



A Passion for Books: A Book Lover's Treasury of Stories, Essays, Humor, Love and Lists on Collecting, Reading, Borrowing, Lending, Caring for, and Appreciating Books

Harold Rabinowitz (Editor) , Rob Kaplan

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"When I have a little money, I buy books. And if any is left, I buy food and clothing." — --Desiderius Erasmus — Those who share Erasmus's love of those curious bundles of paper bound together between hard or soft covers know exactly how he felt. These are the people who can spend hours browsing through a bookstore, completely oblivious not only to the passage of time but to everything else around them, the people for whom buying books is a necessity, not a luxury. *A Passion for Books* is a celebration of that love, a collection of sixty classic and contemporary essays, stories, lists, poems, quotations, and cartoons on the joys of reading, appreciating, and collecting books.

This enriching collection leads off with science-fiction great Ray Bradbury's Foreword, in which he remembers his penniless days pecking out *Fahrenheit 451* on a rented typewriter, conjuring up a society so frightened of art that it burns its books. This struggle--financial and creative--led to his lifelong love of all books, which he hopes will cosset him in his grave, "Shakespeare as a pillow, Pope at one elbow, Yeats at the other, and Shaw to warm my toes. Good company for far-travelling."

Booklovers will also find here a selection of writings by a myriad of fellow sufferers from bibliomania. Among these are such contemporary authors as Philip Roth, John Updike, Umberto Eco, Robertson Davies, Nicholas Basbanes, and Anna Quindlen; earlier twentieth-century authors Christopher Morley, A. Edward Newton, Holbrook Jackson, A.S.W. Rosenbach, William Dana Orcutt, Robert Benchley, and William Targ; and classic authors such as Michel de Montaigne, Gustave Flaubert, Petrarch, and Anatole France.

Here also are entertaining and humorous lists such as the "Ten Best-Selling Books Rejected by Publishers Twenty Times or More," the great books included in Clifton Fadiman and John Major's *New Lifetime Reading Plan*, Jonathan Yardley's "Ten Books That Shaped the American Character," "Ten Memorable Books That Never Existed," "Norman Mailer's Ten Favorite American Novels," and Anna Quindlen's "Ten Big Thick Wonderful Books That Could Take You a Whole Summer to Read (but Aren't Beach Books)."

Rounding out the anthology are selections on bookstores, book clubs, and book care, plus book cartoons, and a specially prepared "Bibliobibliography" of books about books.

Whether you consider yourself a bibliomaniac or just someone who likes to read, *A Passion for Books* will provide you with a lifetime's worth of entertaining, informative, and pleasurable reading on your favorite subject--the love of books.

A Sampling of the Literary Treasures in A Passion for Books

Umberto Eco's "How to Justify a Private Library," dealing with the question everyone with a sizable library is inevitably asked: "Have you read all these books?"

Anatole Broyard's "Lending Books," in which he notes, "I feel about lending a book the way most fathers feel about their daughters living with a man out of wedlock."

Gustave Flaubert's *Bibliomania*, the classic tale of a book collector so obsessed with owning a book that he is willing to kill to possess it.

A selection from Nicholas Basbanes's *A Gentle Madness*, on the innovative arrangements Samuel Pepys made to guarantee that his library would survive "intact" after his demise.

Robert Benchley's "Why Does Nobody Collect Me"--in which he wonders why first editions of books by his friend Ernest Hemingway are valuable while his are not, deadpanning "I am older than Hemingway and have written more books than he has."

George Hamlin Fitch's extraordinarily touching "Comfort Found in Good Old Books," on the solace he found in books after the death of his son.

A selection from Anna Quindlen's *How Reading Changed My Life*, in which she shares her optimistic view on the role of reading and the future of books in the computer age.

Robertson Davies's "Book Collecting," on the difference between those who collect rare books because they're valuable and those who collect them because they love books, ultimately making it clear which is "the collector who really matters."

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From Reader Review A Passion for Books: A Book Lover's Treasury of Stories, Essays, Humor, Love and Lists on Collecting, Reading, Borrowing, Lending, Caring for, and Appreciating Books for online ebook

~Geektastic~ says

Like many collections of essays from various sources, some pieces were stronger than others. This was, however a very enjoyable and, indeed, passionate exploration of books with contributions from a variety of people, of many times and places.

Perhaps what has stuck with me the most, due to the current climate of the publishing and printing industries, was an excerpt from a longer piece by Anna Quindlen, "How Reading Changed My Life," that examines the future of the book in digital age (in the late 1990s). While it's interesting to see that the argument preoccupying so many readers today was already stewing nearly 15 years ago, the piece was tinged with a touch of sadness and bitter humor for me personally; her outlook is positive but is not holding up quite so well in the present day.

Another piece I really enjoyed was Umberto Eco's examination of the large personal library, something he most definitely possesses. It's suggested reading for anyone who has ever had a non-bibliophile friend survey your overstuffed shelves and ask "Have you read all of these books?" Really, what good is a library where you've read everything? I agree with my pal Umberto: not much good at all.

For those of us who turn to books not only for entertainment or edification, but for solace and understanding, there is the essay by George Hamlin Fitch. After the death of his beloved son, only the comfort of books could keep him going, and I feel that is the ultimate testament to the power of the written word.

A Passion for Books is a well-balanced compilation of insight, humor and wit and it ranks among my favorite books about my favorite thing: books.

KimberlyRose says

I was rocketship-revving excited for this book. The rocketship backfired and fell over. Ka-boom. Thud.

There were four problems with this book which overshadowed the rare-gem-thoughts in several essays.

1. It was more about the love of collecting books, not the love of reading books, more about the power collecting books can have than the power reading books can have.
2. The limiting belief that "high" art is the only sort of art worth perusing, the only sort that has value, can affect a person profoundly? It was everywhere. Annoyed the fuck out of me, it did. Low art, high art, it's all art, it's all worthy and has the potential to punch you in the soul throat. If I didn't ask you specifically cuz I value your input, don't give me your subjective list of 100 best books for everyone in the world, you arrogant

sob, I ain't you.

3. Dated. My god was it dated. Most POVs were middleclass American, or upper middleclass American, and male. (And, perhaps understandable because of the selection committee, an inordinate amount of Jewish POV essays?) Also, ebooks *can* be part of a beloved personal library. Ebooks *can* affect the emotions. (But we've come a long way in quality and appreciation of the new book format--ebooks--since 1999.)

4. The little intro blurbs before most of the essays were completely off-putting. It don't impress me much to hear about the author's brilliance, his awards, his accolades, his accomplishments before I read anything he wrote; all it does is alienate me, and sets a tone of "eww, unapproachable, unreal, unlikeable."

Love reading, be it romance or comics, classic literature or raunchy poems? Wanna read about the power of *reading*? Try *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction* by Alan Jacobs. Please give me a rec if you have one too!

Vivek Tejuja says

Books about books and more books about books. That is almost four times that I have used books in a sentence and it only feels less. The joy of reading yet another book about books, collectors, book lovers, book stores and more only feels more exhilarating as an experience. As though, nothing compares to it or everything is pale in comparison. There are so many stories booklovers share – from where they bought a particular book to what they loved or did not love at all. It is almost an ocean ready to unravel its mysteries and what lies within. The treasury of books, a different world which readers inhabit and do not ever want to come out of.

“A Passion for Books” is a treat for book lovers. It is a compilation of essays of various authors, edited by Harold Rabinowitz and Rob Kaplan. The editing has been done to the tee with the right amount of precision needed for a book like this. The book can be read from anywhere and that to me is definitely one of the plus points of this book. Right from a second-hand bookshop experience, to the top 100 books of the century to Pillow books and what makes them that, everything is here.

One cannot forget the contributors – from John Updike to Umberto Eco to Milton to Anna Quindlen – all of these and more talk of their book passions and why books are so important to them. More so, the introduction is by Ray Bradbury, which is a bonus in so many ways. I can go back to rereading this book anytime. The beauty, like I said, lies in starting from any page and perhaps only reading an essay or two and yet it feels so fulfilling. Full marks to the editors for compiling this wondrous book of book love and essays on reading. Also, don't miss out on the book quotes at the end of every chapter. They also add to the charm.

Melissa says

Every single book lover needs to read this. No, I'm serious, all of you! If you love collecting books, reading books, wandering through bookstores, making lists of books you still have to read, etc. this collection will be a delight. I can't think of a bibliophile who wouldn't enjoy this.

It opens with an introduction from Ray Bradbury and just gets better from there. There are bits from Gustave Flaubert, Umberto Eco, Anna Quindlen, John Updike and dozens of others. Obviously every single essay or list isn't perfect, but the majority of them are wonderful. The editors blended essays, lists of books, book themed cartoons and even a short story or two in the perfect order. There are a few slow pieces (I'm looking at you "Bible through the Ages"), but most are well-paced and quick to read.

There are so many clever book lovers out there and this collection highlights some of their best pieces. It's a great book to set on your nightstand or somewhere where it's easy to grab. If you only have a few minutes to read, you'll find pieces to fill those moments, but then you can set it down easily.

"Dull books soothe only dull brains – a moderately healthy mind will be irritated rather than rested by a dull book."

"But the vital thing is that you have your own favorites – books that are read and genuine, each one brimful of the inspiration of a great soul. Keep these books on a shelf convenient for use, and read them again and again until you have saturated your mind with their wisdom and their beauty."

"It could be said that they are still people who consider a bookshelf as a mere storage place for already read books and do not think of the library as a working tool."

Simon says

A celebration of the reading obsession that likeminded readers will continuously nod and smile to, knowingly browsing through the stories and essays, finding highlights and ideas here and there.

The only problem for me is that there are too many texts on collecting books, usually obsessively, rather than reading or appreciating them for content. And not all of the stories are equally interesting, but for book lovers, the fitting title hardly disappoints.

This was funny to read on an e-reader, as many times over, the physical qualities, the smell, the weight and the feeling of a real book are praised. I share these feelings, but for me, the content is more important. E-readers have a lot of benefits like digital bookmarks and notes or the sheer amount of books you can store on them. So i rather appreciate this as nostalgia with an age requirement.

There's this quote that i can't find a reference for anymore that neatly sums it up:

Books, however precious, are meant to be read.

Julie says

What a delightful little anthology that every devoted reader and collector should own. This book was my constant coffee-table companion for several weeks. I enjoyed sitting on the couch and reading an essay or story or list here and there. I really felt I could relate to the writers and their passion for books. My favorite essay was Rob Kaplan's "The Ritual," which describes his methodic routine of purchasing and cataloguing his books. I could relate to his meticulous practices, as I have my own specific methods upon attaining a book. Most enjoyable were the helpful lists, like "Ten Best Selling Books Rejected by Publishers Twenty or More Times," and "100 Great Novels in the English Language." These prompted me to get out my

highlighter and evaluate what was I had read or what was in my library. This is the perfect book for all bibliophiles who, like me, can relate to Umberto Eco's statement that a library is a work in progress.

Sandra says

I found this in my recommendations box here on Goodreads after I added a similar book. The cover was actually what initially drew me in, and after reading the summary of the book, I immediately bought it, already knowing that I would love it. It was a pleasure reading this book.

I did not read every single essay all the way through, as some of them did not interest me very much, but I read most of them and they were really good. And there is a great foreword/introduction by Ray Bradbury. I had great fun looking through the lists spread throughout the book - I love lists.

Anyway, I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in books about books, and especially if you like collecting valuable books, as there much of the content is about that.

C-shaw says

What can I say? A passionate book about my greatest passion. (Sorry, honey!)

This was disappointing, with some good bookish quotations, but mostly dull essays about collecting esoteric books and authors I've never heard of and/or aren't interested in reading.

Heather Fineisen says

This would be a great book to dip into although I read it straight through. Any bibliophile will savor the excerpts and essays from various names in the book business. Features include the history of book printing, collecting, selling, editing and caring for Books. Definitely one to have in your library with a complete bibliography of more.

Kathy McC says

I enjoy books about authors and books, but this book was more about book collecting. I do not consider myself a collector of books because I am not concerned about a book's monetary value. Books are not an investment to me, they are a part of my life that I invest in. Too many of the chapters in this book were about how to collect books for profit, not for pleasure. Some of those essays were worthwhile, but only because they provided information about novels that have made an impact.

Some of the essays I had read before. Some of the "Memorable Books" lists were also repeats from other books. I did enjoy many of the essays, and it is wonderful to read praises for books. I also liked perusing the lists that I had not seen before. I am always thrilled when I have actually read books on these lists. Of course, I am also saddened by the number of books that I have not read.

e first step, of course, is walking into a bookstore. There's an expectation of discovery, a sense of journeying into the unknown, that always excites me."

"But the vital thing is that you have your own favorites--books that are real and genuine, each one brimful of the inspiration of a great soul. Keep these books on a shelf convenient for use, and read them again and again. So may you be armed against the worse blows that fate can deal you in this world."

"The fact that a book you buy may rise in value is fine, but it should be secondary to the fact that you have bought it because you want to read it and have it on your own shelves."

Andrew says

passages i especially liked:

intro by ray bradbury

how to justify a private library by umberto eco

how to organize a public library by umberto eco

new lifetime reading plan

bibliomania by gustave flaubert

bibliomania by roger rosenblatt

how reading changed my life by anna quindlin (only because of this quote: "the fountainhead...with all the tiresome objectivist polemical speeches set in a different font for easy skipping-over (or even the outright deletions that ayn rand's editor should have taken care of).)

why does nobody collect me? by robert benchley

the collection starts out with the ideas of loaning and borrowing a book, and how books have affected various editors' and writers' lives, includes some good top book lists, but ends in tedious explanations of how to collect books and have a valuable collection. looking for first editions and whatnot. some of the stuff about the printing process and the high quality book stores of london and new york were pretty cool to read about tho

Jen says

As a confirmed bibliophile, I assume I will automatically love any book about books and loving them. This proved to be true in this case. Devouring it in two days, it was absorbing enough that I completely forgot about a poetry reading earlier this evening that I had intended to go to...but that's a side note.

I anticipated that it would be a delicious read that would inspire me to make a mad dash down to my favorite independent bookstore (A Few Books More, in Billings, Montana, in case you're in the neighborhood and want to check it out - I highly recommend it!). Which it did.

It's a mix of profound, serious, and humorous essays revolving around the passion for books. There are various lists of types of books ("Fifteen Books We Would Memorize if We Were the "Living Books"

Characters in Ray Bradbury's Novel *Fahrenheit 451*"; "Books That Shaped the American Character"; "Books That Changed America"; "The New Lifetime Reading Plan"); cartoons - from the *New Yorker*, I'm guessing, although not sure; and various pithy quotations that I managed to restrain myself from immediately posting on Facebook.

My favorite essays were "How to Justify a Private Library" by Umberto Eco; "How Reading Changed My Life" by Anna Quindlen, which articulates an optimistic take on the future of the book in the digital age far better than I could ever manage (basic summary: computers are portable, yes - but real books are companionable) - somewhat dated, as it was published in 1999 before the era of the Kindle and Nook really got started, but ridiculously relevant just the same; Robert Benchley's "Why Does Nobody Collect Me?" in which he wonders why his buddy Hemingway's novels are more valuable than his own, because as he notes, "I am older than Hemingway and have written more books than he has"; and "The Ritual" by Rob Kaplan, about the process he goes through upon acquiring any new book.

Some sections were a bit dry for me so I admit I skimmed and/or didn't finish some selections, "The Bible Through the Ages" being the most notable. However, that's just me; you might love that one and hate all my favorites! In which case, feel free to leave a comment and we shall discuss.

A couple quibbles: there were sporadic instances of typographical and grammatical errors that got on my nerves, none worse than finding the name of Homer (yes, he of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*) misspelled as HOWER. You would think the editors could have at least added a "[sic]" if that error was in the selection as originally published. But really, there's no excuse for that.

Also, in an otherwise informative and enjoyable essay called "On Reading and Collecting" by Herbert Faulkner West, originally published in 1947, which included some genuinely educational tidbits on things to keep in mind as you approach making serious book purchase for your collection, at auction or via whatever other means, I found this little gem: "Another fairly good rule to follow is never to buy just because, for the moment, the author brings fancy prices. Popularity is not usually permanent. This is especially true of modern writers such as William Faulkner...John Steinbeck...G.B. Shaw...and others." Insert double-take here. What makes me chuckle, too, in light of this ERRONEOUS comment, is Mr. West's middle name.

Despite those few quibbles, and the fact that I didn't fall head-over-heels in love with every single selection included, I really, REALLY, enjoyed this book and plan on referring to it again in the future. In addition to the philosophical aspects that are discussed, it also includes very practical guidance on acquiring and caring for your personal library. If you love books - which, let's face it, if you're on Goodreads already it's a pretty sure bet that you do - get out there and buy a copy of this book post haste!

First edition, of course.

Elizabeth A says

A book for bookophiles. A collection of essays, stories, lists, and, well, what the subtitle says. There are pieces I loved, and ones I did not. I enjoyed the romp through the mania of book collectors - the idea of buying two of each book, one to read and one to lend. And waiting for someone to die, so their collection is available on the market, were two that tickled my funny bone. I was disappointed that women collectors and readers were not well represented. This macho point of view was expressed in one essay: men read literature while women read novels. OK, so the piece was a reflection of its times, but still would have liked to see a

more balanced view. Overall an interesting read with lots to think about. Is collecting more important than reading? When does a collector become a hoarder and need help?

Sherry Elmer says

FUN! FUN! FUN!

What a great book for book lovers. I read a lot of passages out loud to my 11 year old and we laughed out loud. If you need a break from serious reading, pick up a copy of *A Passion For Books* and read a chapter now and then.

Educational, funny, informative.

Yaaresse says

Read about 12% and gave the TOC a good going-over. This appears to be mostly about possessing than enjoying. It will appeal to collectors who are more about the hunt, acquisition, and bragging rights of value. As someone who is far more interested in the reading than the owning--which is why I consider our public library "my" library--the angle of this book didn't appeal to me.
