters from the Famous Five to Noddy capturing the imagination and inspiring a t Another book I loved as a child. Children keep the family afloat, with mom in hospital and dad missing. Classic raw material for a Bollywood feel-good movie. Has it ever been made into one, I wonder? The other day, I wanted to feel the nostalgia of Enid Blyton, and so went to the Teen section of the nearest library to find it. However, I found out that Enid Blyton is actually in the kids' section of books, and aren't huge books like I thought they were 15 years ago. So, I went back to my childhood and re-read this book. There's parts of it that make me go hmm, such as Jack Daw being a person of color who doesn't talk well.