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Enid Blyton
Born
Enid Mary Blyton
11 August 1897
East Dulwich, London, England
Died
28 November 1968 (aged 71)
Hampstead, London, England
Resting place
Golders Green Crematorium
Pen name
Mary Pollock
Occupation
Novelistpoetteachershort story writer
Period
1922–1968
Genre
Children's literature: adventuremysteryfantasy
Notable works
The Famous FiveThe Secret SevenNoddy
Spouse
Hugh Alexander Pollock
(m. 1924; div. 1942)
Kenneth Fraser Darrell Waters
(m. 1943; died 1967)
Children
Gillian Baverstock
Imogen Mary Smallwood
Relatives
Carey Blyton (nephew)
Hanly Blyton (brother)
Signature
Website
www.enidblytonsociety.co.uk
Enid Mary Blyton (11 August 1897 – 28 November 1968) was an English children's writer whose books have been among the world's best-sellers since the 1930s, selling more than 600 million copies. Blyton's books are still enormously popular, and have been translated into 90 languages; her first book, Child Whispers, a 24-page collection of poems, was published in 1922. She wrote on a wide range of
Following the commercial success of her early novels such as Adventures of the Wishing-Chair (1937) and The Enchanted Wood (1939), Blyton went on to build a literary empire, sometimes producing fifty books a year in addition to her prolific magazine and newspaper contributions. Her writing was unplanned and sprang largely from her unconscious mind; she typed her stories as events unfolded before her. The sheer volume of her work and the speed with which it was produced led to rumours that Blyton employed an army of ghost writers, a charge she vigorously denied.

Blyton's work became increasingly controversial among literary critics, teachers and parents from the 1950s onwards, because of the alleged unchallenging nature of her writing and the themes of her books, particularly the Noddy series. Some libraries and schools banned her works, which the BBC had refused to broadcast from the 1930s until the 1950s because they were perceived to lack literary merit. Her books have been criticised as being elitist, sexist, racist, xenophobic and at odds with the more liberal environment emerging in post-war Britain, but they have continued to be best-sellers since her death in 1968.

Blyton felt she had a responsibility to provide her readers with a strong moral framework, so she encouraged them to support worthy causes. In particular, through the clubs she set up or supported, she encouraged and organised them to raise funds for animal and paediatric charities. The story of Blyton's life was dramatised in a BBC film entitled Enid, featuring Helena Bonham Carter in the title role and first broadcast in the United Kingdom on BBC Four in 2009. There have also been several adaptations of her books for stage, screen and television.

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14.1 Notes
Enid Blyton was born on 11 August 1897 in East Dulwich, South London, the oldest of the three children, to Thomas Carey Blyton (1870–1920), a cutlery salesman, and his wife Theresa Mary (née Harrison; 1874–1950). Enid's younger brothers, Hanly (1899–1983) and Carey (1902–1976), were born after the family had moved to a semi-detached villa in Beckenham, then a village in Kent.[1] A few months after her birth Enid almost died from whooping cough, but was nursed back to health by her father, whom she adored.[2] Thomas Blyton ignited Enid's interest in nature; in her autobiography she wrote that he "loved flowers and birds and wild animals, and knew more about them than anyone I had ever met".[3] He also passed on his interest in gardening, art, music, literature and the theatre, and the pair often went on nature walks, much to the disapproval of Enid's mother, who showed little interest in her daughter's pursuits.[4] Enid was devastated when he left the family shortly after her thirteenth birthday to live with another woman. Enid and her mother did not have a good relationship, and she did not attend either of her parents' funerals.[5]

From 1907 to 1915 Blyton attended St Christopher's School in Beckenham, where she enjoyed physical activities and became school tennis champion and captain of lacrosse.[6] She was not so keen on all the academic subjects but excelled in writing, and in 1911 she entered Arthur Mee's children's poetry competition. Mee offered to print her verses, encouraging her to produce more.[1] Blyton's mother considered her efforts at writing to be a "waste of time and money", but she was encouraged to persevere by Mabel Attenborough, the aunt of a school friend.[4]

Seckford Hall in Woodbridge, Suffolk, was an inspiration to Blyton with its haunted room, secret passageway and sprawling gardens. Blyton's father taught her to play the piano, which she mastered well enough for him to believe that she might follow in his sister's footsteps and become a professional musician.[6] Blyton considered enrolling at the Guildhall School of Music, but decided she was better suited to becoming a writer.[7] After finishing school in 1915 as head girl, she moved out of the family home to live with her friend Mary Attenborough, before going to stay with George and Emily Hunt at Seckford Hall near Woodbridge in Suffolk. Seckford Hall, with its allegedly haunted room and secret passageway provided inspiration for her later writing.[1] At Woodbridge Congregational Church Blyton met Ida Hunt, who taught at Ipswich High School, and suggested that she train as a teacher.[8] Blyton was introduced to the children at the nursery school, and recognising her natural affinity with them she enrolled in a National Froebel Union teacher training course at the school in September 1916.[7][9] By this time she had almost ceased contact with her family.[1]

Blyton's manuscripts had been rejected by publishers on many occasions, which only made her more determined to succeed: "it is partly the struggle that helps you so much, that gives you determination, character, self-reliance â€“ all things that help in any profession or trade, and most certainly in writing". In March 1916 her first poems were published in Nash's Magazine.[10] She completed her teacher training course in December 1918, and the following month obtained a teaching appointment at Bickley Park School, a small independent establishment for boys in Bickley, Kent. Two months later Blyton received a teaching certificate with distinctions in zoology and principles of education, 1st class in botany, geography, practice and history of education, child hygiene and class teaching and 2nd class in literature and elementary mathematics.[1] In 1920 she moved to Southerhay in Hook Road Surbiton as nursery governess to the four sons of architect Horace Thompson and his wife Gertrude,[7] with whom Blyton spent four happy years. Owing to a shortage of schools in the area her charges were soon joined by the children of neighbours, and a small school developed at the house.[11]

Early writing career[edit]

Further information on works by Enid Blyton: Enid Blyton bibliography

In 1920 Blyton relocated to Chessington, and began writing in her spare time. The following year she won the Saturday Westminster Review writing competition with her essay "On the Popular Fallacy that to the Pure All Things are Pure".[12] Publications such as The Londoner, Home Weekly and The Bystander began to show an interest in her short stories and poems.[1]

Child Whispers (1922)

Blyton's first book, Child Whispers, a 24-page collection of poems, was published in 1922.[12] It was illustrated by a schoolfriend, Phyllis Chase, who collaborated on several of her early works.[13] Also in that year Blyton began writing in annuals for Cassell and George Newnes, and her first piece of writing, "Peronel and his Pot of Glue", was accepted for publication in Teachers' World. Her success was boosted in 1923 when her poems were published alongside those of Rudyard Kipling, Walter de la Mare and G. K. Chesterton in a special issue of Teachers' World. Blyton's educational texts were quite influential in the 1920s and '30s, her most sizeable being the three-volume The Teacher's Treasury (1926), the six-volume Modern Teaching (1928), the ten-volume Pictorial Knowledge (1930), and the four-volume Modern Teaching in the Infant School (1932).[14]

In July 1923 Blyton published Real Fairies, a collection of thirty-three poems written especially for the book with the exception of "Pretending", which had appeared earlier in Punch magazine.[15] The following year she published The Enid Blyton Book of Fairies, illustrated by Horace J. Knowles,[16] and in 1926 the Book of Brownies.[17] Several books of plays appeared in 1927, including A Book of Little Plays and The Play's the Thing with the illustrator Alfred Bestall.[18]
In the 1930s Blyton developed an interest in writing stories related to various myths, including those of ancient Greece and Rome. The Knights of the Round Table, Tales of Ancient Greece and Tales of Robin Hood were published in 1930. In Tales of Ancient Greece Blyton retold sixteen well-known ancient Greek myths, but used the Latin rather than the Greek names of deities and invented conversations between the characters. The Adventures of Odysseus, Tales of the Ancient Greeks and Persians and Tales of the Romans followed in 1934.

**Commercial success**

_Blyton had an interest in biblical narratives, and retold Old and New Testament stories. The Land of Far-Beyond (1942) is a Christian parable along the lines of John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress (1678), with contemporary children as the main characters. In 1934 she published The Children's Life of Christ, a collection of fifty-nine short stories related to the life of Jesus, with her own slant on popular biblical stories, from the Nativity and the Three Wise Men through to the trial, the crucifixion and the resurrection._

The first book of Blyton's Old Thatch series, The Talking Teapot and Other Tales, was published in 1934, the same year as the first book in her Brer Rabbit series, Brer Rabbit Retold.[21] (Note that Brer Rabbit originally featured in Uncle Remus stories by Joel Chandler Harris), her first serial story and first full-length book, Adventures of the Wishing-Chair, followed in 1937. The Enchanted Wood, the first book in the Faraway Tree series, published in 1939, is about a magic tree inspired by the Norse mythology that had fascinated Blyton as a child.[7] According to Blyton's daughter Gillian the inspiration for the magic tree came from "thinking up a story one day and suddenly she was walking in the enchanted wood and found the tree. In her imagination she climbed up through the branches and met Moon-Face, Silky, the Saucepan Man and the rest of the characters. She had all she needed."[22] As in the Wishing-Chair series, these fantasy books typically involve children being transported into a magical world in which they meet fairies, goblins, elves, pixies and other mythical creatures.

_Blyton's first full-length adventure novel, The Secret Island, was published in 1938, featuring the characters of Jack, Mike, Peggy and Nora._ [23] Described by The Glasgow Herald as a "Robinson Crusoe-style adventure on an island in an English lake", The Secret Island was a lifelong favourite of Gillian's and spawned the Secret series.[22] The following year Blyton released her first book in the Circus series[24] and her initial book in the Amelia Jane series, Naughty Amelia Jane.[25] According to Gillian the main character was based on a large handmade doll given to her by her mother on her third birthday.[22]

During the 1940s Blyton became a prolific author, her success enhanced by her "marketing, publicity and branding that was far ahead of its time".[26] In 1940 Blyton published two books â€“ Three Boys and a Circus and Children of Kidillin â€“ under the pseudonym of Mary Pollock (middle name plus first married name),[27] in addition to the eleven published under her own name that year. So popular were Pollock's books that one reviewer was prompted to observe that "Enid Blyton had better look to her laurels".[28] But Blyton's readers were not so easily deceived and many complained about the subterfuge to her and her publisher.[28] with the result that all six books published under the name of Mary Pollock â€“ two in 1940 and four in 1943 â€“ were reissued under Blyton's name.[29] Later in 1940 Blyton published the first of her boardroom school story books and the first novel in the Naughtiest Girl series, The Naughtiest Girl in the School, which followed the exploits of the mischievous schoolgirl Elizabeth Allen at the fictional Whitleafe School. The first of her six novels in the St. Clare's series, The Twins at St. Clare's, appeared the following year, featuring the twin sisters Patricia and Isabel O'Sullivan.[14]

In 1942 Blyton published the first book in the Mary Mouse series, Mary Mouse and the Dolls' House, about a mouse exiled from her mousehole who becomes a maid at a dolls' house. Twenty-three books in the series were produced between 1942 and 1964; 10,000 copies were sold in 1942 alone.[30] The same year, Blyton published the first novel in the Famous Five series, Five on a Treasure Island, with illustrations by Eileen Soper. Its popularity resulted in twenty-one books between then and 1963, and the characters of Julian, Dick, Anne, George (Georgina) and Timmy the dog became household names in Britain.[31] Matthew Grenby, author of Children's Literature, states that the five were involved with "unmasking hardened villains and solving serious crimes", although the novels were "hardly 'hard-boiled' thrillers".[32] Blyton based the character of Georgina, a tomboy she described as "short-haired, freckled, sturdy, and snub-nosed" and "bold and daring, hot-tempered and loyal", on herself.[10]

_Blyton had an interest in biblical narratives, and retold Old and New Testament stories._ The first book of Blyton's Five Find-Outers series, The Mystery of the Burnt Cottage, was published in 1943, as was the second book in the Faraway series, The Magic Faraway Tree, which in 2003 was voted 6th in the BBC's Big Read poll to find the UK's favourite book.[37] Several of Blyton's works during this period have seaside themes; John Jolly by the Sea (1943), a picture book intended for younger readers, was published in a booklet format by Evans Brothers.[38] Other books with a maritime theme include The Secret of Cliff Castle and Smuggler Ben, both attributed to Mary Pollock in 1943;[39] The Island of Adventure, the first in the Adventure series of eight novels from 1944 onwards;[40] and various novels of the Famous Five series such as Five on a Treasure Island (1942),[41] Five on Kirrin Island Again (1947)[42] and Five Go Down to the Sea (1953).[43]

_Capitalising on her success, with a loyal and ever-growing readership,[14] Blyton produced a new edition of many of her series such as the Famous Five, the Five Find-Outers and St. Clare's every year in addition to many other novels, short stories and books._ In 1946 Blyton launched the first in the Malory Towers series of six books based around the schoolgirl Darrell Rivers, First Term at Malory Towers, which became extremely popular, particularly with girls.[44]

**Peak output: 1949â€“1959**

_The first book in Blyton's Barney Mysteries series, The Rockingdown Mystery, was published in 1949,[45] as was the first of her fifteen Secret Seven novels.[46] The Secret Seven Society consists of Peter, his sister Janet, and their friends Colin, George, Jack, Pam and Barbara, who meet regularly in a shed in the garden to discuss peculiar events in their local community. Blyton rewrote the stories so they could be adapted into cartoons, which appeared in Mickey Mouse Weekly in 1951 with illustrations by George Brook. The French author Evelyne Lallemand continued the series in the 1970s, producing an additional twelve books, nine of which were translated into English by_
Blyton's characters Noddy and Big Ears

Blyton's Noddy, about a little wooden boy from Toyland, first appeared in the Sunday Graphic on 5 June 1949, and in November that year Noddy Goes to Toyland, the first of at least two dozen books in the series, was published. The idea was conceived by one of Blyton's publishers, Sampson, Low, Marston and Company, who in 1949 arranged a meeting between Blyton and the Dutch illustrator Harmsen van der Beek. Despite having to communicate via an interpreter, he provided some initial sketches of how Toyland and its characters would be represented. Four days after the meeting Blyton sent the text of the first two Noddy books to her publisher, to be forwarded to van der Beek.[48] The Noddy books became one of her most successful and best-known series, and were hugely popular in the 1950s.[49] An extensive range of sub-series, spin-offs and strip books were produced throughout the decade, including Noddy's Library, Noddy's Garage of Books, Noddy's Castle of Books, Noddy's Toy Station of Books and Noddy's Shop of Books.[50]

In 1950 Blyton established the company Darrell Waters Ltd to manage her affairs. By the early 1950s she had reached the peak of her output, often publishing more than fifty books a year, and she remained extremely prolific throughout much of the decade.[51] By 1955 Blyton had written her fourteenth Famous Five novel, Five Have Plenty of Fun, her fifteenth Mary Mouse book, Mary Mouse in Nursery Rhyme Land, her eighth book in the Adventure series, The River of Adventure, and her seventh Secret Seven novel, Secret Seven Win Through. She completed the sixth and final book of the Malory Towers series, Last Term at Malory Towers, in 1951.[44]

Blyton published several further books featuring the character of Scamp the terrier, following on from The Adventures of Scamp, a novel she had released in 1943 under the pseudonym of Mary Pollock.[52] Scamp Goes on Holiday (1952) and Scamp and Bimbo, Scamp at School, Scamp and Caroline and Scamp Goes to the Zoo (1954) were illustrated by Pierre Probst. She introduced the character of Bom, a stylish toy drummer dressed in a bright red coat and helmet, alongside Noddy in TV Comic in July 1956.[53] A book series began the same year with Bom the Little Toy Drummer, featuring illustrations by R. Paul-Hoye,[54] and followed with Bom and His Magic Drumstick (1957), Bom Goes Adventuring and Bom Goes to Ho Ho Village (1958), Bom and the Clown and Bom and the Rainbow (1959) and Bom Goes to Magic Town (1960). In 1958 she produced two annuals featuring the character, the first of which included twenty short stories, poems and picture strips.[55]

Many of Blyton's series, including Noddy and The Famous Five, continued to be successful in the 1960s; by 1962, 26 million copies of Noddy had been sold.[1][a] Blyton concluded several of her long-running series in 1963, publishing the last books of The Famous Five (Five Are Together Again) and The Secret Seven (Fun for the Secret Seven); she also produced three more Brer Rabbit books with the illustrator Grace Lodge: Brer Rabbit Again, Brer Rabbit Book, and Brer Rabbit's a Rascal. In 1962 many of her books were among the first to be published by Armada Books in paperback, making them more affordable to children.[1]

After 1963 Blyton's output was generally confined to short stories and books intended for very young readers, such as Learn to Count with Noddy and Learn to Tell Time with Noddy in 1965, and Stories for Bedtime and the Sunshine Picture Story Book collection in 1966. Her declining health and a falling off in readership among older children have been put forward as the principal reasons for this change in trend. [56] Blyton published her last book in the Noddy series, Noddy and the Aeroplane, in February 1964. In May the following year she published Mixed Bag, a song book with music written by her nephew Carey, and in August she released her last full-length books, The Man Who Stopped to Help and The Boy Who Came Back.[1]

Blyton cemented her reputation as a children's writer when in 1926 she took over the editing of Sunny Stories, a magazine that typically included the re-telling of legends, myths, stories and other articles for children.[7] That same year she was given her own column in Teachers' World, entitled "From my Window". Three years later she began contributing a weekly page in the magazine, in which she published letters from her fox terrier dog Bobs.[1] They proved to be so popular that in 1933 they were published in book form as Letters from Bobs,[57] and sold ten thousand copies in the first week.[1] Her most popular feature was "Round the Year with Enid Blyton", which consisted of forty-eight articles covering aspects of nature history such as weather, pond life, how to plant a school garden and how to make a bird table.[58] Among Blyton's other nature projects was her monthly "Country Letter" feature that appeared in The Nature Lover magazine in 1935.[59]

Sunny Stories was renamed Enid Blyton's Sunny Stories in January 1937, and served as a vehicle for the serialisation of Blyton's books. Her first Naughty Amelia Jane story, about an anti-heroine based on a doll owned by her daughter Gillian,[60] was published in the magazine. [1] Blyton stopped contributing in 1952, and it closed down the following year, shortly before the appearance of the new fortnightly Enid Blyton Magazine written entirely by Blyton.[61] The first edition appeared on 18 March 1953,[62] and the magazine ran until September 1959.[7]

Noddy made his first appearance in the Sunday Graphic in 1949, the same year as Blyton's first daily Noddy strip for the London Evening Standard.[1] It was illustrated by van der Beek until his death in 1953.[1][63]

Blyton worked in a wide range of fictional genres, from fairy tales to animal, nature, detective, mystery, and circus stories, but she often "blurred the boundaries" in her books, and encompassed a range of genres even in her short stories.[64] In a 1958 article published in The Author, she wrote that there were a "dozen or more different types of stories for children", and she had tried them all, but her favourites were those with a family at their centre.[65]

In a letter to the psychologist Peter McKellar,[b] Blyton describes her writing technique:

I shut my eyes for a few minutes, with my portable typewriter on my knee â€“ I make my mind a blank and wait â€“ and then, as clearly as I would see real children, my characters stand before me in my mind's eye ... The first sentence comes straight into my mind, I don't have to

Anthea Bell between 1983 and 1987.[47]
In her later years, Blyton continued to be a prominent figure in the world of children's literature. She was a member of several literary clubs, and her work was featured in many periodicals and anthologies. She also wrote articles for newspapers and magazines, and her work was translated into many languages.

Blyton's most famous series, The Famous Five, was first published in 1941, and it quickly became a best-seller. The series was aimed at young girls, and it was set in the English countryside. The stories were about a group of five children who went on adventures together, and they were always accompanied by Blyton's famous horse, Bunter.

Blyton was a prolific writer, and she produced hundreds of books during her lifetime. She was a tireless worker, and she often wrote for several hours a day, even when she was ill. She once said, "I have to work hard to keep up with the demand for my books." Blyton was a master of the genre, and her work continues to be popular today. She is considered one of the greatest children's authors of all time, and her books are still enjoyed by children and adults alike.

Blyton was also known for her charitable work. She was a supporter of many charities, and she used her books to raise money for them. She was particularly interested in helping children, and she was a strong advocate for the rights of disabled children. She was a member of the Famous Five Club, which was set up to support disabled children, and she was also a member of the Enid Blyton Magazine Club, which was formed in 1953. The club was based in Beaufort House, and it was set up to raise money for children's charities. The club had a membership of 220,000 by 1974, and it was growing at the rate of 6,000 new members a year.

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