

Faulkner and Modern Americana

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There is a great difference between having a book collection and being a book collector. When I was a child I had a good collection of children's fiction. In elementary school our teacher asked us write a letter to whomever we would most like to meet. The majority of boys wrote to Michael Jordan; for me it was the great children's author Rohl Dahl. The love of books I had as a boy never left, although it was never like this.

As an English major it was a source of personal embarrassment that I had never read *Catcher in the Rye*. I went to the local mega-bookstore and was shocked at the price of a hardbound copy of the classic. I passed on the copy and vowed to buy a cheap paperback copy. Shortly thereafter I happened upon a vintage hardbound copy in a local used bookstore. It was slightly more than the newer copy, but was different in a quintessential way: history. This copy was slightly worn and it had J.D. Salinger's picture on the back. The history of the book intrigued me and I did some research. As it turns out J.D. Salinger was a relatively shy fellow and had his picture removed from after the first printing. In addition to the magnitude for which *Catcher in the Rye* is loved with the scarcity of true first printings has made the cost of obtaining a true first edition quite a costly adventure. I found out that my copy was a Book of the month club edition, almost identical but printed on cheaper paper and sent to subscribers. The astronomical price for a true first had driven the cost of these Book Club Editions too ten times what I paid for mine. Today, I look back upon that day as the turning point in my life from normal to book collector.

Book Collecting is a neurosis. When a book collector holds a vintage copy in their hands, they feel the rush of years of history. Book Collecting becomes compulsory, an obsession. The book collector spends all their money and free time filling their shelves. After their shelves, their closets, their floor, their living room. As such it is hard to point to a focus of a collection, as all books beg to be collected. After the *Catcher in the Rye*, I became infatuated with ornate bindings, and then modern American firsts. Books by authors I had read and felt changed by: Cather, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Faulkner, and onwards. Currently Faulkner owns the locus of my collection and thus one could say my "emphasis". Although, lately Faulkner has lead me into Armed Service Editions (Books produced by the government for G.I.'s during W.W.II). As Arnold Bennett has been quoted: "As a rule people don't collect books; they let books collect themselves".

- "Even when reading is impossible, the presence of books acquired by passionate devotion to them produces such an ecstasy that the buying of more books than one can peradventure read is nothing less than the soul reaching towards infinity, and that this passion is the only thing that raises us above the beasts that perish".

A. E. Newton