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"A sexist, racist, homophobe, and not a very well regarded writer": The controversial publications of Enid Blyton from 1930 to 2020

In 2010, the publisher Hachette UK made the controversial decision to update the language and characters of the author Enid Blyton's iconic *Famous Five* series. The decision was later reverted, due to the unpopularity of the new modernised editions. The divide between the objectives of publishers and mediators of children's books and the desires of readers (including adult fans of Blyton's books), along with the inconsistencies between modern editions of Blyton's numerous series are the focus of my paper. I examine the subjectiveness and inconsistency with which popular children's fiction is edited and censored. The prolific and immensely popular author's many series are criticised for promoting racist, sexist, xenophobic and imperial ideologies, with the author controversially denied a commemorative coin on the 50th anniversary of her death. Blyton's work is consequently censored and bowdlerised by modern publishers, but despite undergoing intensive editing and modernisation to make Blyton's books appear suitable for modern young readers, the new, seemingly politically correct versions of Blyton's books still retain nationalistic and xenophobic sentiments. By editing and updating Blyton's work, the texts can continue to perpetuate a sense of British national identity which is on the surface modern and politically correct, but which is built on a foundation of imperialist thinking. Using a socio-political approach to analyse Blyton's work and enduring popularity, this paper asks if the gatekeepers and mediators working between Blyton's books and child readers are failing to fulfil their objectives to protect seemingly impressionable young readers from outdated ideologies, and if in fact these elements of British children's books should be erased from modern editions or if publishers are guilty of whitewashing and of "presentism": of removing unpleasant aspects of national history and bringing the past "up to date" to better align with twenty-first century ideals (Rudd *Mystery*).

Keywords: British children's literature; Censorship; Enid Blyton; Nationalism; Socio-political literary analysis

Siobhán Morrissey is a third year PhD student in the School of Humanities at the National University of Ireland, Galway. She completed an M.Phil in Popular Literature at Trinity College Dublin where she began researching the children's author Enid Blyton. Her PhD thesis is a study of Blyton's early- to mid-twentieth century fiction which analyses the colonial, imperial and nationalistic elements of the author's work. An article on Enid Blyton and Brexit was published on RTÉ's Brainstorm website in January 2019.