

Oxford University: Two Centuries of Magical History

I grew up in Pittsburgh, the second son of two parents with three jobs. By day, my dad worked at a steel company and my mom ran a travel agency. At night, the two of them would trudge upstairs to the attic, where they would answer emails for the children's camp that they ran every summer in Upstate New York. Because they were so busy, they hired a live-in nanny, a British woman with blonde hair and bad teeth by the name of Louise Paige. Weezy, as I liked to call her, cared about me like I was her own son, and turned every outing into a story.

"If you stick your gum to that tree, you'll grow a gum tree," she told me at the park.

"That flower just told me the most interesting thing," she said at the conservatory.

"That looks like the vulture that ate Prometheus' liver," she said at the aviary.

I think it's because I loved Louise that I fell in love with imagination, and her homeland, England, which I imagined as a rainy, matronly country where everyone baked and it was always Christmas. Louise encouraged these interests, pulling out fantasy books set in England during our weekly trips to the library. It was Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy—given to me by Louise for my seventh birthday—that further streamlined my interest into a passion for Oxford-based fantasy.

During the fall semester of my junior year of college, I had the opportunity to study abroad at St. Catharine's College, Oxford. Exploring the Bodleian Library, looking into the glass cases of Blackwell's Rare Books, and enjoying a pint at the Eagle and Child, famed hangout of the Inklings, were surreal, life-altering experiences. Before I left for Oxford, I had been debating between a career in writing and a career in business. CarBone, a company I had started my freshman year that converts waste animal bone into porous carbon electrodes for use in modern electronics, had placed second in Duke's Elevator Pitch Competition, and Winyata, my second company, had just received a first round of venture capital. Both had bright futures, and I could imagine running both of them as careers. However, while walking around C.S. Lewis' favorite trail in the Magdalen Deer Park, I realized that my stories were a lot closer to my heart than my companies.

That afternoon, I used some of the money I had set aside for my companies to start a collection of novels that were inspired by Oxford's magic. The collection, which has since grown to 42 pieces and continues to grow, includes several first editions, including signed UK copies of Phillip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy and a UK copy of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. It pays homage to Louise Paige, and to Oxford, a city that has provided two centuries of magical inspiration.

Richard Adams

An English novelist, Richard Adams attended Worcester College, Oxford, where he read Modern History.

1. Adams, Richard. *Watership Down*. New York: Penguin, 2012.
Purchased from Foyles Books in London, England. This piece stands out in the collection as one of the few in which the book's setting does not specifically relate to Oxford. I have chosen to include it because I feel that Adams' education in Modern History at Worcester College impacted the way that he wrote the rabbits' culture and mythology.

Max Beerbohm

A popular writer in the early half of the century, Beerbohm studied at Merton College, Oxford, although he graduated without a degree.

2. Beerbohm, Max. *Zuleika Dobson*. CreateSpace, 2012.
Purchased online. Beerbohm's only novel, *Zuleika Dobson* is a satire about a stunning beauty who has the power to charm every male at Oxford. The book is no longer in print.

Lewis Carroll

Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, better known by his pen name, Lewis Carroll, was a graduate and teacher at Christ Church, Oxford. Although a talented mathematician—he won the Christ Church Mathematical Lectureship in 1855—he is perhaps best known today for his written works, many of which are examples of literary nonsense.

3. Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. London: Tate, 2011.
Purchased from Waterstone's Books on Piccadilly, London, England. This story began when Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) was trying to amuse the daughters of the Dean of Christ Church while rowing them up the Isis River. When I studied abroad in Oxford, I had a chance to recreate a section of his five-mile journey.
4. Carroll, Lewis. *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*. London: Tate, 2011.
Purchased from Waterstone's Books on Piccadilly, London, England. The poem at the end of this book, "A Boat Beneath A Sunny Sky," is a reference to the original Oxford boat trip that Carroll took with Alice Liddell and her two sisters.

C. S. Lewis

Along with J. R. R. Tolkien, another member of the collection, Clive Staples (C. S.) Lewis was part of the literary discussion group known as the Inklings that met at the Eagle and Child bar between 1930 and 1949. Lewis is best known for *The Chronicles of Narnia* series, which has sold over 100 million copies. While in Oxford, I had a few pints at the Eagle and Child, and also frequented C. S. Lewis' favorite footpath, a track around the Magdalen Deer Park on the grounds of Magdalen College known as Addison's Walk. Theophilus Carter, the eccentric furniture dealer often rumored to be the inspiration for Carroll's Mad Hatter, is buried in the Holywell Cemetery near St. Catherine's College.

5. Lewis, C. S. *The Magician's Nephew*. London: HarperCollins Children's, 1998.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England.
6. Lewis, C. S. *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*. London: HarperCollins Children's, 2008.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England.

7. Lewis, C. S. *The Horse and His Boy*. London: HarperCollins Children's, 2009.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England.
8. Lewis, C. S. *Prince Caspian*. London: HarperCollins Children's, 2009.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England.
9. Lewis, C. S. *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. London: HarperCollins Children's, 2010.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England.
10. Lewis, C. S. *The Silver Chair*. London: HarperCollins Children's, 2011.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England.
11. Lewis, C. S. *The Last Battle*. London: HarperCollins Children's, 2011.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England.

Phillip Pullman

A student at Exeter College, Oxford, in 1968, Pullman went on to teach part time at Westminster College between 1988 and 1996, and again at Exeter College in 2004. The protagonist of his books, the headstrong Lyra Belacqua, grows up at Jordan College in a fictional Oxford. The location and layout of Jordan parallel the real-life Exeter College. When I studied abroad at St. Catherine's College, I had a chance to meet Professor Pullman, one of my literary idols, when he came to dinner as a guest of the Master.

12. Pullman, Philip. *Northern Lights*. Signed Uncorrected Proof Copy of the first edition.
Purchased from Sotheby's London. Rare uncorrected British proof copy of the first edition, signed by the author on the title page.
13. Pullman, Philip. *Northern Lights*. London: Scholastic Children's, 1995.
Purchased from Sotheby's London. First edition signed UK hardback. In the United States, this book is called *The Golden Compass*. Rumor has it that Pullman originally meant to call his trilogy *The Golden Compass Says...*, which is the name he sent to RandomHouse, his American publisher. While waiting to hear back from them, he changed the name to *His Dark Materials*, which is the name his British publisher used. By this time, Random House had already done cover art featuring a golden compass, and insisted that he stick with the name.
14. Pullman, Philip. *The Subtle Knife*. London: Scholastic Children's, 1997.
Purchased from Sotheby's London. First edition signed UK hardback. Knife on the cover. Complete number line (2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1) on the copyright page, signed by the author on the title page.
15. Pullman, Philip. *The Amber Spyglass*. London: Scholastic Children's, 2000.
Purchased from Sotheby's London. First edition signed UK hardback. Amber spyglass on the cover. Complete number line (2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1) on the copyright page, signed by the author on the title page.

Terry Pratchett

I admire Pratchett's fun, comic writing voice, and think that he did for fantasy what Douglas Adams did for science fiction. Although Pratchett has no personal connection to Oxford, Unseen University, a central setting in

his Discworld series, is based on the school. Of the sixteen Discworld novels that reference the Unseen University, eight were purchased from Oxford and eight were purchased from London.

16. Pratchett, Terry. *The Colour of Magic*. London: Transworld, 2012.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England. The US publication of this book, *The Color of Magic*, uses the American English spelling of the word "color."
17. Pratchett, Terry. *The Light Fantastic*. London: Transworld, 2012.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England. Like the Bodleian Library at Oxford, the library at Unseen University have books that are chained to the shelves. Unlike the Bodleian Library, the chains in the Unseen University library are to protect the students from the books.
18. Pratchett, Terry. *Equal Rites*. London: Transworld, 2012.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England.
19. Pratchett, Terry. *Mort*. London: Transworld, 2012.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England.
20. Pratchett, Terry. *Sourcery*. London: Transworld, 2012.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England.
21. Pratchett, Terry. *Eric*. London: Orion, 2000.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England.
22. Pratchett, Terry. *Moving Picturse*. London: Transworld, 2012.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England.
23. Pratchett, Terry. *Reaper Man*. London: Transworld, 2012.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England.
24. Pratchett, Terry. *Soul Music*. London: Transworld, 2012.
Purchased from Foyles Books in London, England.
25. Pratchett, Terry. *Interesting Times*. London: Transworld, 2012.
Purchased from Foyles Books in London, England.
26. Pratchett, Terry. *Hogfather*. London: Transworld, 2012.
Purchased from Foyles Books in London, England.
27. Pratchett, Terry. *The Last Continent*. London: Transworld, 2012.
Purchased from Foyles Books in London, England.
28. Pratchett, Terry. *The Truth*. London: Transworld, 2012.
Purchased from Foyles Books in London, England.
29. Pratchett, Terry. *Thief of Time*. London: Transworld, 2012.
Purchased from Foyles Books in London, England.

30. Pratchett, Terry. *Going Postal*. London: Transworld, 2012.
Purchased from Foyles Books in London, England.

31. Pratchett, Terry. *Unseen Academicals*. London: Transworld, 2012.
Purchased from Foyles Books in London, England.

J. K. Rowling

Many visitors comment that Duke University looks like Hogwarts, but Oxford University is the true inspiration for the magical school. While at Oxford, I had a chance to eat in the Christ Church Hall, the setting of the Great Hall in the Harry Potter movies, and stand on the 16th century stairs that lead into the Hall, where Professor McGonagall welcomes the first year students.

32. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. London: Bloomsbury, 1997.
Purchased from Sotheby's London. First edition UK printing. Another example of cross-Atlantic name change, this book is known to US audiences as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. The US publisher didn't think the word "philosopher" sounded magical enough. My copy of this book is remarkable in that only 500 first edition copies were printed, and many of them went to libraries where they were stamped. This version is in perfect condition and without the library stamp.

33. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*. London: Bloomsbury, 1998.
Purchased from Sotheby's London. First edition UK printing.

34. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. London: Bloomsbury, 1999.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England. This is the July 8th, 1999, British version of the book. The American version was published on September 8th of the same year.

35. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. London: Bloomsbury, 2000.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England. Although the British and American versions were published on the same day, the American version was published by Scholastic.

36. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. London: Bloomsbury, 2003.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England.

37. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*. London: Bloomsbury, 2005.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England.

38. Rowling, J. K. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. London: Bloomsbury, 2007.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England.

J. R. R. Tolkien

Another member of the Inklings, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (J. R. R.) was a graduate of Exeter College, Oxford. Later, he became the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Pembroke College, Oxford, from 1925 to 1959, and the Merton Professor of English Language and Literature from 1945 to 1959. While at Oxford, I made a special trip to Exeter College to see his bust.

39. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Hobbit*. London: HarperCollins, 2012.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England.
40. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Fellowship of the Ring*. London: Harper Collins, 1997.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England. Divided into three volumes because of post-war paper shortages, *The Fellowship of the Ring* went on to become the third best selling novel of all time. I first read this book in the fifth grade and am not ashamed to admit that I cried when Gandalf died.
41. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Two Towers*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 2007.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England. I was so excited when Gandalf came back.
42. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Return of the King*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 2007.
Purchased from Blackwell's Books on Broad Street, Oxford, England.

It was not easy narrowing my wish list to five books. In the end, I chose to improve the quality of my collection over the quantity. Two of my favorite series are Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and Carroll's Alice books, and although I have standard editions of all five books I dream of acquiring signed first editions. However, because signed first editions of these five books remain the Holy Grail for many collectors, I think I will continue to dream.

Then again, what is Oxford but a city of dreams?

1. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Fellowship of the Ring*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1954.
2. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Two Towers*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1954.
3. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Return of the King*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955.
4. Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. London: Macmillan, 1865.
5. Carroll, Lewis. *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*. London: Macmillan: 1871.