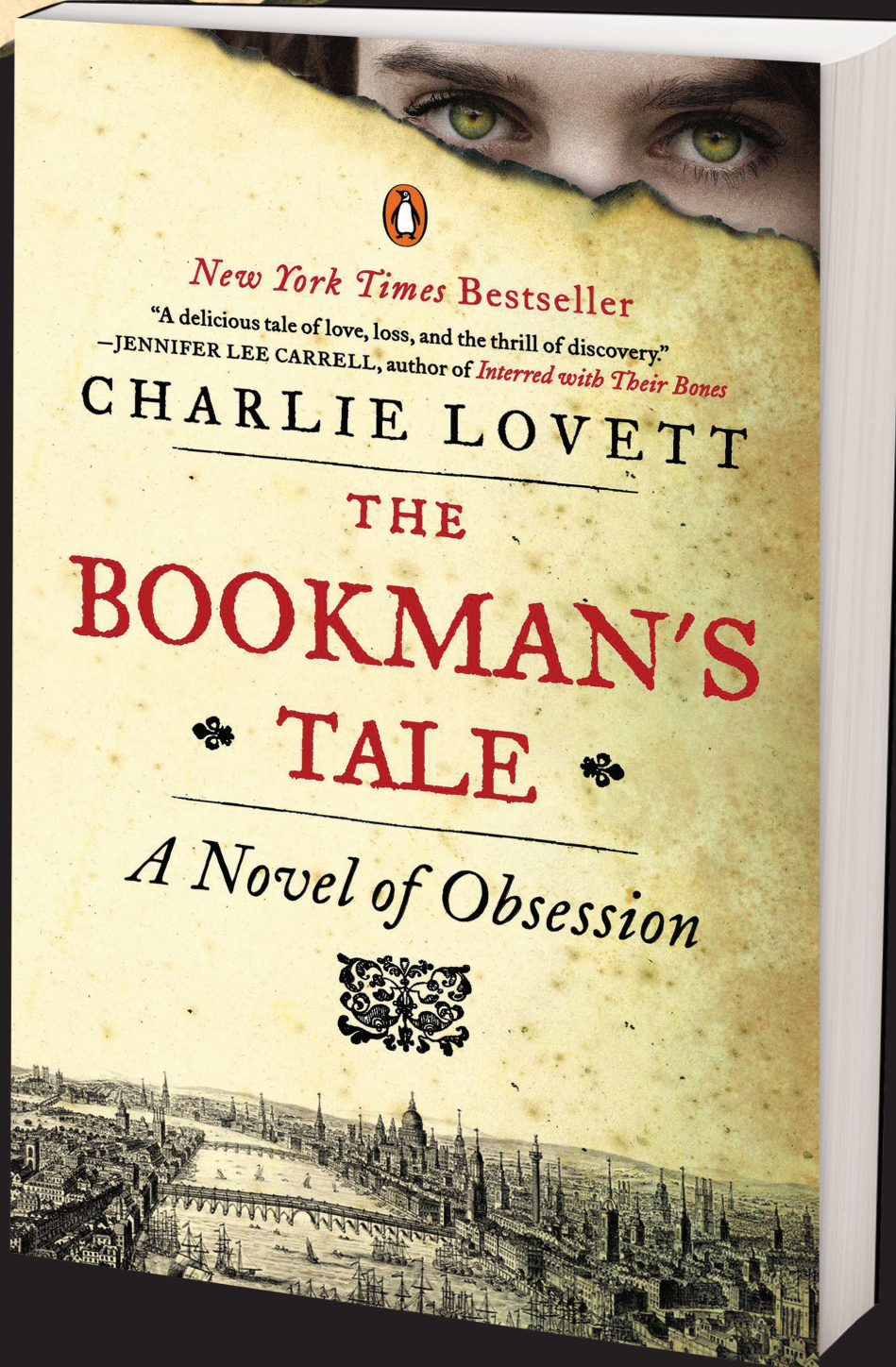


BOOK CLUB KIT

Inside this kit is material to aid in your book club discussion, including additional content from Charlie Lovett. Follow this guide to find the secret to a different literary holy grail... the perfect book club.




www.charlielovett.com


 @CharlieLovett42

Charlie Lovett is happy to have phone conversations with book clubs about *The Bookman's Tale*. If your book club is interested, contact him through his website: <http://charlielovett.com/contact/>

The Story Behind **THE BOOKMAN'S TALE**

By Charlie Lovett





The story of how I came to write *The Bookman's Tale* is really the intersection of three stories: how I came to be passionate about antiquarian books, how I came to love the English countryside, and how those two passions collided in the idea for a new novel—my fourteenth book, but my first widely published work of fiction.

When I was growing up, my father Robert Lovett began collecting editions of *Robinson Crusoe*. It's a great novel to collect because it's been in print constantly since 1719. Bob eventually donated his collection of over 700 English language editions to Emory University. As a teenager, when I began traveling on my own, I would troll through bookshops looking for copies to buy for him. I learned that I loved old books and also I liked the idea of collecting a single title.

In college, I began to collect copies of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, inspired by an old set of records I used to listen to on rainy days—Cyril Ritchard reading the Alice books. I had no idea what I was getting into, and certainly didn't know what a fascinating person Lewis Carroll would turn out to be. Over the years my collection has broadened to include a wide array of books and other materials related to Lewis Carroll and his world. I have *Alice* translated into scores of languages, first editions of all of Carroll's major works (including the extremely rare first edition of *Alice*—only five copies are in private hands), movies, plays, etc. I've ended up writing several books about Carroll—you could say that he helped launch my writing career.

Some of my favorite items are those you won't find anywhere else—a seven foot tall theatre poster from the 1930s, copies of *Alice* and other books inscribed by the author, and even Lewis Carroll's own 1888 Hammond typewriter. But my favorite thing about book collecting has been the people to whom it has introduced me—other Carroll enthusiasts, booksellers, auctioneers, and scholars. I've made friends around the world, and my shelves are full of books that come with wonderful stories of how I acquired them, often with the help of a new friend. So, my first passion that became incorporated into *The Bookman's Tale* was not just my love of books, but my love for the way books can shape relationships.

In 1980, when I was a senior in high school, I participated in a study abroad program in the English countryside. Fourteen of us lived in a house with an English family and learned about English culture and life, politics and architecture, and William Shakespeare. It was a formative experience for me and I decided I would like to return some day with my family—not as tourists but as residents, staying long enough to say we were living in England. One day in 1980 our group stopped off at a village in the Cotswolds on the way to Wales. There had been a light snow before and I remember thinking, as I snapped a picture of the snow-dusted churchyard—this is where I would like to live when I come back.

In 1997, I convinced my wife Janice to join me in this dream, and we went to live in the Cotswolds for six months. Our daughter Jordan was nine, and we took her out of school and in January moved to the small Oxfordshire village of Kingham. We chose Kingham almost at random—I wanted to be close to Oxford so I could do some research on Lewis Carroll, but beyond that we simply chose a cottage that was available for a six-month rental and had the amenities we needed.

Almost immediately we fell in love with Kingham—a peaceful village of 700 people close to the more famous tourist towns of the Cotswolds, but mostly undisturbed. We took our daughter to every Shakespeare play at the RSC and the Globe. I was working on a book about the places Lewis Carroll had lived and worked, so we visited places from the Isle of Wight in the South to Whitby in the North. It's fair to say that we experienced the amazing variety of the English countryside. We made many friends among other Carroll enthusiasts and, most importantly for us, we met a wonderful family who lived at the end of our lane and became dear friends.

In the years that followed we remained close with this family. In 2007, we received an e-mail from them telling us that Keen's Cottage, the cottage we had rented ten years earlier, was for sale. We bought the cottage and, with the help of our friends' eldest daughter, renovated it. Since then we have lived in Kingham for about six to eight weeks each year, and used the cottage as a rental property in our absence. We have had the joy of visits from family members and friends, with whom we've been able to share our peaceful corner of England. So my second passion that I stirred into *The Bookman's Tale* was the English countryside (particularly the Cotswolds) with a heavy dose of William Shakespeare.

In 2005 I was walking alone in the Yorkshire countryside on a chilly day during a family vacation. I had just finished devouring the latest *Harry Potter* book and I was thinking about what I might like to write next. In addition to several published books of nonfiction, I had written a novel that had been rejected by several agents—one of whom had told me in particular why he thought it wouldn't sell. I was thinking about what he had said, when I hit on the idea of a hiding a secret in an old family chapel. I think this idea must have come from recalling a previous trip to the north of England during which some friends had taken me to see a tomb in just such a chapel. Like my fictional Evenlode House, the house near the chapel, once a fine country home, had fallen into disrepair and the residents lived in trailers in the garden. The chapel itself was covered with vines, but held a quite remarkable collection of Anglo Saxon carving along with the impressive medieval tomb of a local noble who had supposedly slain a dragon nearby.

When I returned from my walk that day in 2005, I began to make notes and ended up with several pages of ideas about a Victorian English painter and a modern day American expatriate bookseller (I myself had worked as an antiquarian bookseller for several years). With the exception of those two characters and the settings of the falling-down house and hidden chapel, almost nothing of my original notes made it into the novel. In fact, it was two years later before I started working on the book in earnest. By that time I had come up with the idea that the book would include three booksellers from three widely different time periods: Elizabethan, Victorian, and contemporary. Suddenly I found that I had the perfect vehicle for the intersection of my passions for rare books, for the English countryside, and even for William Shakespeare.

When my fictional Peter Byerly needed to be hiding away from the world in a quiet English village, I did not hesitate to put him in Kingham. With a few modifications, our cottage became Peter's cottage, and my own familiarity with Kingham and the English countryside (including places such as Hay-on-Wye which I had visited many times) helped me create the world of the novel.

I think a significant part of the success of *The Bookman's Tale* comes from the fact that the novel springs from my own passions—it means that I care about the characters and the world they inhabit, but it also means that readers sense a passion in the book that they connect to. Bringing together the world of rare books and the world of the English countryside sparked my creativity in *The Bookman's Tale*, and those two worlds are joining forces again in my new novel, *First Impressions*, in which Jane Austen features as a major character. I've no wish to become formulaic, but I also think you can do a lot worse than write from a place of your own passion.



Recipes for a Traditional English Summer Tea

TEA

Put boiling water in your teapot to warm it before you brew. Then empty the pot and put your loose tea in with more boiling water to steep. Serve with milk and sugar.

SCONES

Ingredients:

2 cups all-purpose flour

4 tsp baking powder

$\frac{3}{4}$ tsp salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar

4 tbsp. butter

2 tbsp. shortening

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup cream

1 egg

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup dried currants or cranberries

Heat oven to 375°F. In a large mixing bowl, combine flour, baking powder, salt, and sugar. Mix well. Cut in butter and shortening. In a smaller separate bowl, combine cream with beaten egg and add to dry ingredients. Stir in dried fruit. Turn dough out onto a floured surface. Roll dough out and cut into biscuit sized rounds. Place on a sheet and bake for 15 minutes or until brown.

Serve right from the oven split open with a big dollop of clotted cream and a spoonful of strawberry jam.

SUMMER TEA SANDWICHES

Cucumber or Smoked Salmon:

Start with a square of fresh bread. Spread with a little butter and top with thinly sliced cucumber or Scottish smoked salmon. Sprinkle a little salt and pepper on the cucumber, and top the salmon with a sprig of fresh dill and a squeeze of lemon. Serve open faced or add a top piece of buttered bread.

CLASSIC PIMM'S CUP

Chop up strawberries, oranges, lemons, and limes and put them in a pitcher. Top up with Pimm's # 1 (if you can find it, if not you can make your own with one part gin, one part red-vermouth, and one half part triple sec). Chill and then pour about a half glass over ice, topping with a little ginger ale and a little sparkling lemonade. Add a sprig of fresh mint and enjoy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe that Shakespeare was the true author of his plays?
2. It's ironic that Robert Greene's most immortal words are those deriding Shakespeare as "an upstart Crow." Can you think of any other writers who were belittled by their contemporaries but went on to achieve greater and more enduring fame?
3. Consider Dr. Strayer's "typed list of things [Peter] needed to do in order to move on with his life" after Amanda's death. Can following such a list help someone recover from grief?
4. Peter's first visit to the Conservation Department at Ridgefield University transforms the way he regards books, "He had thought of books before only as his shield, but now they seemed to be taking on lives of their own, not so much as works of literature or history or poetry, but as objects, collections of paper and thread and cloth and glue and leather and ink." Have you ever experienced a similar epiphany?
5. As Harbottle watches a performance of Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale*, he takes some offense at the character of Autolycus. "Was knavery really Bartholomew's profession? Surely the proudest moments of his career did not drip with honesty, but Bartholomew did not believe he had ever done anyone real harm." Are Harbottle's crimes—as he believes—mostly harmless?
6. When Bartholomew Harbottle offers Robert Cotton the opportunity to purchase Shakespeare's manuscripts, the latter is reluctant because he "doesn't collect contemporary literature." Are there any writers at work today who you feel might attain literary immortality? Why?
7. At one point, Peter contemplates how he would feel if he were asked to change his name from Byerly to Ridgefield in order to preserve Amanda's family name. Since he always felt estranged from his own parents, why might this be difficult for him? How would you feel in his position?
8. Philip Gardner spurns the woman he loves and his own child in order to keep his affair a secret from his wife. Does he do so for his own comfort or for the preservation of his family estate?
9. Was Peter justified in hiding the letter in which Amanda Devereaux writes about her desire to have a child from his own Amanda?
10. Is Peter really visited by Amanda's spirit or is she a figment of his imagination?
11. Are high-quality forgeries themselves works of art?
12. There are many unacknowledged children in *The Bookman's Tale*: Robert Greene's son, Fortunato; Bartholomew Harbottle's son, Matthew; and Phillip Gardner's son, Phillip Devereux. Why do you think this might be?

TOP TEN QUESTIONS I'M ASKED BY BOOK CLUBS

By Charlie Lovett, author of *The Bookman's Tale*



I've visited a lot of book clubs in the year since *The Bookman's Tale* was published in hardcover and I always enjoy hearing readers' take on the story of Peter and Amanda and William Shakespeare. Here are some short answers to the questions I hear most often.

10. *Have you always been a Shakespeare enthusiast?*

I first encountered Shakespeare as a middle school student when our fifth-grade class saw a production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. I loved it and immediately tried to motivate my classmates to do our own staging of *Romeo and Juliet* (a short-lived project only partly motivated by a crush I had on a girl). Since then I've seen scores of Shakespeare productions, read the plays for classes and for pleasure, acted in Shakespeare, and even used Shakespeare as a jumping off point for several of my children's plays. I got to play the lead in *Measure for Measure*, but my favorite role was Feste, the clown, in *Twelfth Night*. I love that show, and I got to end every performance with a song. What could be better? When I came to write about Shakespeare in *The Bookman's Tale*, I brought all my experiences (as an audience member, an actor, and a playwright) to the project.

9. *Who do you believe wrote Shakespeare's plays?*

I like to say that though I have a cottage in Oxfordshire, I remain a staunch Stratfordian. In other words, I believe the plays were written by William Shakespeare of Stratford. There is one way of wording the principal called Ockham's Razor that goes like this: *the simplest explanation is usually the best one*. I'm inclined to believe that—I am not naturally a conspiracy theorist. One reason I side with the Stratfordians is that the number of people necessary to keep a secret Shakespearian identity hidden would have been impressive and would have included actors, theatre managers, printers, and even royal officials. All of these people would have had to have been involved in a conspiracy and all of them would have had to keep their mouths shut. In my experience, people aren't that good at keeping their mouths shut. So, unless hard evidence convinces me otherwise, I'll stick with Mr. Shakespeare.

8. *Did you do a lot of research?*

If you look in the acknowledgements of the book you'll find the titles of some of the books I consulted when working on the historic part of the novel. Many other reference sources are mentioned in the text itself—particularly the *Dictionary of National Biography*. However, much of the information about rare books I gleaned from many years as a collector (and several as a rare book dealer). I also believe, as another historical novelist and friend once said, that it's possible to do too much research. A novel, after all, is fiction, and first and foremost it must function as a work of fiction. So, while I worked hard to get the details of the different time periods correct, I was perfectly happy to treat historical characters (like William Henry Smith for instance) as fictional characters and have them do things they almost certainly did not do in real life.

7. *What is your book collecting "Holy Grail"?*

I always say that my Holy Grail is some book that nobody knew existed—some previously unknown pamphlet by Lewis Carroll for instance (he is the focus of my collection). But as far as items that we know existed at some point in history, I think I would have to say that my Holy Grail would be the four missing volumes of Lewis Carroll's adult diary. They were still in existence in the 1920s and nobody knows what happened to them. While they would, by all rights, belong to the British Library (to whom the family donated the rest of the diary volumes) it would be amazing to be the person who opened up an old box and found those missing diaries.

6. *Did you know the ending when you started writing?*

I didn't. When working on a novel I like to first get grounded in a place. I knew the worlds of Kingham and Ridgefield well before I started writing. Next comes character, and while I learned a lot about Peter, Amanda, Liz and others through the writing process, I had a good idea of what the major characters were like fairly soon. Last for me comes plot or story. I had a general idea where the book was going when I started, but I do not like to work from an outline. I like to leave myself room to change plans or add in new ideas that come up during the process. As I get near the end of the first draft, sometimes I will make a rough outline of all the things that still need to happen. Once the first draft is done and I have a solid story, I begin working on revisions to hone that story and the characters who enact it.

5. *What do you think are better: physical books or digital books?*

I honestly believe there is room in the world for both. I use my iPad to read electronic books when I am traveling and it's great to have instant access to millions of titles. On the other hand, as I explore in *The Bookman's Tale*, there are things a physical book can do that a digital book cannot. When text, physical book, and reader all interact opportunities arise. A watercolor portrait of Amanda could not have fluttered out of a digital reader. Peter could not have felt the texture of letterpress printing on his iPad. And ink and paper are a proven technology—they can store information for centuries. We don't know what today's digital books will be like five hundred years from now. So neither is "better," but there is still a place in the world for printed books.

4. *Is there going to be a movie of The Bookman's Tale?*

You never know. While there are no plans currently in the works, my agent has shown the book around Hollywood. Coincidentally, when the manuscript was first being circulated there, an historical movie about the Shakespeare authorship controversy was in release. *Anonymous* did not fare well at the box office, and as a result there was not a lot of enthusiasm at the time for projects with a Shakespeare connection. Still many, many readers have told me they would love to see a film of *The Bookman's Tale* and of course all it takes is for one of those readers to be a movie producer.

3. *How did you juggle all the different time frames?*

When I was first writing *The Bookman's Tale*, I didn't know exactly how the various stories would end. I would write a little in one time frame and then get an idea for something that would happen in a different time. So I skipped around a lot in writing the first draft. As I began to see the connections among the various stories in subsequent drafts, I became more intentional in where I ended each section. The last major edit of the book, which I did for my wonderful editor at Penguin Books, Kathryn Court, involved more adjusting of the interacting story lines. Kathryn felt that readers should spend more time in each time period before shifting to another. In the end, I reduced every scene in the book to a single sentence, put each of those sentences on a slip of paper, and then laid out all those slips on a big table. Creating the final draft by rearranging these slips was as much a logic puzzle as it was a writing exercise. I had to be sure the audience found out information in a certain order and that I maintained thematic and linguistic links between the sections. It was a great mental exercise!

2. *What are you working on next?*

My next book, *First Impressions: A Novel of Old Books, Unexpected Love, and Jane Austen*, will be published by Viking on October 16, 2014. Like *The Bookman's Tale* the novel explores English literature, antiquarian books, and the English countryside. There are two timelines in *First Impressions*, each with its own heroine—Sophie Collingwood in the present day and Jane Austen in 1796.

1. *Is Peter Byerly a self-portrait?*

The short answer is 'no.' Peter and I do have certain things in common—primarily our love of both rare books and the English countryside. But I, for instance, love to stand in front of a group of strangers and answer their questions; Peter would hate that. I certainly did not have myself in mind when creating Peter. Having said all that, I gave that answer to a group in Kingham and my neighbor and dear friend said to me afterwards, "Now, Charlie, you and Peter are more alike than you think." It got me to thinking, and I do believe that Peter and I are both, in our own ways, hopeless romantics. We both believe in love. So Peter is not me; but I think we'd get along.



Praise for **THE BOOKMAN'S TALE**



"[A] delightful tale of love." —*Parade*

"Lovett tells his story with ease, charm and a faith in his characters." —*USA Today*

"This novel has something for everyone: William Shakespeare, a love story, murder and even a secret tunnel." —*Minneapolis Star-Tribune*

"*The Bookman's Tale* has plenty of richness to offer. Lovett is deft at juggling plots and eras." —*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

"A treat." —*New York Journal of Books*

"Lovett's tale sparkles with seasoned storytelling, and . . . is deftly handled by an author whose playwright roots and sense of scene showcase the skill to keep the reader turning pages." —*The Mountain Times*

★ **"A gripping literary mystery that is compulsively readable until the thrilling end.**

For fans of Geraldine Brooks's *People of the Book*, Shakespeare aficionados, and bibliophiles." —*Library Journal* (Starred)

"A pleurably escapist trans-Atlantic mystery is intricately layered with plots, murders, feuds, romances, forgeries—and antiquarian book dealing. . . **cheerily old-fashioned entertainment.**" —*Kirkus*

"I don't read much fiction. I'm picky. But I loved racing through Charlie Lovett's *The Bookman's Tale*, **a richly rewarding thriller** filled with real-world details about the discovery of a rare book that may or may not be a priceless Shakespearean artifact. Fun for everyone who's ever fondled a soft leather binding!"

—DANIEL SINGER, founder, Reduced Shakespeare Company and co-author of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Abridged)

"With *The Bookman's Tale*, Charlie Lovett tells us a terrific story—there's mystery and suspense, murder and seduction—but more important, he shows us how it's all connected, all of this: the reading and the keeping and the sharing of books. It forms a chain long and strange enough to tie a heartbroken young scholar from North Carolina back to the Bard himself, who might or might not have been William Shakespeare. Every link along the way is a bookman's tale all its own, and Lovett tells them all, except the very last, of course: because that's you, about to read this book right now."

—ROBIN SLOAN, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore*

"Lovett's novel, *The Bookman's Tale*, is a marvelous new Shakespearean mystery: **an intelligent thriller that is also a love song for books and the people who relish them.** Lovett knows his stuff about Shakespeare, rare books, and the passions that both inspire, and he weaves from these a delicious tale of love, loss, and the thrill of discovery. It kept me turning pages till the wee hours for days.

The only disappointment was that it came to an end."

—JENNIFER LEE CARRELL, author of *Interred with Their Bones*