

CHAPTER ONE

The Imagination of Enid Blyton

E NID BLYTON manages to enter the mind of the child. The themes and storylines are instantly appealing and are combined with a strong narrative drive. Her characters are larger than life and her use of 'heightened reality' reveals a dramatic (sometimes melodramatic) instinct. She once wrote, 'The story is enacted in my mind's eye almost as if I had a private cinema screen.' This is true for her readers too, giving an immediacy and, even in her most fantastic stories, a believability which involves them. The reader cares passionately about her characters and their predicaments. Blyton offers humour, magic and adventure. She appeals to her readers' natural sense of fairness, making them indignant when an injustice is done, and inspiring a burning desire to see a wrong righted. She intrigues her readers with puzzles and mysteries to solve:

she doesn't simply hold their attention, she grabs it, then dares them not to turn the page to see what happens next.





"THAT IS THE OLDEST AND MOST MAGIC TREE IN THE WORLD. IT IS THE FARAWAY TREE," SAID THE BIGGEST BROWNIE.

An open letter to her readers from Enid Blyton contained the lines, 'I want to know you from the very beginning and go with you all through your childhood till you are old

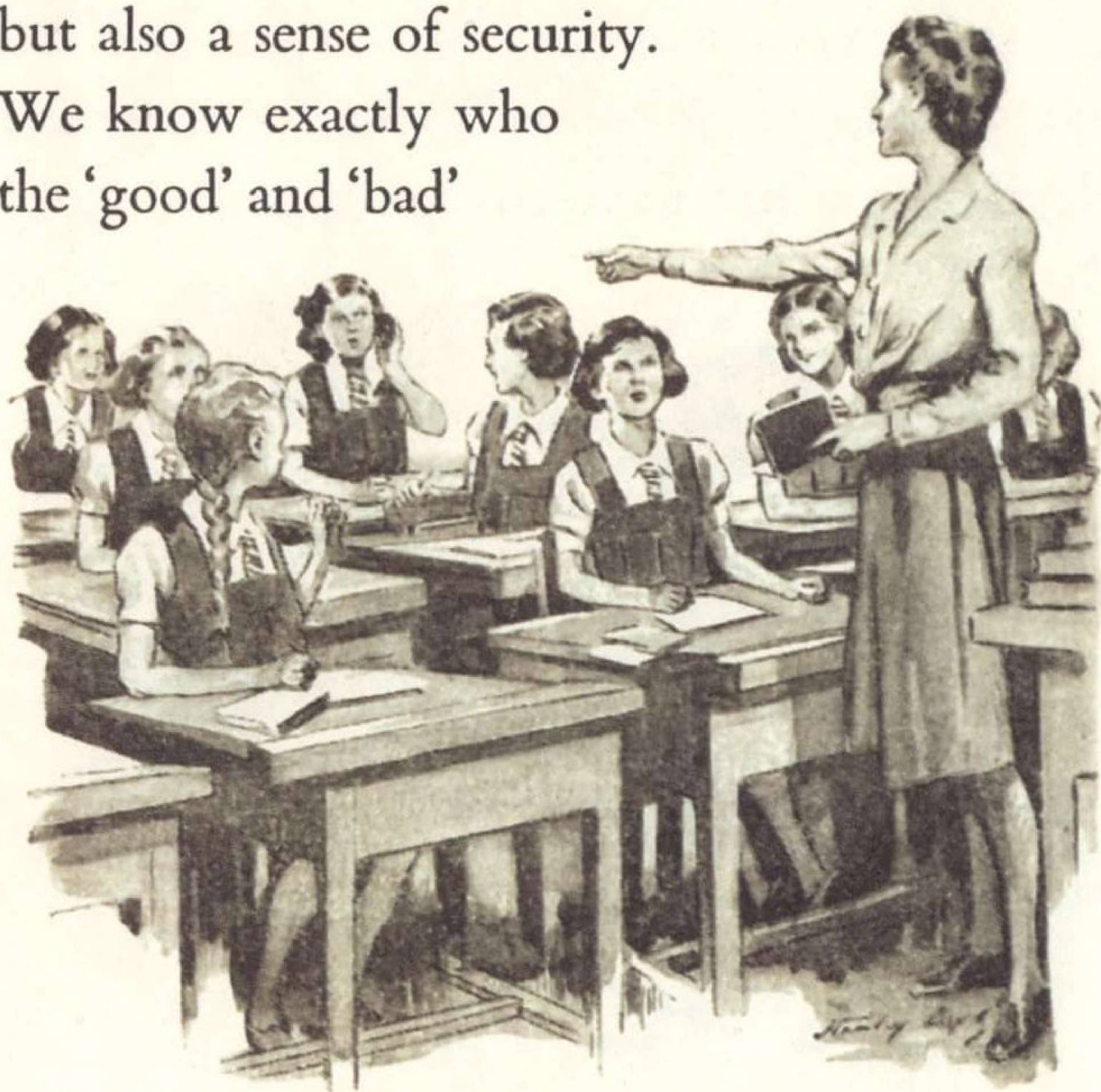
enough to read adult books.' Certainly her range embraces children of all ages.

The youngest revel in the inventiveness and imaginative ideas in series such as *The Faraway Tree*. In an enchanted wood ordinary children meet extraordinary characters like Moon-Face, Silky the elf and the Saucepan Man; every time they climb to the top of the Faraway Tree, they find a different magical land awaiting them. Toyland might well have been one such land, but, in the Noddy books, Blyton developed the idea of a fantasy world even further – a world peopled by toys, all of them alive and living in a colourful toy town, like people in our 'real' world. Children identify with Noddy. He may be a wooden doll, but he is also a child learning how the world works, how to cope, how some people are your friends and others cannot be taken at face value. Enid Blyton then mixes in

another ingredient to give the Noddy stories a sense of magic and danger – an enchanted world of friendly brownies and unfriendly goblins lurking in the Dark Wood. She recognises that children are fascinated by characters from the realms of fairytale.

As they grow older and leave pure fantasy behind, children identify more with The Famous Five or The Secret Seven. These are ordinary children inhabiting a world more like the readers' own – albeit somewhat idealised – sharing adventures and solving mysteries. Unsupervised by adults, these children work together as a team in an atmosphere of freedom and excitement; yet they are responsible, look after one another and never encounter excessive horror or gratuitous violence. There is danger, but also a sense of security.

We know exactly who the 'good' and 'bad'



'YOU SHALL WRITE ME OUT "I MUST NOT BE DEAF IN MAM'ZELLE ROUGIER'S CLASS" ONE HUNDRED TIMES'

characters are. And the series format (there are 21 Famous Five books) inspires a sense of loyalty among regular readers who enjoy the familiarity of the characters, know what to expect and are not disappointed.

The Malory Towers books inspire a similar loyalty. This archetypal school series uses themes to which every schoolchild can relate – hero-worship, bullying, the best friend – with highly-recognisable characters. Enid Blyton's consummate skill creates interesting storylines for them against a background of ordinary school activities; she makes her craft look deceptively easy.

Eight million copies of Enid Blyton's books are sold every year, in dozens of different languages. One hundred years after her birth, her characters are household names and the regular adaptations of her books for stage and television confirm their timeless appeal.



JACK WENT WITH THEM. THEY CAME TO THE POST-OFFICE AND
WENT IN. PETER TOOK UP TWO TELEPHONE BOOKS . . .