

I have a somewhat unusual history with books, in the sense that they entered my life very late. I grew up in a poor neighborhood, in a household that was devoid of books. The neighborhoods in which I lived had no libraries, and, in those that did, my family's tenure in them was far too short to take notice. Actually, "library" was a word that was rather meaningless to me, until about the eleventh grade. It was no doubt in my vocabulary, but hadn't bubbled up to the surface of my consciousness. "Books" were the sometimes-employed, odious tools used by teachers to inflict varying degrees of boredom, agitation, or discomfort. Aside from this, I had few run-ins with books. It wasn't until the seventh grade, when I moved to the Carrick area of Pittsburgh, that "book" would take on a radically different meaning. Like any lofty-minded youth who knows everything, and who temporarily proceeds under the auspices of "there is nothing I can't understand," I was interested in going straight to the top—or so it was for me, at that time. On a trip to the library, I came across *Relativity* by Albert Einstein. My understanding was that he knew a thing or two about a thing or two. Remarkably, even though I had the reading ability to understand everything that was said, and sufficient algebraic knowledge to understand the mathematics, the book was conceptually obtuse enough to defeat me. I kept my defeat quiet, bought a copy of *Relativity* upon my inaugural visit to the bookstore, and went about studying and re-reading it; this may have been the pivotal instance in the formation of my professional interests and my love of reading.

The point of this little anecdote is convey some sense of the ardor and desperation with which I have burrowed through these books (and others), as though I have been deprived of something in my youth and am desperately seeking to fill the lacunae, if not the interstices. It is on this sort of basis that I would like to spark discussion about these collections, so that you and I can share in the joy of these classics, together. Similarly, it is with the same enthusiasm that I hope to engender the same in others, for those not familiar with these collections.