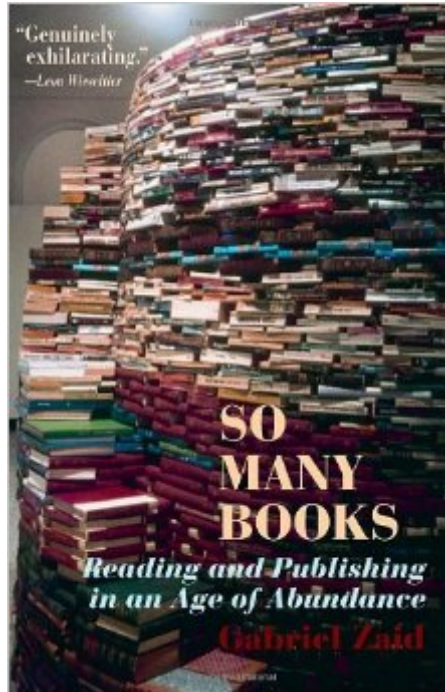


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So Many Books: Reading And Publishing In An Age Of Abundance



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.'"#151;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 WimmerÂ is an editor and a translator in New York City. Her recent translations includeÂ The Savage DetectivesÂ and 2666 by Roberto BolaÃ o andThe Way to ParadiseÂ by Mario Vargas Llosa.

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Customer Reviews

Gabriel Zaid's "So Many Books" is a stimulating and provocative book for anyone interested in book publishing. His brief, inexpensive book can be read in a single sitting, yet its ideas will, I suspect, percolate for a long time afterwards. Books need to address small and specific readerships, and computer digitization and internet communication technologies are fostering that. Thus, a renaissance of reading is now at hand. How we think about books, Zaid argues, needs to be reoriented from emphasis on publishing and best-sellers to emphasis on reading and the conversation that books can stimulate. Books, Zaid argues following Socrates, are a means to something greater: private and public conversation enlivening and sustaining civilization and culture. Books of paper, ink, and glue will endure long into the future, helped, not hindered, by new technology to bypass their current commodification by big corporate entities. (For more about that,

read Jason Epstein's "The Book Business" (2001).) Already, books are relatively cheap to produce (compared, for example, to films). One needs only a few thousand readers to break even. (Think, for example, of the impact of samizdat publications of Soviet dissidents, of Thomas Paine's "Common Sense", and of contemporary zines.) These advantageous economics, making possible publication of niche works, should grow as print on demand technology drives the costs lower. (The primary way this will happen is by reducing the expense and risk assumed by publishers and booksellers in maintaining inventory.) Zaid's approach identifies new concerns.

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 its 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.

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