

A British Homecoming: Growing Up Alongside Austen, Dickens, and Dahl

On a spelling test in primary school, I was marked incorrect on one word: Color. That little word, to which I added the needed letter “u” highlights much of my character and growth as a book collector. As a young girl, home, for me, was always one of two places. The first was my own sanctuary, the family house, nestled amongst the rolling hills and red-barned landscapes of a small Wisconsin town. The second was amongst books, be they at the library or the local bookshop whose bespeckled shopkeepers knew me by name. However, such books magically shared one common point of origin. From the tender age of seven when I first picked up a Roald Dahl novel, I knew that I had found my ink and paper kin in a tiny island nation over 3,000 miles away: Britain. Amongst books, I sought out the avenues available for a magical trip across the pond. Into the rabbit hole. Through the looking glass. By means of the great glass elevator. All of these delightful inventions of the classic British authors enthralled me.

Perhaps growing up with four siblings in the house made life a bit of a tornado of activity. From the chaos of everyday life, I would find peace in the rolling hillsides of Surrey and the perpetual magic of London. Through my British books I could find a world where Sherlock always solved the crime, tea arrived promptly at 4 pm on the nose, and small boys could change the mind of stodgy Lord Fauntleroy's. These books were gentle reminders for my childhood years that I could solve any problem—while remaining a lady — a policy I uphold to this day.

As I grew older so did the collection. From the lisping rhymes of Roald Dahl and the fanciful imagination of Lewis Carroll, I embarked on new quests and pleasant journeys with the Brits. New names appeared on the book shelf as new friends entered my heart. From the age of twelve, I was smitten with the eternal wit of Jane Austen, the great depth of Dickens, and the epic sagas of Tolkien. The collection grew and so did I. More than once, the fine syntax and beautiful sentence structure of bygone ages caused me to stop my reading and marvel.

At the age of 16, I became the youngest member of the Jane Austen Society of North America, JASNA. This signified that after years of collecting, I also began to share with fellow-minded individuals. My fellow Janeites offered their unfailing help in enlarging not only my knowledge of Austen but also my range of exposure to British Literature. Many a time, books had been thrust into my hands only to later become beloved additions to my collection which now numbers over 50 pieces. I have selected the most meaningful additions, to feature in this catalog, the ones that truly represent my growth with British Literature.

Perhaps Roald Dahl, my very first British ambassador, notes my feelings most succinctly: “No book ever ends when it’s full of your friends”. I find that my own personal formation has come about as a direct result of these many forays into Britain—past and present.

No doubt my third grade teacher and I will never quite agree on the proper spelling of the collective names of the hues of the rainbow, but as rain in Britain perpetually pours, perhaps we

can close the matter. To celebrate, I may treat myself to a scone and a good book—British of course!

Julie Andrews Edwards

Andrews Edwards, Julie. *The Last of the Really Great Whangdoodles*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003.

This 30th Anniversary edition delights the younger reader in me even today. Purchased from the local book shop when I was seven, this book's pages filled my imagination with stories of the creatures that inhabit the closets of British children: Whangdoodles, impressive creatures indeed.

Jane Austen

Austen, Jane. *Emma*. New York: Penguin, 2003.

Austen, Jane. *Sense and Sensibility*. New York: Penguin, 2003.

Austen, Jane. *Persuasion*. New York: Penguin, 2003.

Austen, Jane. *Lady Susan, The Watsons, Sandition*. New York: Penguin, 2003.

Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey*. New York: Penguin, 2003.

The first of the great British authors to catch my eye, Jane Austen has been a constant source of intellectual delight since I first picked up her books in the middle school library. *Pride and Prejudice* lead to many more hours of enjoyment, and I took pride in my entirely Penguin Classics Editions covers, which multiplied as time passed. In particular, the lesser known works of Austen, including an anthology of *Lady Susan, The Watsons*, and unfinished *Sandition*, impress even my fellow Janeites. All of these were purchased from the local book store.

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001.

I had somehow collected most of Jane Austen's major works without her seminal title, *Pride and Prejudice*. After having picked it up at various libraries in my youth, I had amassed a beautiful collection of the Penguin Classics Editions of the other books but never crowned the stack. This state lasted until my Advanced Placement English teacher and fellow Janeite, noting the deficiency, gifted me her edition of the book. While my edition of *Pride and Prejudice* does not follow its Penguin predecessors, it, nonetheless, means just as much given its history.

Charlotte Brontë

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1971.

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001.

Both of these editions of *Jane Eyre* hold a deep significance within the collection. Of the same publisher but of different ages, these two copies come both from high school. Having first read the novel at the age of fourteen, I feel in love with Charlotte Brontë's gothic romance and quickly acquired my own copy, one fresh from the 2001 printing, at the local book store. Later, I found my copy's "ancestor" in the free book stacks at the local library. Not able to pass up the find, I added the beautiful purple-bound book to the *Jane Eyre* family.

Emily Brontë

Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. New York: Puffin, 2009.

Purchased at the local book store, this novel rounds out my Brontë collection and offers a lovely introduction by S.E. Hinton. With evocative cover art, this novel drew me in during a chilly week of exams at the age of fifteen. Purchased from the local book store.

Lewis Carroll

Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2004.

Carroll, Lewis. *Through the Looking Glass*. New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2004.

Both of these fanciful stories were excellent companions during the summers of middle school. With original artwork left intact, the novels retain much of their old-world charm. While not the most popular summer reading selections, I received many positive comments from friend's mothers on my choice of reading material during our many trips to the local pool.

Agatha Christie

Christie, Agatha. *Cards on the Table*. New York: Berkley, 2005.

Christie, Agatha. *Hercule Poirot's Christmas*. New York: Berkley, 2000.

Christie, Agatha. *Three Act Tragedy*. New York: HarperCollins, 2011.

Christie, Agatha. *The Labors of Hercules*. New York: HarperCollins, 2011.

Christie, Agatha. *Evil Under the Sun*. New York: HarperCollins, 2011.

Christie, Agatha. *Murder on the Orient Express*. New York: Penguin, 2000.

Christie, Agatha. *And Then There Were None*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001.

Beginning with the iconic *Murder on the Orient Express*, obtained from the local book shop, I subsequently devoured many other of the Queen of Mystery's tales. Forever a fan of her little Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot, I used these books as lighter material, reading in transit: buses, planes, and car rides. Nashville, TN: the point of origin of my

editions of *Evil Under the Sun* as well as *Three Act Tragedy*. Various other book stores, kiosks, and shopping malls dotted across the country offered the others.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Conan Doyle, Arthur. *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. New York: Scholastic, 2003.

Purchased from a dusty corner of the local book shop, I immediately fell in love with Sherlock Holmes' adventures as told by the intrepid Dr. Watson. I first read these tales curled up during a rainstorm, and each time I open my worn and well-loved copy, I can hear the pitter patter of droplets against the window pane and the gears of a great mind at work.

Roald Dahl

Dahl, Roald. *The Roald Dahl Treasury*. Ed. Tom Maschler. New York: Viking, 1997.

Dahl, Roald. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. New York: Puffin, 1998.

My Dahl books are the crowning jewels to the collection. Given Dahl's considerable influence on my childhood, these books hold their proper place in my heart. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* must also appear, as this one novel first opened my eyes to reading. After a chance encounter at the library, I bought this book with the quarters from my childhood lemonade stands and have always felt it to be the best \$4.75 I have ever spent. Having checked out so many of his books at the library, my god-parents generously gifted me the treasury of his work as a Christmas gift when I was eight. It remains one of my most prized possessions.

Dahl, Roald. *Going Solo*. New York: Puffin, 1988.

A gift from the local library for winning a summer reading contest, *Going Solo* completed my Dahl collection. Very properly rounding out the group, this autobiographical novel, full of rich detail about Dahl's time as a RAF fighter pilot in WWII lead me on a grand tale of adventure made all the more real by the most magical of all narrator's who had ever told me a story in childhood.

Charles Dickens

Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities*. New York: Amsco School Publications, 1971.

At the age of seventeen, I had already read much of Dickens and loved every convoluted sentence. However, the English department of my high school decided to clear out some of its leftover and forgotten books. They offered free books to anyone who might take it. Rescued from sure death, this book has peacefully maintained its home in my collection ever since. A tad worn, this book offers me a deep sense of appreciation for its presence in the collection—a stray after all.

Daphne Du Maurier

Du Maurier, Daphne. *Rebecca*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.

Beginning with its famous opening line, “Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again” (1), I knew that I had found an enthralling tale. Purchased due to sighting a fellow JASNA member’s shirt with this very quote, *Rebecca* remains for me an unexpected addition. With its unassuming cover of an old house, the novel caused me to remember the old adage to never judge a book by its cover.

George Eliot

Eliot, George. *The Mill on the Floss*. New York: Penguin, 1981.

When asking my English teacher and fellow JASNA member what to read over Christmas break at the age of fifteen, I found myself with her own personal copy of *The Mill on the Floss*, my first experience with Eliot—but certainly not the last Eliot addition to the collection.

Eliot, George. *Silas Marner*. New York: Penguin, 2003.

I chuckle to think about buying this book at the big-box store I walked into out of desperation during an internship in Seattle. When asking after the George Eliot, born Mary Anne Evans, I believed nothing to be amiss. To my eternal shame, the store clerk responded by asking “What did he write?” Gender confusion aside, I did indeed hunt down the book and enjoy it immensely.

E.M. Forster

Forster, E.M. *A Room with a View*. New York: Penguin, 2000.

A slightly less well known book, unless one regularly watches Masterpiece Theatre with me, *A Room with a View* came on the recommendation of a family friend, commenting on the new Prince George of England, who shares his name with the hero of the novel.

Kenneth Grahame

Grahame, Kenneth. *The Wind in the Willows*. New York: Puffin, 2008.

Purchased at the local book store, I enjoyed the charming and original illustrations to this classic children’s novel, which offers lessons any adult would be remiss to ignore.

Frances Hodgson Burnett

Hodgson Burnett, Frances. *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. New York: Puffin, 2010.

Hodgson Burnett, Frances. *The Secret Garden*. New York: HarperCollins, 1998.

The Secret Garden, a gift for my mother on my ninth birthday, had a cover suited to the novel's interior. In a tale of transformation from chaos to peace, the light green cover and pleasant rose garden featured never failed to set my heart at ease. Later, I bought the first printing of another lovely little book *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, with the edition featuring the silhouettes of the main characters, cast partially in shadow and partially in light—a fitting illustration of the tale within.

Eva Ibbotson

Ibbotson, Eva. *The Secret of Platform 13*. New York: Puffin, 2000.

Ibbotson, Eva. *Which Witch?*. New York: Puffin, 1999.

With scarcely minutes left until our train pulled out of Union station in Chicago, my mother offered to buy us a quick book for the long train ride home. From the next door book shop, my seven year old self instinctively gravitated towards the British section (thank goodness stores often separate books in such ways) and found a fancifully covered novel: *Which Witch?*, which proved to be an equally fanciful story. My success with the book was repeated the next year with the purchase of the aptly titled *The Secret of Platform 13*, written by an author whose name I had grown to love.

C.S. Lewis

Lewis, C.S. *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Lewis, C.S. *The Magician's Nephew*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Lewis, C.S. *The Horse and His Boy*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Lewis, C.S. *Prince Caspian*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Lewis, C.S. *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Lewis, C.S. *The Silver Chair*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Lewis, C.S. *The Last Battle*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Gifted to me by a friend on the occasion of my eighth birthday party, this set has remained a cherished fixture in the collection. As I have grown, so has my understanding of the books, a set to which I gravitate almost every year to re-read. In many ways I have grown with the children of these delightful tales, with each new read, aided by the original chapter art which was left intact within the novels.

Robert Louis Stevenson

Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Treasure Island*. New York: Puffin, 2008.

While I certainly never participated in any swashbuckling adventures, I did feel myself to be a part of one from the moment I selected this book at the local book store. From its f

J.R.R. Tolkien

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2009.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Fellowship of the Ring*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Two Towers*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Return of the King*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999.

I did not follow the conventional path of most Tolkien readers. Rather than begin with the epic trilogy, I commenced with his lesser known translation of an old Norse tale, *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* which had just recently been published in 2009 with the help of Tolkien's son, Christopher. Having fallen in love with the prose, I quickly acquired a beautiful set of his three master works, each of them covered in a seemingly misty scene of the lands of Middle Earth. Both of these purchases came from the recommendation and the shelves of the local book store.

Diana Wynne Jones

Wynne Jones, Diana. *Howl's Moving Castle*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Wynne Jones, Diana. *Charmed Life*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Wynne Jones, Diana. *The Lives of Christopher Chant*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Wynne Jones, Diana. *The Magicians of Caprona*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Wynne Jones, Diana. *Witch Week*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

The summer after eighth grade, I discovered one of Britain's most undiscovered fantasy writers for Americans, while wandering through the local book store. I instantly set in on *Howl's Moving Castle* only to find that she had written an entire world around many other equally delightful personages. Just in time for a family trip to our little cottage on a Northern Wisconsin lake, I took some new friends along with, and read my stories while listening to rain cover the tin roof. Not a bad way to discover a new addition to the collection after all!

Wishlist

The books on my wish list come from many years of sharing stories with the friends on the pages of each book, whether they be of the Regency, animal, or more modern variety. The Austen of 1895 comes from recognizing that most first editions reside in museums. Instead, I would look to find what is arguably the most coveted of all cover designs, the Peacock, famously illustrated by Hugh Thomson for Macmillan's edition of the Illustrated Novels. The three Dahl novels are wishes for signed first editions. To know that the great author himself would have printed these, some of his most well-known works, fills my collector's heart with excitement. Interestingly, the first edition *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is American, not having been published in the UK until 1967. Of particular worth would be the autobiography, should it be signed by the man whose life the story chronicles. Finally, I believe that the addition of a first edition Dickens, whose works first appeared in serial then later were bound into one book, would add much more meaning to my standard, and well-loved, edition.

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. London: Macmillan, 1895.

Dahl, Roald. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. New York: Knopf, 1964.

Dahl, Roald. *Going Solo*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1986.

Dahl, Roald. *Matilda*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1988.

Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities*. London: Chapman & Hall, 1859.