



Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia

Corso di Laurea magistrale
(*ordinamento ex D.M. 270/2004*)
in Lingue e Letterature Europee,
Americane e Postcoloniali

Tesi di Laurea

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Ca' Foscari
Dorsoduro 3246
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“Let’s play deduction!”:
Analysis of the conventions
of Detective fiction in E.
Nesbit’s *The Bastables*
Series and E. Blyton’s *The*
Famous Five Series

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2013 / 2014

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1. Detective Fiction and Children's literature

1.1 Brief history of the Detective fiction genre

1.1.1 *Did crime fiction exist before 1841?*

Detective fiction is, to the present day, a sub-genre of crime fiction, a literary genre that deals with mystery and crimes, their detection and criminals, and the resolution of a case. It involves, as its name evokes, a detective figure solving a crime or a series of crimes relying most of the time only on logic reasoning. The main character may or may not be a professional figure: in fact, in many of the most popular fictions of this genre the protagonists are men and women gifted with an extraordinary intellect. Nowadays, detective fiction has conquered a wide share of readers, thanks as well to the media frenzy: a large number of tv shows and films revolve around a detective figure and his struggle to solve a mystery, stimulating viewers to approach the literary works their favourite series are inspired from. Nevertheless, the genre of detective fiction was established in the English-speaking world only in 1841, with the publication of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*: before that year, works that might be related to the crime sphere did not fall yet into the category. However, many of the stories written before that year might be considered as part of the genre: as remarked by Maurizio Ascari in *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction*, many critics "customarily cite among the sources of the genre two episodes from the Genesis in the first book of the Bible"¹. Crime has been a predominant theme in literature since ancient times: the condition of perfection is lost by Adam and Eve as soon as they steal the Fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, seen as a crime in front of the eyes of God; Cain is the first human in history to commit murder by killing his brother, and for this crime he is condemned to be exiled forever in the Land of Nod. God acts as a detective and judge of the crimes committed by his sons, always discovering the origin of sin and punishing it according

¹ Ascari, Maurizio, *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational*, Palgrave McMillan, Basingstoke, 2009, p.17

to his omniscient power. This paradigm will be characteristic of the Roman world as well: sheets of pewter were filled with requests from people who wanted a crime to be redressed. The suffering carefully wrote a curse in order to obtain the desired effect on the offender, often accompanied by a list of suspects to help the goddess choose the right one.

Divine detection also plays a major role during the Middle Ages: the belief in the inability of God to let a crime unpunished was strong enough to give him the role of judge once again, both in real life and in literature. Moreover, in the literature of the Middle Ages the act of detection is often connected to the sensational sphere: the rational search for clues that will bring to the culprit is still shaded by the belief not only in the power of God, but in the premonitory power of dreams and in the existence of ghosts. A meaningful example can be found in an episode of Chaucer's *Canterbury tales*: the plot of one of its tales, entitled *The Nun's Priest's tale*, revolves around a premonitory dream made by the protagonist, which shows him the death of a friend he is travelling with. Indeed, when he looks for him the next morning, he discovers that his friend has disappeared during the night. The tale ends with the discovery of the corpse and the condemnation of the culprit for the crime of murder, as it was impossible to hide it from the eyes of God.

The belief in Divine Providence is strong in the Middle Ages. It will be so until its end, when a new atheist movement started a consistent attack toward the Christian religion, publicly denounced by Christopher Marlowe in the prologue of his play *The Jew of Malta*, dated 1590, through the character of Machiavel, strongly inspired by the Italian philosopher Niccolò Macchiavelli. As from this moment, divine justice in literature and drama starts to be replaced by a new theme that can be easily related to the crime world. Revenge starts to play an important role in the society of the period, and its presence can be perceived in literature. Here, the power of judging people passes from the hands of God to the hands of men: revenge is a recurring feature of tragedies during the Renaissance. Detection is still an important element, since the identification of the culprit becomes vital in order to satisfy the thirst for vengeance. The sensational element is present here as well as it was in the literature of the Middle Ages: this time it

is the ghosts of the victims who help the improvised detective to achieve his aim. The most popular dramatist of the period is of course William Shakespeare, and his *Hamlet*, written between 1599 and 1602, is a good example of the combination of detection and revenge, without neglecting the sensational element. As argued by Maurizio Ascari,

Hamlet plays the uncomfortable role of a detective discovering the secrets of the court, in particular by staging the play within the play which simultaneously re-enacts the fictional murder of Gonzago and the presumed murder of his father. As we know, Hamlet calls his play *the Mousetrap*, because it should enable him to catch the ‘mouse’ he is chasing [...] Claudius. Yet the psychodrama Hamlet puts on to induce Claudius to betray himself risks obliterating the supernatural origin of an enquiry which is founded on the revelations of a ghost. Since the scrupulous revenger does not trust the ghost, whose nature might be devilish, it is precisely to assess the spirit’s truthfulness that Hamlet has the play performed.²

Murder plays a prominent role in the popular literature of Renaissance: though the role of God as the primal avenger is slowly disappearing, Providence still plays an important role, as can be proved by a large presence of ‘providential fictions’. The solving of the murder is “neither of miraculous events nor of human ingenuity”³ but is strongly framed by Christianity. In fact, the help of the Almighty permits the main character to discover the truth and secure the culprit to his right punishment. Examples of providential fictions are Thomas Nashe’s *The Unfortunate Traveller; or, the Life of Jack Wilton*, dated 1594, in which the protagonist avenges the homicide of his brother by killing his murderer, guided by God’s will, and John Reynolds’s six books series in which it is God himself who performs the role of revenger, as highlighted by its title: *The triumphs of Gods Revenege against the crying, and execrable Sinne of Murther*, written between 1621 and 1635. The latter is a series that combines the tradition of revenge tragedy with crime fiction as conceived in modern terms; God’s function as

² *Ibidem*, p.25

³ *Ibidem*, p.26

detective and punisher is underlined several times in the stories, since it is the central message of the books: “Murther, though never so secretly acted, and concealed, will at last be detected and punished”⁴. God’s relentless omniscience permits him to exercise his power towards the culprit, who cannot escape his judgement.

Nevertheless, while the theme of murder is typical of tragedies during this period, minor crimes, as for instance cozenage or theft, are central subjects of comedy dramas, and they especially recur in different types of popular literature regarding the underworld. In comedy literature, crime is conveyed in a different way with respect to tragedies: the complex plot that leads to a bloody murder is replaced by stories which are “episodic and arbitrary in their emotional effects, just as the world they imagine is unstable, disintegrating, catalysed by chance meeting and clashes,” as remarked by Hal Gladfelder⁵.

Ascari identifies three different approaches to the comic treatment of crime⁶. In the first case, the culprit is judged as evil and condemned for his attitude right from the beginning: the comedy aims to provoke a rejection of evil, and the text itself is defined as a ‘harmless moral’⁷. The prevention of immoral acts will permit potential criminals to be saved. This case is exemplified by Thomas Middleton’s *The last Will and Testament of Laurence Lucifer, the Old Bachelor of Limbo*, dated 1604. The second approach invites the public to feel pity for the criminal. Here, God is an influential character and conveys a clear message: every person can be saved, even criminals, who have the chance to repent and escape death by receiving a softer punishment. In this type of comedy, the climax of the story usually coincides with the repentance of the criminal, followed by a series of events that will lead him to gain God’s grace. An example of this type of approach is given by Richard Head’s *The English Rogue Described in the life of Meriton Latroon, a Witty Extravagant*, dated 1665. In the last

⁴ Reynolds, John, “Historie V”, in *The Triumphs of God Revenege*, Book I, p. 197

⁵ Gladfelder, Hal, *Criminality and Narrative in Eighteenth-century England: Beyond the Law*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2001, p.33

⁶ Ascari, Maurizio, *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational*, Palgrave McMillan, Basingstoke, 2009, p.31

⁷ Middleton, Thomas, “The Last Will and Testament of Laurence Lucifer”, in *The Elizabethan Underworld*, A.V. Judges, Routedgde, 2002, p.302

case the criminal, more a thief than a murderer, has an ambivalent status: in spite of the crimes committed by him, his actions are seen as right, because he acts against the injustice of the society he lives in, and not against common people. This behaviour leads him to be acclaimed as a hero by the oppressed people. The archetype for this type of character is a famous thief protagonist of myths and manuscripts since 1337, Robin Hood, who steals from the rich and corrupt men of the court and gives everything to the poor. A good example of this type of comedy is Alexander Smith's *A Complete History of the Lives and Robberies of The Most Notorious Highwaymen, Footpads, Shoplifts and Cheats of Both Sexes*, dated 1704, that discloses the secrets behind several criminals and sets them a new, truthful light, turning villains into heroes. Apart from the above-mentioned points, when the crime is treated in comedies, divine detection almost completely loses its centrality.

Between the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the connection between crime literature and the divine fades in order to concentrate more on events based on real facts, which acquire an important relevance due to the development of new printing techniques and journalism, as well as to an increasing interest in real facts on the part of the audience. The obsessive interest in tragic events facilitates the transition to a new way to treat this matter in literature, because 'divine detection' starts to be questioned in favour of the ability of people to judge by themselves what is right or wrong. The *Newgate Calendars*, originally a monthly bulletin of execution started in 1705 with Swindell's *The Tyburn Calendar, or Malefactors Bloody Register* and later published as a series of four volumes becoming to all effect a sub-genre of crime fiction, is a direct product of this new trend:

The tone of the *Calendar* is tragic rather than comic, as is also shown by its illustrations, which emphasise various forms of executions (hanging, beheading, burning) and torments, as well as the practise of branding thieves [...] The purported aim of the editors [...] was still didactic [...]⁸

⁸ Ascari, Maurizio, *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational*, Palgrave McMillan, Basingstoke, 2009, p.35

These publications, since their first appearance in 1779 and up to the last edition in 1826, have satisfied the fascination of the public regarding criminals and crime in general. They gather accounts on their lives, illegal affairs and trials, often concluding with news on their punishment or escape. The main purpose of the *Newgate Calendars* is to collect different examples of crimes that will be used in the future with cases that display similar features. Moreover, these bulletins wanted to educate their readers and invite them to avoid criminal behaviour and trust the Law and its unquestionable judgment. The concept is stressed in the title page of the first volume:

The whole tending, by a general Display of the Progress and Consequence of Vice, to impress on the Mind proper Ideas of the Happiness resulting from a Life of strict Honor and Integrity: and to convince Individuals of the superior Excellence of those Laws framed for the Protection of their Lives and Properties.⁹

The *Calendars* constantly underline that acts of virtues will lead to a state of peace, while criminal intents will find their end in death: they gradually distance themselves from the supernatural sphere and the concepts of Hell and Heaven as rewards and punishments for human behaviour during a man's lifetime. However, much of the appeal of these publications is to be located in the way they exhibit the deviant behaviours of the culprits, satisfying the almost pathological interest of the public for the underworld. The *Newgate Calendars* started to a new trend that lasted until the late 1840s, thanks to the massive dissemination of their themes in the penny press.¹⁰ The majority of the authors and novels following this trend are based on journalism. Edward Bulwer is the first one to write a novel based on the facts reported in the *Newgate Calendars: Paul Clifford*, published in 1830, explores the double life of the protagonist both in the upper-class environment and in the underworld. This novel contains the

⁹ *The Malefactor's Register; or, the Newgate and Tyburn Calendar*, Alexander Hoggs, London, 1779, Vol. I, title page

¹⁰ Pykett, Lyn, "The Newgate novel and sensation fiction, 1830–1868" in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p.20. Penny press newspapers, very common in the United States, were cheap tabloids considered revolutionary because they made the news accessible to the middle classes for a reasonable price (indeed, a penny).

famous incipit “it was a dark and stormy night”, frequently remembered for the gothic atmosphere it evokes and often invoked in the mystery and horror genres. Newgate fiction generated a major controversy at the beginning of the Victorian era, because the protagonists of these novels could be seen both as highwaymen and as heroes, making readers question on what crime really is. In Paul Clifford’s own words,

Men embody their worst prejudices, their most evil passions, in a heterogeneous and contradictory code; and whatever breaks this code they term a crime. When they make no distinction in the penalty – that is to say, in the estimation – awarded both to murder and to a petty theft imposed on weak will by famine, we ask nothing else to convince us that they are ignorant on the very nature of guilt, and that they make up in ferocity for the want of wisdom.¹¹

Crime is for sure a conduct against institutions, but it is first a social construct, and a condition derived by the iniquity of society. Newgate fiction tends to show itself too sympathetic towards criminals. Its novels could be read as an attack towards a social system that leads its people to act as offenders and that will consequently be punished for something that could be easily avoided if their needs were taken care of (“Your laws are but of two classes; the one makes criminals, the other punishes them. I have suffered by the one – I am about to perish by the other.”¹²). Even Charles Dickens makes the best use of the Newgate fashion to write *Oliver Twist* in 1837. The protagonist shares many features with the main characters of Newgate fiction: Oliver is an orphan child trained to be a criminal and one of the main themes of the novel is the struggle between two opposite worlds, the respectable world and the criminal one, to claim a right on his person. Most of the criminal scenes are inspired by the Newgate literature and police reports in newspapers, and one of the secondary characters is based on a real life criminal. The Newgate controversy, which accused the Newgate novels to corrupt their readers and to incite them to become criminals, lasted until the 1840s, the main debate being about what is right to write and what not, and in what form the story has to be

¹¹ Bulwer, Paul Clifford, Bk. 2, Chap. 6, reprinted in John ed., *Cult Criminals*, vol. i, p. 226

¹² *Ibidem*, p.443

conveyed. Anti-Newgate novelists feared that the influence of this genre on middle-class readers would have dangerous side-effects. Moreover, they dreaded that these readers would be motivated to act against society to enhance illegally their life condition, moved by the sympathy shown towards fictional criminals of every kind.

Cesare Beccaria's *Dei delitti e delle pene*, written in 1764, is one of the works that set a new trend in the second half of the eighteenth century: the providential hand of God is definitively put aside and space is given to a more rational model of investigation. Beccaria's work introduces two innovative characteristics in the literature of this period: the questioning of the reliability of the incriminatory clues, and the consideration of a crime not as a sin, but as an infringement of a social pact. As declared by William Godwin in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, written at the end of the eighteenth century, 'the acts and dispositions of mankind are the offspring of circumstances and events, and not of any original determination that they bring into the world'¹³. God has no more power over people's actions, because crime is no longer seen as an offence towards him or a sin, but as a social violation. Lawyers discuss high penalties with great zeal, as the apparatus of justice needs to be reformed without the influence of religion. Moreover, the possibility of making a mistake in the evaluation of the clues leading to a crime brings into question the right to judge those crimes by extreme punishment, such as torture or death penalty. This, and the assertion of the scientific method as an effective way of detecting, permits the development of the new 'professional case' narrative trend and to lay the groundwork to what will become detective fiction as it is known nowadays. Furthermore, the foundation in England of the New Metropolitan Police in 1829 and, later, of its Detective Police branch in 1842 increases the interest in the professional figure of the investigator. Ascari claims that

The sphere of detection was increasingly regarded as the proper domain of professionals who mastered specific disciplines and technical skills, while the theological apparatus that had formerly been utilised to contain crime in

¹³ Godwin, William, "The Characters of Man Originate in their External Circumstances" in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, cited in *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke, 2009, p.37

the absence of police forces became less and less relevant to the discourse of crime.¹⁴

God's omniscience is finally in the hands of professional figures: the scientific method substitutes Faith and superstition is left behind and soon forgotten, replaced by logical reasoning. With *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, Edgar Allan Poe sets the framework of the detective figure as known in modern times, and of a new genre that will widely develop in the following years.

1.1.2 Auguste Dupin and Sherlock Holmes

It is 1841, when Edgar Allan Poe gives birth to the pragmatic character Auguste Dupin, the archetype of what will become one of the most loved genres of all time. Dupin is not a professional figure in the detection field, he is only an amateur; however, the first novel he appears in, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, is widely considered the forefather of detective fiction¹⁵. The combination of Dupin's remarkable creative imagination and the considerable intellect transforms him into a stunning detective. In the first pages of the novel, the anonymous narrator, which will soon become Dupin's best friend, leads the reader on the wonders of intellect and the ability to use them ingeniously. He compares the ability to observe and deduce the circumstances of a crime with the skills of a card player to understand how his opponents' minds work so that he can anticipate their way of playing and win:

[...] the rules of Hoyle [...] are sufficiently and generally comprehensible. Thus to have a retentive memory, and proceed by 'the book' are points commonly regarded as the sum total of good playing. But it is in matters beyond the limits of mere rule that the skill of the analyst is evinced. He matters, in silence, a host of observations and inferences. [...] The

¹⁴ Ascari, Maurizio, *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke, 2009, p.39

¹⁵ Silverman, Kenneth, *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance*, Harper Perennial, New York, 1991, p.171

necessary knowledge is that of *what* to observe. [...] He examines the countenance on his partner, comparing it carefully with that of each of his opponents. He considers the mode of assorting the cards in each hand; [...] he notes every variation of face as the play progresses, gathering a fund of though from the differences in the expression of certainty, of surprise, of triumph, or chagrin. [...] The analytical power should not be confounded with simple ingenuity; for while the analyst is necessarily ingenious, the ingenious man is often remarkably incapable of analysis. The constructive or combining power, by which ingenuity is usually manifested, and to which the phrenologists (I believe erroneously) have assigned a separate organ, supposing it a primitive faculty, has been so frequently seen in those whose intellect bordered otherwise upon idiocy, as to have attracted general observation among writers on morals.¹⁶

The success of Poe's novels and of the genre in a broader framework is to be found, beyond his talent as a writer, in the peculiar moment in which it was published. Moreover, the bond between the American and the British market is strong at this moment, and favours the circulation of literary and technological innovations. In *The Origin of American Detective Stories*, LeRoy Lad Panek writes

[...] In no small measure that success also depended on [...] simply being at the right place at the right time. In his case the fortunate convergences were: 1. The appearance of new media (newspaper syndication and mass circulation magazines); 2. The availability of a significantly larger adult readership resulting from universal education in Britain and the U.S.; 3. The emergence of real detectives and detectives police in Britain and the U.S.; 4. The invention or discovery of revolutionary scientific and analytical tools that could be applied to the solution of crime; and 5. the emergence of new attitudes toward crime and criminals.¹⁷

¹⁶ Poe, Edgar Allan, *Collected Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, Wordsworth Editions, Hertfordshire, 2004, p.4

¹⁷ LeRoy, Lad Panek, *The Origin of American Detective Story*, McFarland & Company, Jefferson, 2006, p. 29.

Several cultural and economical aspects contribute to the development of detective fiction, as explained by Jonathan Hartmann in *The Marketing of Edgar Allan Poe*.¹⁸ The first and most relevant factor is the development of industrialisation and its effect on the editorial environment: the improvement of the printing techniques permits a wider production in less time, reducing production costs as well as texts' prices. This way, the publishing industry becomes available to the middle-classes as well, and permits a widening in the editorial target. This happens also thanks to the serialisation of works of fiction on newspapers. Another aspect to take into consideration is the growing interest in prose rather than in poetry: during the first decades of the nineteenth century, prose was the category sold the most in both Britain and the United States. In the United States, British literature gained popularity due to the lack of the author's copyright that allows the printing of English texts to the detriment of American authors and works. Finally, the foundation and development of the law enforcement agency increases the interest in real facts rather than in fictional events far from everyday life.

Edgar Allan Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* attracts a wide share of readers first of all because of Poe's ability to empathise with them through his text: many people during the nineteenth century have personal or family experiences with gambling, so they shared some familiarity with the themes treated by the author¹⁹. In addition, Poe's narrative devices stimulate the intellect of the readers, bringing them to make their suppositions about the murder's identity on the base of the witnesses' statements. Another reason for the success of the novel is the interest in forensics, a science that started to develop in the sixteenth century and which had been mostly ignored until that time. Auguste Dupin is able to combine the scientific method with the brilliance of his intellect, introducing a new way to investigate and resolve a case. One last reason could be the recent obsession for real crimes. Poe faithfully reported the murder of Mary Rogers, committed in New York in 1841, in his *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt*, acquiring all the details from the newspapers and transforming them in fiction. This period is characterised by a deep interest for crime news. Journalists do a better job than the

¹⁸ Hartmann, Jonathan, *The Marketing of Edgar Allan Poe*, New York, Routledge, 2008

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p.26

police in the gathering of clues and testimonies, but the information given through their articles are often misleading. Indeed, they repeatedly shuffle news stories and conjectures given for valid, which create in the reader a lack of distinction between reality and fiction. This is one of the reasons why, at the end of the nineteenth century, the famous 221B in Baker Street received a large amount of correspondence addressed to Sherlock Holmes. Nobody could understand if the contents of the newspaper were real news or just the new chapter of a serialised novel, and many readers were led to believe that Sherlock Holmes was a real person, and not a fictional character.

The detective character starts to be widespread in 1842, thirteen years after the Metropolitan Police Act and the foundation of the Police Service in London. The foundation of a new police force that looks able to do its job incites the desire to follow a macabre story that will inevitably lead to the right condemnation of the culprit. In literature, detective figures improve their skills in conjunction with the expansion of the police institutions and of the scientific method of deduction during the Victorian era. This is clearly demonstrated by their ability to read clues through the new technologies developed thanks to a new medical approach toward the human body and behaviour. The detective applies forensics knowledge to his deduction process and draws a conclusion, most of the time correct:

The nineteenth-century detective story explores that medico-legal twilight zone and tells the story of a competition by presenting the literary detective as a “thinking machine” able to detect the truth that conventional representatives of the law cannot. Poe's stories inaugurate a body of literature aimed at providing the systematic technology through which a culture's ordering strategies may render legible what otherwise unreadable to it.²⁰

Actually, the exchange of information between literature and the new methods used by real detectives is mutual. In this, Poe demonstrates that he is innovative, anticipating in his novels something that would only come thirty years later. The concept of crime science develops only at the end of the nineteenth century thanks to Cesare Lombroso's

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 37

theories, rooted in ancient time and based on the fact that it is possible to read a story through the signs on a body. Different philosophers and theologians have studied the relationship between the inner and outer nature of human beings over the centuries, but only Lombroso has created the concept of *atavism*, one of the keystones of criminal anthropology. Together with the concept of degeneration by Max Nordau, a new profile was established in the evaluation of criminal behaviours. Lombroso declares that criminals and savages are similar, both in their physical appearance and deviant behaviours, and finds a confirmation in Nordau's theory:

The paucity of body hair, the small capacity of the skull, the receding forehead, the well developed breasts... the great agility, the tactile numbness and indifference to pain, the acute sight... the scarce propensity to affection, the precocious tendency to veneral pleasures and wine, and the exaggerated passion for the aforementioned... [...] even a special literature which reminds one of those heroic times, as Vico used to call them, when murder was praised.²¹

The human body becomes a signifier of crime and the idea that deviant behaviour could be prevented by having deduction rely only on physical features starts to spread. Poe already uses this device, because his characters' bodies, but also their behaviours, speak the truth for them. To this, Poe adds an interest in cryptography: clues on a dead body become secret messages to be interpreted and revealed.

The nineteenth century introduces another important innovation, the invention of a new process in photography: pictures can now be permanently imprinted on paper thanks to Joseph Nicéphore Niépce and his experiments. Police forces take advantage of this innovation to identify and classify criminals and, more in general, people with deviant behaviours. Auguste Dupin, and later Sherlock Holmes, is often compared to a camera, since their ability to observe and catalogue details recalls it:

In the eyes of the gifted literary detective – as if through the telescopic lens of a camera – neither the “truth itself” nor the guilty culprit could

²¹ Nordau, Max, *Degeneration*, Heinemann, London, 1985, p.34

escape, and the true nature of things was recaptured and re-presented to the reader for more careful and accurate scrutiny.²²

In *A scandal in Bohemia*, the first novel by Arthur Conan Doyle starring Sherlock Holmes and published in 1887, Doctor Watson himself refers to his fellow as “the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen”²³: one of the symbols that identify the most famous literary detective is a magnifying glass. It can be certainly compared to the lens of a photographic camera: Sherlock Holmes is a human device who is able to catch and highlight something that an ordinary person cannot see, and the deserving heir of Auguste Dupin. Thanks to Doyle, and in particular to *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, the formulaic character of detective fiction finally starts to consolidate. The Sherlock Holmes myth establishes itself during the first twenty years of its serialisation on *The Strand*, especially in the lapse of time between Holmes’s supposed death and his return in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Sherlock Holmes, famous for his aplomb before sensational cases and his manias, besides his incredible deduction abilities, inherits many features typical of his predecessor. Even though he distances himself from Auguste Dupin, as mentioned in *A study in Scarlet* (“In my opinion, Dupin was a very inferior fellow... He had some analytical genius, no doubt; but he was by no means such a phenomenon as Poe appears to imagine”²⁴), they are more similar than he wants the reader to believe. Both own odd habits and similar interests, as well as a peculiar analytical ability, as expressed by the anonymous narrator in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. Moreover, neither of them has any important social and personal relationship, and their tendency to isolation gives us the distinctive image of the detective who solves crimes sitting on his couch and smoking his pipe.

The most noticeable difference, however, is highlighted by the way they relate to their cases: Holmes is less warm-hearted compared to Dupin:

²² Ibidem, p. 112

²³ Doyle, Arthur Conan, “A Scandal in Bohemia” in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, Sterling, New York 2009, p. 145

²⁴ Doyle, Arthur Conan, “A Study in Scarlet” in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, Sterling, New York 2009, p.12

In contrast to Dupin, who is the brainchild of a mathematician and a poet, Sherlock Holmes, even at his most theoretical, is the offspring of a doctor's brain, and always has his feet firmly planted on the ground.²⁵

Dupin's deductions are based only on the news he reads in newspapers, on the witnesses' depositions and the analysis of the involved people's backgrounds. Dupin appears less analytical and more trustworthy of his deduction powers. Holmes, on the contrary, has a wide knowledge on several fields, listed with attention by Doctor Watson in the second chapter of *A Study in Scarlet* after they meet and go and live together. The detective is not fond of literature, philosophy or politics, but has a wide competence of subjects that hardly relates to each other, such as anatomy and chemistry, or sensational literature²⁶, and uses this knowledge to analyse his cases and solve them without being carried away. Moreover, Holmes has a wide knowledge of subjects not related to academic studies, a knowledge contained in several monographs, for instance on ashes or footprints. Most of the time, details apparently insignificant lead him to the solution of a case, including the often-misleading depositions of his frightened clients.

Despite the constant comparison with Poe's creature, Holmes does not seem to like the continuous association with his predecessors or police force, of which he criticises the lack of method and deduction ability:

“Does Lecoq come up to your idea of a detective?” [...] “Lecoq was a miserable bungler,” [...] “he had only one thing to recommend him, and that was his energy. That book made me positively ill. The question was how to identify an unknown prisoner. I could have done it in twenty-four hours. Lecoq took six months or so. It might be made a text-book for detectives to teach them what to avoid.”²⁷

²⁵ Hitchings, J. L., “Sherlock Holmes the Logician” *Baker Street Journal* (Old series), vol 1, 1946, p. 113

²⁶ Doyle, Arthur Conan, “A Study in Scarlet” in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, Sterling, New York 2009, p.9

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p.12

The tendency to despise any other kind of police service reflects the opinions of society during that period. Detectives are the only ones believed to possess the talent to observe and analyse the “signs” without being influenced by any prejudicial thought, the only ones who were able to bring the criminal, the murderer, the deviant to justice, neutralizing the dangerous individual, out of the control of society. This puts the police forces under a bad light and reduces the trust the population has on institutions.

Sherlock Holmes is certainly an inspirational character, as the works of fiction that follow Arthur Conan Doyle’s series display protagonists reflecting many of his peculiarities. This demonstrates how the most famous sleuth of all times has set what will be the basis of the detective fiction in future times: a man with an extraordinary intellect solves the most intricate crimes thanks to the science of deduction and the help of a loyal companion.

1.1.3 The evolution of the genre in the 20th century: the Golden Age

While the debate regarding the Newgate novel continued to overheat the literary world until the late years of 1840s, another genre took its first steps into the publishing market. The sensational genre develops simultaneously with detective fiction, and bases its plots on journalism, as it was for the Newgate fiction: in 1855, Margaret Oliphant used the word “sensational” to describe the horror that characterises this genre²⁸. Lyn Pykett describes sensational fiction as

[...] a label attached by reviewers to novels whose plots centred on criminal deeds, or social transgressions and illicit passions, and which ‘preached to the nerves’. Sensation novels were tales of modern life that dealt in nervous, psychological, sexual and social shocks, and had

²⁸ Oliphant, Margaret, “Modern Novelists – Great and Small” in *Blackwood’s*, 77, 1855, p.566

complicated plots involving bigamy, adultery, seduction, fraud, forgery, blackmail, kidnapping and, sometimes, murder.²⁹

The difference between Newgate and sensational fiction is difficult to pinpoint, because the themes treated in both of them are very similar. The main difference is that sensational fiction deals more with crime and transgression that is proper of middle and upper-classes, in a modern setting unlike the Newgate novel. The underworld is left behind and gives space to the “dark undersides of respectable societies”³⁰: family has a central role in this genre, as well as the secrets from which most of the plot complications derive. Crimes, and the problems that they generate, are solved within the family, and without the intercession of courts or prison. Another important difference with the Newgate novel is the shift in focus from the crime itself to the deductive method that leads to the solution of the crime. It is the manifestation of the change of the trend that involved the literature of that period starting from the foundation of the Detective Police in 1842 in England. In a world where everyone is a potential criminal, detection becomes fundamental to discover the subterfuges behind the mask of a respectable society. Moreover, starting from this point, female, smart figures start to prevail both in the criminal and the detection worlds of fiction. Opponents see this new approach to the genre as a menace, because it highlights the danger posed by women, who are able to use knowledge to their advantage to threaten the society as they wish.

As happened to the Newgate fiction, the sensation novel started a wide debate on its influence over their readers and on its cultural status. Pykett writes:

Opponents of the sensation novel objected to its mixed characters, moral ambiguity, and mixed feelings – in short, to the ways in which the plots and narrative methods of sensation novels repeatedly put their readers in the position of having to suspend or revise moral judgements.³¹

²⁹ Pykett, Lyn, “The Newgate novel and sensation fiction, 1830–1868” in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p.33

³⁰ Ibidem, p.34

³¹ Ibidem, p.35

As already mentioned before, the cornerstone of sensation novels lies in its journalistic construct: their stories are based so much on news about real crimes that they are as well nicknamed “newspaper novels”. Critics declared that this new subgenre was only a means through which readers "supply the cravings of a diseased appetite"³², and that it does not produce anything good: it was also defined as an “absolute drug to the literary market”³³. The sensational formula worked because it stimulated the interest of the readers, not only because of the already existent curiosity towards the gothic genre, which presents similar themes, but because they see these novels as a criticism toward the corrupted society they live in. To the eyes of the anti-sensation novelists, this genre was the perfect representation of the symptoms and causes of the corruption spreading towards England in the second half of the nineteenth century, and it was a source of nourishment for readers.

Detective fiction, widely spreading through Europe and the United States, reached its greatest popularity in the years between the two World Wars, in a period which is defined by several critics, the first one being Howard Haycraft³⁴, the Golden Age because of the huge variety of subgenres developing from the fame of the sensational novel. There is not a uniformity in the works of fiction produced during that period: themes range from the intuitive methods of the Catholic priest Father Brown to the first examples of psycho-thrillers and spy stories. However, most of the writers of this period, who predominate on the 1920s and 1930s years, share a set of elements, which was less common during the early stages of detective fiction and has now become a milestone. Multiple suspects and the almost constant presence of murder as the main crime were only two of the recurring elements. The first period of the Golden Age of detective

³² Manse, H. L. "Sensation Novels." In *Quarterly Review* 113, 1863, p.357

³³ Hollingsworth, Keith, *The Newgate Novel, 1830-1847: Bulwer, Ainsworth, Dickens & Thackeray*, Wayne State University Press, p. 149.

³⁴ Haycraft Howard, *Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story*, D.Appleton-Century Company, New York, London, 1942, kindle edition. The whole quotation recites: "In ending our consideration of the British detective story for this prolific period -- the richest single age in the literature -- it may be well to summarize briefly the chief developments of the era. They were three in number: (1) the vast improvement in the 'literacy' of the detective story; (2) the new insistence on fidelity and plausibility, as opposed to the old school of melodrama and hokum; and (3) the increased emphasis, particularly toward the end of the period, on character, with the concurrent wane of the story of mechanical plot alone. In all truth, it was 'The Golden Age'"

fiction is characterised by several elements. In the first place, the story is confined to a single place, generally an apartment or, most frequently, a country house. This particular setting will give life to a specific subgenre of detective fiction, the Country House Mystery, in which a crime, generally a murder, occurs during a weekend party in a typical country manor and finds a solution only thanks to the brilliant deductive skills of an amateur detective. Moreover, the environment forces a specific social class to be isolated from the rest of the world, showing the reader its fragility. The choice of the crime has a clear intent: it is in line with the thought that murder is strongly representative of the breakdown involving society, represented as corrupted. When the story does not focus on the country mystery, it involves upper social classes in any case, leaving the lower classes to a marginal role. In *Theory and Practice of Classic Detective fiction*, James Bartell remarks that

Though there are almost always representative of the working class in the background of these social gathering [...] the murdered almost never comes from this [lower] class; in other words, the butler doesn't do it. The people who are caught at the focal point of the novel are almost invariably members of a landowning leisure class.³⁵

The culprit always belongs to a higher social status, and he usually comes from the same environment as the victim: this changes the traditional element that placed the criminal in a lower class. Furthermore, the victim, most of the time a man of success, is never mourned, as he means very little if at all to the involved characters. As far as the deductive process is concerned, the trend set by Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* continues to be followed by the new generation of writers: the emotional detachment from the murder (or, generally speaking, to the crime) allows the improvised or professional detective to rely on rationality more than intuition. The detection concentrates on circumstantial evidence, properly interpreted and used to lead the main character to the culprit, hidden among a multitude of suspects. The almost total absence

³⁵ Bartell E., James, "The Bureaucrat as Reader: The detective novel in the Context of Middle-Class culture" in *Theory and Practice of Classic detective fiction*, 1997, Hofstra University, New York, p.183

of romance is balanced with the constant stimulation of the reader's mind that gets interested in the story through a clearer narration matching the deductive reasoning.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, the "whodunit" genre asserts its supremacy among subgenres, thanks to its ability to involve the reader in the story to the point that he can identify himself with the detective. The "whodunit", jocular formation that stands for "who did it" and coined by the journalist Sime Silverman around 1934³⁶, became soon the most predominant form of detective fiction: here, the author leaves clues in the text that allow his audience to draw their own conclusion before the end of the story. As stated by John Scaggs in *Crime Fiction*, the questions lingering during the reading

"...encourages the reader to imitate the detective, and to retrace the causative steps from effects back to causes, and in so doing to attempt to answer the question at the heart of all stories of mystery and detective fiction: who did it?"³⁷

The attempt of the reader to be part of the deductive reasoning of the protagonist is a basic characteristic of the whodunit genre. In order to give the reader the chance to solve the case together with, or even before the detective, the text must provide him with the same knowledge about the facts that the main character has. This results in another distinctive feature of the genre, the fair play:

"...the most widely known and most unusual element [...] [is] the fact that the reader is challenged to match the detective's process of identifying the murderer and there should be therefore 'fair play': the reader must be informed of each clue that the detective sees."³⁸

Fair play also means that the reason of the murder must lie somewhere inside the novel. The same, of course, is true for the culprit: as established by the set of ten rules written by a priest called Father Ronald Knox in 1929, "the criminal must be mentioned

³⁶ Morris, Mary, Morris, William, "Words... Wit... Wisdom" in *Toledo Blade*, 3rd June 1985, p.31

³⁷ Scaggs, John, *Crime Fiction*, Routledge, New York, 2005, p.34

³⁸ Knight, Stephen, "The Golden Age" in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p.79

in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to know”³⁹.

The most famous type of whodunit fiction is the clue-puzzle, whose archetype appears in 1920 with Agatha Christie’s *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. It follows the trend set by Sherlock Holmes’s success, and gives its success to its challenging nature. Stephen Knight describes the clue-puzzle as providing a high degree of reader involvement, defining it “a highly complex form combining both consolation and anxiety, tests and treats, for those readers who found the form so compulsive in the period - and may still do today.”⁴⁰ In addition to the characteristics that define the whodunit genre, different elements characterise the clue-puzzle novel: the victim is always a successful businessperson, or a rich landowner who provokes envious feelings on the ones near him. Moreover, the lower classes lose their predominant role as members of the underworld and function only as a means to divert the attention from the real murderer, often a colleague or a relative of the victim. Clue-puzzle novels, widely popular in Britain and America, start to be widespread in the rest of the world, and soon become a major literary formation. The success of this subgenre relates of course to the mental strain it generates on the readers’ mind, but it has a deeper, multifaceted meaning as well. On the one hand, the public sees the solving of the puzzle as the restoring of a social order previously upset by the criminal act. On the other hand, clue-puzzle novels have a para-religious function: Nicholas Blake links “the rise of crime fiction with the decline of religion at the end of the Victorian Era”⁴¹, while others see them as a ‘Puritan’ way to reject excess in every way. The post-war period plays an important role as well, as the population tries to find an escape from reality and a way to relax in novels.

Thanks to the popularity of the whodunit subgenre, detective fiction finally achieves the status of literary genre between 1920 and 1930. Different reasons contribute to its remarkable consolidation. Firstly, the length of the stories changes: short stories, who

³⁹ Scaggs, John, *Crime Fiction*, Routledge, New York, 2005, p.37

⁴⁰ Knight, Stephen, *Crime Fiction, 1800-2000: Detection, Death, Diversity*. Palgrave MacMillan, London, 2004, p.91

⁴¹ Black, Nicholas, *Murder for Pleasure: the Life and Times of the Detective Story*, Introduction, Peter Davies, London, 1942, p. xx

ruled the market for almost a century, are now replaced by novels, which favour a slower development of the plot and an increasing interest in the resolution of the enigma. Furthermore, this permits a better development of the characters and the setting, now more elaborated and with a less marginal role. Another element is the change of direction towards the gender of people interested in both writing and reading this type of fiction. As reported by Knight,

Lending libraries which [...] were the basic medium for dissemination of the new clue-puzzle novels had a 75 percent female audience. The tendency towards intellect and observation, rather than heroic action, and the marked limitation of strong masculinity in the detective heroes shape a form which is increasingly read, and written, by women.⁴²

Various representative authors of the period are female, first of all Agatha Christie, one of the most popular authors of the Golden Age: her influence on the genre is so enormous that she was given the title of “Queen of Crime”. Three other women gave an important contribute to the Golden Age, though they all wrote about male detectives: in fact, female detectives start to take a central role on the literary stage only after the Second World War. The first one to give a contribution to the continuous evolution of the whodunit genre is Dorothy L. Sayers, who created one of the most imitated detectives of the Golden Age, Lord Peter Wimsey. He first appeared in *Whose body?*, dated 1923, and later will be the protagonist of 12 novels and 21 short stories series written between 1924 and 1942. The second detective, created by of Margery Allingham, is Albert Campion: he first appeared in 1929 and looked like a parody of the typical detective figure of the Golden Age, especially as a mockery of Peter Wimsey; but as the series progressed, his personality developed and he became an independent character. The last woman is Ngaio Marsh, who started a new series in 1934 featuring Roderick Alleyn, a detective from Scotland Yard, which adventures continued until his last appearance in 1982.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 81

The “de-heroising” of the detective figure⁴³ is a particular event of the Golden Age that deserves to be mentioned. Edmund C. Bentley, writing *Trent’s last case* in 1913, introduced a detective who, contrary to the analytical and cold Sherlock Holmes, is “recognizable as a human being and was not quite so much the ‘heavy sleuth’”⁴⁴, as defined by the author himself. In fact, main purpose of this novel was to show and taunt the fallibility of the Holmesian method. Philip Trent, a journalist who acts as a gentleman detective, not only falls in love with one of the suspects, the attractive widow of the dead victim, but also fails to interpret all the evidence he finds and draws all the wrong conclusions. After the accusation of the wrong person and the revelation by the real murderer of what he missed in his deduction, Trent decides that he will never try again to be involved in a crime investigation.

This deviation from the typical detective story was not considered much though, as most of the authors of the Golden Age preferred to follow the thread established by Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle and, more recently, by Agatha Christie. In addition to the conventions already listed, the majority of detective fictions based their story on the relationship between the brilliant detective and their companion, usually only a means through which the story is conveyed, and sometimes seen as “a conductor of light”⁴⁵. The sleuth’s assistant as a first-person narrator is a fixed characteristic in detective stories. As mentioned by Rimmon-Kenan in *Narrative fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, it is the companion-narrator who sets the pace of the novel. Moreover, the point of view of the sleuth must be unknown to preserve the mystery, and the ingenuity of his clueless companion prevails until the end of the story, when the narrative reaches its climax and the detective solves the case thanks to his stunning abilities. This is the reason why companions are needed: they ensure the success of a story by slowing down

⁴³ Ibidem, p. 81

⁴⁴ Bentley, Edmund C., *Those Days*, Constable Edition, London, 1940, p.252

⁴⁵ Doyle, Arthur Conan, “The Hound of the Baskervilles” in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, Sterling, New York 2009, p. 636. This is the whole quote: “It may be that you are not yourself luminous, but that you are a conductor of light. Some people without possessing genius have a remarkable power of stimulating it,” The statement describes the relationship between Holmes and Watson. It perfectly represents the figure of the loyal companion in most detective fictions that followed the success of Sherlock Holmes’s novels: he is the one who encourages the reader to make their own deductions.

its rhythm and by stimulating the interest in the reader.⁴⁶ This structure works perfectly since the companion-narrator is put on the same level as the reader, and the suspense set by the development of the case is never spoiled. Furthermore, the recurring use of the first-person narrator in the story underlines another function of the companion: he takes the reader by the hand and leads him through the story. Readers can easily relate to someone who directly addresses them, and who is clueless of how the brilliant brain of the detective works. Another important feature is the constant task of praising the detective's skills; otherwise, the main character would probably appear insufferable to the eyes of the readers because of his pompous attitude toward his clients. Besides the anonymous Dupin's fellow and Doctor Watson, detective literature is full of characters supporting their companions, one of the most famous being Captain Hastings, the best friend of Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot and built around John Watson's character, and Archie Goodwin, Nero Wolfe's assistant created by Rex Stout.

The whodunit is not the only genre that develops during the Golden Age. The "hard-boiled" fiction develops in American during the same period. It differs from the whodunit fiction because it deviates from the traditional detective's attitude towards emotions like horror or terror. Here, it is the protagonist himself who informs the reader about his state of mind. This type of narrative is based on Western and gangster stories, in which the main character is an individual who has to face a degrading environment. Because of this degradation, he starts to lead a criminal life, becoming rich and powerful before falling a victim to the same world that gave him success. The combination of this premise and of a detective-hero creates something new in the literary field. The setting of hard-boiled novels changes as well: the country house of the English detective novel is replaced by the urban landscape of big cities like New York or Los Angeles. The glamorous lights of the city hide death and corruption, in an environment that recalls the atmosphere of the gothic story. The only difference is that now the evil that permeates crime is everywhere in the city. The detective serves as a link between the lack of respectability of the society and the criminal world. In addition,

⁴⁶ Shlomith, Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*, Methuen, London, 1983, p.127

he is the only figure able to act against a world that is too corrupted; this is the reason why police forces, showing again their incompetence, rely on him when action is required. He does not come from a wealthy background: he is an ordinary man who lives in isolation because of his distrust towards humankind. However, he is motivated to hinder the mischievous work of a society unable to accept him exactly because of this reason. A characteristic of the hard-boiled detective is the main character's chivalry: he is on the side of the weak, and spends all his energy to protect innocents, working hard to lead the wrong ones back to the right path. Moreover, he acts as a judge of the crime he is put in front of, and he does not wait for police action: this is something he has in common with the detectives of the Victorian era. Minor characters play an important role in the development of the hard-boiled story, as they mostly build the environment in which the detective moves. These characters can be divided in two groups. Corrupted people that hide behind a mask of respectability and honesty, and that the detective must find and expose to judgement compose the first one. The second one, instead, gathers the detective's friends and allies. Regardless of this subdivision, the detective can trust no one, as anyone around him could be a potential criminal, able to dissimulate their real nature. Most of the time, the culprit is above suspicion in hard-boiled fiction: this is a great device used by novelists to surprise the reader. Moreover, it is not strange for the convict to be a woman: female figures often act as weak creatures who attract the detective's attention and try to divert his moral principles. They act first as provocateurs, and then they reveal their real nature.

As many of the novels written before and during the Golden Age, hard-boiled novelists choose to utilise a first person narrator, emphasised by the use of a street vernacular and an explicit language. The first person narrator also permits the reader to see directly into the detective's head, to feel what he feels and understand his actions. The present tense is preferred, because it gives the reader the sensation to be buried in the story and to follow the detective's reasoning and adventure step by step.

In comparison to the whodunit subgenre, the hard-boiled novel survives differently after the Second World War. As mentioned by John Scaggs in *Crime fiction*,

One reason for this survival was the uncertain post-war world in which writers, and readers, found themselves, to which the calm certainties of the whodunnit were unsuited and in which they were no longer useful. A second, and more interesting, reason for this a chronology of crime survival is the suitability of hard-boiled fiction for gender, ethnic, and cultural appropriation.⁴⁷

As far as gender is concerned, the hard-boiled sub-genre is one of the first to set the basis for a future type of novel featuring a woman as main character, the private eye novel. Numerous series that develop at the end of the Second World War, in fact, see a female predomination among the protagonists of these novels. The representation of differences in ethnicity and culture between the detective and the secondary character is a natural consequence of the setting in which hard-boiled novels find their development, as American metropolises are preferred and, consequently, their multicultural and multi-ethnic nature plays a meaningful role.

Another subgenre develops in the 1920s, at the same time as hard-boiled fiction. The private eye fiction shares several features with its alternative: the setting is again the big city, and the detective still works alone. Nevertheless, the private detective, hired to investigate a situation rather than a crime, might have colleagues to support him, and could be considered as a rival of the police forces. T.J. Bynion, in *Murder will out: the Detective in fiction*, explains that

"Early in the 1920's a new type of fictional detective came into being in the United States. [...] the new type, variously called private investigator [...] is the product of American reality. Sometimes he belongs to a detective agency, sometimes he is a lone individual, a modern knight, defending the hapless and oppressed. But in both cases the gangsters, the violence and the gun-play reflect the American life during and after Prohibition."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Scaggs, John, *Crime Fiction*, Routledge, New York, 2005, p.29

⁴⁸ Bynion, T.J., *Murder Will Out: The Detective in Fiction*, quoted in Smith, Kevin Burton, "What the hell?", *Thrilling Detective*, February 1st 2001, Web. May 4th 2014, <<http://www.thrillingdetective.com/trivia/triv78.html>>

The success of the private eye fiction is to be associated with the particular historical, cultural and economic context in which it emerges. Between 1870 and the first years of 1900, the United States were living an era of economic growth and wealth, which lay the basis of the modern capitalism system. This permitted a fast evolution of the social environment, and a rapid improvement of the economic condition of the higher class, though this widened the gap with the lower ones. The new environment in which American society flourished brought the development of a new, more organised type of crime, which was based on the corruption of politics and the representatives of the higher classes. The sanction of the XVIII Amendment in 1920 started the era of Prohibition, and it plunged into despair thousands of people belonging to the working and middle classes, who turned into criminals. Private eye fiction attracted a wide range of readers because it was strictly related with reality, in its content as well as in the way the text was conveyed. The story, generally written using the first person narrator, uses a crude, realistic language, very close to the one ordinary people use to talk about their experience. In *The Simple Art of Murder*, Raymond Chandler describes the different sides of the main character:

“Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor.”⁴⁹

A great example is given by Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest*, published as a novel in 1929 and one of the first private eye novels to meet the editorial world after the serialisation in four parts on the *Black Mask* magazine. The use of the first narrative voice, rich with slang terms, makes Hammett's works realistic and attractive to their readers. Using again Chandler's words

Hammett gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse; and with the means at hand, not hand-

⁴⁹ Chandler, Raymond, in James Nelson, *The Simple Art of Murder*, Norton, New York, 1968, p. 533

wrought duelling pistols, curare and tropical fish. He put these people down on paper as they were, and he made them talk and think in the language they customarily used for these purposes.⁵⁰

Another fundamental writer for the establishment of the genre was indeed Raymond Chandler. *The Big Sleep* is a great example of Chandler's talent: it is the first of a series of novels written between 1939 and 1959 starring the detective Philip Marlowe. The structure of the novel is episodic. Each part is unified by the investigative purpose of the protagonist, and spiced by the dramatization of scenes and dialogues, which generates the suspense typical of this genre. The protagonist of this series is stunningly characterised: he is a wise and honest man, a "pragmatic man of action but one with a work ethic that requires him to take all the punishment low-life hitmen or venal cops can hand out and come back for more."⁵¹ He is not a wealthy man, as prosperity has a clear connotation in Chandler's novels: it represents the failure of the political and economic institutions, which led the nation to the Great Depression in the decades that followed the Second World War.

The 1960s see the explosion of popularity of spy fiction in America. John Cawelti and Bruce Rosenberg describe it as a distinct variation on detective story. The main difference is that there is no discrete crime involved but rather a covert action, which "transgresses conventional, moral, or legal boundaries"⁵². The main reason to its success is related to the increasing anxieties over the credibility of the political institutions. Spy fiction started in the second decade of the nineteenth century, when Fenimore Cooper writes *The Spy*, the very first novel to deal with espionage, which takes place during the American Revolution. In England, spy stories become popular because of the general feeling of insecurity towards the relationships the nation was establishing with foreign countries. The paranoid fear towards the enemy becomes a keystone of the spy story. As remarked by David Stafford, "the world presented by these novels is a dangerous and treacherous one in which Britain is the target of the

⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 14

⁵¹ Porter, Dennis, "The Private Eye" in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p.105

⁵² Cawelti John, Rosenberg Bruce, *The Spy Story*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1987, p.13

envy, hostility, of the other European powers, singly or collectively according to context”.⁵³ Cultural differences between England and other countries made the last ones appear as aliens. In spy stories, the action of spying is performed by foreign countries, while the protagonists are young men, only amateurs of this practice. The main attraction to the reader in spy stories is given by the chance to discover the inner workings of something generally hidden to the eyes of an ordinary person. Citing Arthur Conan Doyle, the reader can have access to “that secret history of a nation which is often so much more intimate and interesting than its public chronicles”⁵⁴. The author who gave the larger contribute to spy fiction is Erskine Childers with *The Riddle of the Sands*, written in 1903. Childers builds his stories on the rejection of the old-fashionable image of the spy and favouring a wider, more detailed examination of characters and events that helped him to build the suspense and excitement readers were looking for.

After the First World War, spy stories started to change in their structure and style. Most of the time, it is difficult to distinguish between the parts involved in the espionage, because the text diverts the reader’s attention to sequences of less importance, making the narration less clear. This lasts until the end of the period between the two World Wars, when Ian Fleming introduces James Bond’s novels, which dominates post-war spy fiction for a long time. Fleming was deeply involved in the espionage world: he participated in the Second World War as a member of the Naval Intelligence, and took advantage of his experience to build events and characters of the Bond series. Fleming’s work is almost fantastic: the protagonist of his novels represents his own fantasies, both in bed and during action⁵⁵, and the use of a style similar to the hard-boiled fiction gives an extra touch to the stunning atmosphere that distinguishes Fleming’s works. His novels function according to the opposition of hero and villain: their rivalry is underlined by several twists and reversed situations. However, it does not matter how many difficulties Bond will have to ride out, he will always triumph in the end. Another aspect that consolidated the series’ popularity is the

⁵³ Stafford, David A. T., “Spies and Gentlemen: The Birth of the British Spy Novel, 1883–1914”, in *Victorian Studies* 24.iv, 1981, pp.497–8.

⁵⁴ Doyle, Arthur Conan, “The Bruce-Partington Plans” in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, Sterling, New York 2009, p. 891.

⁵⁵ Lycett, Andrew, *Ian Fleming: The Man Behind James Bond*, Turner Publishing, Atlanta, 1995, p.220

constant reference to cultural elements that slow down the narrative to explore different worlds: everybody knows James Bond's passion for gambling and wine-tasting. These elements are present in any Bond novel, and always central to the novels' action. During the publication of the novels, in a period that covers about ten years, British readers saw Bond's actions as compensatory fantasies. As remarked by Bennett and Woolacott,

Bond embodied the imaginary power that England might once again be placed at the centre of world affairs during a period when its world power status was visibly and rapidly declining.⁵⁶

The Bond series was so appreciated by the public that it became, and still is, one of the cultural symbols of England, expanding outwards from fiction into other media, as films and music.

In contrast to the incredible adventures of James Bond, John le Carré is characterised by a more realistic and austere style. As for Fleming, le Carré experienced the life of a spy during the Second World War, working for the Intelligence Corps, and successively for the British Intelligence Service. His first novels, *Call for the Dead*, dated 1961, and *A Murder of Quality*, dated 1962, were murder mysteries that contained elements of espionage, but his very debut as a spy novelist coincided with the publication of *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*, in 1963. The novel centres on the politico-military tension that was occurring between the late years of 1950s and the early years of the 1960s of the Cold War, and is set in East Germany, one year after the completion of the Berlin Wall. In his first novels, le Carré keeps to a satirical style, showing a dramatized nostalgia towards the power of the British services when they were at their most powerful, during the Second World War. However, with the Karla trilogy, focused on the character of George Smiley, his narrative becomes more psychological and complex.

Generally speaking, spy novels tend to follow the path already set by detective fiction: the solution of the main problem, the discovery of the threat for a nation, that is the central character who in the previous detective novels was a murderer and now is a

⁵⁶ Bennett, Tony, Woolacott, Janet, *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero*, MacMillan, London, 1987, p.28

spy, is found in the gathering and interpretation of clues and information through which the conspiracy is confirmed and dismantled. The mystery is given by the decoding of the information the protagonist owns. Novels are most of the time an interpretation of the nations as seen by their authors: their relationship with foreign countries, the stability of their government system, and many others are issues constantly debated by spy fiction.

The last genre to develop during the Golden Age and derived by detective fiction is the thriller. Thriller fiction has a lot in common with sensational fiction, with which it shares the disturbing treating of crime, mystery and betrayal typical of the Victorian stage melodrama. As for hard-boiled fiction, the thriller become popular because of the period it started to take shape in: the late Twenties marked the beginning of the Great Depression, which contributed to the creation of a more widespread crime in America.

At its start, thriller fiction was not appreciated by the general public, mostly because of the constant comparison with detective fiction and the distinction between the power of logical analysis promoted by Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* and the crude sensationalism of the thriller, which only aimed, at least for critics, at unsettling its reader. In Dorothy Sawyer's words,

the reader is led on from bewilderment to bewilderment, till everything is explained in a lump in the last chapter. This school is strong in dramatic incident and atmosphere; its weakness is a tendency to confusion and a dropping of links – its explanations do not always explain; it is never dull, but it is sometimes nonsense.⁵⁷

The thriller was described by Austin Freeman as a “mere crime story”, which differs completely from the detective story, which “finds its principal motive in the unravelment of crimes or similar intricate mysteries”⁵⁸. Several critics consider the thriller as a genre that often is not well constructed and loses itself in its dramatic atmospheres and in the scenes that derive from them, without giving the reader any

⁵⁷ Sawyer, Dorothy L., “Introduction” in *The Omnibus of Crime*, Payson & Clarke Ltd, New York, 1929, p.19

⁵⁸ Freeman, R. Austin, “The art of detective story” in *The Art of the Mystery Story: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Howard Haycraft, New York, 1992, p. 7

explanation about these events. Nevertheless, it was not always true that thriller novels were “illogical”. Many authors displayed a meticulous dedication to details, and tried to make their stories plausible: the writer aims to make his readers believe that what happens in his story is believable. The thriller differs in several aspects from the detective fiction. While the deductive method is used in this type of novel, its role is secondary. In thriller, the main focus is on the crime itself, more than on the procedural way to reach its solution, and on the criminal committing it. The predominant feature is action, and it is constantly brought to the extreme, transforming every event into a dangerous one. Even though it is important to take notice of what is unknown and to try to discover as much as possible, the impulse to solve the problem following the desire of rough justice makes the main character impatient. Consequently, he pays less attention to details, because he is convinced that “details don’t make much difference”⁵⁹. As identified by Priestman in *Detective Fiction and Literature*, the focus of the thriller is on present and current danger, more than in the investigation of past actions.⁶⁰ The hero of the thriller is generally characterized by recklessness, and his willingness to take risks, even if they could lead him to make mistakes: he does not worry about them, since they could permit the course of events to go forward and lead him to the solution of the case. Obstacles and mistakes are the best fuel for action in thrillers: they all represent a test for the protagonist. By overcoming them, he will accomplish his mission.

Julian Symons, in a research study on crime fiction, has drawn a list of distinction between detective story and thriller. First of all, the crime thriller bases its stories on the psychology of its characters who, under pressure, cannot bear an intolerable situation, leading them to act violently. Most of the time, the protagonist of the novel is not a detective, unlike what happens in detective fiction or even hard-boiled fiction: he is in fact an ordinary person, not used to danger, who entrusts his mental resources to solve his issues with the antagonist. The setting plays an important role as well, because of the innate relationship it establishes with crime itself: the urban environment gives a defined tone to the story, and sets the novel in the right atmosphere. The novel explores

⁵⁹ Hammett, Dashiell, *The Dain Curse*, Pan Books, London, 1975, p. 93

⁶⁰ Priestman, Martin, *Detective Fiction and Literature: The Figure on the Carpet*, MacMillan, Basingstone, 1998, p.43

and judges different aspects belonging to justice, society and law, according to a radical perspective. To conclude, the story is constituted by the observations made by its characters: in Symons's own words, "The lives of characters are shown continuing after the crime, and often their subsequent behaviour is important to the story's effect"⁶¹. Of course, these characteristics are not valid for all the novels that belong to this genre: it is the absence or the inclusion of one or more of them that creates the great variety typical of the thriller crime: examples are the noir thriller or the legal thriller.

In conclusion, the Golden Age of detective fiction was characterised by the variety of subgenres that were established between the 1920s and 1930s, subgenres which further developed over the decades, asserting their popularity not only in their countries of origin, England and United States, but also in the rest of the world.

1.2 Detective Fiction in Children's literature

1.2.1 The development of the genre in Children's literature: from The Hardy Boys to Harry Potter

According to the *Continuum Encyclopaedia of Children's literature*, mystery and detective stories are one of the most appreciated genres among juvenile audiences: this is proved by the several awards the category received compared to other subgenres of children's literature.⁶² Nevertheless, it is not an easy task to define a specific category in this field as it is for its adult counterpart. Christopher Routledge, in the topic of detective literature for children, writes that

Children and young readers are not restricted to stories written specifically for them, and anthologies of crime and detective fiction

⁶¹ Symons, Julian, *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel*, The Mysterious Press, New York, 1993, p.193

⁶² Cullinan, Bernice E, Goetz Person, Diane, *The Continuum Encyclopaedia of Children's literature*, Continuum International, New York, 2001, p.572

produced for younger readers often include a mix of stories, at least some of which were originally intended for adults.⁶³

The market for crime and detective fiction exclusively dedicated to children is nowadays expanding, but until the last years of the twentieth century, it often overlapped with texts written for adult readers. Detective stories for younger readers have started to differentiate themselves only recently, thanks to a greater attention towards this new, younger public: adults cease to be the main characters and give space to a brand new generation of detectives, as young as their readers.

The interest towards mystery topics in children's literature rose in the middle of the nineteenth century, in conjunction with the rising popularity of detective fiction in the adult world. During this period, children's literature started to take over from religious and moral tales and took a brand new road, characterised mostly by entertainment and adventure. Elements of detection and mystery were already present in stories written specifically for children, but a defined genre did not exist yet, as detective fiction for younger readers developed more slowly than its adult form. Detective stories for children have their roots in several novels featuring young people as protagonists, one of the most popular being *The Adventures of Oliver Twist*. In these novels, children play an unexpectedly predominant role, as they are the ones leading the story in a novel written for an adult audience.

This was the situation until the first decades of the twentieth century. The first one to take a step in the detection field was Baden Powell, with his *Scouting for boys*, dated 1908. It is a handbook based on the author's boyhood experiences and inspired by two military books he had written earlier. It features several steps a boy must follow in order to stimulate his mental activity. Among these instructions, Powell enlists a series of instructions to follow when an encounter with a dead body happens. As pointed out by Troy Boone in *The Juvenile Detective and Social Class*,

The handbook suggest that, if the British boy's play area does not happen to be littered with corpses, such observational skills can be instilled

⁶³ Routledge, Christopher, *Crime and Detective Literature for Young Readers*, Long Lane Press, 2012, kindle edition

in young people by directing their reading habits. The lists of recommended books with which each chapter of *Scouting for Boys* concludes have done much to incorporate adult detective fiction – particularly the works of Doyle – into the juvenile canon.⁶⁴

Successively, the American Edward Stratemeyer, who had already printed several series that contained element of mystery and detection with the Stratemeyer Literary Syndicate⁶⁵, published the first novel of the *Hardy Boys* series in 1927. Stratemeyer was the first one in the literary market to recognise the potential mystery stories could have for young readers. This is demonstrated by the insertion of detection elements in two series that began respectively in 1899 and 1910, *The Rover Boys* series and *The Tom Swift* series, even if these two series still relied more on the sensational effect they had on their young readers than on the fascination originated by the deductive method. *The Hardy Boys* series, who accompanied its young readers from 1927 until recent years (the last book was published in 2005), is composed of 190 novels. The books, written by different ghost writers and published under the pseudonym Franklin W. Dixon, feature Frank and Joe, two brothers who live in a fictional version of Bayport, in New York, with their parents. Their father is a detective. School is hardly mentioned, as the two boys spend most of the book having adventures and solving mysteries. Several times, they investigate on cases related to their father's work, and it is not unusual for him to ask his sons for help.

Detective stories for children developed more slowly than their adult counterparts, because children's literature was still underestimated. In spite of this, children's literature was full of references to detection and crime in books enjoyed by younger readers: many stories revolve around children being victims of strangers' criminal intents, or of the cruelty of their own parents. The change of direction started precisely thanks to the Hardy Boys series, which finally set a trend in the field of Children's literature. Starting from the publication of the first book of the series in 1927, the

⁶⁴ Boone, Troy, "The Juvenile Detective and Social Class" in *Mystery in Children's literature: From the Rational to the Supernatural*, Palgrave, Houndmills, 2001, P.52

⁶⁵ The Stratemeyer Literary Syndicate, founded in 1904 by Edward Stratemeyer, was a novel-writing team that wrote together several of the most famous series about mystery and detective for children, series that were introduced in the literary market under a collective pseudonym.

Syndicate focused more on the production of detective stories, which demonstrated to be very profitable. Though the series was not appreciated by the adult world, as they saw it as a possible threat for their children's minds, it still sold well: it was a way to escape from a world that struggled to overcome the effects of the Great Depression. In Europe, the first example of detective story for children took the shape of a comic album, *Les Aventures de Tintin*, which appeared in a supplement of the Belgian newspaper *Le Vingtième Siècle* and was created by Hergé. Tintin, followed by his loyal dog Snowy, is a newspaper reporter who often finds himself involved in unexpected adventures. Since his adventures are somehow related to the criminal world, Tintin acts as a detective: his adventures recalls the Hardy Boys', where detection is combined with action.

As for its adult counterparts, the golden age of detective fiction for children, as defined by Christopher Routledge, covers the years between 1920 and 1930. While the raise of comic books allowed several authors to convey their stories in a new way, the literary industry started to direct more attention to its younger readers by producing new series about children detectives, guided by the potential profit from the children's market. In 1930, Nancy Drew makes her first appearance in the literary market. The girl sleuth made her appearance at a time when

girls were ready for something different--something that gave them higher ideals. Nancy was the embodiment of independence, pluck, and intelligence and that was what many little girls craved to be like and to emulate.⁶⁶

The first novel she appears in is *The secret of the Old Clock*, published by the Stratemeyer Literary Syndicate under the pseudonym Carolyn Keene. Here, Nancy is a sixteen-year-old girl who helps a family struck by the death of a man called Josiah Crowley. This, and the influence of her father, who is an attorney, brings her to investigate on the Crowley family's rivals, the Tophams, and live an incredible adventure. Nancy Drew came into the literary world in the Great Depression, and

⁶⁶ Fisher, Jennifer, *The mysterious history of Nancy Drew*, July 1st 2001, Web. May 24th 2014, <<http://www.nancydrewsleuth.com/history.html>>

embodies the solution to the problems afflicting the people who suddenly found themselves in the lower classes. This reflects on her intolerance towards the Tophams, and on her struggle for putting everything back in order. As remarked by Routledge, Nancy Drew was so successful because

[it] offered female readers a version of girlhood that blended conventional femininity with practicality, physical resilience, and overwhelming competence. The mysteries Nancy investigates are closer to home and more domestic than those of the Hardy Boys, but even so she takes risks.⁶⁷

The character of Nancy Drew combines several extremes. She is adventurous and willing to take risks as a boy would do, but she retains her feminine persona. In addition, she is adult enough to be treated as an equal, especially by her father, but she is still a child who needs to be rescued and protected, something that makes readers relate to her. It is important to underline that Nancy Drew broke several taboos imposed by the patriarchal standards that society had inherited from the Victorian Era: while women were seen as inferiors, passive and not allowed to know too much, Nancy was a heroine, and, more important, a detective. She is an active character with a wide knowledge, the total opposite of what society expected from women. In this respect, she represents the apotheosis of the girl described in *Scouting for girls*, written in 1920, a version for feminine readers of the already famous *Scouting for boys*. The book depicts a world as mysterious as the one set down for boys, but with clear references to the feminine world, as for instance domestic work or concern for appearance. Although the *Nancy Drew* series might appear unrealistic to adult readers, given the protagonist's perfection and infallibility, it was one of the most influential texts for children, and above all for girls. It is not a coincidence that many of the series that followed it featured female protagonists. Margaret Sutton's Judy Bolton, protagonist of a series developed between 1932 and 1967, provides a perfect example. The series covers her whole life, starting from her first case at the age of fifteen until her marriage, which does not prevent her

⁶⁷ Routledge, Christopher, *Crime and Detective Literature for Young Readers*, Long Lane Press, 2012, kindle edition

from continuing to solve mysteries. Readers found Judy Bolton more appealing as opposed to Nancy Drew, because of the lack of perfection that characterised the latter instead. This added a touch of realism on Judy's character in respect to Nancy, and offered a more suitable and achievable model for girls. Judy shows her weaknesses by asking friends and family for help during the solving her cases and, as remarked by Sally Parry, she "is more likely to restore moral rather than legal order, because her mysteries tend to emphasize human relationships over material possessions."⁶⁸. Sutton's stories were different from the ones written by the Stratemeyer Syndicate. Also, they were so charming that she inspired several authors' works, as for instance *Trixie Belden*, a series written by Julie Campbell Tatham between 1948 and 1986 and more similar to Judy Bolton than to Nancy Drew.

Erich Kästner's *Emil and the Detectives* gives another contribution to the success of detective fiction for children during its Golden Age, especially after the publication of its first English version. It is a novel published in 1929 and set in Berlin, where most of the action occurs. Here, as it was in the *Nancy Drew* series, Emil acts as an adult despite his young age: he is travelling alone from Neustadt and towards Berlin, when he is drugged and robbed on the train by a mysterious man. The event will lead him to chase the thief. He will not be alone, though: during his hunt he will be helped by a crowd of children. The story captures the reader's interest because of the realistic environment in which it takes place: the city, and its dangerous sides, are all seen through the eyes of the child/narrator, who uses an informal style to express himself and relate to the reader.

The success of detective stories for young readers consolidates in the late 1930s: the genre becomes a dominant presence in the literary market for children, and stimulates the production of new series that relate not only to detection itself, but also to the historical moment the whole world was dealing with, the period between the two World Wars. Several series, as for instance W.E. Johns' *Biggles* series, have as protagonist a young man who plays the role of detective and is involved in police actions during World War I.

⁶⁸ Parry, Sally E., "The Secret of the Feminist Heroine: The Search for Values in Nancy Drew and Judy Bolton", in *Nancy Drew and Company: Culture, Gender, and Girls' Series*, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, Bowling Green, 1997, p. 145.

In England, Enid Blyton is the most representative author of the Golden Age of detective fiction for children of the immediate post-war years. She literally conquered the children's market by writing 183 stories in the period between 1946 and 1950, and another 66 only in 1951, becoming one of the most prolific writers for children of her era. The answer to the American Nancy Drew and Judy Bolton is Georgina, who, together with her cousins and a dog, fills the pages of the *Famous Five* series, one of the best known detective series for children. The strongest point of the series is the variety of adventures the children live: using Routledge's words, "they go on camping and hiking trips and explore ruined castles and other mysterious locations, solving mysteries and apprehending criminals"⁶⁹. This is all permitted thanks to the unusually high degree of freedom the children are given by their relatives, something that has long been criticized because the world these children live in is not realistic. Moreover, the role of the child detective in relationship to the adult world looks ambiguous, as it was for Nancy Drew, and as it is for any other novel that follows the *Famous Five* series. Children are constantly contrasted with their parents or relatives, and the act of detecting is used as a means through which the child defines his or her role/identity. In the *Famous Five* series, Georgina and her cousins are self-reliant but constantly scolded by their relatives, who love to underline their condition of children. Still, the moment in which the act of deducing makes its appearance, the scene produces a switch in the perception of the children: they act as adults, facing alone the struggles they are exposed to. The act of detection becomes a collective activity, where challenges and successes are shared between members, and adults are constantly excluded. Routledge remarks how "a defining characteristic of child detectives is that they engage with the world in ways not usually possible for children and solve mysteries in ways not possible for adults."⁷⁰ It is impossible for adults to invade the children's environment.

One of the reasons why detective stories for children became popular is the ability of some authors to involve their young readers in their narrative. Readers are invited by the narrator himself to take part on the investigation: he addresses directly them and

⁶⁹ *ibidem*

⁷⁰ *ibidem*

encourages them to solve mysteries with the main character of the book, following one of the most important conventions of the whodunit genre.

Nowadays, detective elements have become central also in stories regarding other kinds of mystery, as for instance ghost or fantasy stories. An example is given by Tim Winton's *The Bugalugs Bum Thief*, written in 1990, which features a child who suddenly finds himself without the bum mentioned in the title and investigates to discover who has stolen it. Another example, nearer to our times, is given by the *Harry Potter* series. Despite the fact that its main genre is fantasy, it is easy to identify several conventions that belong to detective fiction. Especially in the first three books of the series, the story revolves around a mystery to be solved. J.K. Rowling uses several devices to divert the reader's attention from the "criminal mastermind" behind the mysteries that linger around Hogwarts, lord Voldemort. Routledge underlines that

the center of each of the Harry Potter novels is a detective mystery. Harry and his friend, Ron and Hermione, solve mysteries of mistaken identity and uncover the perpetrators of the evil. A recurrent motif in the stories is wrongful accusations, and much of the detective work undertaken by the trio has to do with establishing the innocence of their friends.⁷¹

The resolution of a mystery in the series is related to the discovery of the real identity of a certain character. An example of this can be found in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, dated 1999, where the real nature of Harry's godfather, Sirius Black, comes to light after years of lies, together with the identity of Remus Lupin as a werewolf. The main aim of detection in this series is always to find the truth and save the wrong accused, and to assure the real culprits to the hands of justice. Even if helped by magic, Harry and his friends' minds works exactly as detectives: most of the story covers the search for clues, which are hidden in the darkest places, in the most mysterious characters. The *Harry Potter* series has another important feature typical of detective stories and, more specifically, of the whodunit novels: fair play. Clues are everywhere in the novels, well hidden behind the magic that permeates them. The young reader

⁷¹ Routledge, Christopher, "Harry Potter and the Mystery of Ordinary Life", in *Mystery in Children's literature: From the Rational to the Supernatural*, Palgrave, Houndmills, 2001, p.205

must be clever and discover these clues during his reading to find the solution of the mystery together with, if not before, the main characters. This is one of the reasons why detective stories for children are considered useful for the development of their literary skills: they offer a constant incentive to use their mind. Carol Billman constantly underlines this in her *The Child reader as Sleuth*: novels of mystery incite the readers to use actively their minds because of the “implicit command [...] to participate in the guessing game of detection”⁷². Furthermore, they “help to solidify for the inexperienced reader the elements and patterns of fictional narrative”⁷³. Detective fiction for children is an important instrument, through which the fantasy of the reader is repeatedly stimulated. The act of detection is seen as a play by both the main characters and the readers, and this way of playing is evolving nowadays, as detective stories are easily found not only on books but as well as in other media, as in comics uploaded in sites devoted to online storytelling.

1.2.2 Sherlock Holmes and the Baker Street Irregulars

The role of children in detective fiction has been irrelevant at least until 1841, when, first in *A study in Scarlet*, and then in *The Sign of the Four*, Sherlock Holmes makes use of a group of street youngsters who help him solve several cases around London: the Baker Street Irregulars. Watson describes them as

The Baker Street division of the detective police force [...] a dozen dirty and ragged little street Arabs. There was some show of discipline among them, despite their tumultuous entry, for they instantly drew up in line and stood facing us with expectant faces. One of their number, taller and older

⁷² Billman, Carol, “The Child reader as Sleuth”, *Children’s literature and Education*, 15.1, Spring, 1984, p.30

⁷³ Ibidem, p.34

than the others, stood forward with an air of lounging superiority which was very funny in such a disreputable little scarecrow.⁷⁴

Although they do not have a prominent role in each of the novels composing the series, these youngsters are a significant device on the hands of the great detective. Using Erica Hateley's words, "it is possible to see youth as another potentially destabilising social presence which both confirms and disrupts visions of mature agency within the Holmes corpus"⁷⁵. Children, always at the margins of a story, can be seen in the same way as women in detective fiction: their function is usually to divert the attention of the reader from the main story. In the Baker Street Irregulars' case, however, the main function is not to distract the reader, but more probably to give children a brand new space in adult's literature: children are an effective means through which the author can attract the sympathy of his readers.

This group does not appear to belong to any social class: Doyle describes them as poor and dirty children who run in the streets of London at Sherlock Holmes's service, with high and shrill voices: this last is useful to the reader, as it is an indicator that the detective's group of assistants is composed by very young people. The term "street Arabs" was very common in the late years of the nineteenth century. Using Cheetham's words, "it was a broad term, describing a range, from the homeless children who lived on the streets, to those who had both home and family but spent much of their time on the streets."⁷⁶ The reader is not allowed to know very much about them: it is unknown whether they live on the streets or if they have a home and a family who takes care of them, but they are most likely to survive thanks to the money Sherlock Holmes gives them for their services. Their supposed lower social status is also reflected in the way they speak: their vocabulary is limited and, as far as the delivery of speeches is concerned, the only one who talks more often to Sherlock Holmes is Wiggins, the

⁷⁴ Doyle, Arthur Conan, "The Sign of the Four" in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, Sterling, New York 2009, p. 110-111.

⁷⁵ Hateley, Erica, "Irregular Readers: Arthur Conan Doyle's "six dirty scoundrels", Boyhood and Literacy in Contemporary Sherlockian Children's literature", *Barnboken - tidskrift för barnlitteraturforskning/Barnboken - Journal of Children's literature Research*, Vol. 37, 2014 <http://dx.doi.org/10.14811/clr.v37i0.167>, p.5

⁷⁶ Cheetham, Dominic, *Middle-Class Victorian Street Arabs: Modern Re-creations of the Baker Street Irregular*, *International Research in Children's literature* 5.1, 2012, p. 39

leader of the Baker Street Irregulars. His speech is characterised by a strong Cockney trail. As remarked by Cheetham,

There are marked lexical choices such as ‘bob’ for ‘shilling’ and ‘tanner’ for ‘sixpence’ [...] Grammatical and phonological choices, as evidenced by ‘hain’t’ (ain’t) rather than ‘haven’t’, were also common signifiers of Cockney speech in turn-of-the-century literature.⁷⁷

Another aspect that underlines their social status is the clothes they wear: the dirt on them is a sign of the unhealthy conditions of the environment these children live in. Moreover, the precarious conditions in which the Irregulars live makes the reader wonder whether these children are orphans, or their parents are not able to guarantee them a clean and adequate space where to live.

The Baker Street Irregulars are one of the first groups of children that work together and are often crucial to the resolution of a case, to appear in a detective fiction. Of course, children have been protagonist of several novels before then, for instance in Charles Dickens’s *The Adventures of Oliver Twist*, dated 1838. Here, as well as in almost every other novel which treats the same subject, however, they perform an opposite role to the one played by Sherlock Holmes’s net of Arabs. While children take advantage of the fact that they are invisible to the eyes of adults so they can rob them without being neither suspected nor seen in the novels that preceded Doyle’s, things changed after the publication of *A Study in Scarlet*. Although their role is still marginal, they are not criminals anymore, but they have become supporters of justice, putting their invisibility at the service of the adult world to prevent crime. Another author who uses children as a means through which justice can be preserved is Mark Twain: even if his *Tom Sawyer, Detective*, dated 1896, is a satirised version of the great novels of the Golden Age of detective fiction, children have an important role in the prevention of crime. In Routledge’s words,

⁷⁷ Ibidem, p. 39

The satire lies in Twain's ongoing joke that the 'childlike' Huck turns out to have more wisdom, and more innate understanding, than more apparently more refined, better educated, more grown-up Tom.⁷⁸

Even if this novel was intended for adult readers, the choice to use a child as a detective underlines that it was common for the novelists of that period to acknowledge the social role of children and the possibilities offered by their invisibility to the eyes of the adult world. As underlined by Sherlock Holmes

"There's more work to be got out of one of those little beggars than out of a dozen of the force," Holmes remarked. "The mere sight of an official-looking person seals men's lips. These youngsters, however, go everywhere and hear everything. They are as sharp as needles, too; all they want is organization."⁷⁹

In children's literature, several novels and series which have been written after Arthur Conan Doyle's works feature groups of children working together to solve their little mysteries and bring to justice criminals. A meaningful example is given by the main characters of Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five series*, who get on top of every adventure thanks to teamwork: it is not unusual for them to solve mysteries right before adults do, most of the time saving them from a potential disaster. The Bastable brothers, protagonists of Edith Nesbit's *The Bastables* series, are another example of collaboration to solve the problems that concern their family. Moreover, the Baker Street Irregulars have so intrigued the public that many authors have re-imagined them, writing numerous works that feature them and which are dedicated exclusively to children. Arthur Conan Doyle did not give many details about the Irregulars' lives, so the novels that followed the *Sherlock Holmes* series represent the group in a slight different way from the original one. The Baker Street Irregulars have become protagonists of over twenty-seven texts in different media, written by authors both from England and from the United States.

⁷⁸ Routledge, Christopher, *Crime and Detective Literature for Young Readers*, Long Lane Press, 2012, kindle edition

⁷⁹ Doyle, Arthur Conan, "A Study in Scarlet" in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, Sterling, New York 2009, p. 29.

The absence of details about these children allows the authors to recreate Doyle's characters by including in their novels brand new details. For instance, Doyle never defines the Irregulars' social status in detail. This encourages many authors to give their own interpretation of the living conditions of the group. For instance, in Robert Newman's *The Case of the Baker Street Irregular*, written in 1978, Sam Wiggins, who probably is a relative of the Wiggins at the head of the Irregulars, belongs to the working class, together with her sister Sarah and the rest of his family. This is shown by the description of the Wiggins' appearance and clothes,

[...] three disreputable looking boys of about his own age and a girl who was somewhat younger came running down the street [...] though her dress was faded and seemed a little large for her it was clean and freshly ironed.⁸⁰

and by the little house they live in:

He was in a small room with a table, a stove and a sink. [...] The room was small and, though it was sparsely furnished, it was clean. The mattress on which Sam had slept – a straw pallet – was on the floor in the corner.⁸¹

Another example is given by a new character introduced in Tracy Mack and Michael Citrin's series written between 2006 and 2011 featuring the Irregulars. Here Wiggins, who still belongs to the working-class of Victorian England, is accompanied by a brand new member of the group, Ozzie. Ozzie, introduced in the first novel of the series, *The Fall of the Amazing Zalindas*, is a peculiar example of how the authors decided to make Doyle's characters their own: as shown several times through the novels, Ozzie is very different from the other children, as he seems to be far more intelligent and educated than the rest of group. He is so confident of his mental ability that in *The Mystery of the Conjured Man*, the second book of the series, the authors describe him as a genius, able even to make deductions like Sherlock Holmes, and who can understand many things about a person only by looking at his or her handwriting. This is justified by the

⁸⁰ Newman, Robert, *The Case of the Baker Street Irregular*, Atheneum, Atheneum, New York, 1984, p.19

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p.67-69

discovery, in the following book, that Ozzie is the grandson of a diplomat, an element that puts Ozzie's family among the middle or upper classes. Another example of this choice can be found in *The Irregulars in the Service of Sherlock Holmes*, a graphic novel created by Steven-Elliot Altman and Michael Reaves in 2005. Here, the social origin of the Wiggins family is made clear by a flashback during the story that concerns them, in which a little William is dressed with a "black velvet suit with a lace collar"⁸². His family is well dressed as well: this is an indicator of their social status, as people belonging to middle or upper classes usually wear these type of dresses. A literate Irregular can be found as well in Anthony Read's *The Case of the Disappearing Detective*, dated 2005, Beaver: he is the one who gives the title to the novel, in what is identified as an emulation of Doctor Watson work: "Thought I'd try and write down all what's happened these last couple of days. Like Dr Watson does for Mr Holmes [...] I think I'll call it 'The Case of the Disappearing Detective'."⁸³

The working-class position for the Irregulars and their family seems to be the most quoted option among the authors who followed Arthur Conan Doyle in any case.

The Baker Street Irregulars are usually identified as a group mainly composed of male youngsters, because it is not specified in any of the episodes that feature them as protagonists whether a girl part exists or not. However, it is not uncommon to find a female component in the apocryphal versions of Doyle's canon. Hateley supposes that the insertion of a female component is an expedient through which authors succeed in widening their audience, and possibly a way to diversify the characters.⁸⁴ However, the presence of girls within the Irregulars is merely secondary, because the structure of the novel relies heavily on masculine predominance. After all, the same happens with the canon: there are not many female characters in the *Sherlock Holmes* series, and those few ones represent the weakness of the gender they belong to. The only exception to the rule is provided by Irene Adler: she was able to overpower Holmes' intellect with her

⁸² Steven-Elliot Altman, Michael Reaves, *The Irregulars in the Service of Sherlock Holmes*, Dark Horse Comics, Milwaukee, 2005, p.71

⁸³ Read, Antony, *The Case of the Disappearing Detective*, Walker, London, 2005, p. 141

⁸⁴ Hateley, Erica, "Irregular Readers: Arthur Conan Doyle's "six dirty scoundrels", Boyhood and Literacy in Contemporary Sherlockian Children's literature", *Barnboken - tidskrift för barnlitteraturforskning/Barnboken - Journal of Children's literature Research*, Vol. 37, 2014 <http://dx.doi.org/10.14811/clr.v37i0.167>, p.7

own mental and physical abilities and was the only woman to be strong and lead a predominant role in a series that favoured the male gender. In Hateley's words

[...] the stories remain firmly aligned with the conventions of "boy sleuth" narratives: adherence to moral "ideals" above individualism; working in teams as preparation for the work (both physical and social) of manhood; and, a subordination of selfhood as a paradoxical strategy for the assertion of subjectivity (Cornelius). These narrative elements affirm heroic masculinity and its attendant social norms of middle-class, white, patriarchy.⁸⁵

This could be attributed to the heritage left by the Victorian Era: at the beginning of the twentieth century most of the texts for young readers were considered as an encouragement to juvenile delinquency, which mainly involved young boys. The only exception was indeed Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories, which were already profusely praised in Baden-Powell's *Scouting for boys*. Doyle's stories were seen by Baden-Powell as an example to follow, because it was a more didactic response to juvenile delinquency, as opposed as other novels that showed a different, more punitive way to deal with criminality. Furthermore, the reading of these texts was considered a better way to build the character of a future man, through the inculcation of family and national values. This thought is expressed through his own words: "Discipline is not gained by punishing a child for bad habit, but by substituting a better occupation that will absorb his attention and gradually lead him to forget and abandon the old one"⁸⁶. As argued by Hateley, "Sherlock Holmes is something to pass through en route to adult masculinity, rather than an ideal vision of adult masculinity for the early twenty-first century".⁸⁷ In the first years of the twenty-first century, the attitude towards adventure and mystery novel for young readers changed radically: the need to

⁸⁵ Ibidem, p.7

⁸⁶ Baden-Powell Robert, *Scouting for Boys: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship*, Elleke Boehmer, Oxford, 1908, p.315

⁸⁷ Hateley, Erica, "Irregular Readers: Arthur Conan Doyle's "six dirty scoundrels", Boyhood and Literacy in Contemporary Sherlockian Children's literature", *Barnboken - tidskrift för barnlitteraturforskning/Barnboken - Journal of Children's literature Research*, Vol. 37, 2014 <http://dx.doi.org/10.14811/clr.v37i0.167>, p.7

educate children to legality through novels was lost and replaced by the necessity to educate children to the act of reading. In addition, since Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* was considered, and still is, one of the best means of education for young readers, the increase in number of apocryphal novels for children was a natural consequence. One of the most popular examples among these texts is of course *Basil of Baker Street*, written by Eve Titus in 1958 and made famous by Disney's *The Great Mouse Detective*, released in movie theatres in 1986. The story follows the original canon set by Arthur Conan Doyle: Basil, an anthropomorphised version of the famous detective, solves crimes around a late Victorian London with the help of his companion Dawson that, just like his human counterpart, writes the adventures they live together. Through these stories, written especially for the youngest children, the interest for the stories about Sherlock Holmes stimulates even the laziest reader to explore a different world, which is both adventurous and surely educational.

2. The conventions of detective fiction in Edith Nesbit and Enid Blyton

2.1 Conventions of detective fiction in Children's literature

2.1.1 The Role of the Child in Detective Stories

The introduction of the child as detective in narratives dedicated to young readers is for sure a great innovation in the literary world. The combination of children's literature and detective stories started one of the most loved genres among young readers. This happens despite the themes that distinguish the detective fiction, which were thought exclusively for an adult audience and are not usually suitable for children. The power of a person to solve mysteries through reason is the feature that distinguishes the detective story from any other kind of mystery fiction. The features of a story generally addressed to an adult audience similar to the ones of a novel exclusively dedicated to children. Of course, some of the themes discussed in detective stories must be reworked and readapted for the audience they are addressing, first of all because of the need to eliminate potential traumatic scenes which are typical of detective stories, but could encourage violent behaviours in its young readers. Typical problems of the criminal and adult world, such as murders, corruption or violence are reshaped so that they can be fit for children. As mentioned by Jaqueline Rose in *The Case of Peter Pan*, in order to preserve the innocence of childhood, juvenile literature must "carry with it a plea that certain psychic barriers should go undisturbed, the most important of which is the barrier between adult and child"¹. It is thanks to the Stratemeyer Syndicate's series, and especially thanks to *The Hardy Boys* and *Nancy Drew*, that detective fiction becomes a successful phenomenon. Here, several authors engage in one of the most difficult

¹ Rose, Jacqueline, *The Case of Peter Pan or the Impossibility of Children's fiction*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1993, p.70

challenges a writer can face: the adaptation of the wavering and corrupted world of adults for children. The main difference lies of course in the protagonist. The world of a detective story for children is built around its readers: adults are deprived of their roles and roles are switched with younger heroes. Routledge underlines how, in *Emil and the detectives*, Emil and his friends behave like adults, as required by the role they are interpreting, without losing their childish nature.

In detective stories for a young audience, the reader finds a dramatic change in the roles of who belongs to adulthood and who is still living his childhood. The child detective has the same characteristics of an adult one: his mind works like an adult one, and he is able to use the logical reasoning. Moreover, he behaves as if childhood was already left behind. On the contrary, the adult behaves in a childish way, especially at the moment in which the criminal is brought to justice². While the resolution of the case is always put in the hands of an adult detective, or of the Police forces, in adult literature, now the duty to find an answer to the questions deriving from a mystery must be shouldered by children.

The role performed by children in detective fiction for adult readers is often marginal. As already mentioned, children are invisible to the eyes of adults, or, more in general, their abilities are underestimated, and often used to make them work in the criminal world. This happens because society, especially during the Victorian Era, did not consider children as a danger: they were unlikely to be suspected or accused of a crime. As remarked by Peter Coveney, who in his *Poor Monkey: The Child in Literature* analyses Charles Dickens's characters, children were the representation of the interior struggle between innocence and evil: "the child became [...] the symbol of sensitive feeling anywhere in a society maddened with the pursuit of material progress"³. As mentioned by Routledge, this vision of childhood is an important legacy for children's literature. It also marks the beginning of the development of a trope often used in detective fiction for young readers: the impossibility of criminal adults to evaluate correctly children's capabilities, adults who underestimate their deductive methods, or

² Routledge, Christopher, *Crime and Detective Literature for Young Readers*, Long Lane Press, 2012, kindle edition

³ Coveney, Peter, *Poor Monkey: The Child in Literature*, Rockliff, London 1957, p.74

do not notice their presence when they are committing a crime. The power of children resides in the poor interest that the adult world takes in them, and in the inability of the grown-ups to understand and accept that a child can perform an action generally related to the sphere of adulthood. Consequently, adults refuse the idea that children can emulate actions like investigating or stealing, which are far from the common image of innocence belonging to childhood, because they are, indeed, children. Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* provides a good example. In the first book of the series, written in 1942 and called *Five on a Treasure Island*, Georgina, an extremely active and clever girl who dresses and behaves as a boy to the point that she demands to be called George by everyone, is given by their parents an island in the sea in front of her home, Kirrin Island. However, when her father receives a proposal to sell the land, George's idea about not selling it is not taken into account by her parents. Quentin, Georgina's father, strongly remarks on the nature of her daughter as a child:

“So you only gave me the island when you thought it wasn't worth anything,” said George, her face white and angry. “As soon as it is worth money you take it away again. I think that's horrid. It isn't honourable.”
“That's enough, Georgina,” said her father, angrily. “Your mother is guided by me. You're only a child. Your mother didn't really mean what she said, it was only to please you.”⁴

While George's mother is more amenable towards her daughter and her nephews, who are guests of Kirrin's family during the summer holidays, Quentin does not waver in front of the tomboy's whims, and he never misses the opportunity to remark the difference between two diametrically opposite worlds. George is a child, and she must behave as such.

The peculiarity to have a child as protagonist helps the young reader to find a connection with the main character. While in the narrative for adults, children do not have a crucial role in the development of the story, in children's literature it is as if the world were turning upside down. The child is a means through which the reader can enter into the story, and through whom the distance between the reader and the narrator

⁴ Blyton, Enid, *Five on a Treasure Island*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1942, kindle edition

is suspended. The same, after all, happens with detective fiction for adults. For instance, Watson describes Holmes as a lonely and single man, and these features can help many readers to find a connection to him. Of course, the relationship a child establishes with a fictional character is different from the way an adult relates to the story he is reading. In Timothy Prchal's words,

an infant is unable to differentiate self- and object-images, sensing that its primary caretaker and itself are one being. [...] Images of ideality emerge from the rom the safety, pleasure, and comfort experienced within the union of infant and caretaker. Such ideality gives the child a pleasurable feeling of omnipotence, an omnipotence that carries into ideal self-representation and ideal object representation as between self and object-images occurs.⁵

A contradiction dominates detective fiction for children. As well as for adult literature, the desire to resolve a mystery, the pursuit of knowledge through the resolution of a crime is strictly connected to the desire for power, and this desire can contaminate the innocence attributed to children inasmuch this desire is characteristic of the adult world. The incongruity between innocence and desire is often justified through the attribution of the desire for knowledge and power to the natural curiosity that characterises children.

The child detective can be considered as a means to resolve class differences. As remarked by Troy Boone, who refers to Nancy Drew in this case, but whose words can be applied on the whole genre, the representation of youngsters as sleuths

embodies the public discourse on social and economic class that characterizes responses to the Great Depression, on the level of both popular culture and government policy, [...] The early novels in the [Nancy Drew's] series condemn unregulated capitalist speculation as the cause of unequal distribution of the nation's wealth and, by implication, of the economic disasters of 1929. Although the solutions to Nancy's cases involve a selective redistribution of wealth, this economic engineering does not

⁵ Prchal, Timothy R., "An Ideal Helpmate: The Detective Character as (Fictional) Object and Ideal Mago", in *Theory and Practice of Classic Detective Fiction*, Greenwood Press, Westport, p.32

challenge the capitalist order but, rather, seeks to obscure the class divisions inherent within it by fantasizing a capitalist culture in which all citizens are united by middle-class social, if not economic, status.⁶

The young detective is often a means through which the author, whether on purpose or not, conveys a message to his readers regarding his ideological stance. As mentioned by Peter Hunt in his essay *Instruction and delight*,

[...] texts for children do not portray childhood as it was or is, but portray childhood as the writers wished it to be seen for political, sociological or dramatic reasons. [...] Adults write, children read, and this means that, like it or not, adults are exercising power, and children are either being manipulated, or resisting manipulation: there is a tension between the reader implied by the writer, and the real readers.⁷

One way or another, children's books end up being didactic even when their task is to take the reader into a world full of adventures. It is difficult, if not impossible, that the contents of a text dedicated to younger readers should not be influenced in some way by the social or political thinking of the writer. An inexperienced reader would probably miss these messages, but they will be clear to an adult's eye. This happens because despite the addressee of the story being a child, the representation of childhood is based on the author's experience of life. His attitude is implicit but it lingers between his words: there will always be his subjective representation of what is right and what is wrong, or of his way of seeing the world. The authors who are able to convey a story for children without letting their writing be influenced by their own way of thinking are really a few, the first one being Enid Blyton. She has been often criticised because of her simple and almost banal style, but her texts were loved by her young readers exactly for this reason. Younger readers have neither the malice nor the experience to read between the lines, something that is almost spontaneous in an adult. It is presumed then that children ignore the messages left by the author regarding his or her way of thinking

⁶ Boone Troy, "The Juvenile Detective and Social Class" in *Mystery in Children's literature: From the Rational to the Supernatural*, Palgrave, Houndmills, 2001, P.55

⁷ Hunt, Peter, "Instruction and Delight", in *Children's literature: Approaches and Territories*, Palgrave, London, 2009, p.14

because they cannot relate to them, and leave the pleasure to find hidden messages behind the authors' words to adults.

2.1.2 The structure of the novel: from the collection of clues to the resolution of the crime

The structure of detective fiction for children does not differentiate itself too much from the model established by the literary canon set by the most relevant authors of the genre: Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle. A story always starts with a problem, develops with the protagonist looking for clues that will help him or her understand the mystery, and concludes with the resolution of the mystery, usually characterised by a happy ending. Several critics have identified a common pattern followed by writers of detective stories. Richard Austin Freeman, in his essay *The Art of Detective Stories*, distinguishes four stages that frequently recur in the novels belonging to this genre. The first stage is characterised by the revelation of the problem, which will provide the main storyline of the novel. In the classics of detective literature, this stage coincides with the appearance of a client who explains his/her problem to the detective. The second stage involves the beginning of the investigation through the collection of the clues related to the problem, and it coincides with the start of the real adventure. Subsequently, there is the development of the investigation, which brings the detective to reveal to his client, and mostly to the culprit, the resolution of the problem. In conclusion, the sleuth demonstrates his theory through the analysis of the clues. This analysis leads to the conclusion of the case and, consequently, of the story.⁸ Actually, it is incorrect to attribute of this structure to Poe or Doyle. As remarked by Viktor Šklovskij in *The Mystery Novel*, the model followed by most detective novels is determined more by the nature of the genre, rather than by the famous writers that contributed to the

⁸ Freeman, Richard Austin, "The Art of Detective stories" cited in *La trama del Delitto: Teoria e analisi del racconto poliziesco*, Pratiche Editrice, Parma, 1980, p.20

consolidation of the genre.⁹ The same is underlined by John H. Cawelti in his *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*: he defines the “literary formula” as a “structure of narrative or dramatic conventions employed in a great number of literary works”, composed by inventions and conventions.¹⁰ In addition, Šklovskij is another critic that outlines a standard structure for detective stories, and bases his work on Sherlock Holmes’ novels. This model is detailed than the one drawn up by Freeman. In addition to the stages already identified by Freeman, Šklovskij adds another few ones. He highlights how several elements that could be useful to the solving of the case are scattered through the whole novel, in accordance to the conventions of the “whodunit”. These clues, which are concealed both from the protagonist of the story and the reader for most of the time, could help the detective identify the culprit of a crime almost instantly, or, at least, they could make the protagonist take the right path that would lead him to the resolution of the case faster. Moreover, Šklovskij identifies two other stages among the four already mentioned:

1. The wrong interpretation of the clues. This interpretation leads the detective and his companion away from the right trail.
2. The reflection on the part of the other people involved in the case. As they are not the detective, they struggle to understand the logical reasoning that will lead to the solution of the case. The companion-narrator usually gives voice to the doubts of the audience. This device helps the reader to find himself more involved in the narrative.

The differences between detective fiction for adults and for children of course exist, but they can be limited to a few elements. For instance, if the first stage proposed by Freeman is taken into consideration, the trope of the client who asks for the detective’s help is often absent in children’s novels, as the main problem usually concerns the little protagonists, more than an unknown person. Another element that differentiates the detective story for children from the novels for adults is the role of adults: they are

⁹ Šklovskij Viktor, “The Mystery Novel”, cited in *La trama del Delitto: Teoria e analisi del racconto poliziesco*, Pratiche Editrice, Parma, 1980, p.40

¹⁰ Cawelti, John G., *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*, reviewed in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 31, No. 3, University of California Press, Oakland, 1976

obstacles rather than helpers. It is clear from the beginning of the story that adults do not trust children to take actions that could be potentially dangerous to them. It is true, however, that, as in the texts dedicated to an adult audience, the detective story meant for young readers goes hand in hand with the structure established for its adult counterpart.

Two types of detective story with different characteristics can be identified in children's literature. The first one, which is the more faithful, accurately follows the stages set by Freeman and Šklovskij. It is composed by those stories that are highly inspired by the Victorian novels written by Auguste Dupin and Sherlock Holmes. These novels are usually apocryphal stories that reflect the original ones in every point. They start with a request of help by a person who is unknown to the protagonist, or from the same protagonist that finds himself in danger and asks for the help of an adult. The novels then follow the evolution of the case until its resolution. An example of this type of detective fiction is *The Case of the Baker Street Irregular* by Robert Newman. The protagonist of this novel is Andrew, a child who asks for Sherlock Holmes's help to solve the mystery that concerns the disappearance of his schoolmaster, Mr. Dennison. The novel follows faithfully the structure established by Freeman. The first chapters of the novel show the alternation of Andrew and Holmes, until they meet for the first time and decide to collaborate to the resolution of the case: the problem concerning Andrew seems to be connected to the case the detective is investigating, and their collaboration turns out to be fundamental to its resolution. On the other hand, most detective stories for young readers, which do not belong to the first type, follow the pattern set by the conventions of the whodunit genre. Actually, the two types of detective fiction have several elements in common. The most important point in common is that it is rare, if not impossible, to find a story for a child audience in which the case revolves around a murder. The crimes that fill the pages of classic detective novels are adapted to their young readers, and every excessively violent element is removed. The main cases might be robbery, kidnapping or conspiracies against someone dear to the little protagonists. However, the presence of violent crimes and triggering situations or elements, such as blood or hints of abuse, are completely absent.

The main reason why the young protagonists of detective stories for children find themselves involved into a mystery is often characterised by an unexpected event. *Five on a Treasure Island*, the first book of *The Famous Five* series by Enid Blyton, will be used as an example. The group of protagonists is formed because Georgina's cousins, Julian, Anne and Dick, cannot spend their summer holidays with their parents at Polseath, the place where they usually go. As their parents will not be with them because they desire to spend some time alone, their father decides to send them to his brother Quentin, a "very tall, frowning man, a clever scientist who spent all his time studying"¹¹. The children find out here that their uncle has a daughter, and they get excited because she is their peer, which is the reason why they think their holiday will be amazing. Generally speaking, detective stories for children often begin with the introduction of the main characters. Even if the novel is part of a series, there will always be a little introduction to refresh the memory of the readers about the protagonists and their past adventures.

In the introduction, there are several hints that could make the reader understand from the start what to expect in the next pages. These hints, however, are not deducible from a first reading: they become understandable only when the children have already ventured into the mystery and they already know most of the details, together with their readers. In *Five on a Treasure Island*, as hinted by the title, the story revolves around the famous island given to George by her parents, Kirrin Island, which can be considered as one of the main protagonists of the story. The island is named in the second chapter of the story:

"Isn't that a funny place?" she said. "I wonder what it's called."
"It's called Kirrin Island," said George, her eyes as blue as the sea as she turned to look at it. "It's a lovely place to go. If I like you, I may take you there some day. But I don't promise. The only way to get there is by boat."
"Who does the funny island belong to?" asked Julian.
George made a most surprising answer: "It belongs to me," she said. "At

¹¹ Blyton, Enid, *Five on a Treasure Island*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1942, kindle edition

least, it will belong to me someday! It will be my very own island and my very own castle!”¹²

George’s cousins are not inclined to believe her words at first, but the thought of her aunt telling them that her child is “absolutely truthful” makes them change their minds. Kirrin Island becomes the place and victim of the story at the same time because of the strong bond George feels with it: if it was not for this strong link, they would never find out what was going to happen there. The words used by George for the description of the island make it appear as a precious place, apparently not commercially worthy, but however, wonderful. Nobody seems interested in buying it (“But they could never sell that little island, because nobody thought it worth anything”¹³), and this makes George extremely happy, since she constantly underlines her ownership of the island to her new friends. Moreover, the island is the only property left to George’s parents, as they faced a financial breakdown in the past and had to sell everything they owned. The highlight on the low value of the island is a device through which the author disseminates the first hints of what the story will be about. The reason of the adventure lived by the children will always be mentioned within the first chapters.

The first chapters help the young reader become familiar with the story, to make acquaintance with the characters and feel involved in the storyline; moreover, they are used by the author to add new elements that will enrich the main characters’ adventure. In *Five go on a Treasure Island*, the children visit Kirrin Island for the first time in chapter six, and here they find something that anticipates what is going to happen next. The discovery of a wrecked ship near the island is just the prelude to something bigger:

George was staring at it with a strange look in her eyes. She turned to face the three children, and they were astonished to see the bright gleam in her blue eyes. The girl looked almost too excited to speak. “What is it?” asked Julian, catching hold of her hand. “Julian, oh, Julian it’s my wreck!” [...]

¹² Ibidem

¹³ Ibidem

“George! We shall be able to row out and get into the wreck now!” shouted Julian. “We shall be able to explore it from end to end. We may find the boxes of gold. Oh, George!”¹⁴

The mention of gold, or more in general of something of great value in a detective story is almost a guarantee: it is one of the main motives that encourage people to commit a crime. As for the hints on what the story will be about, the motive of the crime is always hidden in the first pages of the novel. This is one of the most distinctive tropes of the whodunit fiction, the fair play: the reason of the crime always lies somewhere in the pages of the novel. In the novel by Enid Blyton, George reveals to her cousins that the ship belonged once to her family, and that it probably still contains their possession, among which there are boxes full of gold. Her version is later confirmed by her father who, nevertheless, is not pleased with the action taken by her daughter. He does not approve neither of her daughter’s initiative to explore the ship on her own, nor of the fact that she recklessly took something that could be important to discover what happened to the ship. The already discussed contrast between the world of adults and children starts to emerge as soon as the mystery thickens, together with the determination of the little protagonists to follow their instinct and ignore the adult order not to get involved in matters bigger than them. The obstacle imposed by adults is another element that cannot be found in the adult counterpart of detective fiction, and which is impossible to find outside children’s literature. This contrast recurs constantly during the whole story, and it can be considered a trope typical of detective fiction for young readers. It is not important for the adult to be a known person to the child, because in any case he is unlikely to support the youngsters: his role will be to hinder the children’s adventure, and to prevent them from solving the mystery. The exception is made in some cases by people who, despite their age, are still trapped in a teen-aged mentality or, more often, by adults who are directly involved in the case and seem not to care about the age of whom they are willing to help. They might be victims or acquaintances of the child protagonist, or even adult detectives who, despite their age, lend an ear to the younger ones. Robert Newman’s *The Case of the Baker Street*

¹⁴ Ibidem

Irregular, as already mentioned, gives an example of the last case. In addition to the imposition of their willpower among children, adults seem to be able to prevent children from moving around only with the sole power of their presence in a room. Although their lack of presence would allow them to sneak out of their house and keep on with their investigation without being noticed by adults, most of the time children prefer to wait until night before going outside, as the night has a strong connection with mystery stories. In *Five on a Treasure Island*, as well as in the other books of the series, George and her cousins spend many nights at Kirrin Island, with the intention to protect the property from the hands of avid criminals. In the first book, the popularity of the island enjoys, after the news about the surfacing of the wreck, scares the children, who decide to spend some nights there to check that everything is all right:

When they were alone, the children discussed the whole matter. It seemed very serious indeed to them. They half-wondered if they should let aunt Fanny into the secret but it was such a precious secret, and so marvellous, that they felt they didn't want to give it away to anyone at all. "Now listen!" said Julian, at last. "We'll ask Aunt Fanny if we can go to Kirrin Island and spend a day or two there, sleep there at night too, I mean. That will give us a little time to poke round and see what we can find."¹⁵

When the object or event that leads a yet unknown person to commit the crime is discovered, children will start to explore the environment in which the adventure develops, finding new clues that will eventually lead them to discover the culprit of a crime, which is not yet accomplished. In detective stories for younger readers, the identity of the criminal is often revealed by the young protagonist in the first half of the novel, and not at the end as usually happens in detective fiction for adults: here, the clues lead the detective to the solution of the case and to the discovery of the criminal's identity. In detective fiction for children the culprit is already known, but the main characters lack the evidence that could make adults believe and help them to catch the culprit. Once again, the contrast between children and adults prevents the first ones from revealing the identity of a criminal: their words are hard to believe. Adults do not

¹⁵ Ibidem

give the right credit to children's words, who are always treated as untruthful. Any person around them will not listen to their words and think that they are lying, or just playing a game:

“Uncle, those men won't sign tomorrow,” said Julian. “Do you know why they wanted to buy the island and the castle? Not because they really wanted to build a hotel or anything like that, but because they knew the lost gold was hidden there!”
“What nonsense are you talking about?” said his uncle.
“It isn't nonsense, Father!” cried George indignantly, “It is all true. The map of the old castle was in that box you sold and in the map was shown where the ingots were hidden by my great-great-great-grandfather!”
George's father looked amazed and annoyed. He simply didn't believe a word!¹⁶

The situation is solved with the children being in danger and coming out of dangerous situations only with their own strength. Sometimes, the protagonists do not ask for the help of reliable adults, because it is impossible for them to communicate: they could be isolated from the rest of the world, or, as it is often the case, nobody will take them seriously. Criminals are aware of the little importance parents give to their children's words when they talk about a crime, and count on this fact to achieve their aim undisturbed. In a world where adults are not useful, cleverness is the only means which the young protagonist can use to solve the case: his or her intelligence will lead him/her to the solution of the problem, despite the difficulties he/she has to face alone. A difference with the detective story for adults is that, most of the time, children are never wrong. One of the elements that always figure in the novels of this genre is the declaration of a wrong solution given by the detective, or more often by his companion or even the media. The wrong solution given in the middle of the story is a device the author uses to highlight the brilliant mind of the protagonist who, in the end, will always lead the reader to the right solution. On the contrary, in detective fiction for children, the protagonist never fails to guess who the culprit is. The margin of error is almost non-

¹⁶ Ibidem

existent. Adults always misinterpret of the information given by children, since they are inclined to think they are in the middle of a game when, in fact, they are trying to solve a mystery that is perfectly hidden to adults' eyes. The lack of trust in children always end in the creation of a situation of danger where the criminals threaten the children's lives. The last chapters of a detective story for children are often filled with the most dangerous circumstances: the protagonists are victims of the cruelty of the criminals, who try to kidnap them, or start a fight that, without the intelligence of the younger ones, would be end badly for the children.

The story concludes with the discovery of the truth, and the rightful conclusion of the case through the arrest of the criminals. Moreover, adults finally recognise the effort made by the youngsters to solve the mystery on their own, and compliment them for their courage:

Anne sat on her aunt's knee and listened to George and Julian telling the whole story. They told it well and left nothing out. Aunt Fanny grew quite pale as she listened, especially when she heard about Dick climbing down the well. [...] Uncle Quentin listened in the utmost amazement. He had never had much liking or admiration for any children; he always thought they were noisy, tiresome, and silly. But now, as he listened to Julian's tale, he changed his mind about these four children at once! "You have been very clever," he said. "And very brave too. I'm proud of you. [...] No wonder you didn't want me to sell the island, George, when you knew about the ingots!"¹⁷

Sometimes, adults seems even surprised by the courage the young protagonists show, as if they suddenly realised that the matters children were involved in should have been resolved by them. This would have been possible if they just had paid attention to the children's words:

"But why didn't you tell me?"

¹⁷ Ibidem

The four children stared at him and didn't answer. They couldn't very well say, "Well, firstly, you wouldn't have believed us."¹⁸

It is interesting to notice how, in the whole *Famous Five* series, adults tend to change their mind on the bravery of children between one book and another. At the end of any story, Uncle Quentin recognises the cleverness and ability of her daughter and nephews to solve a big problem, but in the next book this acknowledgement is completely forgotten. The memory of the adventure George and her relatives have lived seems to be just a tale in her parents' mind, since they treat her as the child she actually is again, and not as a person who is able to face difficulties on her own. In some way, the protagonists of detective stories in children's literature have to deal with not one, but two antagonists. The first one is, obviously, the criminal who breaks the quiet atmosphere of a holiday or just an ordinary day (or, in the eyes of the children, who gives them the chance to live an unforgettable adventure), and the adults who try to prevent them from solving the mystery by exercising their power.

Although detective story for young readers is based on the novels that made the history of the mystery genre, as indeed Arthur Conan Doyle's novels, it seems to be a separate, original category, with conventions that belong to it and could never be found in a story for adults. It is an exceptional innovation in children's literature, whose popularity does not show any sign of abating.

2.1.3 The narrative voice as a link between the young detective's world and the reader

The term "narrative voice" is, as defined by Chatman in *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, the referrer to "the voice [...] through which vents and existents are communicated to the audience"¹⁹. Through the narrative voice, the reader is provided with information about what happens to the characters of a story,

¹⁸ Ibidem

¹⁹ Chatman, Seymour, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1978, p.152

or where the action is taking place. Another aspect to be taken into consideration when talking about narration is the point of view. Narrative voice and point of view are strictly related. According to the classification drawn up by Chatman, three different points of view can be distinguished in literature:

1. The *literal point of view*, which coincides with the view of someone relevant for the purpose of the story, for instance the protagonist.
2. The *figurative point of view*: the environment that surrounds the character is seen through someone's world view, through his ideology. This point of view gives information about the character's way of thinking, or his attitude.
3. The *transferred point of view*: in this case, the point of view is given by someone who has an interest or vantage. There are no physical descriptions, nor references about the character's state of mind: this point of view only takes into consideration situations that might or might not be of interest for the character.²⁰

Points of view are used in any kind of text, and are usually combined in several ways to give substance to the narration. The narrator might coincide with the protagonist, and so the points of view. However, the narrator might be a different person from the hero of a story, and the narration might be influenced by his way of thinking or his ideology. Narrative voice and point of view differ because while the first one is used by the author to communicate events and existents to the reader, the second one provides the "physical place or ideological situation or practical life-orientation to which narrative events stand in relation"²¹.

In detective fiction, the role of the narrative voice is performed most of the time by the trustworthy companion of the sleuth, who collects the adventures they both live with accuracy, despite his inability to understand the logical reasoning behind the resolution of a mystery, typical of this literary genre. The companion puts down in writing every single detail of a story that, otherwise, would be impossible for the reader to follow, and accompanies him through the development of the case, bringing him to its conclusion. On the contrary, in detective stories for children the narrator can change from story to

²⁰ Ibidem, pp.152-153

²¹ Ibidem, p.153

story. A convention that establishes that the narrator must be someone inside the group of young detectives or an external voice does not exist. It is the author's choice whether to make use of a mediated narration through a third person narrator (someone outside the story) or to have one of the children tell the adventures they embark on. Sometimes, the author himself occasionally takes part in the narration to communicate with his readers. The narrator performs a fundamental role in capturing the reader's interest. In *Story and Discourse*, Seymour Chatman states:

The narrator's presence derives from the audience's sense of some demonstrable communication. If it feels it is being told something, it presumes a teller. The alternative is a "direct witnessing" of the action.²²

It is extremely important in children's literature to be able to attract the interest of the child through a captivating style, and the weight of this task rests on the narrator's "shoulders".

As already mentioned, while in adult detective fiction the narrator is represented by the detective's companion, as established by the conventions of the genre, in detective fiction for children this might change. However, while the narrative voice can change from text to text, the point of view always belongs to the nearest character to the implied child reader. The way the protagonists see the world, or think of themselves in relationship to the environment around them belong to the characters as much as to the child who reads the story. This allows the child reader to find out he has several things in common with the protagonist, and to identify with him from the beginning. The choice of the narrative voice is up to the author: it might be an external or internal voice on the story. In the field of detective story in children's literature several examples of this condition can be identified. Moreover, the author's point of view (not to be confounded with the narrator's point of view) must not necessarily coincide with the characters': most of the time it does not, a story for children is often educational, and his point of view surely differentiates from a child's. The discrepancy between the

²² Ibidem, p.147

author's point of view and the child's is called slant²³, something the author has to avoid if he wants his narrator to be reliable.

Now, narrative voice and point of view will be taken into consideration in three different detective stories for children: *The Case of the Baker Street Irregular* by Robert Newman, *Five on Kirrin Island again* by Enid Blyton and *The Story of the Treasure Seeker* by Edith Nesbit.

In *The Case of the Baker Street Irregular*, the author chooses to use a third person narrator. In this case, the point of view is only limited to the main character, and sometimes to Doctor Watson, when the scene changes and the attention focuses on the doctor and his detective friend. When the use of a limited point of view is preferred, the narrator concentrates solely on one character, usually the protagonist or someone close to the protagonist, and gives the reader access only to his thoughts, his feelings and his way of thinking. The reader cannot know what the other characters are doing or thinking. The character the point of view belongs to can only make suppositions about what there is on their minds.

“Where you off to?”

“Regent’s Park. The Zoological Gardens.”

“What’s that?”

“Where animals are.”

“Animals?”

“Yes. Lions and tigers and elephants. Haven’t you ever been there?”

“No.”

“Why not?” Screamer shrugged. Andrew was fairly sure the reason was that she didn’t know it existed, but she couldn’t bring herself to say so.²⁴

Most of the time, the main character gives the reader several hints about what other characters are thinking, or makes assumption about their behaviour. These hints are confirmed or proved wrong during the course of the novel by the characters themselves. Through the eyes of the main character, the reader can imagine the environment in

²³ Nikolajeva, Maria, *Aesthetic Approaches to Children’s Literature: An introduction*, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, 2005, p.190

²⁴ Newman, Robert, *The Case of the Baker Street Irregular*, Atheneum, New York, 1984, p.21

which he lives and the people he interacts with. The character the point of view belongs to gives his own interpretation of their gestures and expressions. These suppositions often are revealed to be correct, but they cannot be always taken for granted. This expedient is often used in detective fiction: the protagonist thinks something about another character that is revealed to be incorrect. For instance, in this novel the protagonist, Andrew, assumes that the man in front of him, Ben, is blind by looking at his physical appearance:

A man stood on the corner across from the Arch with his back to them. [...] He must have been tall when he was younger, but now he was stooped and leaned on a blackthorn stick. As they approached him, he turned... and Andrew shuddered. He had seen blind men before, but never one like this. His eyes were not merely sightless; they were milky white, red-rimmed and ravaged. But, in spite of his blank stare, there was something fierce and proud about him that seemed to reject and defy sympathy.²⁵

Only some chapters later, Andrew will show off his deductive abilities and understand that the person in front of him is not an ordinary person, but the great Sherlock Holmes. This narrative style is a favourite one in detective literature, as it permits the reader to identify himself with a character who, as does not stand out for his deductive skills, is near to him. Moreover, it permits the author to hide to the eyes of an inexperienced reader those details that could help both the protagonist and the reader himself/herself to deduce which are the secrets hidden behind cases that appear to be impossible to solve, according to the *fair play* established by the whodunit.

Enid Blyton's novels offer different case from the one presented by *The Case of the Baker Street Irregular*. Like Newman, she uses a third person narrator but in a different way from the novel already analysed: she puts the narration in the hands of an omniscient narrator. Thanks to this device, the narrator is not a character inside the story but someone above it who can explore the thoughts and action of every character without the obstacle given by limited narrative voice. Moreover, as will be shown throughout this analysis, the author herself often interferes with the narration,

²⁵ Ibidem, p.111

occasionally leaving some personal comments, especially at the end of a book. This is a distinguishing feature of Enid Blyton's, which is possible to find not only *in the Famous Five* series, but also in other successful series like *Noddy* and *Malory Towers*:

“Good-bye!” shouted the others. “Give our love to Pongo when you see him.”
“Woof! Woof!” barked Timmy, but only Barker and Growler knew what he mean. It meant, “Shake paws with Pongo for me!”
Good-bye, five caravanners... till your next exciting adventure!²⁶

Enid Blyton distinguishes herself from other authors of narrative for children thanks to her unique style. As mentioned by George Greenfield, her agent and, later, biographer

To apply the strict rules of literary criticism to Enid Blyton's writing would be both unfair and absurd. Her forte was telling stories and her technique was adapted for that purpose. Her sentences tend to be simple and straightforward, with very few dependent clauses. There are few adjectives and those used are the more obvious ones – ‘a hot sunny day’, ‘a short nap’, ‘sharp eyes’, ‘poor Margery’ and so on. Much of the story development takes place through dialogue, which contains a liberal peppering of exclamation marks [...]²⁷

Enid Blyton's narrative style has often been criticised for being too simple, if not prosaic. Despite the criticism, however, that very style is what makes her a successful author in children's literature. Adult readers seem unable to appreciate her narrative style, her stories and her characters, which are often described as being bi-dimensional and without any substance. On the contrary, children love it, and this has made her so popular: thanks to her simple style, she is able to stimulate the interest of her young readers. George Greenfield mentions, in his biography of Enid Blyton, how her stories mostly develop through dialogue: Blyton's style almost lacks hefty writing descriptions. The choice to give a wider space to dialogue rather than description makes the narration

²⁶ Blyton, Enid, *Five Go Off in a Caravan*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1946, kindle edition

²⁷ Greenfield, George, “Enid Blyton”, cited in *Enid Blyton: the Famous Five books*, The English Association, University of Leicester, Leicester, 2013, p.3

more engaging and dynamic, and surely not boring. The author is able to hold the reader's attention until the end of the book.

There was a terrific noise of yelling and shouting everywhere. The teachers could not make themselves heard in the din. "Anyone would think that every single child had gone completely mad," said one of them to another. "Oh thank goodness, they're getting into the coaches. George! Must you rush along the corridor at sixty miles an hour, with Timmy barking his head off all the time!" "Yes, I must, I must!", cried George. "Anne, where are you? Do come and get into the coach. I've got Timmy. He knows it's holidays now. Come on, Tim!"

Down to the station went the singing crowd of children. They piled into the train. "Bags I this seat! Who's taken my bag? Get out, Hetty, you know you can't bring your dog in here with mine. They fight like anything. Hurrah, the guard's blowing his whistle! We're off!"²⁸

Blyton's narrative lacks complex grammatical structures: sentences are short and brief and it is rare that they start with subordinate clauses. The structure preferred by the author is a simple subject + predicate form, which she repeats almost constantly throughout the narration, and she makes a large use of adverbs as 'suddenly', 'angrily', etc. This makes her style "cleaner", and spares their readers the heaviness of many descriptions. The use of adjectives is not frequent. Their occurrence, indeed, is relatively lacking in respect to the abundance of adverbs used to describe the little protagonists' actions and moods. The adjective used with more frequency in the whole series is probably the colour 'blue', although always associated to the sky and the sea around Kirrin Island, and never in other contexts. In other cases, adjectives refer to the weather ("a hot sunny day"), to a condition ("that poor man") or a physical description ("sharp eyes"). Another adjective abundantly used is "queer", in its original acception ("odd", "strange"), which recurs in every single book of the series, and it is rarely substituted by other synonyms like, indeed, "strange", or "suspicious".

²⁸ Blyton, Enid, *Five on Kirrin Island Again*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1947, kindle edition

The use of these narrative devices makes the narrative voice closer to the implied child reader, and the story more comprehensible to his or her yet immature mind. The criticisms advanced to the author come from adult readers who have already left childhood behind and are not able to appreciate a series of books that, however repetitive the plots might be, are written exclusively for children. As far as young readers are concerned, her stories are interesting and engaging, and children do not mind if they are repetitive. Enid Blyton's ability to stimulate her readers' mind is enough to justify a popularity which has lasted for decades, and has made her one of the most famous children stories' author in the whole world.

Newman and Blyton rely on the third person narrator to tell their audience events regarding their little protagonists. Edith Nesbit, on the other hand, totally changes the means through which her stories are conveyed. In *the Bastables* series the author chooses to tell the events through Oswald Bastable's voice: Oswald is the second of six siblings who live several adventures in order to restore the fortunes of their family. Oswald is an extraordinary first-person narrator who shows his readers the world through his own eyes – the eyes of a child who is growing and is trying to take responsibility for the fate of his family – and, at the same time, he manages to preserve the typical innocence of childhood and the ability to make every event an unforgettable adventure. Especially in the first book of the series, *The Story of The Treasure Seeker*, Oswald often interacts with his readers, he directly addresses them, as can be noticed at the beginning of the story:

This is the story of the different ways we looked for treasure, and I think when you have read it you will see that we were no lazy about the looking. There are some things I must tell before I begin to tell about the treasure-seeking, because I have read book myself, and I know how beastly it is when a story begins, "Alas!" said Hildegarde with a deep sigh, "we must look for our last of this ancestral home" – and the someone else says something – and

you don't know for pages and pages where the home is, or who Hildegarde is, or anything about it.²⁹

Oswald is a narrator who is able to entertain his audience with his clumsy attitude. The first mystery he shares with his readers is indeed the one regarding his identity.

It is one of us that tells this story – but I shall not tell you which: only at the very end perhaps I will. While the story is going on you may be trying to guess, only I bet you don't. It was Oswald who first thought of looking for treasure. Oswald often thinks of very interesting things.³⁰

However stubborn this attempt is to keep the secret about his name, the reader will easily understand which one of the siblings he is by the way he describes himself in respect to the others: the narration does indeed favour the older brother over the other siblings, and puts him under the best light possible:

Oswald is a boy of firm and unswerving character, and he had never wavered from his first idea.³¹

Despite this, Oswald tries to keep a halo of mystery around his identity throughout the story, refraining himself from revealing his identity and thus giving a mysterious and yet playful atmosphere to the whole story. He does not reveal his identity, not even at the very end of *The Story of the Treasure Seeker*: during the narration, he always refers to himself using the third person, as he does for the other characters of the book. However, he occasionally lapses into the first person, especially when he is particularly excited or praises himself, and therefore he fails at concealing his identity.

So you see it was time we looked for treasure and Oswald said so, and Dora said it as very well. But the others agreed with Oswald. So we held a council. Dora was in the chair, [...] The hole has never been mended, so

²⁹ Nesbit, Edith, *The Story of the Treasure Seeker*, 1899, kindle edition

³⁰ Ibidem

³¹ Ibidem

now we have that chair in the nursery, and I think it was cheap at the blowing-up we boys got when the hole was burnt.³²

This makes the narrator immediately recognisable, even for a child. In *A Woman of Passion*, Julia Briggs writes that

Edith makes use of a complex narrative technique by which Oswald relates much of the story in the third person, and often in a self-congratulatory and ‘literary’ style, every now and then slipping back into the first person. Edith was always much amused by literary clichés, and Oswald’s childish desire to sound ‘grown-up’ gave her ample scope to parody some of these. [...] Oswald’s narrative shifts ingenuously between first and third person narration, between a chatty, informal tone and one of deliberate ‘literariness’ that simultaneously conveys his inexperience as a story-teller, sets him in an ironic perspective and also solves one of the most fundamental problems of children’s books – the question of ‘Who is speaking and to whom?’³³

Oswald’s will to act as an adult is easily noticeable throughout the whole narration. In this way, Edith Nesbit is able to approach both the young and adult audiences: when Oswald uses an informal tone, the author lays the emphasis on him being still a child. On the other hand, a more sophisticated style can easily relate to the adult world, and his way of delivering the story almost results in a parody of the formal way adult narrators use to communicate.

The use of the first person narrator allows the reader to see the world through the eyes of a child. Through the first person narrator, the main character becomes an intimate friend of the readers, and eliminates the distance between fiction and reality: most of the time, the protagonist’s thoughts and sensations and the way the story is conveyed, are the same of any real child. Moreover, the first person narration gives the author the chance to play with the text. A third person narrator often describes the events from an objective viewpoint. On the other hand, when the narrator is the

³² Ibidem

³³ Briggs, Julia, *A woman of Passion: the Life of Edith Nesbit*, Tempus Publishing, Gloucestershire, 1989, p.198

protagonist of the story, the viewpoint might as well be objective, but most of the time it is subjective, influenced by the character's thoughts and by the way he or she personally relates to the outside world. In a detective story, the first person narrator might add more value to the whole story because it shows the reader how the protagonist-detective thinks, how his mind works and how he solves the problem without interferences on the part of third narrators.

Narrative voices in detective fiction for children are not a pre-set convention of the genre: authors choose to convey their story using the means they consider the most appropriate. Narrative voices can be intrusive, as in Blyton's case; they can be somehow childish and closer to children's way of thinking, who will find in the narrator someone they can relate to, as it is in Nesbit's works. The young narrator must be almost unreliable, as he should lack experience. His inability to evaluate the events and people around him must be the same as his reader. The author's task is to "create the illusion that there is no slant in the text, that is, that the reader knows as much as the narrator"³⁴; the narrator's task is to accompany the child reader through his adventurous journey in the best way possible.

2.2 The Bastables and the Famous Five: Two series according to the conventions of Detective Fiction

2.2.1 How real life influenced the events of the novels

Since the revolution that took place with the advent of the Golden Age of children's literature between 1920 and 1930, many authors have explored new themes and genres, trying to renew this field of literature. Of course, their contribution to the development of detective fiction that could be suitable for children has been essential for the establishment of the genre, but only a few names stand out for their narrative abilities. Among many authors, only a few are remembered through time: they are the ones who

³⁴ Nikolajeva, Maria, *Aesthetic Approaches to Children's Literature: An introduction*, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, 2005, p.190

are still popular nowadays. Edith Nesbit and Enid Blyton stand out among other authors for their inventiveness, their ability to build a child-friendly world that is rich in detail and attracts the attention of child readers.

Edith Nesbit is considered the “first modern writer for children”³⁵. Julia Briggs writes that

She invented the children’s adventure story more or less single-handed, and she added further magic ingredients such as wishing rings and time travel. Her books established a style and an approach still widely used today, yet she was forty before she produced her first great success, *The Treasure Seekers*, and had already tried her hand at many different kinds of writing – poems, plays, romantic novels, ghost stories, tales of country life, reviews, as well as her earliest and now long-forgotten writings for children.³⁶

Edith Nesbit is one of the pioneers of adventure fiction for children, a genre within which detective fiction is often located. Briggs notes how many of her experiences as adolescent, as well as her tastes, reflect on the stories she writes: her life is richly present in her writings. Many people who were important to her took part somehow in her writings: starting from her husband, many characters of her books were inspired by the people who were constantly present or particularly close to her in her life, as for instance their brothers, who inspired Oswald and Dicky. Even absence has an important role in the development of her stories. One of the common traits of Nesbit’s stories is the absence of a parental figure. In the *Bastables* series, Oswald’s father is only a feeble presence: the reader knows that he “is the bravest man in the world”³⁷, but nothing more, apart from the sporadic description given by Oswald. The readers also know that the children’s mother died, but they do not know when or why. However, the moment their mother died somehow triggers the adventure for the little group of brothers:

“I’ll tell you what, we must go and seek for treasure: it is always what you do to restore the fallen fortunes of your House.”

³⁵ Briggs, Julia, *Edith Nesbit: a Woman of Passion*, Tempus Publishing, Gloucestershire, 1989, p.10

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p.10

³⁷ Nesbit, Edith, *The Story of the Treasure Seeker*, 1899, kindle edition

Dora said it was all very well. She often says that. [...] Most of our things are black or grey since Mother died; [...] Father does not like you to ask for new things. That was one way we had of knowing that the fortunes of the ancient House of Bastable were really fallen. Another way was that there was no pick-pocket money – except a penny now and then to the little ones, and people did not come to dinner anymore, like they used to do. [...] Father was very ill after Mother died; and while he was ill his business-partner went to Spain – and there was never much money afterwards.³⁸

The absence of a parental figure who guides the children, or just pays attention to what they do or say, is one of the conventions of detective fiction set during the Golden Age of children's literature, a pattern that recurs in most stories about mystery and detection. Edith Nesbit suffered the absence of her father, whom she lost when she was only four. Of course, his early departure did not allow her to have many memories of his father, but she used the best of her experience to create an imaginary world where loss was not a cause of pain, but instead a reason to embark on exciting adventures. Nesbit was blessed with two older brothers, who also contributed to the formation of her nature: Briggs writes that

Playing with them, she developed an adventurous, tomboyish front that eventually became part of her. When she first began to fictionalize her childhood experiences through the adventures of the Bastables, she seems to have portrayed herself as twins – as the courageous, lovable Alice and her timid, highly-strung brother Noel.³⁹

Her childhood is everywhere in her novels. In the *Bastables* series, almost every character has an equivalent in her real life. As already mentioned in the previous quotation, Nesbit took herself as reference for two characters: Noel is probably the one who is closest to her, since he adores writing. His poems are everywhere in the novel, written to commemorate a particular event or to describe his and his siblings' state of mind.

³⁸ Ibidem

³⁹ Briggs, Julia, *Edith Nesbit: a Woman of Passion*, Tempus Publishing, Gloucestershire, 1989, p.20

Nesbit uses her memories as starting points for her novels: the *Bastables* series contains many fictionalised episodes of her life. For instance, in the first pages of *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, Albert is accidentally buried in the hole the children are digging to find their family's treasure:

So Albert-next-door began to dig with his feet, and we stood on the ground over him, waiting – and all in a minute the ground gave way, and we tumbled together in a heap; and when we got up there was a little shallow hollow where we had be standing, and Albert-next-door was underneath, stuck quite fast, because the roof of the tunnel had tumbled in on him. He is horribly unlucky boy to have anything to do with.⁴⁰

This episode is strictly connected with one that really happened to her during her childhood: before a party for which she and her brothers were well dressed, the two boys decided she was so cute and looked so much like a daisy that she should have been planted out on the ground, like a real flower. Of course, in her novel Nesbit dissociated herself from the role of victim, reserving this unfortunate event to another character, who does not like digging in the ground because he is scared of worms. Briggs reports how “Albert takes here the role of the victim, the muff, the outsider. Retrospectively, Edith sides with the adventurous spirit of her brothers, mocking and despising the timorous role she played in reality”⁴¹.

Many of the adventures described by Nesbit in her novels are an elaboration of the experiences she lived as a child during her summer holidays, or the stories she heard from her relatives. Some of the events described in *The Wouldbegoods* are inspired by the holidays Edith spent in La Haye with her family during the summer of 1868, when she was only ten years old. The halo of mystery that surrounded the farmhouse allowed Nesbit to enrich the *Bastables* adventures with several details that would not have been possible to add without her childhood experiences and memories.

Many of the places where the *Bastables* adventures take place were visited by Edith Nesbit both during her childhood and after she married Hubert Bland. The Mill House

⁴⁰ Nesbit, Edith, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, 1899, kindle edition

⁴¹ Briggs, Julia, *Edith Nesbit: a Woman of Passion*, Tempus Publishing, Gloucestershire, 1989, p.23

in Dymchurch, for instance, is the home of the Bastable family in *The New Treasure Seekers*, where the brothers spend most of their time; the setting of the first Bastable stories is Blackheart, where Edith lived during the first years of their marriage. One of the aims Edith Nesbit pursued was to show her reader the power of imaginative play. As reported by Briggs,

Children use it [the play] as a way of learning to grow up, or of re-enacting what they have lost. [...] Books themselves represent an important form of play. All her books bring about a confrontation between play and experience, though they often increase the power of the imagination within play by the use of magic.⁴²

Edith Nesbit made a large use of her own experiences to shape the adventures of her fictional characters, giving her novels a touch of reality that permits the children to relate to those stories, and have fun while, in a sense, growing up.

Enid Blyton followed a similar pattern as Edith Nesbit. She drew inspiration from her life experiences, pulling out the best ones and re-elaborating them to write the Famous Five's adventures. Enid, first of three children, had a difficult relationship with her family, especially during her childhood, and this is reflected in every book of the series: George and his cousins never have the support of their family, and consequently they are forced to solve their problems on their own. As Edith Nesbit, Enid Blyton suffered from the loss of her father, who she was really close to: he left home when she was only thirteen, something that, as David Rudd suggests, "set the pattern for Blyton's subsequent imaginative treatment of the truth"⁴³. In the *Famous Five* series, the only fatherly figure is Quentin, who represents one of the toughest obstacles to overcome. As much as the relationship between Enid and her father was good enough to bring them to occasionally keep up a correspondence, she often felt that he was distant. As for her mother, Blyton was not very close to her, especially after his father's departure: Enid blamed her for her loss, and she did not think she could find in her mother the support

⁴² Ibidem, p.421

⁴³ Rudd, David, *Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children's Literature*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke, 2000, p.25

she needed during her adolescence, when she lived the most delicate period of her life. The *Famous Five* series shows how George's mother, kind and caring towards her daughter and nephews, has not any space in the stories: she has the same weight as other random characters whose only role is to make the story develop, but nothing more. The fact that she was there would not make any difference. The issues she had with her family in the past reflect a trait that several critics tend to highlight when talking about Enid Blyton: the idea of "a woman who never really grew up, who had many dark fears that she managed to conceal until near the end"⁴⁴. This condition is visible in her writings as well: as previously mentioned, Enid Blyton's style has been often criticised for being childish, too simple, a peculiarity that made her writings closer to her readers: "she was a child, she thought as a child, and she wrote as a child"⁴⁵. The reason of her adult characters being scarcely characterised and often described as cruel and snobby towards children might lay here, in her inability to see the adult world objectively, thus trying to feel closer to her young readers.

In *The Famous Five* series, Enid's love for animals is represented by Tim, George's dog. Enid had a strong animal interest, which is also one of the strongest elements of her successful formula: children are attracted to animals as much as animals are attracted to children. This interest is reflected in every creature she talks about in her books: Tim, and the other dogs as well, appear to be rather clever, sometimes more than their human companions. Tim is conscious of what there is around itself, he senses the danger and promptly points it out to his friends through his barking. Tim is almost essential for the children, as he often saves them from the dangers they put themselves in.

"Got the map?" said Dick, suddenly.
Julian nodded. "I put on clean jeans this morning," he said, "but you may be sure I remembered to pop the map into my pocket. Here it is!"
He took it out and the wind at once blew it right out of his hands! It fell into the sea and bobbed there in the wind. [...] But someone was quicker than

⁴⁴ Ibidem, p.26

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p.27

she was! Tim had seen the paper fly from Julian's hand, and had heard and understood the cries of dismay.⁴⁶

The love George feels for his dog Tim is the same Enid felt for every animal, a love that probably developed during her childhood, when she was not allowed to keep pets at home. The main reason is explained by Barbara Stoney in *Enid Blyton: the Biography*. Enid based George's character on her younger self:

Enid always acknowledged that 'George', the main character in this series, was based on a 'real person, now grown up', but only once did she reveal the true identity of this girl 'who so badly wanted to be a boy and acted as if she were'. The 'real' George, she wrote in *The Story of My Life*, had been 'short-haired, freckled, sturdy and snub-nosed... bold and daring, hot-tempered and loyal' – and, like her counterpart, had also been sulky on occasions [...]. But it was only in an unguarded moment, many years later, while discussing the Fives' popularity in France, that she eventually confessed to Rosica Cohn, her foreign agent, that George was, in fact based upon herself.⁴⁷

The same certainty does not exist for the other characters of the series. Enid herself declared that she did not often draw her characters from her life experiences, even if she sometimes recognised how her own subconscious brought her to invent and develop her characters drawing the inspiration from someone she had known and probably had forgotten long time before that moment.

The main setting of the whole series, Kirrin Bay, might as well have been inspired by the places where Blyton lived most of her life. She started to feel the need to be independent when she was still very young, as she left home when she was just nineteen years old. During her first marriage with Hugh Pollock, she lived in 'Elfin Cottage', as she loved to call it, a detached house surrounded by fields and woods that inspired her several settings for George's adventures. 'Old Thatch' as well, the second cottage where

⁴⁶ Blyton, Enid, *Five on a Treasure Island*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London 1942, Kindle Edition

⁴⁷ Stoney, Barbara, *Enid Blyton: The Biography*, The History Press, Gloucestershire, 2011, Kindle edition

she lived almost all her life, shared the same characteristics: it was isolated from the noises of big cities, situated near the River Thames, and she loved it so much that she described it as a Fairy Tale house⁴⁸, and that somehow resembles Kirrin Cottage in her private writings.

The first book of the *Famous Five* series, *Five on a Treasure Island*, written in 1941, is about the first meeting between George and her three cousins, and their adventure on Kirrin Island, a place dear to the protagonist and that she must defend from the hands of the adults who want to make a fortune with it. During the same period, England was in the midst of the Second World War, and the English were trying to defend their own island from “wicked men”⁴⁹. The World War period, as well as the concern about the presence of spies in the English territory during the Cold War, are barely cited in Blyton’s novels, but plenty of references can still be found in all the books of the series:

“They’ve gone off to sell their secrets to another country. Why do we let them?” [...]

“I’m jolly glad I’m not at home today – Father will be rampaging round like anything, telling Mother hundred of times what he thinks about scientists who are traitors!”

“He certainly will,” said Julian. “I don’t blame him either. That’s a thing I don’t understand – to be a traitor to one’s own country. It leaves a nasty taste in my mouth to think about it.”⁵⁰

Other references to Blyton’s fear of the foreign are scattered through the whole series. In one of the last books, *Five on Finniston Farm*, Mr Henning represents this fear, in this case towards an American, in representation of a country she feared:

“You ought to be glad that a poor, run-down back dated country like Britain has got anything to sell to a fine upstanding one like America!”⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ibidem

⁴⁹ Rudd, David, *Enid Blyton and the Mystery of Children’s Literature*, Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke, 2000, p.89

⁵⁰ Blyton, Enid, *Five have a Wonderful Time*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1952, Kindle Edition

⁵¹ Blyton, Enid, *Five on Finniston Farm*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1960, Kindle Edition

Enid felt proud to be English, and she did not lose the chance to show this pride on her stories, often expressing it through the words of her characters:

“That was good”, said Julian, voicing the feelings of the others. “Very good. I somehow feel more English for having seen those Dorset fields, set about by hedges, basking in the sun.”⁵²

In conclusion, the life of the two authors, their personal experiences and the historical period in which they lived influenced their writings: both Edith Nesbit and Enid Blyton showed the love they felt for their readers through their stories, using events and people of the real life to give them a touch of reality.

2.2.2 The Bastables and the power of imagination: playing detective

The first novel in *the Bastables* series, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, tells the story of six brothers, Dora, Oswald, Dicky, Alice, Noel and Horace Octavius, and their attempts to restore the lost fortune of the Bastable family. Such attempts which will bring them to embark on several adventures. At a first reading, the novel might not have much in common with detective fiction. Detective fiction is characterised by a situation of danger in which the protagonists give a demonstration of their ability to solve a problem and overcome the danger provoked by a criminal or, at least, someone dangerous to them. In the three books that compose the series, there is almost nothing of that kind: the criminals that appear in the novels are not as dangerous.

Most of the work is about the playful minds of the protagonists. Each book is a collection of little adventures connected to one another: in the first and second book in particular, firstly the Bastables try to restore their family's fortune and then become better persons through a series of events that will eventually lead them to their aim. These events are made interesting and lively thanks to the children's fantasy, which adds some peculiarity to an otherwise ordinary story. For instance, in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, Noel desires to find a princess and marry her: the brothers, while

⁵² Ibidem

having a picnic at Greenwich Park and pretending they are in an enchanted wood – instead of a park in the middle of the city – make a game. There, they meet a girl who looks “like a china doll”⁵³: Oswald is glad they met her, because she says she is a princess and “she said it very well too, exactly as it were true. We were very glad, because it is so seldom you meet any children who can begin to play right off without having everything explained to them”⁵⁴. It is at the end of the adventure, though, that the Bastable brothers will find out that, while they thought that theirs was just a game, the little girl, whose name is Pauline, is actually a princess. Fantasy influences protagonists’ lives a lot: thanks to their imagination, Oswald and his brothers live the most unforgettable adventures, even when there really is not anything exciting to tell.

Several adventures could be seen as little detective stories: in most of them, the centre of the plot is a mystery the brothers have to solve to bring back their family’s fortune or to show their father they have learnt to be good. One of the most representative ones is the story that Oswald tells in the thirteenth chapter of *the Treasure Seekers*, entitled *The Robber and the Burglar*. The adventure starts by chance: the children have been left alone at home, and they are talking about what is right or wrong in being a robber. During their chitchatting, “a strange and wonderful thing” happens.

Alice was just asking Noel how he would deal with the robber who wouldn’t go if he was asked politely and quietly, when we heard a noise downstairs – quite a plain noise, not the kind of noise you fancy you hear. It was like somebody moving a chair. We held our breath and listened and then came another noise, like someone poking a fire. Now, you remember there was no one to poke a fire or move chairs downstairs, because Eliza and Father were both out. They could not have come in without our hearing them, because the front door is as hard to shut as the back one, and whichever you go in by you have to give a slam that you can hear all down the street.⁵⁵

⁵³ Nesbit, Edith, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, 1899, kindle edition

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*

Every moment in the life of the Bastable brothers is full of sparks that might give life to an unexpected and exciting adventure. The amount of mystery in each story is the same as of every detective fiction for young readers. Oswald and his brothers never lose the opportunity to make their life more interesting, and every single event gives them the cue to create a new context where to live their adventure, even when there is nothing exciting or dangerous to face. Their imagination runs wild thanks to the books they constantly read, from Kipling to Conan Doyle, authors who help them develop their own stories, and then applied in their daily lives. In *The Robber and the Burglar*, the Bastable brothers put their reading into practice, and perfectly act as detectives: they start to make suppositions about what could have made that noise in their living room downstairs, and try to keep cold and be reasonable – as much as children can be.

H.O. and Alice and Dora caught hold of each other's blankets and looked at Dicky and Oswald, and everyone was quite pale. And Noel whispered - "It's ghosts, I know it is" – and then we listened again, but there was no more noise. [...]
"Shall we open the window and call police?" [...]
"I know it's not ghosts, and I don't believe it's robbers. I expect it's a stray cat got in when the coals came this morning, and she's been hiding in the cellar, and now she's moving around." [...]
Now, Oswald said that about the cat, and it made it easier to go down, but in his inside he did not feel at all sure that it might not be robbers after all.⁵⁶

Assumptions are one of the main elements that characterise detective fiction. Although Nesbit's series might not contain all the conventions of the genre, the power of imagination of her protagonists makes her writings as interesting as any detective story, as they are full of elements of mystery enriched by the fantastic way the children have to build stories around boring, ordinary details of their lives. Oswald's assumptions, nevertheless, reveal to be wrong: a robber has actually broken into their house. In detective fiction, the sleuth hardly makes the correct assumptions at the very beginning of the story, and of course, a child could not behave differently. In this case,

⁵⁶ Ibidem

though, Oswald's assumptions might be wrong because of his fear of meeting a real robber, than because of a fault in his reasoning process. What makes this adventure exciting though, is that the robber, as will be discovered at the end of the chapter, is an old friend of their father's, who was caught in what he thought it was a game:

“Children, what is the meaning of all this?” And for a minute nobody spoke. [...] Then we began to understand, and it was like being knocked down, it was so sudden. And our robber told us he wasn't a robber after all. He was only an old college of my Father's, and he had come after dinner, when Father was just trying to mend the lock H.O. had broken...⁵⁷

Moreover, the “fake” robber will eventually help the children to try catching a real burglar, who managed to escape. Another chapter that involves some investigation is *The high-born babe*, one of the adventures contained in *The Wouldbegoods*. Here, the Bastable brothers find a baby:

“I wonder whose baby it is,” Dora said, “Isn't it a darling, Alice?” Alice agreed to its being one, and said she thought it was most likely the child of noble parents stolen by gipsies. “These two, as likely as not,” Noel said. “Can't you see something crime-like in the very way they're lying?” There were two tramps, and they were lying on the grass at the edge of the lane on the shady side, fast asleep, on a very little further in than where the Baby was.⁵⁸

Once they notice the baby and make their assumption on the reason he is with someone who might actually have kidnapped him, Oswald and his siblings decide to leave him to take care of their own business. When they come back, they walk through the place where they first met the baby, only to discover that the child has disappeared, together with its perambulator and the tramps that were with him. They cannot do much about the problem, so, after they have made their assumption, they decide to go back

⁵⁷ Ibidem

⁵⁸ Nesbit, Edith, *The Wouldbegoods*, 1901, kindle edition

home by walking through a short cut. The short cut leads to a stile at the edge of a little wood, who has grown out beyond the stile, because it looks as if nobody has been taking care of it. Here, Oswald notices something:

[...] among the hazels and chestnuts and young dog-wood bushes, we saw something white. We felt it was our duty to investigate, even if the white was only the underside of the tail of a dead rabbit caught in a trap. It was not – it was part of the perambulator.⁵⁹

The finding of the perambulator encourages the Bastables to investigate on the mystery of the disappeared baby. Soon they find out that the perambulator has been hidden to the eyes of people by covering it with leaves, but there is no trace neither of the child nor of the tramps. Still, everyone sounds really excited:

Whoever had abandoned the helpless perambulator in that lonely spot had done exactly as H.O. said, and covered it with leaves, only they were green and some of them had dropped off. The other were wild with excitement. Now or never, they thought, was a chance to be real detectives. Oswald alone retained a calm exterior. It was he who would not go straight to the police station. He said: "Let's try and ferret out something for ourselves before we tell the police. They always have a clue directly they hear about the finding of the body."⁶⁰

The whole story appears to be only a game. As far as the fact they discovered might be serious and need an immediate intervention, Oswald and the others just think about this as a chance to act like real detectives, and set a stage where they are the protagonists of a case that would probably need the assistance of an adult – or even better, of the police. This assertion is proved by the fact that Oswald puts their dinner before the resolution of the case. However, the children actually act as they were true detectives: they observe the crime scene, make their assumptions and decide how to act

⁵⁹ Ibidem

⁶⁰ Ibidem

on the basis of the clues they have, mostly taking inspiration from what they have read in mystery books or newspapers:

“The dead body, or whatever the clew is, is always left exactly as it is found,” he said, “till the police have seen it, and the coroner, and the inquest, and the doctor, and the sorrowing relations. Besides, suppose someone saw us with the beastly thing, and thought we have stolen it; then they would say, ‘*What have you done with the baby?*’ and then where should it be?”⁶¹

The discovery of the empty perambulator affects the children’s mind. The thrill they felt that afternoon continues to accompany them through the rest of the day, so much that the main topic of conversation during dinner is exactly the supposedly kidnapped baby. The excitement increases when Dora reveals to her brothers that she has found the baby. Although Oswald is disappointed with her sister’s behaviour, he knows that taking the baby with her was the right thing to do. In this story, the children ask for the help of an adult, Albert’s uncle. In detective fiction for young readers, children do not usually seek the help of someone who does not belong to their group, since they know these people would be of hindrance, more than of help. This is one of the circumstances in which adults are involved in children’s problems and give the final help to solve the mystery. In this story, Albert’s uncle brings the children to the right solution, and solves the mystery of the kidnapped baby.

The most meaningful story of the Bastable brothers that relates to detective fiction is the third adventure they live in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, which is entitled *Being Detectives*. The chapter starts with a mention of Sherlock Holmes’s novels, as well as other references to many other detective novels Oswald and his brothers have read during their childhood. This way, the reader already knows that the little protagonists have a general knowledge of what it means to be a detective, how he reasons and how he investigates to solve the mystery. It all starts with an assertion:

“I should like to be a detective.”
I wish to be quite fair, but I cannot remember exactly who said it. Oswald

⁶¹ Ibidem

thinks he said it, and Dora says it was Dicky, but Oswald is too much of a man to quarrel about a little thing like that. “I should like to be a detective,” said – perhaps it was Dicky, but I think not – “and find out strange and hidden crimes.” “You have to be much cleverer than you are,” said H.O. “Not so very,” Alice said, “because when you’ve read the books you know what the things mean: the red hair on the handle of the knife [...] I believe we could do it.”⁶²

The first part of the story is filled with the most common conventions of detective fiction: it explains, as a child could explain something that does not belong to his environment, how a detective works, and what are the consequences of a crime as atrocious as a murder. The presence of brutal elements – in this case, Alice talks about murderers being hanged – is unusual in detective stories for children, but Oswald describes every detail of a murder, and of the resulting punishment, in detail and without giving any sign of disgust or fear. On the contrary, the narration has a playful touch, which somehow distances the reality of a brutal, adult world from the way of thinking of the children. Murders are “not safe”⁶³ because “it always ends in the poor murderer being hanged”⁶⁴, and the main problem does not seem to be the death of an innocent person, but rather the blood it would be shed and the nightmares the murderer would have after looking at it. The same applies to the detective as well: better not to deal with a murder, because the sight of blood will haunt him forever. Even the idea the children have about how a detective works is somehow influenced, besides by the novels they read, by their playful minds: Oswald clearly says that a detective cannot choose which crime he wants to investigate, but he “just have to get a suspicious circumstance, and then look for the clue and follow it up”⁶⁵. As an alternative, he can look for news on different newspapers: there will probably be some young lady being missing, a lady the detective will surely find only by knowing her physical features, and how she is dressed – something clearly impossible in real life. The concept the children

⁶² Nesbit, Edith, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, 1899, kindle edition

⁶³ Ibidem

⁶⁴ Ibidem

⁶⁵ Ibidem

have of the work of a detective is based only on the stories they have read and listened to: this leads them to think that detectives are infallible, since almost every novel ends with the resolution of the case and the criminal being arrested (or hanged, in this imaginative case). This idea of infallibility brings the Bastable brothers to think they could as well be detectives; luckily, someone in the group of children is mature enough to know that trying to be involved in a dangerous case, like a murder or robbery, is not a choice they should make. However, of course, they can still be detective in their own right:

“This is a dark secret, and any one who thinks it is better not to be involved in a career of crime-discovery had better go away ere yet to be late.” [...] H.O. went with her because he had two pence to spend. They thought it was only a game of Alice’s, but Oswald knew by the way she spoke. He can nearly always tell. And when people are not telling the truth Oswald generally knows by the way they look with their eyes. Oswald is not proud of being able to do this. He knows it is through no merit of his own that he is much cleverer than some people.⁶⁶

Oswald tends to underline several times how much of a clever boy he is. Of course, cleverness is a typical feature of detectives: a case could not be solved without the help of an ingenious mind. And Oswald, being the protagonist of the series, must necessarily keep up with the great names of detective fiction. His model is probably Sherlock Holmes, the only detective whose name is cited in this chapter. Holmes’s level is difficult to achieve, so Oswald wants to try to resemble him as much as he can. The mystery the brothers are going to be involved in is apparently a very simple one. The Bastable’s neighbours are away for a few days, and their house is shut and empty. However, the previous night Alice had noticed there was something strange, because she saw a light through the windows, and dark figures moving inside the house. The news excites the children to the point that they decide to investigate about the mysterious event the following night. To their surprise, they find out a man is actually in the house, but he is not a robber as they first thought. Still, his intentions are not clear.

⁶⁶ Ibidem

The atmosphere of this story recalls many mystery novels, since most of the action takes place during the night, and night and mystery are connected. Of course, like real detectives, the Bastable brothers reflect on what they are going to do, and devise a plan to follow in case things start to go wrong. They act very professionally, as they evaluate the risks and try to have a way of escaping in case of need. Unluckily for them, there never was a gang of coiners into their neighbours' house to begin with. The wrong deduction, anyway, brings the children to discover the truth – or better, to let the readers know the truth, as Oswald, probably like his brothers, will never know why their neighbours pretended not to be at home. The reason is to be found in Oswald's words:

“I am very sorry, and I beg your pardon. We wanted to be detectives, and we thought a gang of coiners infested your house, so we looked through your window last night. I saw the lettuce and I heard what you said about the salmon being three halfpence cheaper, and I know it is very dishonourable to pry into other people's secrets, especially ladies', and I never will again if you will forgive me this once.”⁶⁷

The reason behind the shut of the lights in the house of the Bastable's neighbours might be the circumstances in which the family is living: both here, and previously in the novel, Oswald hears the two young ladies who live in that home talking about money, and how they wish “if we could all go away decent every year”⁶⁸. But this is, just as the ones the readers will make by reading the story, only an assumption.

Each chapter in *the Bastables* series contains elements of detective fiction: the key point is always a mystery, at least to the eyes of the little protagonists. Their power of imagination is so strong that every single event is transformed into an exciting adventure: children see in every little detail a clue to solve their personal cases, acting as real detectives on the basis of what they have read in their beloved books. Here, the dangers they face are not life-threatening, as most of the “criminals” they meet are, in fact, ordinary people. Everything starts as a game, because that is what children do, playing, and build wonderful fantasy adventures that will help them to grow.

⁶⁷ Ibidem

⁶⁸ Ibidem

2.2.3 The Famous five and the whodunit genre

While in *the Bastables* series the mysteries are based on the imaginative power of their little protagonists, the *Famous Five* series relates to detective fiction in a different, more direct way. In *the Bastables* series, the adventures the brothers experience, as well as the dangers, are actually a figment of their imagination; with Blyton's series, the circumstances are completely overturned. The dangers they have to face are real, provoked by cruel and greedy adults who constantly cross their path. Each of the books that compose the series is a detective story. As opposed to the Bastable brothers, George and her cousins do not try to look for an adventure in the events and details that surround them. The power of imagination of the protagonists plays a marginal role. Sometimes, it is not even needed, precisely because the criminals in the stories are real and not someone the children mistake for a dangerous person.

The *Famous Five* series follows many of the conventions of detective fiction for young readers: although cases are not about murders, the crimes committed by adults in the series are so serious that they keep putting the children in danger – dangers that their parents persist not to see despite they keep presenting in each story. Each novel follows the same pattern, and thus it can be divided into four main points:

1. The story starts with George and her cousins who usually meet at Kirrin Island to spend their holidays together – the type of holiday is not really important: it might be for the summer break as well as for any other kind of festivity, as soon as it is a chance to meet each other.
2. At some point during the holiday, the children notice that something unexpected is happening around them. It might be the announcement of some great event in their neighbourhood, like the arrival of a circus, or the meeting with some strange friend of their relatives who looks suspicious. They will then communicate their suspicions to George's father, but he will promptly tell them to mind their own business, and to stop babbling around about things that do not exist.

3. From this point on, the real adventure begins. George and her cousins decide to investigate on their own, leaving adults outside their “case”. After the children have discussed what to do to thwart the criminals’ intentions, and have discovered that their suspicions were grounded, they will come face to face with their enemies, who will take advantage of their being adults to prevent the children from revealing their plans to someone else, usually by kidnapping them.
4. Thanks to their cleverness and the help of George’s dog, the children are able to escape from the criminals’ hands, and look for a way to warn their parents and the police about what happened. The story ends with the children who assure the culprits to the hands of justice and the adults who praise them for their good work.

The holiday as a time of discovery and adventure has become a trope of detective fiction for young readers through time. School is barely mentioned in Blyton’s novel, as the little protagonists would not be able to explore the world nor have any kind of adventure in a place where children are constantly controlled and governed by adults. “Holiday” almost becomes a synonym for “freedom”, because during this period everyone – adults included – have the chance to live new experiences, such as discovering places they had not ever seen before or facing situations they did not think could be possible until that moment. The holiday break is a chance, for George and her cousins, to spend most of their time wandering through Kirrin Cottage’s neighbourhood, and live their own adventures:

“Wake up! It’s Tuesday! And the sun’s shining!”
Anne woke up with a jump and stared at Julian joyfully. “It’s come at last!”
she said. “I thought it never would. Oh, isn’t it an exciting feeling to go
away for a holiday!”⁶⁹

As it happened with the Bastables, George and her cousins find themselves involved in a criminal environment by chance. During their outdoors activities - but it could happen while they are at home as well – they meet someone they do not know and who

⁶⁹ Blyton, Enid, *Five on a Treasure Island*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1942, Kindle Edition

has a suspicious aura, or find an object that looks precious, or at least, “mysterious”. The eventuality to deal with something dangerous does not scare the children, who decide instead to investigate despite the advice of adults.

The children’s cleverness is the driving force of the adventures they get involved in. They have the same ability as the most famous detectives: they are clever and capable of reasoning in order to understand the situation they find themselves into and to find a solution to solve their problem. George and Julian are the most intelligent children of the group; they are the masterminds behind every single adventure, although different forces move them. George is wild and impulsive, and she often wants to solve the problem without anyone’s help. From time to time, she even keeps her cousins out of danger by hiding what it is really happening, with the only aim to act alone -, and this is a trait that often puts her in danger because, as a child, she obviously cannot act alone against a group of adult criminals. On the contrary, Julian is more reasonable, probably because he is the oldest child and, consequently, the most mature. He always tries to guide the group to solve the mystery in the safest way, often through suggestions that George does not particularly approve, as they usually involve help on the part of those adults that do not pay attention to them. This is the reason why the two friends, especially after the first book of the series, do not work well together, even for the silliest circumstances:

“I don’t know if you’re supposed to take that dog in, Miss. Your father didn’t say anything about it.”
“It’s all right,” said George, her face red with joy. “Quite all alright. You needn’t worry. Start the car again, please.”
“You are a monkey!” said Julian, half-annoyed with George, and half-pleased because Timmy was with them. “Mr. Lenoir may send him back, you know.”⁷⁰

The *Famous Five* series shares several features with one of the most famous subgenres of detective fiction, the “whodunit”. Among the characteristics of the whodunit genre, the presence of clues that are scattered throughout the whole novel and

⁷⁰ Blyton, Enid, *Five Go to Smuggler’s Top*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1945, Kindle Edition

through which the reader has the chance to solve the mystery together with the detective, if not even before him, is included. Moreover, thanks to the “fair play”, which is an exclusive characteristic of whodunit fiction, readers have the same amount of information as the detective: they see the same clues that the detective sees, and know the context in which the crime happened. The “fair play”, besides, forces the author to put the reason of the crime somewhere in the story. These conventions allow the readers to put themselves in the shoes of the detective, and to try to solve the case with their own reasoning ability. The eccentricity of the detective might as well be found in the series, as the children, George in particular, seem eager to show the world of adults their intelligence, their adventurous spirit, and to snoop around to find even the most insignificant clue to solve their cases. Of course, these stories cannot be properly considered as being of the same genre, as whodunit fiction usually follows the clue-puzzle form, in which several people find themselves locked in a room and one of them is necessarily the culprit, while most of the stories of the *Famous Five* series occur in different places depending on the story. Even when they are locked in a place from which it looks impossible to escape from, the children always find a way to leave it: this happens, for instance in *Five Go To Smugglers Top*. In this adventure, George and her cousins are back to Kirrin Island for the Easter Holidays. During the first night, the children hear a “loud and woeful groaning and creaking”⁷¹ noise coming from outside, and they see the ash tree in their garden dangerously bending towards their home. Julian tries to warn his family, but the tree falls, destroying the roof and wrecking the girls’ bedroom. This “unexpected” event will bring Quentin to decide to make the children go to Mr. Lenoir, a fellow scientist who is interested in the same scientific matters. The word “unexpected” has been put in evidence because before the accident, a clue on what was going to happen had already been left in the previous chapter of the story. Just a few hours before the accident happened, Quentin had asked the children if they knew Pierre Lenoir, who is, as it is easily deducible, Mr. Lenoir’s son:

“Do you know a boy called Pierre Lenoir?” suddenly asked Uncle Quentin, taking a letter from his pocket. “I believe he goes to your school and

⁷¹ Ibidem

Dick's,

Julian.”

“Pierre Lenoir – oh, you mean old Sooty!” said Julian. “Yes, he’s in Dick’s form, sir. Mad as a hatter.”⁷²

The information would have been absolutely useless, if the accident had never occurred. But, as in whodunit fiction clues will eventually lead to the culprit, the same happens here: the children are informed of the existence of Pierre Lenoir because they will meet him in the immediate future. Moreover, Quentin mentioned that Pierre’s father has written a letter addressed to him, and that he has invited him over at Kirrin Cottage to discuss about their experiments. Obviously, the nature of the character cannot be completely deduced on the basis of only this information, but it is enough to let the reader know that whatever will happen in the next pages will involve Lenoir’s family. Dick gives a description of his behaviour at school, and this might lead the reader to think that Pierre will be on their side in the new adventure awaiting them:

“Well, it wouldn’t be bad sport to have old Sooty here, Uncle. But he’s quite mad. He never does as he’s told, he climbs like a monkey, and he can be awfully cheeky. I don’t know if you’d like him.”⁷³

In Blyton’s stories there are plenty of little clues that make their development somehow predictable. This is due to the fact that these are, indeed, stories written for a young audience, who of course has a vivid imagination, but probably does not possess any true deductive competence: readers would not be able to understand any well-hidden clues, since adults as well find it complex to find the solution of a case before the detective.

In whodunit fiction, the culprit is not immediately identifiable: the detective usually has a shortlist of suspects that thins out as the story proceeds. Then, he finds out new clues that help him to exclude from that list as many people as possible, until he finally identifies the criminal and brings him to justice. On the contrary, the course of events for George and her cousins works in a different way, since the culprit is easily

⁷² Ibidem

⁷³ Ibidem

identifiable since the very first chapters of the story. The criminal owns some peculiarities that stimulate the children's suspicions, and these suspicious are never proved wrong. Once again, children show they own an infallible intuition, and they share a lot with the most famous detectives of all times. For instance, in *Five Go Off in A Caravan*, there are several hints about whom the children will have to deal with. The first signs are given by Nobby, a boy who works at the circus near the place where George and the others will camp for the night. Nobby gives them an advice about his uncle, Dan:

“You should see him act with my Uncle Dan. He’s the chief clown, you know. Pong is just as big a clown as my uncle is. It’s a fair scream to see them act the fool together.”

“I wish we could see them,” said Anne, “acting in the ring, I mean. Will you uncle mind you showing us all the animals and everybody?”

“Why should he?” said Nobby. “Shan’t ask him! But you’ll mind and act polite to him, won’t you? He’s worse than a tiger when he’s in a temper. They call him Tiger Dan because of his rages.”

Anne didn’t like the sould of that at all. Tiger Dan! It sounded very fierce and savage.

“I hope he isn’t about anywhere now,” she said nervously, looking around.⁷⁴

A few lines later, another character makes his first appearance in the story, Lou. His description will anticipate what he is going to represent for the protagonists later in the story:

Lou was a long-limbed, loose-jointed fellow with an ugly face, and a crop of black shining hair that curled tightly. [...] The children thought that he and Tiger Dan would make a good pair bad-tempered, scowling and unfriendly. They all made up their minds that they would have as little as possible to do with Lou the acrobat and Tiger Dan the clown.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Blyton, Enid, *Five go Off in a Caravan*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1946, Kindle Edition

⁷⁵ Ibidem

These two descriptions, however short, are sufficient to make both the main characters and the readers of the story realise who the menacing adults are and what will be the consequences of their meeting with the little protagonists. Enemies in Blyton's series are often, if not even always, introduced with negative attributes. The people George and the other will have to face in their adventures are never introduced with good words: they are always described as greedy, or constantly angry, or somehow threatening for the children or their beloved one, Timmy often being one of the favourite victims of these people. The identification of the negative characters helps the implied readers to better identify themselves with the main characters: the distinction between the positive and negative characters is neat, as well as the concepts of evil and good. Children never feel fondness for the people who will eventually become a menace for them, and the feeling is reciprocated. In their first appearance, the people who will eventually become enemies never show any kind of appreciation for the children. In fact, they look annoyed by their presence, as if they sensed there will be trouble if children will not be kept away from them. This might be considered part of the trope of detective fiction for young readers that highlights the continuous contrast between the adult and children's worlds: a compatibility between the two spheres is almost non-existent, as it is shown through the novels. The difference between the two separate worlds is also visible in the way each story of the series ends. In *the Famous Five* series, there is no redemption on the part of the evil characters, nor any absolution for them: they never repent for their action, nor show themselves sorry for what they have done. On the other side, children do not forgive them for their actions and delight themselves with the compliments they receive on the part of the adults that did not trust their suspicious until the very end of the book.

The development of the plot in Blyton's novels differs from the typical clue-puzzles that distinguish most of the whodunit production. However, the definition of "whodunit" is still suitable, as most of the story follows the deductive process through which George, Julian, Dick and Anne reach the solution of their case, almost interacting with their readers, showing them the clues they find and sharing with them their reasoning. Every element is important and necessary, every comment is fundamental to understand

what the protagonists are thinking, and why they come to that particular conclusion. Any details is analysed with an almost obsessive care, and shared with an audience that feels the same interest for the case, and has the same desire to live an adventure. In *Five Go Off in a Caravan*, the contrast between adults and children is shown through a dialogue between Julian and Lou, the acrobat of the circus near the place where they will camp for that night. The exchange of words between them conveys the idea that the children represent a serious bother for the two circus performers:

“Posh, aren’t you?” said Lou sneeringly.

“Not particularly,” said Julian, still polite.

“Any grown-ups with you?” asked Lou.

“No. I’m in charge,” said Julian, “and we’ve got a dog that flies at people he doesn’t like.”

Timmy clearly didn’t like Lou. He stood near him, growling in his throat.

Lou kicked out at him.⁷⁶

Both Julian and Timmy know that the man in front of them is not friendly, and that he will probably cause them many problems during their holiday, especially after he tries to kick Timmy, attempting to hurt one of the most precious things the protagonists are fond of, and threatening the children to make the dog disappear. Their suspicions are grounded, because that same night the two men try to invade the children’s space and attack them, giving up only thanks to Timmy’s presence. The holiday the children had desired is now spoiled. They know it will not be a pleasant holiday as Anne wanted it to be, because they have become now too involved into the two men’s affairs. The true adventure, which in this novel’s case had neither been predicted nor wanted, starts in this precise moment: the awareness to have met someone who looks suspicious and who is probably plotting illegal actions will lead the children to face danger, excitement, and their consequences. At this point, both the protagonists and their readers know how the story will evolve, because the followed thread is always the same. The moment the main characters discover what the two (or more) criminals are plotting behind the scene, the villains will try to prevent them from revealing their plans to the children’s relatives,

⁷⁶ Ibidem

most of the times by trying to poison their animals, or kidnapping them. Thanks to the support of a person near the criminals, who usually is another child obliged to live with them, and above all thanks to the help of George's dog, who sometimes appears to be even cleverer than her owner, George and her cousins manage to escape and call the police. As in the best detective novels, the story ends with the arrest of the delinquents, who will never accept to be outwitted by a group of children:

“So one of you kids slipped out and shut the boards on us!” he said savagely.
“I might have guessed. You...”
“Hold your tongue, Lewis Allburg,” rapped out the Inspector. “You can talk when we tell you. You’ll have quite a lot of talking to do, to explain some of the things we heard about you.”
“Dick! How did you get here so soon?” [...] “I shot off to the farm, woke up the Mackies, used their telephone and got the police up here double-quick in their car.”⁷⁷

. George, Julian, Anne and Dick, as well as Timmy, receive the compliments of their family and of the people who got involved in their adventure. Adults worry about their state too, but they show no sign of fear or body injuries:

“What are you children going to do?” asked the big inspection [...] “Hadn’t you better come down into the town with us after this disturbing adventure?”
“Oh no thanks,” said Julian politely. “We’re quite used to adventures. We’ve had plenty, you know.”⁷⁸

The *Famous Five* series has surely contributed to the constitution of the conventions of a detective story suitable for children. As for *the Bastables* series, George and the other children are not involved in mysteries that really put their lives at stake, even if in Blyton's novels the dangers the little protagonists face are greater. For instance, the criminals the Famous five have to deal with are more aggressive than Nesbit's, and often make use of weapons to try to physically eliminate the obstacle they find on their

⁷⁷ Ibidem

⁷⁸ Ibidem

path. It is a bigger danger, and this makes the reading more interesting, and surely more similar to “real” detective fiction, the one addressed to adult readers. Enid Blyton was able to take the best elements from the most popular novels on mystery and detection, and to create a mix that would be suitable for children. Out of a genre that was mostly intended for adults, she set the stage for a world of stories that was accessible for younger readers as well, opening the way to the success of what can now be considered one of the most beloved genres of all times.

3. Innovative conventions in children's detective stories

3.1 The role of the family

3.1.1 The contrast between children and the world of adults

As previously mentioned, in detective fiction for young readers, the relationship between children and adults is characterised by a sharp contrast, which involves a change of roles which is different from the traditional ones they have in literature. Children have a more defined role, as they are now the main characters of the stories in which they are involved, and stop being elements with a marginal importance. Although they do not possess any experience of the world (as they should only think about having fun and growing up in a calm environment instead of worrying about solving issues that usually concern adults), children are the key point of detective stories for young readers. The answer to the mystery they are trying to solve is in their own hands.

One of the roles of detective fiction for children is to explore the differences and tensions between adulthood and childhood¹. Adults have an ambiguous role. In *Mystery in Children's Literature*, Christian Routledge explains how in detective stories for young readers "the interplay and frequent antagonism between children and adults may be seen as the interaction and competition between two distinct discourses, two distinct agendas"². The boundaries between adulthood and childhood appear blurry: children are required to behave in an adult way, though they combine "childish playfulness and adult rational method to solve the mystery"³. On the contrary, adults often act childishly, especially when their plans are going to be spoiled by someone they thought would be

¹ Routledge, Christopher, "Children's detective fiction and the crime of adulthood", in *Mystery in Children's literature: From the Rational to the Supernatural*, Palgrave, Houndmills, 2001, p.64

² Ibidem

³ Ibidem

insignificant.⁴ The change of the adult role in detective fiction for young readers might be attributed to an innovation which has roots in what Christopher Routledge defines the Golden Age of children's literature. During this period, set between 1920 and 1930, children's literature experiences a transformation and becomes a source of amusement for its readers, starting to give space to other functions besides being a support for the education of children. The idea that "children read books for enjoyment rather to just learn a lesson"⁵ started to assert itself in the literary world. Thanks to the Golden Age of children's literature, characters started to be more detailed, and adults have since performed new roles never considered before, among which we should include the criminal. Anyway, the adult figure might still retain an educative role for the reader. Criminals are often strangers and, through detective stories, children might be induced to believe that people they do not know are dangerous. As the little protagonist of the story he is reading, the child will learn not to trust someone he does not know, and will be convinced to pay attention to the advice many parents often give to their children: *do not talk to strangers*.

Adult criminals have a predominant role throughout detective stories. Through the narration, the reader knows exactly what adults are plotting, what they will do and, above all, what their intentions are towards the children that will try to obstacle them. Sometimes, these criminals are well-known to the protagonists' parents. Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five* series gives many examples. For instance, in *Five Run Away Together*, the main villain is played by George's aunt's cook, Mrs Stick. The reader knows from the words the narrator and George use to describe her that the new introduced character will not be an ally:

A sour-faced woman came out from the back door to help them down their luggage. The children did not know her. "Who's she?" they whispered to George. "The new cook," said George. "Joanna had to go and look after her mother,

⁴ Routledge, Christopher, *Crime and Detective Literature for Young Readers*, Long Lane Press, 2012, kindle edition

⁵ Barone, Diane M., *Children's literature in the Classroom: Engaging Lifelong Readers*, The Guilford Press, New York, 2010, kindle edition

who broke her leg. Then Mother got this Mrs. Stick, her name is.”
“Good name for her,” grinned Julian. “She looks a real old stick! But all the same I hope she doesn’t stick here for long. I hope Joanna comes back. I liked old fat Joanna, and she was nice to Timmy.”
“Mrs. Stick has a dog too,” said George. “A dreadful animal, smaller than Tim, all sort of mangy and moth-eaten. Tim can’t bear it.”⁶

From the beginning, readers face the same danger as the protagonists: a few lines description is sufficient to let them know who the villain of the story will be. Actually, the presence of criminals who are indeed close to the family is not rare. In the *Famous Five* series, this is almost a trope: George’s parents never pay attention to their daughter’s suspicions, and this is the reason why criminals can act undisturbed for most of the story. They will then try to intimidate the children, showing the terrifying prospect of their parents becoming angry with them for their behaviours. The members of the protagonist’s family might be seen as antagonists when they try to prevent their children from solving a mystery, but the real enemies in a detective story for children are strangers who try to take advantage of their condition of adults to achieve their deplorable plans. As only children worry about the events around them, noticing any suspect behaviour on the part of these people and trying to make their relatives listen to them, criminals are able to act undisturbed, and to accomplish their mission without any bother. Children know there is a high chance to be scolded by their parents for the lack of respect they show towards their antagonists, so they try to be as cautious as possible, in order not to be discovered. This will not stop them from following their instinct and solve the problem without any help on the part of their family. Routledge observes that in Enid Blyton’s *Famous Five series*, “the child detective’s continuing interest in a problem or danger the adults have long since disregarded”⁷ is one of the basis of her stories. Although adults might be stronger and more powerful in respect to the child protagonist, the main character always finds the way to achieve his aim. Children often outwit criminals, or defeat them thanks to their intelligence.

⁶ Blyton, Enid, *Five Run Away Together*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1944, kindle edition

⁷ *Ibidem*, p.65

Sometimes, the success of a case and, consequently, its happy conclusion, is a typical characteristic of children, that adults cannot possess, for instance the purity of heart. In *the Bastable* series, many characters try to take advantage of the innocence of the protagonists, but in the end, the children's feelings of love and honesty prevail. As much as the antagonists try to bring adults on their side, lying on their true intentions and convincing them that their children need a punishment for their bad behaviour, it is impossible to prevent the little protagonists from ruining their plans. The purity of heart of the children is always more powerful than the corruption that permeates the adult world; grown-ups are eventually unable to be educative figures because of their yearning for money and success. There is almost a challenge between two different worlds: on one hand, adults seem to forget their main role of educators for children and put aside any good value to make room for corruption and thievishness, and they see in the youngsters a danger. On the other hand, children discover that adults might not always be by their side to protect them, and cannot always be trusted, because they might not have good intentions. This is a good reason to challenge a world adverse to them: child detectives find significance in details that are overlooked by adults, and this ability allows them to understand who can be trusted, and who might represent an obstacle or danger. Of course, children sometimes find help in supportive adult character; still their task only consists in giving the protagonists any kind of help they might need, and they are not essential to the development of the story.

3.1.2 The ambiguous function of the family: support or obstacle?

Until the first years of 1920, family was one of the central themes of children's literature. Novels written during the Victorian era in particular concentrate on it: the centre of the story was the family, together with the problems concerning it and the efforts to overcome them. Nevertheless, the idea of the perfect family soon starts to change: thanks to novels like Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, children's literature stops being "so serious and full of reason, and it began to emphasise

the importance of emotion and feelings”⁸. The nuclear family loses its central role and makes space to new, different themes that concentrate more on what the child protagonist feels, and on the adventures she/he lives, often without the support of her/his beloved parents. In *Introducing Children’s Literature*, Deborah Thacker and Jean Webb argue that if the role of family is not central anymore, children acquire “a sense of self-sufficiency without the assistance of adults (and often despite adult efforts)”⁹, and this is particularly evident in detective fiction, where the relationship between children and their parents is marginal. Most of the times, this relationship might be even counterproductive, as parents often act as an obstacle for the adventure their children want to live, because they do not approve of the idea to see them wandering alone, and putting themselves in a potentially dangerous situation.

In detective fiction for young readers, parents are often absent, either physically or not. When they are just too occupied with their adult matters to care about what their children do, the little protagonists do not suffer their lack of presence: on the contrary, they enjoy it, as they will have more freedom to do what they most desire. Indeed, parents will always emerge from their duty in worse times and try to prevent their children from doing something dangerous, serving as an obstacle for their adventure. Of course, several cases of interaction between the children and their families might be present in cases that do not directly involve the adventure itself: a set convention of the relationship between them does not exist. The novels previously analysed show how children can have different relationships with their parents.

The Bastables series displays a relationship between the elements of the nuclear family which is still strongly connected to the concept of family of the Victorian Era. Oswald, the first son of the Bastable family, often tries to take the role of his father during the whole series. Here, their father is the only family the Bastable siblings have, but he is too busy trying to restore the financial status of the family to take care of his children. Oswald takes his responsibility seriously, because as the first son he feels the need to fill his father’s place, as strongly as he can. Oswald takes care of his siblings, tries to find new ways to restore the Bastables fortunes, and gets himself involved in the

⁸ Alston, Ann, *The Family in English Children’s Literature*, Routledge, New York, 2008, p.35

⁹ Thacker, Deborah, Webb Jean, *Introducing Children’s Literature*, Routledge, New York, 2002, p.109

weirdest adventures, always doing his best to solve his little mysteries and draw the best from every adventure. The reason that brings Oswald to act this way is of course the thirst for adventure, but also the will to contribute to the rebuilding of what his family was before his father lost everything he owned. Oswald's father does not try to prevent his children from having their experiences, because he is absent. He does not show interest in the children's adventures, and he probably does not even know what his children do when they are outside their home. Still, family is one of the main themes of Nesbit's stories, as

“by placing the home at the beginning of the narrative it is shown to be integral to the text; it is the foundation of the story regardless of whether it is a good or bad home.”¹⁰

Even the description made by Oswald in *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* gives the reader important information on how important family is to the Bastable siblings. Home as a place where the family reunites is so important that Oswald describes it in the first pages of the novel:

There are some things I must tell before I begin to tell about the treasure-seeking, because I have read books myself, and I know how beastly it is when a story begins, [...] and you don't know for pages and pages where the home is, or who Hildegarde is [...] Our ancestral home is in the Lewisham Road. It is semi-detached and has a garden, not a large one. We are the Bastables. [...] “I'll tell you what, we must go and seek for treasure: it is always what you do to restore the fallen fortunes of your House.”¹¹

For the Bastables, family and home are two important elements of their lives. The act of detection they improvise during their adventures has the aim to restore the fortune of their family, and together with it the peacefulness and safety of their family environment, something that got lost when their mother died and the rest of the family

¹⁰ Alston, Ann, *The Family in English Children's Literature*, Routledge, New York, 2008, p.75

¹¹ Nesbit, Edith, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, 1899, kindle edition

had to face a financial problem. In *The Bastables* series, family is not an obstacle to the children's adventures. Family represents an important element of the children's lives and development, as their love for their father (and of course, for their lost mother) is the strongest sentiment that moves the Bastables brothers to find a way to restore their fortune, whether it concerns their financial or familiar status. Moreover, the Bastable brothers can count on the help of a person who does not belong to their family, but is still considered as a part of it because of the huge help he gives the children during their experiences outside their house: Albert-next-door's uncle. Albert's uncle, whose name is never mentioned throughout the whole series, is the adult the Bastable brothers refer to when they need help but do not want to ask their father. The children are so fond of him that they trust him every time they are in need, preferring to ask him for help than their father, in order not to disturb him while he works to support his own family.

While the Bastables count a lot on the support given by the family, the *Famous Five* series presents a different situation. The main character of the series, George, belongs to a family that does not appear to be supportive at all: as already mentioned in the previous chapters, George's parents are not inclined to accept their daughter's attitude towards them, and the strong desire of freedom she constantly manifests. Both her parents do not share the enthusiasm she shows for the adventures she lives at Kirrin Island and its surroundings during her holidays. On one hand, George's mother is often shown as having a passive attitude towards her daughter: she answers to her excitement with a placid and compliant tone and treats her as if she was only a child. Her father has a stronger position in respect to George's desires: Quentin represents the greatest obstacle, as he really appears not to approve of George's behaviour, and he admonishes her for almost everything she says or does. Neither seems interested in what George has to say or reveal about the mysteries she tries to solve with the help of her cousins: for her parents, those are only the worthless words of a child who has too many suspicions about the strangers she meets, combined with a wild imagination. Thanks to Enid Blyton's series, family starts to be perceived as an element of interference, and stops being a support for the children protagonists. Ann Alston highlights how

On the other hand, the adventures are rich in secrecy as the children fight strange adults and conceal things from their parents, and for perhaps the first time adults and children are openly pitched against each other within the family.¹²

Blyton gives a renewed image of family:

David Rudd suggests that while parents are often absent in children's texts, Blyton's work goes beyond the normal convention in which children have the right to escape their parents, as it also validates the parents' rights to be free of their children. Rudd then goes on to argue that the parents in Blyton's texts 'are not quite in the same league as Hansel and Gretel's parents, but they are far from exemplary'¹³

The role of the family in Blyton's texts is important, but in a different way from Nesbit's *The Bastables* series. The Bastable brothers lived their adventures to offer a support to their family, thus they showed love for their father by trying to help him out. On the contrary, George does not show any respect for her absent parents, except at rare moments: she prefers to wander in search of new adventures, unconsciously, to annoy her father, more than to pay attention to what he has to say. Quentin represents the typical paternal figure of the Victorian Era: he is a strict and authoritative parent, and the respect he shows towards her daughter is almost inexistent. The contrast between adults and children is highlighted by the lack of mutual respect: George never complies with her parents' orders, but Quentin is way too strict, and does not show any sign of love or faith in his daughter. Moreover, Quentin is presented to readers as an absent father, but there is a difference between him and Oswald's father in *The Bastables* series. Quentin's main occupation is his experiments: Quentin spends most of his time locked in his study, and seldom appears at dinnertime, paying less attention to his family. The family occasionally gathers around the dinner table, and this highlights how George's family is unconventional. Of course, Quentin counts on his experiments to sustain his

¹² Alston, Ann, *The Family in English Children's Literature*, Routledge, New York , 2008, p.53

¹³ Ibidem, p.53

family, because his family is not rich, as underlined by George herself in *Five on a Treasure Island*:

“Daddy doesn’t make much money with the learned books he writes, and he’s always wanting to give mother and me things he can’t afford. So that makes him bad-tempered. He wants to send me away to a good school but he hasn’t got the money”¹⁴

The discovery of a family treasure on the wreck of a ship near Kirrin Island, however, does not really change the situation. Quentin promises her daughter that things will change from then on, and tries to justify himself for the behaviour he previously had both with George and his wife:

“Father! There are hundreds!” cried George. “Simply hundreds all in a big pile in the dungeon. Oh Father! Shall we be rich now?”
“Yes,” said her father. “Rich enough to give you and your mother all the things I’ve longed to give you for so many years and couldn’t. I’ve worked hard enough for you – but it’s not the kind of work that brings in a lot of money, and so I’ve become irritable and bad-tempered.”¹⁵

Of course, in the novel that follows, Quentin will not be “less irritable and bad-tempered”: what happens in a novel does not link with the following ones. Indeed, every novel starts with a demonstration of Quentin’s irritability towards her daughter, and will end with an aura of happiness and peace that will be forgotten as soon as the next story begins. Quentin’s role in the series is ambiguous, as well as the way George relates to him. If the analysis of the relationship between father and daughter is based on their ordinary life, Quentin appears to be a loving father: George recognises that his bad temper derives by the great distress he must deal with because of the financial status of his family, and appreciates it. The happy endings of Blyton’s novels strengthen this assertion: once the children have solved the mystery they were involved in, George runs to his father, who congratulates with her for the courage and cleverness she showed

¹⁴ Blyton, Enid, *Five on a Treasure Island*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1942, Kindle Edition

¹⁵ *Ibidem*

during the dangerous situations she faced and embraces her. But their relationship dramatically changes when George shows her intentions to investigate on weird behaviours on the part of people close to her family, or of people nobody knows about. Quentin tries to prevent his daughter from putting herself in danger, probably because he cares about her. The reader does not know the actual reason that drives Quentin to warn George against the dangers she could face by prying into problems that do not concern her, and strongly disapproves of her behaviour. The world in which George and her cousins live their adventures is seen with the children's eyes. This way, Quentin's behaviour is somehow affected by the aversion George feels about her father. The sensation the reader gets by reading the story is that Quentin forgets the love he feels for her daughter, and becomes a strict and unpleasant father in the same moment in which George steps outside the house. The moments of contrast between George and Quentin exceed the moments in which they act as a happy family, and this is the reason why the head of the family seems constantly angry with his daughter.

George's family is not the only one to appear uninterested in what their children do when they are not around. Julian, Anne and Dick, George's cousins, live in a family the reader knows nothing about, since it is mentioned only a few times during the whole series. Most of the books that compose the series start with the three brothers on a train directed to Kirrin, where they will spend their holidays because their parents want to enjoy their time together without their children around:

“Mother and I won't be able to go with you this year. Has mother told you?”

“No!” said Anne. “Oh, Mother – is it true? Can't you really come with us on our holidays? You always do.”

“Well, this time Daddy wants me to go to Scotland with him,” said Mother.

“All by ourselves!”¹⁶

The contrast between the idea that parents should take care of their children and what actually happens in *The Famous Five* series is strong, and at a first reading might cause a considerable uncertainty. The fact is justifiable on the grounds that children need to be

¹⁶ Ibidem

free to live their own adventures, and a strict control on the part of their parents would prevent them from doing what they want. Of course, the role of family in detective fiction does not reflect the role family has in reality: its role is somehow hanging between reality and fiction, between the responsibility that parents have towards their children, and the children's will to live their life as they wish. The lack of interest is almost needed, and set itself as a convention of detective fiction for young readers. An absent parent surely will lead up the main characters to an exciting adventure, in which children might seem as left behind by the people who should care about them the most, but they will have the chance to learn to rely on themselves, and to face the dangers of the world through what will mostly seem as a game. On the other hand, most of the times, it is the family itself that provides the possibility to live an adventure: a mysterious wrecked ship full of treasures who belong to it, a long lost relative with a mysterious secret to reveal, most of the chances of a good mystery are given by the family itself.

3.2 The boundary between the safety of the home and the dangers of the outside world

The importance of the spaces in which the children live their adventures is constantly underlined by the words spent by the authors to describe them: often, the environment in which the children play, or experience new sensations or relationship with people they do not know or situations they never lived before is described with an abundance of information, making it almost one of the main characters of detective fiction for young readers. The main environments described in detective fiction in children's literature are the home and its outsides, which are the places where most of the action takes place as well. Both in *The Bastable* series and in *The Famous Five* series, the importance of these places is constantly underlined by the children themselves, as they are the ones who spend most of their time there and make them places of comfort or where to live their most exciting experiences. Through their descriptions, and through the narrator's words, the reader is shown the structure of the world where the narration

takes place; he will be shown as well how these two different spheres of the world in which the story develops are constantly interconnected, and how they are part of a fixed structure that composes the environment in which the child-hero moves. These spheres contain elements which belong exclusively to them: for instance, family is strictly linked to the home, which might be defined as the inner sphere, while the adventures the children get involved into are confined to the outside world that, together with its dangers, frame the outer sphere. The negative characters who will try to prevent the children from getting in their way, solve their mysteries, and live an exciting and safe adventure, belong to the outside world as well: it almost looks like if these elements are not allowed to cross the boundary set by the walls of the home, because that is the safest and most intimate place the child-hero owns, and nobody is allowed to contaminate it.

The child-hero is the only character who is free to move: he is the only one allowed to move between the two spheres, to find rest in the safety of his or her home and explore its surroundings by stepping on the outside world. This structure is present both in *The Bastable* series and in *The Famous Five* series: Oswald, George and their relatives cross the boundary and go across the two spheres several times, taking refuge in their homes when the strain of the adventure is too much to bear, and leaving it when they are ready to spend all their energies on the mystery they are trying to solve.

In *The Bastable* series, Oswald and his siblings spend a long time in their house. The value the children give to their home is immense: it is the place where the family gathers, and where Oswald and the others plot most of their adventures. It is filled with the memories of their mother, and of the stories she told them when she was still alive. In the house of the Bastables, the children are safe most of the time. Though their father is often absent, the children feel protected thanks to the walls of their own home: every potential danger is kept outside it, in the neighbourhood, in those places where children should not go – but that they will eventually explore. Though this space is sometimes invaded by external elements, as the burglar who breaks into the Bastables' house in *The Robber and the Burglar*, one of the chapters of *The Story of the Treasure seekers*, the home still is the children's safest place: the burglar himself becomes a friend of Oswald and his siblings, and helps them to catch the robber. The discovery of the real

identity of the burglar, who is indeed a friend of Oswald's father, confirms that the inner sphere belongs to those people or environments that cannot endanger the protagonists. "Home" is mentioned several times during the whole series: it is probably one of the most mentioned, often associated with the most difficult times the children have to deal with. Oswald and the others always go back home for a cup of tea when they are tired or worried: here, they have the chance to put the worries at rest, and to think about their situation or problem without any rush. Inside the home, Oswald tries to order his thoughts about restoring his family's fortune; he can offer his support to his older sister, or a cup of tea to help his siblings find relief at the toughest times. Of course, home is a place of joy as well, the comfortable place where to think about the good actions the children did during the day. The boundary between their home and the outside world is not too marked: the strangers the children meet during their explorations are not really dangerous, as most of the adventures Oswald and the others live are mostly a construction of their own fantasy. More than a danger, the crossing of the boundary might be considered as a chance for the children to grow up thanks to the people they meet and the experiences these people share with them. Leaving their home, the Bastable brothers can learn to distinguish what is good from what is bad for them, even thanks to the rush of adrenaline that danger can give. They discover that not every adult is like their mother and father, because there actually are people ready to do anything to accomplish their aims and fulfil their own desires. Nevertheless, they will find out that kind people can be easily find outside their home as well, generous people whom Oswald and the others will not hesitate to help if they are in need. These experience will help the children to cross another boundary, which is not physical like the one which exists between home and the outside: the boundary between childhood and adulthood. Any experience lived in this period of time will surely contribute to their development as adults, because the outside world shows them how they should or should not behave as adults, and these children are clever enough to learn from their adventures.

In *the Famous Five* series, the situation might appear different from what happens in *The Bastables* series. Of course, the structure of the novels is the same as in the two series: on one hand, Kirrin Cottage, uncle Quentin and auntie Fanny belong to the inner

sphere, to the home that belongs George, and in which the protagonists can (or should) find rest:

“We’ll wait until the waves go down a bit then we’ll go back home,” she said. “I rather think there’s some more rain coming, and we’ll only get soaked through. We shan’t be back till tea-time as it is because we’ll have a long pull against the out-going tide.”¹⁷

On the other hand, the surroundings of Kirrin Cottage are really different from the ones around the Bastables’ home: they are full of hidden dangers, and of people ready to do anything to put their hands on the greatest treasures, often trying to get rid of the children. The outer sphere is an unsafe place, especially for the main characters, mostly because the adults who should protect them do not pay attention to their words, and put them in a dangerous situation. The heroes of this series, are different from the ones who characterises *the Bastable* series. George is an unruly child who gets herself involved in the most dangerous situations often on purpose, and who is ready to go against the people who belong to what should be her safest place just, to live the way she wants. George does not cross the boundary between safety and danger only to live her adventures: she mostly does it to annoy her parents, to provoke them. She does not care if they worry about her, because George sees her parents as an obstacle, more than a help. George’s parents themselves might be considered a boundary that the children, and George in particular, constantly cross, because they behave more like negative characters, ready to prevent their relatives from doing what they want, than like supportive characters. This situation is reflected as well in the relationship George establishes with the outer sphere. The time spent by George outside her home is more than the time she spends at home with her family, because she cannot stand her father’s moody behaviour most of the time:

¹⁷ Blyton, Enid, *Five on a Treasure Island*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1942, Kindle Edition

“I’m jolly glad I’m not at home today – Father will be rampaging round like anything, telling Mother hundreds of time what he thinks about scientists who are traitors!”¹⁸

Home is of course a place where children can recover, where they can share thoughts and opinions and can reason about what they should do to solve their mysteries in the best way possible, but, in this case, it is not a place where they desire to be, where they feel protected and understood by their relatives. Though their parents mostly act for their good, children do not understand their efforts, and prefer to spend their time outside, because the thrill of danger is more tempting than the wise words of adults. The surroundings of Kirrin Cottage, starting with the constantly mentioned Kirrin Island, are preferred by the children as place where to live their adventure, and where most of the action takes place. The possibility to get involved in a mystery to solve acts as a magnet for George and her cousins: holidays are a chance to do something new and different as opposed to the boring life they lead during the rest of the year. The children leave their home and explore the surroundings, although these surroundings are unknown and insidious. Several times George expresses her will to leave home and stay away from her parents, because the outside world is more tempting, more *appetizing*, and in neat contrast with Quentin’s strictness, who restrains her from doing whatever she wants to. The relationship between George and her father, already discussed in the previous paragraphs, is once again relevant, because it is what drives George to distance herself from her safest place to find a sort of peace, and a sure enjoyment, in the dangers she puts herself into. George is not afraid of the darkest side of the world: she is attracted by it.

Among the four children, the one the most unwilling to leave home is Anne: she is totally opposite to George, as she loves staying in the quiet environment of George’s home. This is particularly evident in *Five Go Off in A Caravan*, where she expresses her disappointment when she and the other children find themselves in danger:

¹⁸ Blyton, Enid, *Five have a Wonderful Time*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1952, Kindle Edition

“Don’t look so scared, Anne. I wonder what they want up in the hills. They don’t look the sort that would go walking for pleasure.”

“Dick, we are not going to have another adventure, are we?” said Anne suddenly, looking very woebegone, “I don’t want one. I just want a nice ordinary, peaceful holiday.”

“Course we’re not going to have an adventure!” said Dick, scornfully. “Just because we meet two bad-tempered fellows from a circus camp you think we’re in for an adventure, Anne! I jolly well wish we were! Every hols we’ve being together so far we’ve had adventures and you must admit that you love talking about them and remembering them.”

“Yes, I do. But I don’t like it much when I’m in the middle of one,” said Anne. “I don’t think I’m a very adventurous person, really.”¹⁹

Anne is a character who belongs more to the inner sphere than the outer one, especially in respect to George: she does not like being involved in any kind of adventure, she is the one who cries the most when the group of children is in danger, and the one who most recalls her days at home when the strain is too much to bear. She appears scared most of the time, especially when her brothers and cousin get extremely excited by the chance to build new memories and have fun by living an adventure. Her role as a moving hero is atypical: she does not feel the need to explore the world. On the contrary, she looks out of place in respect to her companions. She would rather stay at home than risk her life outside, where nothing is safe and everything represents a potential danger.

The difference between inner and outer space in detective fiction for young readers is marked: both of them have positive and negative elements that children decide to take advantage of according to their own needs. The difference between the two spheres might be explained by the fact that the children’s ability to distinguish good and bad is not fully developed yet: even the most dangerous event is seen as a chance to have fun; on the contrary, parents are sometimes seen as the real enemy, the obstacle to overcome. Nevertheless, children know that their relatives are more a support than a hindrance:

¹⁹ Blyton, Enid, *Five go Off in a Caravan*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1946, Kindle Edition

these stories always end well, with the heroes who come back to their parents and find relief in their arms after their visit to the outside world.

3.3 A case of gender: Georgina, Julian and the predominance of the male role in detective fiction

The most famous detective in the history of English Literature is of course Sherlock Holmes: everybody has seen the profile of the popular sleuth while wearing his deerstalker and pipe on books' cover or posters, or even on TV shows, at least once in his or her own life. It is almost impossible for anyone not to react to that name. Many authors followed the trail left by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and created their own detective, filling pages and pages with stories and adventures which mostly involved, and still involve nowadays, male characters. The detective as a literary figure is predominantly a man: a woman who performs the role of main character in a detective story is unusual, if not extremely rare. Of course, cases of detective stories with female protagonists do exist: Agatha Christie created one of the most beloved and clever female detectives of the twentieth century, Jessica Fletcher. However, generally speaking, the majority of people are inclined to think of detectives as male characters, probably because the collective consciousness sees men as more suited for facing danger in a braver way in respect to women, which are seen as fragile and, consequently, need to be protected.

The same situation reflects itself on detective fiction for younger readers. Most of the stories concerning the solving of a mystery have young men as protagonists, who are ready to take all the risks of an adventure that none of the characters know where it will lead, and are determined to come to its end. Young girls act as a support for these little heroes, and do not do too much to help them: they do not have a defined role within the story. However, their main function is to put themselves in danger, so that the child hero can show his cleverness, his courage, and save them from any possible risk. The number of female heroes within detective fiction for young readers is considerably inferior to their male counterpart, in a perfect reflection of what happens in detective fiction for

adults. The imposition of gender roles that want the young boy to be adventurous and reckless in the actions he takes and always ready to save a girl in danger to show off his abilities and his courage, while a girl must think of nothing different from cooking and dressing and learning how to be the perfect wife once she grows up are strongly entrenched in detective fiction for young readers. Anne, one of George's cousins in *The Famous Five* series, is a good example of how girls tend to perform gender related roles. She is presented to the readers as a child without any kind of maturity, unable to keep a secret, a moaner who only wants to stay at home with her parents. On several occasions, the only role she has is to settle the places where the children will live or sleep during their adventures, and nothing more. She is scared of the danger of mystery, and she never loses the chance to express her thought, mentally or verbally:

But Anne didn't want to go alone. She was trying her best not to show that she was afraid of the storm but it was more than she could do to go out of the cosy room into the rain and thunder by herself.²⁰

She really tries to show the same enthusiasm her relatives manifest when something potentially dangerous happens, but the fear she feels is stronger than the will to leave her home behind to experience something new and mysterious, and it takes over almost instantaneously. In *Five Go Off in a Caravan*, she often shows her will not to live an adventure with her brothers and cousin:

“Dick, we are not going to have another adventure, are we?” said Anne suddenly, looking very woebegone, “I don't want one. I just want a nice ordinary, peaceful holiday.”²¹

Anne's thoughts are often related to her home, her room or in any case to the place she feel the safest. She does not seem to enjoy the adventures she lives as much as her relatives and, after a first moment of excitement for the novelty of having a different experience from her usual ones, she thinks back about the ordinary things her life is full of:

²⁰ Blyton, Enid, *Five on a Treasure Island*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1942, Kindle Edition

²¹ Blyton, Enid, *Five go Off in a Caravan*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1946, Kindle Edition

Anne thought with delight of the coming evening, when they would stop and camp, cook a meal, and drowse over a camp-fire, and go to sleep in the little bunks.²²

Anne embodies the stereotype of the woman who does not want to get involved in something different from housework, but she gives her best not to be excluded from the group of little adventurers that formed in the first book of the series. She embodies the traditional female role, as reflected in several episodes during the whole series: Anne is the one who takes care of the other members of the group, cooking for them and tidying up the place where they most spend their time. Anne is the weakest character of the series, and she is in total opposition to the other girl of the group, Georgina.

Georgina is a strong character: she does not want to be trapped in the same stereotype that Anne belongs to. In the first lines of the first book of the series, Georgina is described by her father as “naughty”, “difficult”, “one on her own”²³: she does not conform to the expected, typical womanly figure. Every book has, at some point, a reference to the desire of the girl to be treated like a boy: the first one to reveal her attitude towards her own gender is her father Quentin:

“Do you call her ‘George’?” asked Anne, in surprise. “I thought her name was Georgina.”

“So it is,” said her aunt. “But George hates being a girl, and we have to call her George, as if she was a boy. The naughty girl won’t answer if we call her Georgina.”²⁴

The same thing is underlined by Georgina herself later, when she first meets Anne:

“Are you Georgina?”

The child in the opposite bed sat up and looked across at Anne. She had very short hair, almost as short as a boy’s. Her face was burnt a dark-brown with the sun, and her very blue eyes looked as bright as forget-me-nots. But her mouth was rather sulky, and she had a frown like her father’s.

²² Ibidem

²³ Blyton, Enid, *Five on a Treasure Island*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1942, Kindle Edition

²⁴ Ibidem

“No,” she said. “I’m not Georgina.”
“Oh!” said Anne, in surprise. “Then who are you?”
“I’m George,” said the girl. “I shall only answer if you call me George. I hate being a girl. I won’t be. I don’t like doing the things that girls do. I like doing the things that boys do. You’re to call me George. Then I’ll speak to you. But I shan’t if you don’t.”²⁵

George uses every possible moment to underline her desire to be a boy. Every book starts with a description of her body features, and highlights her attitude towards the world that reflects her boyish side. Every action she takes, every opinion she expresses is moved by the pretension to be treated and referred to as a boy by the people surrounding her. And while this attitude seems to be well accepted by her cousins, adults are more reluctant to the idea of accepting something that is absurd to them. Quentin agrees to call her daughter by a male name just because his patience is wearing thin, and he is clearly too busy with his experiments to listen to George’s reason to be called a boy.

Several critics have accused Enid Blyton being sexist, of showing her readers a world not conforming for children. Bob Dixon describes her as “a bad case of that castration complex, or penis-envy, first described by Freud”²⁶, Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig use even stronger words:

Like all tomboys, she can be ‘as good as’, but this implies a basic deficiency. She never can be the genuine article. [...] There is not suggestion that [George’s] fantasy of being a boy is as ‘normal’ as Anne’s acceptance of a ‘housewifely’ role.²⁷

Still, in the books George does not seem to suffer from a “castration complex”: she does not really care about her own body, as long as she can act like a boy and do things

²⁵ Ibidem

²⁶ Dixon, Bob, “The Nice, the Naughty and the Nasty; The Tiny World of Enid Blyton”, in *Children’s Literature in Education*, Volume 5, Issue 3, 1974, p.53

²⁷ Cadogan, Mary, Craig Patricia, *You’re a Brick, Angela!: The girls’ story: 1839-1985*, Girls Gone by, Somerset, 2003, pp. 338-343

that girls usually do not do. The saddest thing, though, is that her cousins often forget how George loves to be referred to as a boy, and hurt her through harsh words:

“I’m going to drive the caravan,” said George. “Anne wouldn’t be any good at it, though I’ll let her have a turn at it sometimes. Driving is a man’s job.”

“Well, you’re only a girl!” said Anne indignantly. “You’re not a man, nor even a boy!”²⁸

George knows she is not a boy, but she does not see how this should prevent people from treating her like one. George is a strong character, especially in the first books of the series: she often isolates herself, and this is what makes her untouchable.

“You won’t find that my brothers take much notice of you if you act as if you knew everything. They’re real boys, not pretend boys, like you.”

“Well, if they’re going to be nasty to me I shan’t take any notice of them. [...] I’m quite happy on my own.”²⁹

George is not used to the presence of people different from her parents in her house; moreover, she has learnt to do many things a man usually would do because of her loneliness. Especially in the *Five on a Treasure Island*, the reader is shown how she can handle a boat, even during a storm. She can swim like a boy, she knows how to take care of herself during her isolation on Kirrin Island, and she handles most of the physical jobs that are required during their adventure. She is cleverer than the whole group of cousins together, as she is the first one to understand the dangers they put themselves into, and, most of the time, to solve them. Here, even Julian, who is the biggest boy of the group, recognises her as a leader, leaving the organisation of their team to her. However, the integration with her new group of friends makes her weaker, as she is brought to conform to their way, and be outclassed by the other strong element of the group, Julian. As remarked by David Rudd,

²⁸ Blyton, Enid, *Five go Off in a Caravan*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1946, Kindle Edition

²⁹ Blyton, Enid, *Five on a Treasure Island*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1942, Kindle Edition

At the end of the first book we might say that George has joined the symbolic order: they – the Famous Five – are henceforward a named entity [...] But even if George has accepted that “no man is an island” [...] she has not forsaken her independence.³⁰

George still insists on being referred to as a boy, and demands to be treated as the leader of the group she has guided in the first book. But as time passes, and the group starts to get along, roles change. On one hand, Quentin insists more on calling her by her full name, Georgina, and, Julian starts to claim his role of leader over George, underlining several times her nature as a girl. Even if the three brothers are willing to call her as she prefers, their recognition of Georgina as a boy is almost inexistent: they totally forget that she wants to be a boy the moment George wants to do something which does not suit to a girl, as they constantly remind her that she is not a boy. George is constantly compared to the other children, especially in relation to the people they have something to do with. George does not appreciate the intrusion of strangers in her personal space (her home or Kirrin Island or simply the place where her cousins and her decide to go to solve their mysteries), while her cousins seem to be more tolerant, and while George harshly judges everyone, the rest of the group tries to see the good side of them. Starting from the second book, it is possible to identify the moment in which Julian starts to assert himself as the leader of the group and tries to “depose” George. George is more domineering when the adventure they embark on develops in places she is familiar with. When the group of children is at Kirrin Island or its surroundings, George is clearly the leader: she knows everything about that island, so she can guide her cousins better. But when they find themselves in an unknown place, it is Julian who takes the role of leader – at least, he tries to. George is a strong character, and she is not inclined to see her role “stolen” that easily. Julian tries to prevail over George by any means, especially by telling her to stop acting like a boy, since she is not one. Julian’s assertion as the leader of the Famous Five is particularly evident in *Five Go of in a Caravan*, where there are not element strictly related to George: the adventure is set far

³⁰ Rudd, David, “Five have a Gender-ful Time: Blyton, sexism and the infamous Five”, in *Children’s Literature in Education*, Volume 26, Issue 1, 1995, p.186

from the boundaries of Kirrin Cottage, and far from George's parents. Moreover, Julian is supported by his own father:

“You will be in complete charge, you understand, Julian,” said the boy's father. “You are old enough now to be really responsible. The other must realise that you are in charge and they must do as you say.”³¹

George tries to establish a bond with the elements that makes her stronger: she tells the rest of the group, and Julian's father as well, that Timmy will be in charge as well, as “he's just as responsible as Julian.”³² In *Five on Kirrin Island Again*, George is subjected to further damage: her father appropriates her beloved island without her permission, imposing himself over her. David Rudd describes the building of a high tower at the centre of the island as a “highly potent phallic symbol”:

In Lacanian terms, we have here the phallus, the law of the Father. This “erection” pulses with energy periodically, and the whole thing blazes with light! Even James, the fisher boy, seems to delight in George with a grin. [...] It is worth noting that James calls her “Miss” here, when previously he has addressed her as “Master”.³³

There is a role reversal: while in the first novels George was recognised as the leader of the group by every single member of the Famous Five, as the series progresses and the children start to grow up (there are at least two years between the first adventure and the one set in *Five on Kirrin Island Again*), her predominant role starts to fade, because the male characters team up against her to overcome her. George is able to reassert her predominant role only at the end of the book, when she decides to go to Kirrin Island and solve the mystery alone. Everyone, even her father, is obliged to recognise her courage (“You do behave as bravely as any boy. I'm proud of you.”³⁴). In any case, this will not help George to keep her predominant position, as the next books of the series

³¹ Blyton, Enid, *Five go Off in a Caravan*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1946, Kindle Edition

³² Ibidem

³³ Rudd, David, “Five have a Gender-ful Time: Blyton, sexism and the infamous Five”, in *Children's Literature in Education*, Volume 26, Issue 1, 1995, p.190

³⁴ Blyton, Enid, *Five on Kirrin Island Again*, Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1947, Kindle Edition

will see her struggling to be recognised as a leader once again. George's desire to be a boy is scattered everywhere through the whole series: she gets angry every time someone underlines the fact that she is a girl, she acts recklessly as any boy would do, at least in her mind. She tries not to succumb to the power that real males try to impose upon her, and she succeeds most of times because of her strong personality: this is what makes her a strong, trustworthy character. Despite her being a girl, George overcomes the obstacles she finds on her path, showing her cousins, and her readers as well, that being a boy is not only a matter of body.

The aim of this dissertation is to demonstrate how a genre which is often specifically addressed to an adult audience as detective fiction might be suitable for children as well. Thanks to the innovations introduced during what has been defined by Christopher Routledge as the Golden Age of detective fiction for children, detective fiction has developed into one of the most beloved and appreciated children's genres— a genre which presents a series of conventions that only belong to it. With the advent of detective fiction for young readers, and of adventure stories more generally, children started to have a predominant role in literature: they stopped being invisible to the eyes of adults and become the protagonists of their adventures. The analysis of two different series, *The Bastables* by Edith Nesbit and *The Famous Five* by Enid Blyton shows how most of the conventions that belong to detective fiction for adult readers can be found in detective fiction for children as well. The plot always centres around a mystery which the protagonists have to solve thanks to the same deductive method used by the famous Sherlock Holmes. The difference lies in the obstacles the children have to overcome to find the solution to their problem: while an adult detective is free to investigate, as he or she is qualified to do so, children must deal with the opposition on the part of their parents and, above all, with their own nature. This does not make them less adventurous. Every problem turns into a chance to give a lesson to the grown-up world: children can overcome any problems, thanks to their own cleverness and without the help of any adult.

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