

Characterisation of Famous Five Portrayed in the Famous Five Fiction Series of Enid Blyton With Specific Reference to a Treasure Island: An Evaluation

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Abstract

In asymmetrical power relationships when one person is controlled or oppressed by another, the dominant discourses frequently take shape. Enid Blyton (1897–1968) was a famous female author in a culture that was heavily influenced by Victorian imperial ideology and in which the dominant paradigm encouraged patriarchal heteronormative discourses. Early twentieth-century schools of thinking in England promoted the idea that women should be passive beings who concentrate on domestic tasks like childrearing and home management as opposed to males who are active in the public realm. Enid Blyton seems to support and further the prevailing ideologies of the day. The prevailing values and interests of the society had an impact on her expectations and, consequently, how she thought about gender roles in society. As a result, Blyton's depictions of gender roles codify the dominant gender ideology of Western civilization.

Key Words

Patriarchal hegemony, dominant discourse, stereotypes, hegemonic man, heteronormative ideology etc.

Social developments over the first half of the 20th century contributed to a rise in women's education and literacy rates. The 20th century also saw an increase in public awareness of women's social concerns, which Emmeline Pankhurst used to launch the Women's Social and Political Union on October 3, 1903. These union's members subsequently became known as suffragettes. On July 2, 1928, women in Britain were granted equal voting rights. Women were encouraged to work and take on jobs outside the home during the First World War in defiance of the dominant discourse that forbade

this and in defiance of the idea that a woman earning an income and gaining financial independence and security represented a disruption of the natural order of things (Klein 95–6). Nevertheless, despite increased gender awareness and societal developments in the first half of the 20th century, a number of rigidly orthodox discourses about acceptable gender behaviour that promoted submissive female behaviour remained to rule the culture in the years following the war.

Women employees who chose to work in men's jobs rather than take care of the home faced negative public attitude. For requesting good pay and refusing to return to domestic duties, they were viewed as leeches and bloodsuckers (97). Because of this, the dominant patriarchal ideology of the time pushed women to fulfil the conventional duties of wife and mother, to find happiness in marriage, and to have children (Miles 102). These principles have been adopted by many of the well-known and well-known authors of children's books from that era, and these values have impacted their expectations. The works that were written during this time period served as a platform for the patriarchal hegemony's propagation and reinforced "clear male and female roles" (Norton 63).

Enid Blyton, who was well-liked by both boys and girls examine societal norms and morality as well as the normalising ideas of home and heterosexual families, upholding the status quo. (Druce 256). Blyton is renowned for her many children's book series with recurrent characters. Her writing frequently incorporates magic, fantasy, and adventure stories. The majority of her books centre on regular kids experiencing exceptional events, going on adventures, solving crimes, etc. The Famous Five, the Secret Seven, the Adventure Series, etc. are some examples. Many people have criticised Blyton's portrayal as being stereotypical and promoting sexist ideas. Julian, Dick, Anne, Georgina and their dog Timmy go on adventures on Kirrin Island in the first book of the series, *The Famous Five* (1942), titled *Five on a Treasure Island*.

The oldest of the four, Julian, is Dick's and Anne's elder brother as well as George's cousin. He is in control of the group since he is tall, powerful, and intellectual in addition to being compassionate, responsible, and severe. He is dominating, demanding, and fiercely devoted to Anne. The youngest brother, Dick, plays a heroic role and has

good gymnastic skills that aid the group of five in many predicaments. When Anne becomes unhappy, he does his best to cheer her up because he cares a lot about her. The dependant is Anne, the group's youngest member. She often does their household chores while the Five are out on their numerous camping trips. She gets scared easily and despises the adventures the Five have to go on all the time. She occasionally forgets things easily, and she does let her mouth wander. She enjoys playing the "House Wife." The three brothers' cousin is George (Georgina). She is a tomgirl and insists on being referred to as George. She is frequently mistaken for a boy because of her short hair and boyish clothing, which makes her quite happy. She may be quite difficult to control at times, upsetting both her mother and her cousins.

In choosing Julian as the masculine leader of the Famous Five series (leadership is also shared by Dick, the youngest sibling), Blyton confirms the cultural prejudices of the period. The boy characters are given privileges and authority. The book's two child protagonists, Julian and Dick, fit the stereotype of the hegemonic man. The boys' love of exploration is used as an illuminating metaphor for their "manly" traits. When it is determined that they would travel to the Kirrin Island to spend their vacations, the novel's opening hints to their love of adventure. Dick, who is ecstatic, exclaims, "I just feel like it's the right place somehow." It kind of sounds adventurous! Additionally, it is clear in chapter 7, where they want to investigate the wreck. Dick's exclamation, "Well, then, we'd better explore it thoroughly ourselves before anyone else does," is filled with eagerness. (90). Chapter 8, which explains the day the implementation of the plan is chosen, provides another illustration: Upon waking, Dick smirked at Julian. Happiness slowly began to wash over him. They were off on a journey (101).

The story specifically highlights the boys' ability to endure injustice. No setback can let down their spirit. In chapter 9, when the children are disappointed about the loss of the box which they got from the wreck, it's Julian who consoles them. Getting hold of the box is very crucial with regard to the children's exploration, as the box contains the sketch of the castle in the Kirrin Island. This vital task is entrusted with Julian.

Dick's attitude when he gets a wound in his cheek is also perceptible:

Dick's cheek was pouring with blood!

‘ Julian exclaimed, "Golly!" as he flashed his torch on Dick. Can you endure it if I remove the splinter for a moment? Your poor cheek is still being pierced by a large object.

Dick, though, did everything by himself. Soon, Dick's colour returned, and he was eager to descend once more into the dungeons (Blyton 182-4).

As a result, the dominant school of thought at the time demanded boys and men to act in a way that was seen to be manly. That involves refraining from displaying "feminine" feelings like melancholy or unhappiness. They are depicted as fearless and involving in highly dangerous activities. In chapter 16, when the children are portrayed at the zenith of their adventure, the boys play the vital roles. The discovery of the right dungeon in which the ingots are stored, and that of ingots themselves, which are the pivots of children's adventure are attributed to Dick and Julian respectively (171-186). In sharp contrast to these discoveries is Anne's "accidental" finding out of the dungeon entrance: " suddenly Anne discovered the door! It happened entirely by chance. (166-7).

Further it is presented that Julian comes up with a reasonable idea while others are asked to wait patiently without causing any hindrance for him. Julian says "Avoid interrupting me for a moment; wait. I'm considering. When Julian sat and pondered his strategy, everyone else awaited in quiet (216). In the words of Rowland, "masculine" aspires solely for itself the realm of rationality" (136-7). Later, Dick is depicted as much excited to go down the well a second time, in order to fool the intruders and thereby to ensure their escape (217). Man was thought to be led by his mind, despite the fact that "gender prejudices of the 1930s and 1940s readily recognised woman as a being controlled by her emotions" (Plain 44).

The prevailing gender ideology that pushed women to play a subordinate role in relationships with males is properly portrayed by Blyton. In Blyton's tale, which is similar to many other children's stories from this era, girls are given experiences that would prepare them for motherhood. As Nodelman and Reimer assert, In this concept,

"the conclusion of girlhood is not an advance into individual their later years, but into the inevitably status quo of married life and parenthood" (204).

The character of Anne in the *Famous Five* series is an embodiment of the conventional traits of femininity. She is depicted as "essentially feminine in her ways and manners" (Berguland 145). A significant facet of Anne's feminine personality is implanted in her propensity for caring and to be in attendance. This is manifest in the episode where she attends to a wounded Dick: "Anne delicately patted Dick's face with a hanky after dipping it in the water in the kettle. Taking his hand, Anne. She was quite angry at the minor mishap (184-5). Additionally, it is hinted that in spite of her mouth frequently going amok, "Anne was a terrible giggler, and had frequently thrown covert objectives down by her abrupt bursting choking" (102).

As a consequence, at many instances she is presented in the garb of the sufferer. In chapter 4, when Anne inadvertently begins to mention about Timothy, George's pet dog, she receives a kick from George, for which George is scolded by Aunt Fanny. George being angry with Anne for this refuses to take her cousins to the island. Here, Anne is willing to sacrifice the pleasure of visiting the island, for the sake of the boys, as a punishment for being careless (47). The idea of self-sacrifice helps to reestablish traditional female roles and images. It seems that Anne is growing into a "perfect woman," according to the Victorian and Edwardian standards.

Blyton promotes stereotypically feminine home tasks in order to encourage socially accepted feminine behaviour. Anne is shown to appreciate household tasks and pastimes. When she receives praise for finishing tasks like "housekeeping," she feels proud. The best compliment Anne may receive from the other characters is being referred to be a "good housewife." Additionally, by creating the figure of Anne, Blyton highlights the disparate treatment of boys and men and women. Aunt Fanny instructs Anne and George, the girls, to assist her in making the sandwiches in Five on a Treasure Island chapter 5 (64-5), while the guys are dispatched to gather plums from the garden and get several bottles of lemonade or ginger beer. Here, Blyton alludes to a clear gender-based

division of labour. Blyton also portrays the tender physique of girls, particularly with regard to the depiction of Anne, as a foil to the sturdy masculine build of the boys. The boys' exhibit of knowledge is also in sharp contrast to girls' ignorance.

Additionally, Blyton encourages the other characters to adopt a protective attitude in order to promote Anne's gender as one that has to be safeguarded. A woman who represents the ideal of femininity of the moment, claims Berglund (139), "can actually only be appropriate for the role of sufferer rescued by the hero in the nick of time." Berglund's suggestion is in fine tune with the example given in chapter 15, where Dick comes to the rescue of Anne:

She was quickly dragged to her feet by Dick and taken to the centre of the ancient courtyard. Around the castle's opposite side, the guys were on the prowl. There was just enough time to enter. Dick assisted Anne in descending the ladder by sliding aside the well's aged wooden cover. She was terribly frightened. (201)

With regard to the characterization of George, at the surface level, Blyton seems to endorse the emergent and alternative discourse. It underlined how capable girls and women are of engaging in and excelling at hitherto male-dominated pursuits. On the connotative level, it has been demonstrated to be the prevailing patriarchal rhetoric. Throughout the 21 Famous Five novels, Blyton highlights George's resolve to behave like a guy and defy any gender-based stereotypes. George, who insists on going by the name George rather than Georgina as she did in the first book, *Five on a Treasure Island: A Novel*, is one of the key ways Enid Blyton does this. No, she answered. I'm not Georgina, I say. 'Oh,' said Anne, startled. Who are you, then?

I'm George, the girl said. If you call me George, I'll only respond. I detest being a woman. (19)

It is also overtly stated that George abhors being categorized as a girl. This is explicit in chapter 11 of *Five on a Treasure Island*, where Julian asks the "two girls" Blyton highlights the disparities between Anne and George throughout the series. Anne is

presented as totally embracing her femininity and being a female, in contrast to George, who acts like a boy and denies her femininity.

Blyton's essay highlights the stereotyped behaviour associated with the notion that "boys don't cry" in regard to one of the societal norms of the time. When George sobs, pouts, and loses her anger, Enid Blyton portrays this behaviour negatively and ties it to stereotypically feminine behaviour. By enabling her to express her feelings and taking into account this part of George's behaviour, unlike the boys, Blyton displays the expected feminine behavior in George: "She says, half-ashamed, 'I've been behaving like a girl'" (143). Furthermore, even though Blyton casts George in a manly mould, she doesn't bestow George with an equally prominent status as the boys. An excellent illustration is given in the episode where Julian and George attempt to smash the lock:

She had thoroughly damaged the lock with her fists, but it simply would not release. She handed the axe to Julian, who swung it ferociously into the tree. After a few strikes, the lock appeared to undergo a change. It started to droop and hang a little bit sideways, then the lock gave way loudly. (185)

In addition, it is shown in *Five Go off in a Caravan* that while George feels terrible about Anne's lack of a larger domestic role, Even though Anne takes pride in her domestic prowess, she does not alter her actions to relieve this source of shame. George experiences shame as a result of internalizing the social and cultural discourses of the period regarding appropriate feminine behaviour and realizing that she deviates from these norms. In contrast to George, Blyton does not enable the boys to feel any remorse because they are not required to help out around the house (39–40). It is also said that Anne's mother expects George to "must" help Anne maintain the cleanliness and order of the caravans, perhaps due to George's gender. (26).

Additionally, George continues to be in a "false position. Like all tomgirls, she can be "as good as," but this suggests a fundamental weakness. She is never going to be the real deal (Rudd 111). George is only as good as a lad because he is still a man and not

a child. Blyton reinforces this idea in *Five on a Treasure Island* by having Anne call George a fake. If you act as though you are an expert, you won't find that my brothers pay you much attention. They're actual lads, not make-believe boys like you.

Blyton's portrayal of gender relations with regard to adults also appears to promote the established patriarchal structure. Men assume the role of the decision-maker in the home setting that Blyton depicts, while women don't make decisions without consulting their husbands, emphasising the subordinate status of women. The heated discussion over getting rid of the Kirrin Island, among George, her father and mother in chapter 10 is fairly explicable in this respect. George is much disappointed and irritated to be informed by her mother that her parents have decided to sell the island. The example highlights the mother's submissive status and her lack of authority and power while also implying that she is not involved in decision-making.

Thus the familial setting of the novel is a perfect replica of the external social configuration with its emphasis on specific gender roles. Aunt Fanny is often presented as engaged in her household chores and Uncle Quentin is often portrayed as reading newspaper or busy in his study (94). Further Aunt Fanny is depicted as accepting her own submissive role as well as her husband's privileged position. She always answers her husband "in a gentle voice" and often reminds her daughter. This is an instance of hegemony in action, as here; the woman willingly consents to her subordinate position.

Through the ideological manipulation of her characters, Blyton therefore depicts in her writings the societal norms and expectations concerning heteronormative roles in a patriarchal society. The hegemonic practises of a time period include the heteronormative beliefs prevalent at the time that supported certain gendered behaviour.

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