



Comparative Cultures

A Novel Mystery

By Kinjal Dagli-Shah

If I had to name one childhood book that left a lasting impact on me beyond my teenage years, it had to be the *Malory Towers* series by British author Enid Blyton.

The title is the name of a boarding school for girls in Cornwall, the setting for all that the six books contain. It was almost a rite of passage, a series that had to be read in order for you to be deemed a truly confused and struggling-with-identity kind of teenager – the existential angst that all girls could relate to at that stage in life.

Who can forget Blyton's *The Five Find-Outers*, the stories about a group of children who solve mysteries in the fictitious village of Peterswood? Or *Noddy*, the little wooden boy who lives in Toyland? Any mother with the slightest pride in her upbringing abilities would have *Noddy* books in the house. Or so I thought.

As part of a Reading and Writing Club that I run, we had a discussion on cult books, those that would immediately bring about a gleam of recognition, no matter where you grew up. But how wrong I was, when I learnt that some of my students had never heard of Enid Blyton, let alone read her! And I'm talking about some of my brightest students, who are prolific readers and are aiming to become accomplished writers someday.

After my mouth fell open at this startling discovery, I regained my composure and asked, with dread, "Did you at least read *Anne of Green Gables* by L.M. Montgomery?" Thankfully, they had. And that, they said, had been like a rite of passage for them, so

they understood what *Malory Towers* meant to me.

I've learnt never to be snobbish about reading – I read all kinds of authors and books, even chicklit. Many believe that it's only if you've read Tolstoy or Ayn Rand that you're an intelligent reader. I tend to disagree.

Growing up amid a confluence of cultures sometimes has its advantages, as was the case for my generation. A country that was on the brink of transformation, with a global media and an increasing Western influence and exposure, made us 'products' that were equally at ease with tradition and what is termed modernization in India. I read everything, from books that were considered classic literature, to 'trash' like Sidney Sheldon (sorry, Sheldon fans) and even *Archie* comics, or what was our *desi* (native) version – *Tinkle* comics.

I think those comics fueled my imagination as much as the good stuff did, and I know for a fact that they contributed to shaping my career as a writer and a journalist.

I am still aghast that there exist people who never had a Blyton that help them cope with their growing up years (and I urge all children to pick up a copy), but I hope this column might have caught some at the right age and time.

Kinjal Dagli-Shah runs a Reading & Writing Club for children and youth, an activity that aims to spread the love of reading and writing. To enroll, email her at kinjal.dagli@gmail.com or call on 905-591-1797.

TREASURES AND HEIRLOOMS

By Rob Reid

This is a gorgeous fruit bowl set in an original flow blue pattern.

Transfer ware china was made primarily in England starting in 1756. It is a process where a pattern is first drafted and etched onto a copper, (or other metal) plate. The metal plate is covered with ink and the pattern is transferred to a special tissue. The tissue is then put on the bisque (china that has been fired in a kiln once but not glazed), glazed and fired again, creating a crisp pattern on the china.

The technique was developed during the industrial revolution in response to a demand for decorated china by those who could not afford expensive hand decorated pottery. Later technology allowed for more than one colour. A supplementary technique, called clobbering, involved a basic transfer outline with hand painted details like petals and leaves added within.

Many colours were used including blue, red, purple, green and yellow. Brown was the least expensive and therefore most common, while yellow was much rarer. Blue was, and still is, the most sought after and tends to be the most valued, especially pieces referred to as flow blue.

Originally flow blue was a mistake in the cobalt pigments used in the decorative glaze. The blue dyes could not withstand the high temperature of the kiln and ran during the firing process. The result was a blurry effect in the finished china. The colour can vary from dark cobalt to steel blue and the flow can be very slight or so thick that the pattern is all but unrecognizable.

Until the 1870's the base used was primarily ironstone pottery. From about 1880 to 1910, more refined semi porcelain was used resulting in less smearing. Over 90 percent of all "antique" flow blue was made in England with the rest being made in Germany, France, Holland and the United States.

The large serving bowl measures 8 inches across and is 4.25 inches tall while the four small dishes are 7 inches across and stand less than 1 inch tall. All have elements of the familiar Willow pattern. They were made by the Wiltshaw & Robinson Company about 1895 at their Carlton Works factory, Stoke on Trent, England.

Blue and white china has typically been the most popular colour for collectors and the more unique or unusual it is the more one can expect to pay for it. While all of the bowls are in good condition, there were probably at least eight if not twelve small bowls for this set. That said, a nice little group like this could easily sell for \$150 or more.

I welcome inquiries about any objects and look forward to seeing and perhaps writing about them. Please forward a photo and a description to me through *Stouffville Free Press* or drop them off at Reid's Antiques, 6397 Main St. Stouffville during regular business hours or via Robert@reidsantiques.com.



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