“Let’s play deduction!”: Analysis of the conventions of Detective fiction in E. Nesbit’s The Bastable Series and E. Blyton’s The Famous Five Series

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Abstract:

From the second half of the Nineteenth century on, Detective fiction for young readers has become one of the most appreciated genres of children’s literature, especially thanks to the growing attention that has been shown through the years, both on the part of authors and editors and of the juvenile audience. This dissertation is composed of three main chapters, each of them exploring different aspects of detective fiction in children’s literature.

The first chapter focuses on the development of the detective genre both in adult and children literature, exploring the main points that have made the success of the genre possible, from Sherlock Holmes to Harry Potter. The second chapter analyses the conventions of detective fiction applied to children’s literature, starting with the structure of the novel and with the role of the child and the narrator. Three works of fiction are used as reference: The Case of the Baker Street Irregular by Robert Newmann, The Bastables series by Edith Nesbit and The Famous Five series by Enid Blyton, the focus being in particular on the last two. The third and last chapter deals with the innovations typical of detective fiction for young readers that cannot be found in adult literature in the two novels previously analysed: the relationship between the child protagonist and the family, the importance of the environment in which the child lives, and the influence of gender in the development of the story.

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51 2.1 Conventions of detective fiction in Children’s literature. 51 2.1.1 The Role of the Child in Detective Stories. 51 2.1.2 The structure of the novel: from the collection of clues to the resolution. 51 2.1.3 The narrative voice as a link between the young detective’s world and the reader. 56 2.2.2.2 The Bastables and the Famous Five: Two series according to the conventions of Detective Fiction. 75 2.2.2 The Bastables and the power of imagination: playing detective. We are the Bastables. There are six of us besides Father. Our Mother is dead, and if you think we don’t care because I don’t tell you much about her you only show that you do not understand people at all. Dora is the eldest. He tore it on a nail when we were playing shipwrecked mariners on top of the chicken-house the day H. O. fell off and cut his chin: he has the scar still. Dora is the only one of us who ever tries to mend anything. ‘Let’s read all the books again. We shall get lots of ideas out of them.’ It was Noel who suggested this, but we made him shut up, because we knew well enough he only wanted to get back to his old books. Noels is a poet. He sold some of his poetry once—and it was printed, but that doesn’t come in this part of the story. Then Dicky said, ‘Look here. Detective Fiction lesson plans include elements of detective fiction, detective code, characters, & more. Teach this sub-genre of crime fiction & mystery in the classroom today!’ The popularity of the detective fiction genre came with industrialization: that is, when people began to move into large cities, crime wasn’t really a common part of people’s lives; however, as is the case with any large city, break-ins, robberies, muggings, and other crimes became commonplace. People were both fascinated and afraid of crime, which made it the perfect topic to exploit for entertainment purposes.