

Edward Morris

An Uneven Stroll Down Memory Lane

• 2008 (1/3)

ALTHOUGH I TAUGHT COLLEGE ENGLISH FOR TEN YEARS, THE GREAT BOOKS HAVE FOUND LITTLE PURCHASE ON THE SUNNIER SLOPES OF MY BRAIN. THERE RESIDE THE VOLUMES THAT MADE ME LAUGH OR FEEL JOY MORE INTENSELY THAN MY EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES COULD. TO BE SURE, MY HEART OPENED TO SOME SERIOUS LITERATURE BUT NOT ENOUGH TO MAKE ME TENURE MATERIAL.

THESE ARE THE BOOKS I TREASURE MOST—ROUGHLY IN THE ORDER THEY DISCOVERED ME:

THE HOOSIER SCHOOL BOY BY EDWARD EGGLESTON. THIS WAS A BOYHOOD FAVORITE, NOT AT ALL FUNNY, BUT IT CONJURED UP A SCHOOL VERY MUCH LIKE THE REMOTE, TWO-ROOM RURAL ACADEMY I ATTENDED; AND IT MADE ME FEEL PITY FOR SOMEONE ELSE BESIDES ME. I'M A BIG FAN OF PITY. I SHOULD BE THE OBJECT OF MORE OF IT.

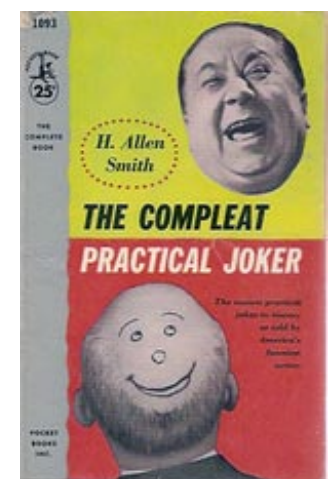
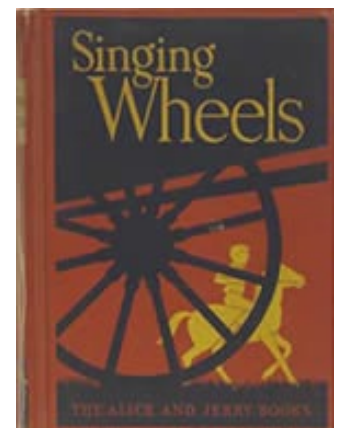
SINGING WHEELS, A FOURTH-GRADE READER IN THE ALICE AND JERRY SERIES. THIS BOOK ABOUT PIONEERS IN THE WESTERN WILDERNESS FASCINATED ME WITH ITS ILLUSTRATIONS OF FARM AND HUNTING IMPLEMENTS.

MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING BY GENE FOWLER. THIS WAS THE FIRST BOOK I EVER REVIEWED FOR MY COLLEGE NEWSPAPER. FOWLER WROTE THIS AFFECTIONATE GROUP BIOGRAPHY OF HIS WILD AND WILDLY TALENTED FRIENDS, THE ACTORS JOHN BARRYMORE AND W. C. FIELDS, THE PAINTER JOHN DECKER AND THE POET SADAKICHI HARTMAN. TALK ABOUT ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT! THESE GUYS INVENTED IT.



THE COMPLEAT PRACTICAL JOKER BY H. ALLEN SMITH. A DELIGHTFUL COMPENDIUM OF SHENANIGANS ENGINEERED BY INSANELY IMAGINATIVE PRANKSTERS WITH TOO MUCH TIME ON THEIR HANDS.

TURNABOUT AND **RAIN IN THE DOORWAY** BY THORNE SMITH. SMITH'S CHARACTERS WERE ALWAYS BEING MAGICALLY TRANSPORTED INTO WORLDS FOR WHICH NEITHER THEIR EXPERIENCES NOR TEMPERAMENTS SUITED THEM. IN TURNABOUT, A HUSBAND AND WIFE EXCHANGE BODIES TO HILARIOUS EFFECT. THE MAIN CHARACTER IN RAIN IN THE DOORWAY IS SUDDENLY SNATCHED INTO A PARALLEL UNIVERSE IN WHICH THE CHIEF AMUSEMENTS ARE DRINKING AND WENCHING. NATURALLY, HE HAS THE BEST TIME OF HIS LIFE. READ THORNE SMITH ON YOUR DEATHBED BECAUSE YOU SIMPLY WON'T BE ABLE TO EXIT UNTIL YOU'VE FINISHED THE STORY.



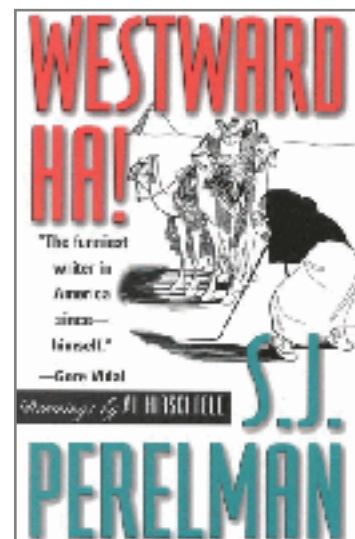
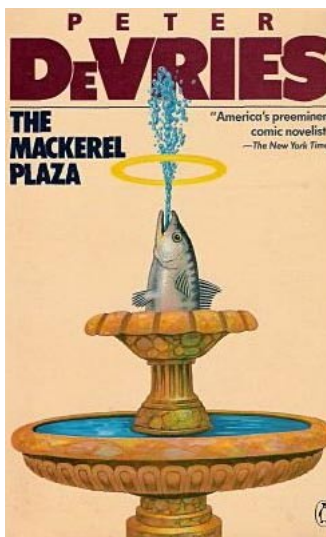
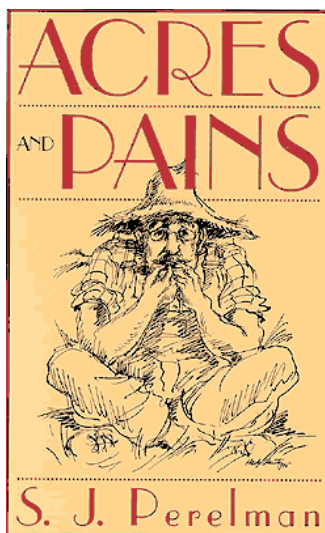
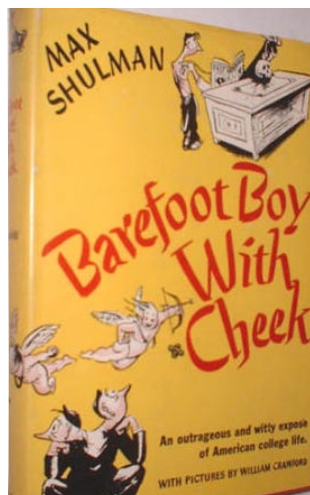
● 2008 (2/3)

BAREFOOT BOY WITH CHEEK BY MAX SHULMAN. COLLEGE TRADITIONS HAVE CHANGED SO MUCH OVER THE PAST HALF-CENTURY THAT MODERN READERS WILL NOT RECOGNIZE—NOR LIKELY BE AMUSED BY—THIS PARTICULAR ACADEMIC ROMP. BUT IT BROKE ME UP BACK IN THE '50S, AND IT STILL DOES.

WESTWARD HA! AND **ACRES AND PAIN** BY S. J. PERELMAN. FOR SELF-IMPORTANT, SELF-DEPRECATING HUMOR, NO ONE TOUCHES PERELMAN. IMAGINE SEINFELD'S GEORGE COSTANZA WITH A GREAT VOCABULARY, EVEN GREATER POWERS OF SELF-DELUSION AND INFINITELY MORE NEUROSES AND YOU GET SOME IDEA OF PERELMAN'S PERSONA. WESTWARD HA! IS HIS FAR-FETCHED CHRONICLE OF THE WORLD TOUR HE TOOK FOR HOLIDAY MAGAZINE WITH THE THEATRICAL CARICATURIST AL HIRSCHFELD. THAT ITS PUBLICATION DID NOT SPARK INTERNATIONAL INCIDENTS ACROSS THE GLOBE STILL AMAZES ME. ACRES AND PAIN RELATES HOW PERELMAN FELL AFOUL OF NATURE AND MAN WHEN HE BOUGHT A FARM IN BUCKS COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA, AND SET OUT TO BECOME A COUNTRY SQUIRE. ANYONE WHO'S EVER HATED A HIRED MAN OR A REAL ESTATE AGENT WILL SAVOR THIS BOOK.

THE MACKEREL PLAZA AND **REUBEN, REUBEN** BY PETER DEVRIES. DEVRIES DOTTED ON POKING FUN AT THE UPWARDLY MOBILE, ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL PRETENSIONS. IN THE MACKEREL PLAZA, HE TARGETS, WITH CONSIDERABLE SYMPATHY, AN ULTRA-LIBERAL MINISTER CLASHING WITH FOES WHO MIGHT ACTUALLY BELIEVE IN GOD. IN REUBEN, REUBEN, HE GIVES US A BURNED-OUT AND OVERSEXED POET (WHO APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN MODELED ON DYLAN THOMAS). DEVRIES APHORISMS ALONE MAKE HIS BOOKS WORTH READING.

THE LAST BUFFON BY LEONARD JORDAN. HOW CAN YOU NOT LOVE A MAN WHO MAKES HIS LIVING MARRYING WOMEN WHO WANT A QUICK ROUTE TO CITIZENSHIP WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY ASPIRING TO WRITE THE GREAT AMERICAN PORNOGRAPHIC NOVEL? HE SURE WON ME OVER.



● 2008 (3/3)

AND NOW, FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT:

WALDEN BY HENRY DAVID THOREAU. DESPITE MY COLLECTIVIST POLITICS, I FIND THOREAU'S SERMONS ON SELF-RELIANCE IRRESISTIBLE—SOMETIMES EVEN PERSUASIVE.

THE COMPLETE POEMS OF EMILY DICKINSON EDITED BY THOMAS H. JOHNSON. WITH HER JEWELER'S EYE FOR DETAIL AND INSISTENCE THAT EVERY WORD MUST BEAR THE WEIGHT OF MEANING, DICKINSON COMES CLOSER THAN ANY WRITER I KNOW OF MAKING THE EXPERIENCE AND HER PERCEPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE THE SAME THING.

EDWARD MORRIS IS A WRITER FOR THE COUNTRY MUSIC WEBSITE CMT.COM AND A FORMER EDITOR FOR BILLBOARD AND WRITER'S DIGEST MAGAZINES. HIS BOOKS INCLUDE THE ROADS THAT BROUGHT US HOME (CO-AUTHOR), GARTH BROOKS: PLATINUM COWBOY, A KILLING FROTH: ON EDGE AT THE EDGE AND ALABAMA. HIS ARTICLES HAVE APPEARED IN TV GUIDE, MCCALL'S, THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER, ADVERTISING AGE, SALON, MSNBC INTERACTIVE, AMUSEMENT BUSINESS, COUNTRY WEEKLY, THE JOURNAL OF COUNTRY MUSIC, THE MOTHER EARTH NEWS AND ELSEWHERE. MORRIS HAS BEEN A CONTRIBUTOR TO FOREWORD SINCE ITS BEGINNING.

