Liverpool Law Review (2023) 44:325–339
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10991-023-09336-8

Children's Literature and National Consciousness: Bruno Vincent's *Five on Brexit Island* (2016) and *Five Escape Brexit Island* (2017), Text by Enid Blyton

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Accepted: 12 June 2023 / Published online: 10 July 2023
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Abstract
Children's literature focusses on the process of identity formation of its young readers and for this reason it has always been connected with models of social behaviour. By imaginatively engaging with the proposed narratives, the child experiences society's and the nation's embodied practices. However, there are also instances of resistance to accepted worldviews through unconventional characters who foster a critical perspective on the issues at the centre of the narrative. The re-reading of Enid Blyton's successful Famous Five series of the 1950s by Bruno Vincent focuses on Brexit's narrative space to reflect upon the changes we are witnessing in our contemporary society and try to understand their sociocultural, economic, and political implications. Brexit is based on nostalgic images of Englishness, linked to an idealisation of the past as a Golden Age for Great Britain. Within this context, children's Brexlit offers an interesting source for jurisprudential debate, creating a juridical forum for both adult and children's audiences.

Keywords Children's literature · Identity · Island · Law and literature · Brexlit

This article is the result of the joint work of the authors. Sidia Fiorato wrote paragraphs 1 and 2, Susan Honeyman wrote paragraph 3.

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The Idea of the Nation and Children's Literature

As Anderson observes, a nation is an imagined community, 'produced in the imagination by concepts, narratives, memories and traditions: that is, through the work of culture.'[1] Literary works engage our collective and individual imagination, as they give expression to the experience of individuals within specific (national) communities and the narrative elaboration and development of their identity in the social context.

Interestingly, as Kelen and Sundmark put it, the emergence of the modern nation-state coincided with the emergence of children's literature at the end of the eighteenth century,[2] as 'part of the project of constructing a modern society and the identities that would support it',[3] as Knuth further points out. In the recognition of childhood as a separate period of life from adulthood, however, the child was shaped as a cultural trope, according to the period's social and cultural needs and/or anxieties and less as a social being in him/herself. In the paradoxical 'impossibility'[4] of children's literature, as it is written by adults following a specific socially determined worldview, 'What the child *is* matters less than what we *think* it is and just why we think that way'.[5] Children's literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth century aimed to form future citizens by providing them with narratives imbued with specific values which would help reproduce and perpetuate a specific image of the nation and of Englishness. Children engaged in vicarious emotional journeys of adventures which took place either in England, thus underlining its traditions and the unifying function of their shared performance, or in faraway places but always including a final return to the safety of England, that is, home. In this way, the sense of a collective cultural identity was forged and fostered through the bonding between friends in specific situations in the course of their adventures. Over the centures, children's adventures embodied the values of the time in which they were produced, alternating between an educating and moralising function and a recognition of the playfulness and innocence connected to childhood. Worlds of children's literature also contributed to shape and change the image of the child, from an idealised and innocent one to a flawed and more complex one, in particular towards the end of the nineteeth century, proceeding during the twentieth and twenty first centuries, following the changes in society. The narratives increasingly moved from providing static educational models to becoming canvases which sketched the complexities of specific periods in the experiences of child characters. Children's stories might be conservative, introduce a criticism of the social and political situation, and in some cases they may introduce a perspective towards change. As Rudd observes, children's literature actually focusses on 'the gap between the 'constructed' and the

[1] Eaglestone (2018), 1. See also Anderson [1983] (2016).

[2] See Kelen and Sundmark (2013), 1. With regard to this, the authors observe also how the idea of childhood pervades the rhetoric of the nation.

[3] Knuth (2012), 5.

[4] Cfr. Rose [1984] (1993).

[5] Kincaid (1994), 62).

'constructive' child, in […] a 'hybrid', or border area'[6] which sees the intersection between imagination and reality and between the adult and childhood world in a process of 'interplay and cross-fertilisation'.[7] By imaginatively engaging with the proposed narratives, the child experiences society's and the nation's metanarratives and embodied practices, often opening forums for reflection and establishing a dialogue between (adult and children) individuals. This aspect crosses the conventionaly traced borders between children and adolescent as addressees; at the same time, it mirrors the loose demarcation of childhood which has always typified the critical discourses regarding the genre, and the precocity of twentieth and twenty-first century children, who 'have been tasked with confronting frightening and disillusioning aspects of reality, forging identity, and finding a place in the world'.[8]

Imagined communities rely on the process of storytelling and the sharing of grounding myths and narratives for the creation of the symbolic space of the nation. Children's authors 'have forged a new storytelling tradition […] that has fostered cultural consensus and a common and constantly morphing national consciousness and identity.'[9] As Ward, quoting Watkins, asserts, 'the child's [personal and social] identity […] is determined by a narrative and communicative experience'.[10] Children's literature focusses in particular on the process of identity formation of its young readers as the future constituent members of society, and, for this reason, it has often portrayed acknowledged models of social and political behaviour. However, there are also instances of resistance to accepted worldviews through the representation of unconventional characters which diverge from stereotypical representations of children or processes of *Bildung* whereby the protagonists acquire a critical perspective on the issues at the centre of the narrative. Sometimes this takes place in the context of a revision of tradition and rewriting of canonical texts from an updated perspective, as in the case of the re-reading of Enid Blyton's successful Famous Five series of the 1950s by Bruno Vincent, which focuses on the Brexit contemporary time and the impact of this juridical transition on children's/young adults' legal and cultural imagination. Brexlit offers an imaginative narrative space to reflect upon the changes we are witnessing in our contemporary society and tries to understand their sociocultural, economic, and political implications in a form of 'Brexexplanation'[11]; it is a kind of fiction that 'engages with emergent political realities'[12] and reflects cultural arguments. It mostly engages with issues of identity and relationship with the 'other,' which, during the Brexit campaign, was associated with Europe.[13] Shaw observed that 'Brexit did not create a new national narrative: it symbolized a retreat to comforting fantasies out of step with the cosmopolitical

[6] Rudd [1999] 2005, 16.
[7] Knoepflmacher and Myers (1997), vii.
[8] Knuth (2012), vi.
[9] Knuth (2012), 12.
[10] Ward (1995), 93.
[11] Witen (2020), 147.
[12] Shaw (2021), 16.
[13] See Zwet et al. (2020).

realities of the twenty-first century'.[14] It is based on nostalgic images of Englishness, linked to an idealisation of the past as a Golden Age for Great Britain. Within this context, children's Brexlit offers an interesting source for jurisprudential debate, creating juridical fori for both adult and children's audiences.

Bruno Vincent's Adaptation of Enid Blyton's Series

Five on Brexit Island by Enid Blyton, text by Bruno Vincent (2016) is a contemporary parody of a very popular children's literature series of the 1940s and 1950s: 'The Famous Five.' The first novel of the series was titled actually *Five on a Treasure Island* (1942). Blyton's books aimed at communicating the enjoyment of childhood after the difficult period represented by the world war and the restoration of a stable world. In recent times, Knuth underlines how Blyton is part of a tradition of children's literature that includes authors such as: Edith Nesbit in the Edwardian period, who focussed on children's playfulness, their imaginative adventures and the final return to the stability of the middle-class domestic background, opposing a socially educational and moralising attitude and giving space to the children's perspective; A. A. Milne in the interwar period, who depicted the myth of rural England in a self-contained and child-oriented, romantically idealised world tempered by irony and the experience of the war, and an idealised image of children which included also their possible human flaws; Arthur Ransome in the post World War I period, who presented children's vacation adventures with a focus on the acquisition of skills which integrated the Edwardian childhood's happiness and an Englishness rooted in the sense of place as well as intrinsic to the children's self-restrained behaviour.[15]

Blyton's narrative continued the tradition of children's safe holiday adventures, which is now considered by critics to have been already exhausted in Blyton's period and mainly responding to her wish to 'protect her readers from reality and provide them with a world that was predictable and undemanding'.[16] Blyton's books were later considered to be 'out of alignment with contemporary social ideals'[17] and 'inappropriate models for a modern [...] Britain'.[18] In particular, her characters have been described as lacking psychological self development in the representation of a static condition of childhood; the stereotypical features both of her narrative structure and characters have led to a critique of shortcomings in matters of gender, class and ethnic issues. However, some critics (for example Rudd) have pointed out how social criticism is not completely absent from her fictional world,[19] although

[14] Shaw (2021), 218.

[15] About this, see Knuth (2012).

[16] Knuth (2012) 136.

[17] Knuth (2012), 116.

[18] Knuth (2012), 135.

[19] See Rudd (2000), ch 2 Kindle edition: Blyton's fictional world temporarily questions the traditional framework of society: 'patriarchy can be challenged and the Five can upset middle-class tenets, both literally with their tunnelling, and socially, in joining the circus and fair-folk.'.

at the end 'conventional values are reasserted […] and anarchy contained'.[20] We can say that within her conservative stance there are some insights which allude to the child's conscious definition of his/her identity and role in society, as in the case of George/Georgine's gender definition which remains on the background and is conventionally dismissed at the end of the adventures, but which appears most powerfully, particularly from a twenty-first century perspective, as the character is indulged in her preferences and poses as a boy in society.

The relevance of Blyton's narrative in the British cultural context is testified by Vincent's parody, in which Blyton is adapted to contribute to Brexlit's creation of a new mythology for children, in order to represent and try to make sense of a rapidly changing and possibly upsetting world.

Blyton's original protagonists are a group of children who experience adventures during the school holidays on an island of the English coast. The mainland appears to represent a static ideal of Merry Old England, characterised by rural life in cottages, stereotypical English rituals such as the afternoon tea, and a traditional family environment. It appears to be a separate and secure microcosm from the larger society of the city, which does not appear in the texts. Within this microcosm another microcosm opens with Kerrin island, an imaginary island of the English coast, based on the peninsula of Purbeck, Dorset, which belongs to the family of one of the children protagonists. This isolated place opens the dimension of the fantastic adventures of the children, who in the first novel *Five on Treasure Island* (1941) discover the secret map of a treasure, which they have to defend against thieves, and in the second novel *Five on Kirrin Island Again* (1947) they allow George's father to reside on the island to carry on his scientific research and then they engage into a fight with unscrupolous people who aim to speculate on his discoveries. As Rudd observed, George defends the island mirroring England's defence of its own territory in the context of the war,[21] thus highlighting the political background of the stories. In Blyton's multilayerd narrative, the ruins of an ancient castle represent a refuge for the children, where they can spend time in harmony, drink tea and indulge in their favourite pasttimes. Moreover, the castle's subterraneous passages become the setting for their adventures and recall the stories of the children's penny dreadfuls of the period[22] with criminals and pirates's headquarters in subterraneous caverns in different settings, as well as a rereading of gothic tenets. The island stages a psychomachia of the children, who wish to preserve the isolation and exclusivity of the place where they can exert their agency.

Bruno Vincent's texts update and relocate in contemporary London the adventures of the children, who meanwhile have become young adults, maintaining the same names and features, as well as the structure of the stories, with the only addition of cousin Rupert in the role of villain. Vincent's text starts in medias res with what appears to be a political speech in favour of Brexit; the character Julian warns

[20] Gillett (2020), 22.

[21] See Rudd (2000).

[22] For example, in *The Boy Detective*, the criminals have their head quarter in subterraneous caves where the Boys enter in order to face them.

the audience against the potential scaremongering connected to the consequences of the vote, in particular 'about subsides, about people's livelihoods being threatened, about the economy and about hope in the future'.[23] Julian rejects all this as disgraceful and cheap rhetoric and appeals instead to 'what made ours a great country'; he says 'we must fight to retain the values that make this country wonderful, that make it the place we have always loved'. (*FBI*, 1–2) The speech concludes declaring that 'Britain is great, and Kirrin Island is great too—and they are better… together' (*FBI*, 2), thus introducing the element of strangeness due to a separation between an English island and Britain and further revealing the audience as possessing paws. Seemingly introducing the fantastic, this initial scene is revealed to be a rehearsal at the presence of the dog Timmy in preparation of a public debate which will take place some chapters later, and the narrative proceeds with a flashback to three days earlier. The five protagonists are described as they reach Kirrin island and head to Kirrin Castle; they are older than Blyton's originals and they arrive there the evening before the result of the Brexit referendum: 'it's so good to be out of London while all those disgusting toffs are deciding our future, and droning on about who's going to be in charge'. (*FBI*, 5) The decision to go to Kirrin island responds to the desire to go away from the city and everything that was happening there: 'There had been a rancorous and ill-tempered mood all across Britain in the run-up to the EU referendum'. (*FBI*, 7–8).

The text draws upon the tradition of the literary topos of the island as a privileged setting to reflect upon institutions, customs, and cultural attitudes. As metonimies of the self, literary islands may underline their separation and therefore appear as a retreat from civilisation, or a new space for the protagonists to 'regain their familiar, social and cultural identities'.[24]

When the next morning the protagonists learn the result of the referendum on their smartphones, they feel shocked: Julian expresses his enthusiasm praising freedom from Brussels, thus mirroring the popular and populist conception of the referendum itself, while George reacts by posting on Twitter Kirrin island's independence from Great Britain, in a mise en abyme of the political referendum, at the same time disrupting the worldview of their microcosm to which their identities are connected. In this way, George creates a new geopolitical entity which is at the same time separated but connected with the country of origin, and whose specular image, like a photographic negative, offers the possibility for a social critique that extends to a critique of the social community, hence of the human, within the context of the codification of boundaries and discourses of sovereignty. George's reaction underlines Twitter's relevance for political communication compared to other social media and indirectly acknowldges its coverage of the Brexit campaign.[25] In this case, Twitter symbolises the court of public opinion that provides 'the technical means for 're-presenting' the kind of imagined community that is the nation,'[26] in a parallel way to

[23] Blyton (2016), 1. All quotations will be taken from this edition, the title abbreviated as FBI.

[24] Le Juez and Springer (2015: 1).

[25] See Simunjak (2022).

[26] Anderson [1983] (2016), 24.

the eighteenth century's two new 'forms of imagining' in this sense: the novel and the newspaper, as Anderson points out. In Vincent's text, Twitter follows an inverted path as it annouces the result of a political decision and only later it follows the referendum that should determine that political event. If Blyton's protagonists 'may disagree with authority [… but] they try to avoid open confrontation'[27]; Vincent's ones openly perform their disagreement, and thus trigger the whole plot. As Carpi observes, 'The new juridical space created on the island is […] a temporary artificial organisation that keeps the cultural memory of the system from whence it comes'.[28] In this case, Kirrin island represents a refuge from the shock of the proceedings which are taking place in the country of origin with the Brexit referendum, and their permanence on the island represents their refusal to go back to the new reality that has been established with the results of the vote.

After the declaration of Kirrin Island's independence, George realises she needs to declare sovereignty through the establishment of the constitution of the new state, but another referendum becomes necessary: George has given citizenship of Kirrin island to Dick, Julian and Anne as 'they were all residing on the island when I declared independence' (*FBI*, 21), but due to Julian's dissent and the fact he represented 25% of the human population, both positions need to be debated through a referendum. In this way, the situation the five protagonists escaped from is reproposed on Kirrin Island, as well as the political positions, like a distorting mirror. As a matter of fact, Julian sustains the necessity for Kirrin Island to remain united to the mothercountry, thus eliminating the risk of administrative consequences such as fishing right, passports to cross the country and negative implications for the economy. George seems to wish to keep the island as a form of utopian place where there is no economic system, no system of revenues, but only the flourising of nature and animals. This delineates an a-political system of the newly constituted micronation that contests from within its own foundational assumptions. Actually, the arrival of cousin Rupert points out the effects of George's tweet: she now has 425,000 followers and this will bring public attention on Kirrin island, as well as the press and the need for lawyers in order to deal with the juridical implications of her act. As self-appointed head of state, a role deriving from her property of the island, George nominates Dick Minister of the Interior, Julian Minister in charge of Island Security, Anne Home Secretary, and Timmy Attorney General. When the journalists arrive on the island, George holds a press conference, where it is pointed out that there are only four human voters on the island, and where she describes her political project: 'I plan for plants to grow, and the tides to wash on the beaches, and for time to go about its business, until we've all died of old age and there's no one to bother about on the island except the rabbits'. (*FBI*, 53). This image of pastoral idyll mirrors the mythical conception of English national identity rooted in the rural landscape and lifestyle usually associated to the South of England, which was exploited by Brexit supporters as embodying England's original and independent identity. Interestingly, Vincent here disrupts such image by depriving it of all political undertones and

[27] Gillett (2020), 19.
[28] Carpi (2022), 19.

opening a fantastic dimension characterised by a full immersion in nature as key to a happy and harmonious life.

This ideal vision is countered by a more utilitarian vision; as a matter of fact, in the course of the days preceeding Kirrin island's referendum, Rupert organises an encounter with a European businessman who proposes George to use the island as a headquarter for European companies in exchange for monetary gain. George refuses first to preserve the natural landscape of the island, as well as its symbolical value as a counterpart to the society of the city, but also to preserve its moral symbolical value of the friendship between the protagonists: 'After all the division caused by Britain's referendum, we don't want Kirrin's referendum to throw up the possibility of further division among us'. (*FBI*, 100)[29] She rejects personal gain in favour of the preservation of the community.

Rupert instead decides to take action and declares independence from Great Britain for another island, or rather a soon-to-be-island and independent territory. As a matter of fact, the territory is an isthmus, but through the intervention of land-movers it would change its status, which is necessary not for independence itself but for Rupert's aims, as a journalist remarks. Rupert's intervention creates a *Terra Nullius* he can claim sovereignty upon and carry out his plans. He actually intends to offer European companies the possibility to dodge taxes in exchange for fees, thus favouring business for the British isles. Rupert's action recalls Thomas More's *Utopia*, where the island is created by separation, not through natural phenomena; Utopo's kingdom is severed from the mainland through human intervention in order to suggest 'the geographical production of utopian autochthony'.[30] This artificial isolation keeps a strong connection with the mainland.

Actually, the novel ends with a cliffhanger, and the question of Rupert's independent island is addressed in the subsequent novel *Five Escape Brexit Island* (2017). The protagonists are invited to Rupert's Dorset cottage, where he lives with his wife Anastasia and his daughter Lily. The excavation works to separate the isthmus from the mainland had led to the discovery of the ruins of a stone fortress of the fourteenth century which stood now perched on the rock of his man-made island. His original project of relocating companies on the island for tax purposes had failed allegedly because they had rejected the idea of maintaining an office in the castle,[31] so the castle had been restored and rendered a museum for tourists. As they are enjoying a private visit of the subterranean parts of the castle, the protagonists remain trapped due to an electrical malfunctioning of the system and Rupert leaves the castle supposedly in order to ask for help, but his ambiguous behaviour leads to suspect the accident might have been orchestrated on purpose.

[29] See also Blyton (2016), 97–99: 'everyone, as far as I can see, throughout this whole referendum process, has been out to make personal profit from it. I made my announcement from the heart, as a sincere rejection of all the values and attitudes that we've seen coming out in recent weeks. That's why people paid attention to us in the first place, and latched on to it as a story—because they detected that here was one small thing that was sincere. So, for me—or, rather, for all of us on Kirrin—to profit financially from it would just be… It would be final and complete betrayal of values. It just couldn't be done'.

[30] Izzo (2019), kindle edition.

[31] See Blyton (2017), ch 3. All quotations will be taken from this edition, the title abbreviated as FEBI.

Echoing Blyton's protagonists in *Five on Treasure Island* who discovered the dungeons of the castle, here the protagonists explore the dungeons of the castle of Rupert's island in a parody of Gothic tenets, encountering armours and skeletons. They manage to find a secret passage (created by the old chimney of the castle) which leads them to discover a detention centre developing on the back side of the castle, with a group of forty prisoners wearing the same identical yellow jumpsuits, anxious for news from the outside world, surveilled by armed men. Jim, one of the inmates explains: 'I think it's a prototype—for the detention centres they want to set up after Brexit is finished. Protecting the borders from illegal immigrants, you know. But keeping them off British soil, so the laws don't apply and they can do what they please' (*FEBI*, ch 5).

In a parody of the populist Brexit imagination, the inmates are all academics who were going to leave the country and take jobs abroad and were stopped probably to prevent a process of brain-drain, as they assume. They do not know about their legal status, as they confess in discomfort. The narrative suddenly plunges into a dystopian setting, with Eastern European guards who don't speak English who keep order by force also with periods of isolation for rebellious inmates. The next day they manage to meet Rupert, who explains that as owner of the land and not of the facility, he cannot intervene. The facility belongs to Her Majesty's Immigration Office; the place 'technically does not exist. This place does good, important work […] helping to keep our country safe.' (*FEBI*, Ch 6).

The island has always been represented as a liminal setting, the seat of eceptional regulations or what escaped the social, political, and moral norm, given its separation from the mainland through the sea. If in Blyton the secret passages of the castle represent the unconscious of the children, the setting for the fantastic and their wish for secret adventures where they could play heroes, in Vincent they become the unconscious of the country, the seat of inner drives and obscure impulses that go beyond the common style of life in the national community. The Gothic castle has been considered as the emblem of secular power, a metaphor for the authority of the English consitution by Blackstone.[32] Vincent's text focuses on the repressed aspects of the Gothic castle, an underground mirror-like dystopian construction that comes to embody a 'response to the political and religious insecurity of disturbed times'.[33] Here it engulfs the inmates in its own legal fiction, as an imaginative and nightmarish psychomachia of the Brexit process in a kind of Brexit gothic. The novel depicts the law's metaphysics of presence, which aims at 'perpetually polic[ing] its borders, spending 'unlimited effort and energy demarcating the boundaries that enclose law within its sovereign terrain, giving it an [presumed] internal purity'.'[34]

The inmates are undocumented persons in an undefined country, and consequently have very few rights. This context recalls the centres for indefinite detention. However, this kind of legal discrimination is here reversed as it is applied to academics who wish to leave the UK, but are forced to stay in an hostile enivornment

[32] Davison (2009), Kindle edn.

[33] Thomkins in Varma (1957), xiii.

[34] Douzinas and Warrington (2007), 1.

and submit to a citizenship test in order to re-enter the UK legally, presumably in order to try to leave it. The centre assumes nighmarish dystopian tones as the isolation and incommunicability among the inmates is remarked upon and remains without any answer. This sinister depiction of Brexit Britain adapts the Imperial Gothic tropes to the contemporary political reality in a new literature of crisis, Imperial Gothic 2.0, where a threatening decline of society is brought about not by political issues but wider cultural changes. Interestingly, the UK is presented as a dystopian context (contrary to pre-2016 fiction, characterised by a dystopian image of the EU); the gothic has always embodied society's fears, giving birth to monsters which attack its boundaries, here represented by dehumanised Leavers, therefore pointing attention to the monsters within. Also in post 2016 fiction, 'Europe is always the 'Other' to the British, and never the 'Self'.'[35] We may interpret it as the ghost of the Brexit castle/detention centre, which leads to its collapse when it becomes too big to inhabit it, in a reference to Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*.

The inmates are furthermore deprived of all the reference points for their identity, as previous personal relationships are not acknowledged (as in the case of Julian and the guard Peter who had met before) and Rupert himself cannot vouch for their identity as he has changed his name for reasons connected to his traffics. In this Kafkaesque context, they are told that they have to take a British citizenship test in order to re-enter the UK legally; this proves to be 'a next-to-impossible quiz on UK manners, morals and history' (*FEBI*, ch 9), which they all fail. In the attempt to escape, the protagonists manage to explore more secret passages and underground corridors until they reach a chamber 'in the very bowels of the castle' (*FEBI*, ch 10). They meet a man who has retired down there in the 1970s, when the UK decided to join the EC, in another form of criticism against Europe crystallised in time. The case of this man seems to suggest that retiring from public life does not lead to any achievement and provokes only disorientation and isolation. They manage to escape by the sea and through a voyage redolent of literary robinsonades, they shipwreck on the beach in Weymouth on the Dorset coast, still in the UK, highlighting the fact that the dystopian scenario they escaped is located within their own country and the journey entails a process of political and cultural Bildung. They learn from the news that an illegal detention centre was closed in Dorset and also that Rupert managed to escape: the police had been alerted by an anonymous tip which the protagonists supposed might have been their own message in a bottle, which they had thrown in the stormy waters of the sea while floating in a raft, thus restoring the atmosphere of children's literature's adventures.

Both texts by Bruno Vincent do not take sides but seemingly aim to contrast images of counterpositions and division between the social community, metonimically represented by the group of the protagonists. The image of the other as a site of potential disruption seems to backfire in the extremes of the Brexit position. As Martha Nussbaum underlines, it is only by 'looking at ourselves through the lens of

[35] Foster (2022), 2.

the other, [that] we come to see what in our practices is local and nonessential, what is more broadly or deeply shared'.[36]

Final Remarks

Just as the brothers Grimm aimed to demonstrate ties of kith and kin by diseminating a common lore for tribe and nation, Bruno Vincent is using one of the most ubiquitously recognized children's writers for his parodies with the safe assumption that readers will be able to access her writings by memory. After all, as Andrew Maunder prioritizes them, 'Blyton's stories are part of Britain's historical record as it played out in the middle of the twentieth century'.[37] Enid Blyton's massive contribution to a common child culture for a nation serves as the perfect canvas for pondering an issue that divided yet binds those who recognize themselves as British. If the isolationist consequences of the Brexit decision had an appearance of defining the British as a group, it also demonstrates how polarized the political body was, is, and can be.

Vincent's choice of parody entails a creative approach to tradition. As Hutcheon asserts, 'Parody […] is a form of imitation, but imitation characterised by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text'.[38] As she further observes, based on the double etymology of the prefix *para* meaning 'counter/against' and 'beside', parody is not reduced to producing a ridiculous effect, but opens a whole range of possibilities.[39] Parody addresses forms of representation and formal tenets of the literary tradition, both reproducing and disrupting them, thus opening a critical dialogue with the genres it engages with, thus raising 'questions of a sociological nature which relate the text […] to the social context' and fulfills 'epistemological […] poetic, political and social functions'.[40] Bruno Vincent himself maintained that his parodies lampoon the public, not Blyton. Or, that is, he declared respect for the originals: 'I take being Enid Blyton's comedy representative very seriously'.[41] And the target of laughter is indeed usually specific to our time, not Blyton's. Consider the mocking of globalized consumerism, hyper-bureaucratic regulation, in *Five of Brexit Island*, as when Julian extemporizes pro-Brexit arguments: 'Just listen to some of these perfectly crazy EU bans: references to non-Halal meats in Christmas-cracker jokes; sun cream for the epileptic; reheating quiche; exchanging gifts in a hot-air balloon; alcoholic picnics on chalky soil; freewheeling on a tandem; storing nutmeg in a confined space; storing nutmeg in the open air; operating a funeral parlour while colour blind; the use of bald ornamental dice; sarcastic apologies' (*FBI*,

36 Nussbaum (2010), 163.
37 Maunder (2021), 39.
38 Hutcheon [1985] 2000, 7.
39 Hutcheon [1985] 2000, 53–54.
40 Rose (1979), 186–187). For another example of parody connected to children's literature and Brexit see Fiorato (2023).
41 Bruno and Ough (2016).

38). The parodies also delight in the contrast between children's literature and adult humor, as when Julian defeats the purpose of his own speech against 'the bureaucratic nightmare of EU—an organization that has no fewer than 214 laws covering the production of raspberry jam! And the ridiculous fruits they foisted upon us –Frankenfruits, I call them. Straight bananas. Saggy plums. Round melons, firm cherries, hard cucumbers… Sorry I lost my train of thought' (*FBI*, 71).

Another interesting passage is when Julian, after three days of campaign that should lead to Kirrin Island's referendum, wavers in his convictions, feeling trapped in an architecture of populist words, that implicitly satirise the construction of Brexit itself: 'Was he beginning to suffer from that horrible word which had sprung to life just a few days before—Regrexit? What would he suffer from it if he felt badly after the Kirrin island referendum? Kregrexit? How many more bloody awful words was this ghastly mess going to throw up? Did the English language have to die along with Britain's ties to the European Union?' (FBI, 84). This denounces a linguistic mise en abyme of imaginary cultural processes, which seems to mock juridical codification by reducing it to a linguistic game which should contain a whole new vision of the world. The risk is the creation of a self-contained and claustrophobic world, which would take shape in dystopian Kirrin island with unforeseeable consequences. Julian's rebellion entails a rejection of ready-made slogans and the realisation of the impact of juridical reform on the life of the community.

Sometimes the difference between 'parody' or 'pastiche,' conventionally intended as transformation vs imitation, is simply whether or not it is successful enough at producing laughter to justify a slight. There are explicit references to the formulaic enterprise of Famous Five novels, for example, the one mocking the common appearance of the family dog at the end of chapters, often seemingly out of nowhere, which introduce a metafictional twist to the narrative: 'Oh, look, and there's Timmy. We must be near the end of a chapter' (FBI, 89). Then again, it is perhaps our love of common childhood classics that allows us to forgive the ways they fail to grow up with us and changing times, allowing us to join in gentle ribbing—a bit of harmless self-reflective mockery.

In such moments of fictive self-reflexivity, Bruno Vincent takes advantage of the subversive power of children's literature, which proves particularly effective for neutralizing an already divisive topic. Owen Dudley Edwards points out that even the originals managed to keep a heavily polarizied audience from seeing too much of the opposition in its pages: 'Blyton built literary houses for her devoted readers in which they existed sealed off from academic, critical and paternal criticism, but not easy to re-enter once abandoned. Right-wing adult snobbery disliked Blyton for being popular; left-wing adult snobbery dislike her for being right-wing.'[42] Yet, Edwards sees the parodies, in contrast, as being more politically explicit: 'the anti-Brexit satire is clear, sophisticated, and hard. It is bluntly telling us that once Brexit is imposed we may expect totalitarian solutions for consequent problems.'[43]

[42] Edwards (2019), 222.

[43] Edwards (2019), 226.

As Shaw underlines, 'the EU referendum mobilized fears and prejudices as opposed to hopes and visions for a restructured and independent Britain,'[44] favouring the prevalence of simplistic binary categories of thought instead of an ethic of social responsibility.

We would argue that the parodies succeed at being a bit more contained, or at least neutralizing the stronger jabs with the obfuscation remote child fantasy provides. David Rudd writes that 'Blyton's islands […] are more often imaginative spaces where the normal order is suspended.'[45] Indeed this isolation is part function and form for the parodies as well. This is explicit when Cousin Rupert reveals his hidden motivation to turn the family island into a tax shelter, only to discover that the land 'is not technically an island at this time' but will be once the 'narrow isthmus' is to be cut off by 'the finest land-movers in the business on an achievement-related pay-scale' in order to 'confirm island status shortly' (FBI, 92). The Brexit campaign actually played upon an old-fashioned and popular idea of sovereignty which underlined 'autonomy, the ability for the country to male its own decisions about its future, its relations with others, and who can cross its borders.'[46] As Georgie's parents assert, when asked about their vote by their daughter, 'We don't like having no control over our own laws! […] It's a matter of sovereignty!' (FBI, 18) As Calhoun asserts, all domestic issues were implicitly ascribed to the connection with the EU; for this reason, the Brexit vote represented mainly an 'expressive more than instrumental action. A Brexit vote expressed frustration, rage, resentment, and insult—as well as hope that a vanishing way of life could be saved and a proud national identity celebrated. It was not a strategic effort to secure a particular political or economic outcome.'[47] In Vincent's narrative, foreigness frequently suggests badness, and even the service at a ticket counter can result in in-grouping on a national level: 'However much he [Julian] would have liked to stay and debate British values with this fiend in human shape, he couldn't overlook the fact that one of the most profound of these values was respect for the sanctity of a queue' (FEBI, 2).

Vincent's Brexit-themed parodies are the perfect vehicle for discussing boundaries of belonging and nationality. He creates commentary on what makes all British, no matter where on the spectrum they read from, part of an identity group, in common. David Rudd has stressed that Enid Blyton liked to both isolate and interconnect her fictional settings—even more than routinely demonstrated by the ubiquity of islands in children's literature: 'This insular theme can be traced back to Blyton's earliest writings. In 1923 […] she presented a map of Fairyland that she herself had drawn, comprising a number of separate from 'Our World,' it can be reached by a bridge.'[48] For Rudd, then, the Famous Five get to have adventures in an isolated, independent sphere, with the safety of connection: 'it is only when the children work together, becoming an archipelago of Five […] George comes to realize that she is

[44] Shaw (2021), 218).

[45] Rudd (2006), 73.

[46] Calhoun (2017), 58.

[47] *Ibid* at 58.

[48] Rudd (2006: 72).

not an isolated island.'[49] In Bruno Vincent's parodies, George's island is the analogous Britain to the mainland's EU. Though its interconnectedness makes for misadventure, it also underscores the fact that only through interdependence and building bridges can there be great safety or stability for the Famous Five.

Funding Open access funding provided by Università degli Studi di Verona within the CRUI-CARE Agreement.

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[49] *Ibid* at 74.

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