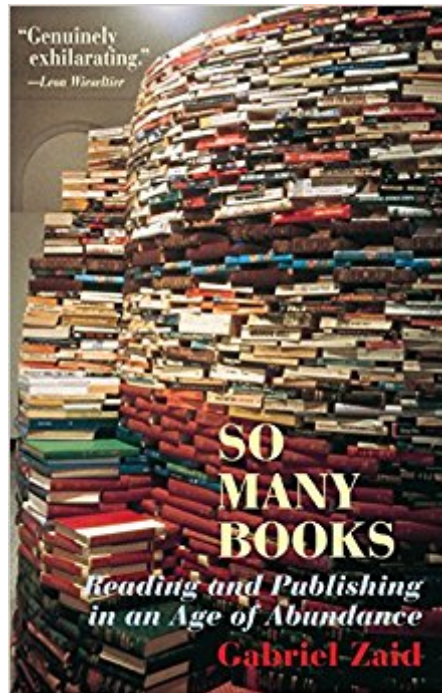




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So Many Books: Reading And Publishing In An Age Of Abundance



Synopsis

"Gabriel Zaid's defense of books is genuinely exhilarating. It is not pious, it is wise; and its wisdom is delivered with extraordinary lucidity and charm. This is how Montaigne would have written about the dizzy and increasingly dolorous age of the Internet. May *So Many Books* fall into so many hands."—Leon Wieseltier "Reading liberates the reader and transports him from his book to a reading of himself and all of life. It leads him to participate in conversations, and in some cases to arrange them"; It could even be said that to publish a book is to insert it into the middle of a conversation."—from *So Many Books* Join the conversation! In *So Many Books*, Gabriel Zaid offers his observations on the literary condition: a highly original analysis of the predicament that readers, authors, publishers, booksellers, librarians, and teachers find themselves in today; when there are simply more books than any of us can contemplate. "With cascades of books pouring down on him from every direction, how can the twenty-first-century reader keep his head above water? Gabriel Zaid answers that question in a variety of surprising ways, many of them witty, all of them provocative."—Anne Fadiman, Author of *Ex-Libris* "A truly original book about books. Destined to be a classic!"—Enrique Krauze, Author of *Mexico: Biography of Power*, Editor of *Letras Libres* "Gabriel Zaid's small gem of a book manages to be both delectable and useful, like chocolate fortified with vitamins. His rare blend of wisdom and savvy practical sense should make essential and heartening reading for anyone who cares about the future of books and the life of the mind."—Lynne Sharon Schwartz, Author of *Ruined by Reading: A Life in Books* "Gabriel Zaid is a marvelously elegant and playful writer; a cosmopolitan critic with sound judgment and a light touch. He is a jewel of Latin American letters, which is no small thing to be. Read him; you'll see."—Paul Berman "'So many books,' a phrase usually muttered with despair, is transformed into an expression of awe and joy by Gabriel Zaid. Arguing that books are the essential part of the great conversation we call culture and civilization, *So Many Books* reminds us that reading (and, by extension, writing and publishing) is a business, a vanity, a vocation, an avocation, a moral and political act, a hedonistic pursuit, all of the aforementioned, none of the aforementioned, and is often a miracle."—Doug Dutton "Zaid traces the preoccupation with reading back through Dr. Johnson, Seneca, and even the Bible ('Of making many books there is no end'). He emerges as a playful celebrant of literary proliferation, noting that there is a new book published every thirty seconds, and optimistically points out that publishers who moan about low sales 'see as a failure what is actually a blessing: The book business, unlike newspapers, films, or television, is viable on a small scale.' Zaid, who claims to own more than ten thousand books, says he has sometimes thought that 'a chastity glove for authors who can't contain

themselves' would be a good idea. Nonetheless, he cheerfully opines that 'the truly cultured are capable of owning thousands of unread books without losing their composure or their desire for more.'";New YorkerGabriel Zaid's poetry, essays, social and cultural criticism, and business writings have been widely published throughout the Spanish-speaking world. He lives in Mexico City with the artist Basia Batorska, her paintings, three cats, and ten thousand books.Natasha Wimmer is an editor and a translator in New York City. Her recent translations include The Savage Detectives and 2666 by Roberto Bolaño and The Way to Paradise by Mario Vargas Llosa.

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Customer Reviews

"The human race publishes a book every thirty seconds," writes Mexican author and consultant Zaid. How can the average reader keep up with even a fraction of the latest new releases, let alone the multitude of classics stretching all the way back to Homer and Plato? The prospect is daunting to even the greatest bibliophile; furthermore, Zaid argues, people seem more interested in writing books than reading them (a recent survey shows 81% of Americans feel they should write a book). Though frustrated by this state of affairs, Zaid takes a philosophical perspective on the state of book publishing today, claiming that the industry doesn't always recognize one of its greatest strengths: its overwhelming diversity. In the publishing industry, a book that appeals to just a few thousand readers stands a good chance of getting published, whereas the commercial film industry and other mass media must function almost exclusively on a mega-budget scale. He celebrates the small

printings that appeal to segmented clienteles, specialized niches, and members of different clubs of enthusiasts because "just a few thousand copies, read by the right people, are enough to change the course of conversation, the boundaries of literature, and our intellectual life." Not a groundbreaking book, but an appealing, meditative collection of thoughts and observations on the book industry and the state of literature in the early 21st century. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

"The human race publishes a book every thirty seconds," observes Mexico City-based poet and essayist Zaid, and therefore "how is a single book among the millions to find its readers?" This is the conundrum upon which Zaid builds his incisive, wry, ultimately celebratory meditation on the chaotic and wasteful, yet exciting and felicitous world of books. Believing that culture is a conversation conducted on many levels around various foci, of which books constitute a vital and crucial number, Zaid reminds readers that books don't have to reach a huge audience to have impact but, rather, must be read by the right readers. Zaid also considers our ambivalence regarding books: we want them to be readily available--that is, produced and sold as commodities--but we also hold them sacred. He then parses the absurdities inherent in the economics of publishing, notes with stinging wit the frustrating fact that more people want to write than to read, and delights in the fecundity and diversity of book ecology. Lively, cosmopolitan, and piquant, Zaid's treatise will engage every serious reader. Donna Seaman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

The Great Conversation began centuries ago when Socrates walked and talked with his students. He saw no need to put his efforts on a scroll. After all, the conversation was a communication of ideas. However, Plato disagreed and gave us those talks in perpetuity. Today, when we discuss great subjects, such as the contents of provocative books, we continue this Great Conversation. "So Many Books" is a marvelously thoughtful, even a challenging continuation. The cover illustration depicts the TBR (to-be-read) list of a typical fan reviewer. Yes? Zaid includes both subjects: that unread stack and the role it plays in matching reader with book. Think. When you go into a bookshop--or even in 's cyberspace--aren't you looking for the perfect book? After Zaid discusses microcosmic you and the perfect book you seek in your constellation of books, he expands and broadens his subject exponentially until macrocosmic proportions: .According to Zaid, eight out of ten Americans think there's a book inside waiting to meet the paper (or cyberspace). He uses mind-bending figures to make one of his major points: There are far too many books for any one person ever to read--ever! When you consider ALL the books ever written or published and how

very few ever find their readers--some never being read at all!--then the question is: Why write? Do you know that eight out of ten Americans think they have a book waiting to be put on paper. Yes, I just repeated myself--to emphasize Zaid's point that there are "so many books." On a grander scale, reading books is part of that conversation. Finding the right books is the biggest problem. An author, Zaid says, sees his work "as the centre of a whole," with each author holding that belief. How then can a reader join the conversation when it seems so scattered? By accumulating "a minimum of 'flight hours' in common." His ultimate point is this: "Learning to read is the integration of units of ever-more complex meaning." I had to chuckle. That sentence reminded me of an ian reviewer who recently made a declaration that he would no longer read a book unless it is worthy of being re-read. Hence, his TBR stack and actually Read-Books promote this development of "ever-more complex meaning." There are so many gems of sentences, even whole paragraphs that make THIS book a must-read one. Since the new school year began almost six weeks ago, I go to bed exhausted and can read just a few pages before konking out. I chuckled over this sentence: "Is anything more certain to make a book completely unintelligible than reading it slowly enough?" His point is that a reader must "grasp a book all at once, in its entirety." After developing his point, he concludes: "Reading is useless: it is a vice, pure pleasure." (Caught me unawares--reading so slowly, you know--until I grasped his whole point. Ha!) This review touches on just a bit of the riches inside "So Many Books." However, it is the constellation of reader and books that forms the foundation. Zaid discusses 's services for readers, noting that books cannot stay on shelves because of the clamor of new ones to replace them. That's where the independent seller, as found on , serves the reader. Personal case in point: I frequently buy books for my school library and so, sell discarded books on . One such book--this is a true story!--was an old travel guide of Washington, D.C. Even though the book--to me--has historical value, I thought to put it for sale just to see. Yes, the man who wrote a series of travel guides for schools back in the '50's and '60's had a son who apparently is collecting his father's books. That I could be part of this son's constellation was a thrill beyond compare. The intermediary--the bookseller of any description (and the reviewer)--makes "the difference between daunting chaos and a diversity that encourages dialogue. Culture is conversation, and the role of the intermediary is to shape that conversation and give new meaning to readers' lives simply by helping them find the books they need to read" (133). This reviewer hopes also to be an intermediary between a future reader of "So Many Books" and the chaos of books lost "out there."

I disagreed with quite a lot of what the author had to say- I feel like much of what he said about books is easily refutable and aside from the point. But this is not the reason that I rated this book a

two. Zaid has over-written this book to where, even as an English Major, at points I found it difficult to read. The author comments that books being a good medium for information because you can capture their meaning in one short stint of reading (this reminded me of Edgar Allen Poe who suggested this to be the virtue of the short story); so I found it a bit ironic that I had to reread passage after passage to understand what he was ultimately trying to say. In the end I was too concerned with navigating his wordy prose to get much from his writing. It was too much effort spent on a work that did me little tangible good.

Though already slightly outdated, I enjoyed this book's persuasive and argumentative standpoint about the publishing industry. It was a quick read that was an easy review of what I've learned thus far about my field.

This book was even worse than paper dreams. The author rambles on and is sarcastic. If you are trying to learn editing, do not pick up this book! It goes nowhere in its own thesis and is trite.

I ordered this book because of my interest in contemporary reading and publishing, its short length, and the very positive reviews. I am surprised to be only the second to offer a negative review. I did not find the content well thought out. In each chapter the author lays his hand on a very general idea and surrounds it with reasonable, yet superfluous literary references and feel-good literary language. I didn't believe that the majority of the content of each chapter could hold much weight for a reader well read in the classics. My reaction was: yes, I've been there; so what? His arguments aren't so much wrong as too vague to be worth considering. If I wanted to disagree with him I would find the counterargument equally boring. I find this book most appropriate for someone who has read only a little literature and is still in love with the idea of it. If you don't have an opinion about literature on the whole, but rather only about particular books and schools of thought, you'll find yourself most often thinking, "What school is Zaid really promoting here," because it's hard to believe he wishes to promote all reading. The line which most made me feel this way was "But somewhere today a student read *The Apology* for the first time and felt free." Well, this short changes Nietzsche. But I suppose Zarathustra will make him feel free, as well (according to Zaid). Great. That said, there are a few nuggets in the chapters that are thought provoking, but these could easily stand alone in an essay, and are not really worth the insult of skimming required to find them. The first counterargument I imagine to what I have said here is that Zaid doesn't intend to make strong arguments or observations about reading and publishing in this age of abundance. Yes, that much

is clear.

If you are the kind of person who clicks on a link to see "So Many Books" you are almost certainly the kind of person who will love this book. It's short, well-translated, and ultimately pretty mind-blowing. It's also very relevant to this broader cultural moment; I think it speaks as much to the internet & social media as it does to books and publishing.

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