

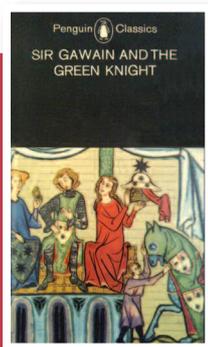
A VERY BRITISH CHRISTMAS IN BOOKS

Apart from the pulp beach novel, no other season in the year has inspired the writing of stories like Christmas has. Some of the most beloved tales in Western literature are set within the misty, short days in which we find ourselves at the end of every year. Here is a stocking full of Britain's classic Christmas tales, not to miss this season. Whether you fancy mystery or the medieval, your British Christmas will be all the more memorable with a read of one of these quintessential tales.

SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

by Simon Armitage

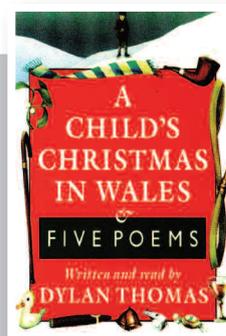
Originally written around 1400 and translated dozens of times, *Green Knight* is a medieval poem set in Arthurian Britain at Christmastime. Armitage is a modern British poet who published a recent translation of it in 2008. The Knights of the Round Table are celebrating their holiday meal when a giant green figure on a green horse enters the hall and challenges one of the men to strike him with an axe, then suffer the same blow in return a year-and-a-day later. Arthur's nephew, Gawain, takes up the challenge and from there a tale of survival, chivalry and honour unfolds. Will the blows be fatal, and which one of them will dare to survive?



A CHILD'S CHRISTMAS IN WALES

by Dylan Thomas

A prose work by the Welsh poet, *A Child's Christmas in Wales* began as a series of recorded stories for the BBC and was published as a written story only in 1950 when Thomas sold it to the American magazine *Harper's Bazaar*. It recounts his memories of childhood Christmases in his native Swansea and is full of Thomas's signature poetic rhythms and emotive nostalgia for everything connected with the holiday, even the snow. Thomas made an audio recording of the story in 1952, which the United States National Recording Registry largely credits with launching the audiobook market in the US.



THE ADVENTURE OF THE CHRISTMAS PUDDING

by Agatha Christie

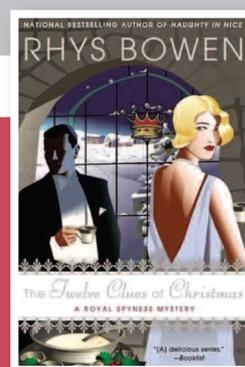
What is Christmas without a bit of Hercule Poirot intrigue? *The Adventure of the Christmas Pudding* is part of a short story collection published in the UK in 1960. In it, Poirot retreats with a family to the country estate of Kings Lacey to experience a traditional British Christmas. Little does he know that his life will be threatened, he will attempt to solve a murder that may never have happened, and will have to recover the lost jewel of a desperate prince on the eve of the prince's wedding.



THE TWELVE CLUES OF CHRISTMAS

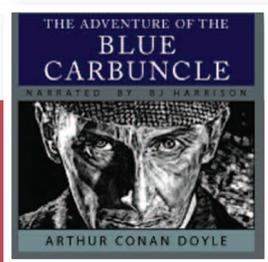
by Rhys Bowen

This modern read is a delightful follow on from Christie's story. Celebrated British mystery writer Bowen satirises the typical English country house mystery with a fumbling but lovable main character named Lady Georgiana Rannoch. Rannoch is merely thirty-fifth in line to the throne and subsequently finds herself in need of gainful employment to keep her place in polite society. She takes a job supervising Christmas festivities at a country house in the tiny English village of Tiddleton-under-Lovey, but when villagers turn up dead one by one, Lady Rannoch must shift gears into whodunit mistress.



THE ADVENTURE OF THE BLUE CARBUNCLE

by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

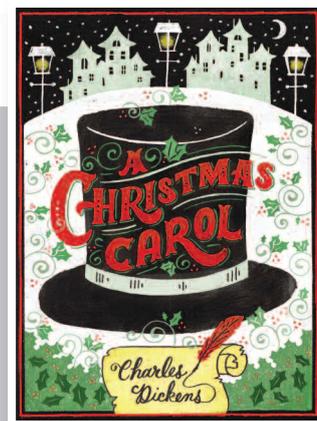


If you have not had your fill of Christmas fare and jewel thievery, Doyle penned a tale in the same vein, published in 1892. It's even tempting to suspect that Doyle's much earlier story inspired Christie's *The Adventure of the Christmas Pudding*. A priceless jewel nicknamed the Blue Carbuncle has been stolen from the opulent London hotel suite of the Countess of Morcar, and Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson must find the thief and the jewel. At the start of the investigation, a Christmas goose provides a key clue, after which the pair wend their way through London settings from the British Museum to Covent Garden to solve the mystery.



A CHRISTMAS CAROL

by Charles Dickens

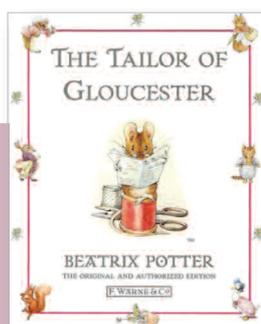


Originally this world-famous story forever associated with Christmas was not about the holiday at all. At the start of 1843, Dickens read a government report about the state of child labour in England and was alarmed by the brutality of conditions that left children crippled and impoverished, working in inhumane conditions and consigned to poverty. Dickens' anguish over the issue prompted him to conceive of writing a pamphlet, which would rouse the compassion of the rich and powerful, entitled *An Appeal to the People of England on behalf of the Poor Man's Child*. Eventually he decided to create what he termed a "Christmas ghost story", which he believed would have a greater impact through the power of imagination and people's sense of generosity during the holidays.

THE TAILOR OF GLOUCESTER

by Beatrix Potter

We may know and love Potter best for her Peter Rabbit books, but it was this story about a poor tailor—one she self-published in 1902 after creating a single copy as a Christmas gift for a friend's child—that she said was her favourite. It tells the story of an elderly tailor who must finish sewing a waistcoat for the mayor's wedding the next day but falls too ill to finish his work. Overnight, with his wily housecat, Simpkin, out to fetch him more thread, the tailor frees a collection of mice that his cat has trapped under teacups. With time running short and his energy spent, only the grateful mice and his repentant cat can save his fortune.



Melissa Romo is an American writer and author of a historical novel about identity and nationhood entitled *Blue-Eyed Son*. She lived in London from 2013-2017 and now resides with her family in New York.