



Browse: The World in Bookshops

Henry Hitchings (Editor), Various

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Edited and introduced by the writer and critic Henry Hitchings, these fearless, passionate, inquiring essays by award-winning international writers celebrate one of our most essential, but endangered, institutions: the bookshop. From Denmark to Egypt, from the USA to China, Browse brings together some of the world's leading authors to investigate bookshops both in general and in particular - the myriad pleasures, puzzles and possibilities they disclose.

The fifteen essays reflect their authors' own inimitable style - romantic, elegant, bold, argumentative, poetic or whimsical - as they ask probing questions about the significance, the cultural and social (even political) function as well as the physical qualities of the institution, and examine our very personal relationship to it.

Contributors include:

Alaa Al Aswany (Egypt)

Stefano Benni (Italy)

Michael Dirda (USA)

Daniel Kehlmann (Germany)

Andrey Kurkov (Ukraine)

Yiyun Li (China)

Pankaj Mishra (India)

Dorthe Nors (Denmark)

Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor (Kenya)

Elif Shafak (Turkey)

Ian Sansom (UK)

Iain Sinclair (UK)

Ali Smith (UK)

Saša Stanišić (Germany/Bosnia)

Juan Gabriel Vásquez (Colombia)

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From Reader Review Browse: The World in Bookshops for online ebook

Steph says

A wonderful collection of essays from authors around the world telling the stories of their favorite bookshops. The bookshops that shaped them into the book lovers and authors they are today. It was so incredible reading about all these different kinds of bookshops ranging from the 3 stories tall bookshop in Berlin to the little bookshop in New Delhi, the meaning of bookshops - especially in all of these different cultures - and how it changed over the past 40 years, the magic they still possess and how they can transform lives. If you love literature and reading and books and have ever left a bookshop with a book you didn't know you needed, this is a must read for you. I loved it a lot. This book takes you on a journey and maybe the next time you want to buy a book, visit your nearest bookshop instead of ordering you know where ;)

Gail says

I skipped chunks of this collection of anecdotal short stories about bookshops, because, at times, the writers became too self-indulgent.

Bookshops are a subject I enjoy reading about. I love novels that feature readerly protagonists or antiquarian book dealers but this collection was lacking in any real soul.

I was also unfamiliar with most of the authors but it has sparked an interest to read one or two of them.
A "meh" from me.

Fanna says

I was quite excited to read this, given the essays are from diverse writers around the world and all talk about bookshops. However, I soon found myself pulled out from the text for the typical non-fiction influenced writing and evident translation. There were run-on sentences and many of them left me utterly confused. Though I really liked a few bits here and there, especially those that recounted the little notes left in a book (and forgotten about) when it's given to a bookstore and marked as a second-hand—*cute*.

I usually avoid non-fiction as a genre because the narrative, often, sounds too informative and 'telling', *for me*. The same happened in this collection and I once again, have decided to stay away from occurrences-retelling as much as possible.

Having said that, I would still highlight how the essays might be a good read for those who can relate to them. When the essay by Pankaj Mishra (India) came along, I wondered if the things he'd encountered would make more sense to my parents who were grown up in the setting he'd mentioned. And as expected, they did. So there is a possibility that liking this book or not depends largely on who's reading it...and maybe it just wasn't for me. But I definitely prefer books that take me somewhere rather than making sense only if I was already in that place.

Disclaimer: I received a digital copy of this book via Edelweiss+ but that in no way affects

my rating or opinions about this collection.

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Stuart says

Books that capture the magic of both picking up a new book or stumbling upon an amazing new bookshop you never knew existed are probably my favourite kind of book. One aspect of being a reader that unites everyone is what inspired them to learn to read. The places and individuals that encouraged them to fall in love with books and the stories within. *Browse* captures this feeling and substance perfectly.

Each of the contributors to this collection have singled out a bookshop that was significant in both their life and career. *Browse* is a thoughtful, pensive and enticing trip through the world's drastically different bookshop experiences and how they shaped the author's and reader's of today. Each story is filled with wonder, nostalgia and influence. Moments like finding old train tickets in used books, working in bookshops, finding secret book sections and the frustration of only picking one book at a time. Each author manages to bring something new to the subject.

Fortunately it does not get repetitive, with every author having a unique perspective. The most bizarre being Sasa Stanisic who writes about books in a jarring and strange style. Talking as if books were a substance, a drug that can influence your life and change your mind about how the world works. *Browse* is brimming with inspiration, optimism, pessimism, fear and happiness. Every bookshop is hiding wonderful secrets, secrets that cannot be found on book websites. It is up to us to go out, find them, cherish them and pass them on to those we love.

I will always seek out book related books as I think the subject empowers readers, excites us and leads us to place we might not have considered before. *Browse* will suit any reader, I recommend *Browse* to everyone who finds bookshops fascinating, important and significant. Thank you for reading this review, I advise you to pick up this book as soon as you can. I hope you enjoy it and please tell me what you thought.

Eric says

Bookshops are magical places. If this isn't the first article you've read on this blog, you'll see my affinity for books. The love of bookstores is just as great as my love for books. In fact, browsing the shelves of a bookstore is one of my de-stressing strategies. Seeing all the spines lined up is both relaxing and stirs up my curiosity. There is much potential in an unopened book. Whether it's a local or chain store, I love walking among the shelves. But there is a special magic in the small, unique store. When I get the chance, I will visit Left Bank Books, St. Louis's best independent bookstore. When I saw an Advanced Reading Copy of *Browse: The World in Bookshops*, it piqued my curiosity. This collection of essays released by Pushkin

Press features fifteen authors writing about their favorite book store memories. It appeals to the nerd in me.

TL;DR: If you like personal essays and love bookstores, this book is for you. These excellent essays show the diversity of bookstore experiences connected by a common love of books.

This excellent collection, edited by Henry Hitchings, brings together a diverse set of authors from all over the globe. The essays range from a shopping trip before inclement weather to a place of inspiration for children to a meeting place to change the world. Alaa Al Aswany's "If You Wound a Snake..." details a bookstore in Egypt during the uprising against Mubarak. He uses his book signing to show the atmosphere prior to the demonstrations. Yiyun Li's "All the Offers a Happy Ending Is a Fairy Tale" shows us China's problematic treatment of intellectual property. But her pursuit of literature winds its way through Western culture. Pankaj Mishra's "A Bookshop in the Age of Progress" takes us to post-Soviet India, and Dorthe Nors "Intimacy" shows the importance of bookstores across the generations.

Many of the essays are translations for which I was grateful. Before this, I was only familiar with three of the authors. The introduction to new non-US authors is enough to recommend *Browse*. Reading diversely exposes one to the variety that humans are capable of, and yet these essays bridged the cultural gap through the experience of shopping for books. While I'll never get to any of the stores described in here, I feel like I've already been to them.

Stefanie says

I really like books about books and while I enjoyed this one, it was a bit uneven for me. A collection of essays by a variety of authors, they all focus in some way on bookshops. The essay by Ala Al Aswany about the reading he did in a bookshop the night before the Tahir Square protests began in Egypt was fantastic. And the essays by Yiyun Li and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor about the bookshops of their childhoods and what they meant to them were magical. Michael Dirda, who I usually really like, was flat and dull in comparison. But, as the title suggests, the book is definitely good for browsing.

Gill says

'Browse' edited by Henry Hitchings

4.5 stars/ 9 out of 10

I have always enjoyed browsing in bookshops, which immediately interested me in reading this book.

'Browse' is a very nice book!

There is an excellent introduction by the Editor, Henry Hitchings, followed by fifteen sections relating to bookstores and books. Several, but not all, of these sections were written by authors already known to me, such as Ali Smith and Juan Gabriel Vásquez.

I found all of the sections of interest. My favourite section was that entitled 'All That Offers a Happy Ending is a Fairy Tale' by Yiyun Li.

If you enjoy browsing in bookshops, then this book is for you.

Thank you to Pushkin Press and to NetGalley for an ARC.

Amalia Gavea says

One of the most persistent memories in the life of a bibliophile has to do with a bookshop. THE bookshop, actually. It may be that cozy shop, full of children's fiction, or the bookshop where we spent our allowance as teenagers. Or that second-hand temple, perfect for university students. And along with browsing, hunting for old and new treasures, friendships were forged and the first literary discussions shaped us as readers.

In my case, there were two bookshops that make me feel nostalgic at the age of 32. Both are connected to my late grandmother. I grew up in a family that had- and still has- reading as a second religion, but my closest partner in crime was grandma. She would read without getting tired, without omitting a single page even though I could see her eyes growing heavy with sleep. So, she and I had our personal ritual. At the beginning of every month, we would visit two bookshops in our neighbourhood. The first was an ordinary bookshop, its owner one of my mum's good friends, and from here we would buy all the Classics and books that were always slightly (or significantly) above my age. I was reading books suitable for adolescents when I was 8 or nine years old. The, we would visit a second shop that sold toys and children's books. Its owner was Italian, like my grandma. They would talk for hours in their mother tongue, while I used to sneak around, rummaging the shelves, marvelling at the pictures. I usually left that shop with my arms full of books, 5-6 that grandma had bought me and 2-3 more that had been given to me as a gift by the nice lady. Every month was like Christmas back then.

Now, how much more significant some bookshops can be when you eventually become a writer? The authors of this beautiful collection write about their memories connected to these "temples" and the way their writing identity was influenced by them. Quirky owners, dimly-lit second-hand bookshops, industrial, cleancut, immaculately organized shelves. We travel from Scotland to Kenya, from Denmark to China, from Colombia to India, to England, Egypt, Ukraine and Italy, every corner of the world, every culture, every way of thinking and talking about books acquires a voice.

The essays are superbly organized, directly speaking to the reader like a memoir of the common desire to own every book available and express the deepest love for this little item that helps mankind not to fall into eternal darkness. Every text has something to offer and communicate." Leitner and I" by Saša Stanišić is what I consider the highlight of the collection. It shows how booklovers are serious addicts through and through, by composing a striking text full of similes and metaphors between junkies and unrepentant book lovers.

The least favourite was "Intimacy" by Dorthe Nors. In fact, I found it rude and pretentious. A poorly-written blend of childhood memories and an ordinary bookshop owner, while name-dropping Kristin Lavransdatter in the mix for effect's sake. The author tries to justify her unethical behaviour in a Copenhagen bookshop and blames the owner for throwing her out. Of course, she would throw her out. I would. I don't think Nors had the right to re-arrange the shelves and make the copy of her book stand out. Perhaps, she has no idea of the toil that is to organize a shelf. Hell, when it is so difficult to do it in our bookcases, how much harder will it be in the case of whole store? It was downright unprofessional, self-indulgent and her text had nothing to offer apart from informing us that she had a Degree in Literature without ever reading Sigrid Undset's masterpiece. It was cringeworthy.

The two bookshops of my childhood don't exist anymore. They passed away upon the altar of our current times. It doesn't matter, though. It doesn't matter if your favourite bookshop belongs to a bookstore chain with classy, gloriously beautiful and shiny shelves, with grey carpets from wall to wall or a cozy second-hand shop where books are in piles reaching the ceiling or carelessly forming a bookish wall on the steps of a wooden staircase. Spaces are made by people. Sometimes, the person who would take you to the shop and let you indulge in your passion from an early age is the one who creates the memories, and for this, my review of this moving, tender book is dedicated to grandma.

Many thanks to Pushkin Press and Edelweiss for providing me with a free copy in exchange for an honest review.

Craig Rowland says

Browse: The World in Bookshops, edited by Henry Hitchings, is a collection of fifteen short reminiscences about the personal significance bookshops had on a diverse assortment of international authors. Half of the stories Hitchings included were not originally written in English, so he employed the work of at least seven translators. My favourite retail space is a bookstore, and specifically a second-hand bookstore. In the introduction Hitchings revealed the hidden secret of second-hand books and the function of their new resting place:

"Discarded books are 'repositories of the lives they've been so close to', and a second-hand bookshop is a museum of special moments in those lives."

I have read many books about Finland and languages which I no longer intend to keep. If I slipped them into my library's ongoing book sale I wonder what the browsing public might think. There's a nerdy Fennophile linguist in our midst!

Juan Gabriel Vásquez wrote about the charm of bookstores:

"A good bookshop is a place we go into looking for a book and come out of with one we didn't know existed. That's how the literary conversation gets widened and that's how we push the frontiers of our experience, rebelling against its limits. This is something else online commerce deprives us of: on a website we cannot discover anything, we can't bump into the unexpected book, because an algorithm predicts what we're looking for and leads us--yes, mathematically--only to places we already know."

and:

"The best bookshops are places where the principle of serendipity, which in broad strokes consists of finding the book you need when you don't yet know you need it, presents itself in all its splendour. A reader's life is, among other things, this tissue of opportune coincidences."

I would go one degree further and state, to me personally at least, that Vásquez's remarks are more poignant when referring specifically to second-hand bookstores. Retail establishments that sell new imprints are to some extent predictable. If you want a new book, you will find it there. A second-hand store offers no guarantees what you'll find. The sense of discovery is all the more exciting when you find titles you never thought existed. Such were my experiences shopping at Schoenhof's, a foreign languages bookstore in

Cambridge, Massachusetts. While the majority of the stock was in fact new, some of the language-learning materials specifically were old enough to be out of print. When their bricks-and-mortar store was still in existence I would spend hours there literally browsing the languages from A to Z. My blog posts are full of discoveries of spontaneous joys. The store operates only on-line now. My favourite retail establishment remains Helsinki's Akateeminen Kirjakauppa, the largest bookstore in Nordic Europe.

Michael Dirda wrote:

"As a boy, I could lose myself utterly in a book; now I seem to lose myself only in used bookstores. Alas, neither sweet surrender nor wide-eyed wonder, except fleetingly, is advisable for a professional reviewer. Moreover, I'm one who, even on holiday, can't start an Agatha Christie paperback without a pencil in his hand. My mind tends to interrogate any text, on the alert for clues, telling details, key passages, the secret engines of the story. As a result, while reading remains a pleasure, it's become a guarded pleasure, tinged with suspicion. Quite reliably, however, my heart still leaps with childlike joy at the sight of row after row of old books on shelves."

Dirda gets two of my passions down in one paragraph: browsing in used bookstores and always reading in a reviewer's mindset. I will post a review of every book I read, even for books long out of print.

Browse was a fast weekend read which will take you back to your fondest bookstore memories.

Krist?ne says

Vis?das gr?matu gr?matas bija las?tas, bet š? citu vid? izce?as ar to, ka savas atmi?as un st?stus par sap?ainiem gr?matu veikalām sarakst?juši daudzi slaveni vispasaules rakstnieki.

Lulufrances says

How fitting and wonderful that I stumbled over this perfect little book while browsing late at night in Shakespeare and Company, Paris.

(Ordering this book online is a no go.)

Seeing that this had something by Ali Smith in it just made me all the more sure of having to own this. Definitely worth it.

There's just something about reading about books and bookshops.

I feel like I need to spend the next week immersed in all the independent bookshops I can find around me - unfortunately less and less as the years go by, and I really appeal to myself and all of you reading this: please try and buy more in store than online.

How sad would it be if we did not have the opportunity and wonder of taking our time walking down actual aisles and aisles of crammed bookshelves and paper smells and brandnew spines.

Speaking of: A well-known bookshop in my hometown will shut in a few weeks after being in business for 214 years and entertaining many famed German authors in their time (Herman Hesse for example), now *that* is heartbreaking.

So read this, save yourself the heartbreak and go and spend some money in your next door bookshops PLEASE.

Danielle Stanton says

An attractive collection of essays about bookshops, their significance to authors, and their place in the world. The book contains new writing from a selection of international authors including Yiyun Li, Andrei Kurkov, Ali Smith, and Alaa Al-Aswany. It's a very dippable book about why bookshops are worth celebrating and what makes them such special places.

Jackie Law says

Browse: Love Letters to Bookshops Around the World, is a collection of fifteen essays by various writers about what bookshops have meant to them throughout the course of their lives. Opening with an introduction by the book's editor, Henry Hitchings, each contributor shares their experiences from a diverse selection of outlets that have, in some way, helped nurture and shape their development. The contributions are eclectic in style, preferences and setting. Not all the bookshops mentioned still exist but are fondly remembered.

Secondhand retailers feature, with Ali Smith writing of the treasures to be discovered between pages, not just the words. In a charity shop where she volunteered she has found letters, photographs and poignant inscriptions. A book's value is not just what someone else will pay for it.

Michael Dirda also writes of a secondhand bookshop he regularly visits although he seeks titles as investments – rare bindings and first editions – to add to his vast collection. His enjoyment of reading has been affected by his job as a reviewer.

“while reading remains a pleasure it’s become a guarded pleasure, tinged with suspicion.”

Ian Sansom writes of working in the old Foyles on Charing Cross Road where he would try to avoid customers. His colleagues would help themselves to stock – this is not the usual dreamy depiction of avuncular booksellers. Despite the somewhat downbeat experience he laments the shiny edifice the shop has since become.

Daniel Kehlmann, on the other hand, prefers a vast, modern and impersonal bookshop that is well organised – he likes to be left in peace to browse. His essay is written in the form of a conversation between two writers and offers many witty observations. On the importance of bookshops in providing authors with an income his character says:

“I live off giving readings and talks. Also teaching sometimes. I teach people who want to write books how to write books that sell so well that you can live off them. I do that because my books don’t sell so well that I can live off them.”

Stefano Benni opens his essay with a poem that concludes:

“Books speak even when they are closed
Lucky the man who can hear
their persistent murmur”

He writes of a bookseller who, if he distrusted a customer's motives, would refuse to sell to them. It is in these smaller bookshops that the writers get to know the proprietors and recall conversations that led them to books they would not otherwise have discovered. Benni recalls that the bookseller was also a writer and offered him the following advice:

“There comes a time when your work is over and it starts belonging to other people.”

Iain Sinclair writes of the closing of a beloved bookshop, and also of booksellers becoming writers.

“You would think that booksellers would be the last to write bks, surrounded as they are by bestsellers that are now forgotten”

Not all the tales told are positive. Dorthe Nors's essay recounts a painful bookshop experience when a scathing proprietor ordered her to leave for daring to move her latest publication face out on the shelf.

My favourite essay was by Saša Stanišić in which he writes of his need to find a dealer for his regular supply, one he can trust to offer a quality fix. The depiction of books as drugs is cleverly done, humorous and apt.

The essays are from all over the world and reflect the varied tastes of the authors. Whether they prefer: big shops or small, old books or new, cluttered or well organised outlets, antiquarian or stocking their own latest works; there is a nostalgia for the past that is understandable given the memories evoked. In our current times this did leave me a tad wary – the past is not always rose coloured.

What is clear though is how important bookshops are in widening the perspectives of aspiring writers.

“We have the potential to become greater than the role we've been expected to play.”

Many of the recollections of second hand bookshops revolve around treasures found amongst the stacks before the internet offered instant valuations for sellers to compare. I did feel rather sorry for the business owners who lost out. Online sellers are, however, blamed for the decline in the number of bookshops and this is understandably lamented.

As someone who derives pleasure from visiting bookshops but who buys books to read rather than with an eye on resale value, not all the essays resonated. Nevertheless they offer a fascinating window into the eclectic nature of bookshops worldwide, and the preferences of both customers and proprietors.

On writers and the evolving business of book selling, this is an affable and entertaining read.

“A book is not just a product; a book is an experience”

Melissa says

A collection of essays by writers musing on their love of bookshops, usually a bookshop in particular. Some are funny, some sweet, some moving, and a few are a bit eye-roll inducing. There's a lot of Dead Tree Books Rah Rah Bewail Changing Culture Popular Literature is The Devil. I'm a little generous with this book because almost every writer celebrated something I love: the joy of an interrupted bookstore browse. I still

enjoy that activity greatly, no matter my usual store or a new one.

Gordon Gravley says

This wonderful collection of essays about books and bookshops is the single best argument against Amazon's war on brick-n-mortar bookstores. I can't imagine anyone looking back with fondness and sentiment about time spent with their cold, soulless Kindle.
