



Bedside Companion for Book Lovers

An anthology of literary delights
for every night of the year

EDITED BY
JANE MCMORLAND HUNTER

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For Julie, book-reader, bookseller, book-buyer and friend,
and obviously for Matilda,
with all my love.

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About the editor

Jane McMorland Hunter has compiled ten anthologies for Batsford and the National Trust including collections on gardening, nature, friendship, London, England and the First World War. She has also worked as a gardener, potter and quilter, writes gardening, cookery and craft books and works at Hatchards Bookshop in Piccadilly. She lives in London in a small house overflowing with books.

Introduction

I grew up in a house full of books, have worked in bookshops for most of my adult life and now live in a house where the books regularly threaten to take over. My love of books, and stories in particular, began early; every night my parents read to me, although they chose the books, with the result that by the time I went to school I had a wide but fragmented knowledge of Charles Dickens's novels and was under the mistaken impression that P. G. Wodehouse wrote children's books about pigs. Looking round my shelves when I started collecting pieces for this anthology, I was slightly daunted. Three hundred and sixty-six extracts may seem a lot, but I soon realised that I would have a problem when I compiled a 'short' list of over 480 possibilities.

I have attempted to cover all aspects of books and the book world: books themselves, reading, writing, bookshops and libraries, both public and private. I have included pieces of historical interest, but this is not intended to give a comprehensive history of books; there are recommendations in the bibliography on 31 December for those who wish to delve deeper. Indeed, it is my hope that this collection will inspire readers to go off at tangents – either to reread a forgotten favourite or to explore a new discovery.

I started with the books themselves: bestsellers, dictionaries, biographies, diaries, short stories, fact and fiction. Of all the different types of book, it was fiction that divided opinion most. Novels were blamed for leading children into a life of crime and, for many years, were regarded as something one did not readily admit to reading. I found copious advice on what to read and how to make the most of your reading time; it was not until recently that it was widely admitted that you could simply read for fun.

Before you can make choices, of course, you need to learn to read, and while this is an accomplishment many take for granted, some of these extracts tell a very different story, with would-be readers having to resort to secrecy and subterfuge. Writers also have a part in this collection, giving both advice on how to write and explanatory pieces or 'arguments' and 'apologies' regarding their own works. Where to read and write also divides opinion: a large room, a small room, inside or out, all have their supporters.

I could not have complied this without including many pieces on bookshops – from owning a bookshop, to dealing with customers, to browsing for the perfect book. In contrast, online shopping has no mention although, perhaps, I did not look very hard. I have attempted to be unbiased but my favourite authors have inevitably been given preferential treatment, and as a result I have not provided a comprehensive overview of literature but rather a collection that dips and dives wherever I found something of interest. I have not judged the writers; there is literary criticism here, but equally there is criticism of the critics themselves.

The extracts are a mixture of fact, fiction, prose, poetry, adult's and children's books, ranging from Cicero to the present day. Some pieces link with their neighbours, following a theme for a few days' reading, while others stand alone, providing changes each day. There are biographical sketches giving brief glimpses of some authors and extracts from openings of some books, which we all know, but all too briefly. Everyone knows of the man who must be in want of a wife, the rarely quoted scene that follows is every bit as perceptive and entertaining.

There are, of course, as many omissions as inclusions, and many of the stories that I could not fit into the main anthology are clustered together on New Year's Eve; I feel one should always start the year with plenty of reading matter close to hand.

I have, of necessity, had to cut nearly all the entries from larger works but in all cases I have given the original source. Some authors have also had to be omitted for copyright reasons. My aim has been to create an anthology which will provide the reader with a little pleasurable bookishness for every day of the year and, if wanted, a route to following an author further. I hope you enjoy this collection.

Foxing

From *The Private Library*, 1897 | A. L. Humphreys (1865–1946)

Junior Assistant and later Partner, Hatchards Bookshop (1881–1924)

A fine copy should be a clean copy free from spots. When a book is spotted it is called ‘foxed’, and these ‘foxy’ books are for the most part books printed in the early part of this century, when paper-makers first discovered that they could bleach their rags and, owing to the inefficient means used to neutralise the bleach, the book carried the seeds of decay in itself, and when exposed to any damp soon became discoloured with brown stains. A foxed book cannot have the fox marks removed, and such a book should be avoided.

Thank You

From *My Name is Book: An Autobiography*, 2014 |

John Agard (1949–)

I, Book, can’t very well tell you the story of my life without saying thank you from the bottom of my spine to all the people who make me and care about me.

To
 BIBLIOPHILES for collecting me
 BOOKBINDERS for binding me
 BOOKSELLERS for selling me
 DESIGNERS for designing me
 EDITORS for editing me
 ILLUSTRATORS for illustrating me
 LIBRARIANS for lending me
 PRINTERS for printing me
 READERS for reading me
 REVIEWERS for reviewing me
 (favourably or not)
 TRANSLATORS for translating me
 WRITERS for writing me

You’ll notice I mention writers last. No disrespect. That’s what happens when you say things in what’s called alphabetical order. Next time I’ll say ‘authors’ instead of ‘writers’, so authors come first. But they won’t be too upset. Writers know that somewhere it is written that the first shall be last and the last shall be first.

Being a Bookseller

From *Bookshop Memories*, 1936 | George Orwell (1903–1950)

Given a good pitch and the right amount of capital, any educated person ought to be able to make a small secure living out of a bookshop. Unless one goes in for ‘rare’ books it is not a difficult trade to learn, and you start at a great advantage if you know anything about the insides of books. (Most booksellers don’t. You can get their measure by having a look at the trade papers where they advertise their wants. If you don’t see an ad. for Boswell’s *Decline and Fall* you are pretty sure to see one for *The Mill on the Floss* by T. S. Eliot.) Also it is a humane trade which is not capable of being vulgarized beyond a certain point. The combines can never squeeze the small independent bookseller out of existence as they have squeezed the grocer and the milkman. But the hours of work are very long – I was only a part-time employee, but my employer put in a seventy-hour week, apart from constant expeditions out of hours to buy books – and it is an unhealthy life. As a rule a bookshop is horribly cold in winter, because if it is too warm the windows get misted over, and a bookseller lives on his windows. And books give off more and nastier dust than any other class of objects yet invented, and the top of a book is the place where every bluebottle prefers to die.

Opening a Bookshop

From *The Bookshop*, 1978 | Penelope Fitzgerald (1916–2000)

[In 1959 Florence Green buys a house and warehouse in Hardborough, on the East Anglian coast, where she intends to open a bookshop. She goes to the bank to arrange a loan.]

‘Naturally I want to reduce expenses to a minimum.’ The manager prepared to smile understandingly, but spared himself the trouble when Florence added sharply ‘But I’ve no intention of re-selling. It’s a peculiar thing to take a step forward in middle age, but having done it I don’t intend to retreat. What else do people think the Old House could be used for? Why haven’t they done anything about it in the past seven years? There were jackdaws nesting in it, half the tiles were off, it stank of rats. Wouldn’t it be better as a place where people could stand and look at books?’

‘Are you talking about culture?’ the manager said, in a voice half way between pity and respect.

‘Culture is for amateurs. I can’t run my shop at a loss. Shakespeare was a professional!’

It took less than it should have done to fluster Florence but at least she had the good fortune to care deeply about something. The manager replied soothingly that reading took up a great deal of time.

The London Reader

From *The Life of the Fields: Country Literature* |

Richard Jefferies (1848–1887)

[The Londoner] has seen books, books, books from boyhood always around him. He cannot walk down a street, enter an omnibus, go on a platform without having books thrust under his eyes. Advertisements a yard high glare at him from every hoarding, railway arch, and end-house facing a thoroughfare. In tunnels underground, on the very roofs above, book advertisements press upon his notice. It is impossible to avoid seeing them, even if he would. Books are everywhere – at home, at the reading-room, on the way to business; and on his return it is books, books, books. He buys a weekly paper, and book advertisements, book reviews, occupy a large part of it. Buy what sort of print he will – and he is always buying some sort from mere habit – books are pushed on him. If he is at all a student, or takes an interest – and what educated Londoner does not? – in some political, scientific, or other question, he is constantly on the watch for publications bearing upon it. He subscribes to or sees a copy of one or other of the purely literary papers devoted to the examination of books, and has not the slightest difficulty in finding what he wants; the reviews tell him precisely the thing he requires to know, whether the volume will suit him or not. The reading Londoner is thus in constant contact with the publisher, as much as if the publisher spoke to him across the breakfast table.

Richard Jefferies: London

From *A Literary Pilgrim in England, 1917* |

Edward Thomas (1878–1917)

Though he never lived in London, Jefferies became no inconsiderable Londoner by right of a long series of visits, from the time when as a boy he used to go to the printing-house of his uncle, Thomas Harrild, in Shoe Lane. He could possess his thoughts in Trafalgar Square and under the portico of the British Museum, and, as he records in *The Story of my Heart*, he had his great moments amid the throng by the Mansion House. ‘Let the grandees go to the opera,’ said he in *Amaryllis*; ‘for me the streets.’ And he asked: ‘Could Xerxes, could great Pompey, could Caesar with all his legions, could Lucullus with all his oysters, ever have enjoyed such pleasure as this, just to spend money freely in the streets of London?’ And again: ‘Let the meads be never so sweet, the mountain-top never so exalted, still to Fleet Street the mind will return.’ He was pleased with the red roofs of Bermondsey as he saw them on approaching London Bridge by train from Eltham. He loved the ships on the Thames, and, gazing at the great red bowsprit of an Australian clipper, ridiculed the idea that Italian painters, had they seen such vessels, ‘would have been contented with crank caravels and tales twice told already.’ The colour of the Horse Guards, the dresses of the women, the pictures in the National Gallery, the statues in the Museum, the lions in Trafalgar Square, were among his delights.

The Death of Dickens

From *Great English Novelists*, 1908 |

George Holbrook Jackson (1874–1948)

[Charles Dickens died on 9 June 1870.]

No other writer comes so near to the national heart as Charles Dickens. His death was treated as a national calamity, and his remains were laid in the most sacred and most honoured place in the land, the Abbey of Westminster, and to this day flowers and evergreens, and holly at the Yule Tide he did so much to make a living festival, are placed upon his grave. For three parts of a century he had served England instead of a poet, taking the place of a Burns, where a Burns was not, and of a traditional folk-muse where the ballads of the countryside were no more. Even to-day, over thirty years after his death, the charm of his books, in spite of many prognostications to the contrary, has not been worn away by the passing years. His books are still the happy reading of innumerable people wherever the English language is spoken.

An Escape into Books

From *David Copperfield*, 1850 | Charles Dickens (1812–1870)

My father had left a small collection of books in a little room upstairs, to which I had access (for it adjoined my own) and which nobody else in our house ever troubled. From that blessed little room, Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, the Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and Robinson Crusoe, came out, a glorious host, to keep me company. They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time, – they, and the Arabian Nights, and the Tales of the Genii, – and did me no harm; for whatever harm was in some of them was not there for me; I knew nothing of it. It is astonishing to me now, how I found time, in the midst of my porings and blunderings over heavier themes, to read those books as I did. It is curious to me how I could ever have consoled myself under my small troubles (which were great troubles to me), by impersonating my favourite characters in them – as I did – and by putting Mr and Miss Murdstone into all the bad ones – which I did too. I have been Tom Jones (a child's Tom Jones, a harmless creature) for a week together. I have sustained my own idea of Roderick Random for a month at a stretch, I verily believe. I had a greedy relish for a few volumes of Voyages and Travels – I forget what, now – that were on those shelves; and for days and days I can remember to have gone about my region of our house, armed with the centre-piece out of an old set of boot-trees – the perfect realisation of Captain Somebody, of the Royal British Navy, in danger of being beset by savages, and resolved to sell his life at a great price. The Captain never lost dignity, from having his ears boxed with the Latin Grammar. I did; but the Captain was a Captain and a hero, in despite of all the grammars of all the languages in the world, dead or alive.

This was my only and my constant comfort. When I think of it, the picture always rises in my mind, of a summer evening, the boys at play in the churchyard, and I sitting on my bed, reading as if for life.

Reading Aloud

From *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 1969 |

Maya Angelou (1928–2014)

‘Come and walk along with me, Marguerite.’ I couldn’t have refused even if I’d wanted to. She pronounced my name so nicely. Or more correctly, she spoke each word with such clarity that I was certain a foreigner who didn’t understand English could have understood her.

‘Now no one is going to make you talk – possibly no one can. But bear in mind, language is man’s way of communicating with his fellow man and it is language alone which separates him from the lower animals.’ That was a totally new idea to me, and I would need time to think about it,

‘Your grandmother says you read a lot. Every chance you get. That’s good, but not good enough. Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with shades of deeper meaning.’

I memorized the part about the human voice infusing words. It seemed so valid and poetic.

She said she was going to give me some books and that I not only must read them, I must read them aloud. She suggested I try to make a sentence sound in as many different ways as possible.

Reading Kipling Aloud

From *The English Patient*, 1992 | Michael Ondaatje (1943–)

Novels commenced with hesitation or chaos. Readers were never fully in balance. A door a lock a weir opened and they rushed through, one hand holding a gunnel, the other a hat.

When she begins a book she enters through stilted doorways into large courtyards. Parma and Paris and India spread their carpets.

He sat, in defiance of municipal orders, astride the gun Zam-zammah on her brick platform opposite the old Ajaib-Gher – the Wonder House, as the natives called the Lahore Museum. Who hold Zam-zammah, that ‘fire-breathing dragon,’ hold the Punjab; for the great green-bronze piece is always first of the conqueror’s loot.

‘Read him slowly, dear girl, you must read Kipling slowly. Watch carefully where the commas fall so you can discover the natural pauses. He is a writer who used pen and ink. He looked up from the page a lot, I believe, stared through his window and listened to the birds, as most writers who are alone do. Some do not know the names of the birds, though he did. Your eye is too quick and North American. Think about the spread of his pen. What an appalling, barnacled old first paragraph it is otherwise.



A glorious treasury of literary curiosities, *Bedside Companion for Book Lovers* contains an eclectic mix of fact and fiction, letters, diaries, essays and poems, all suffused with the joys of books and reading. Within these pages you'll find Charles Dickens on the pleasures of a bookshop, Maya Angelou on the importance of reading aloud, Virginia Woolf on finding space for writing, Wendy Cope on why books are good for your health, and much, much more. Keep this book by your bedside and escape into a magical world of books every night of the year.

Cover illustration by Elen Winata

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