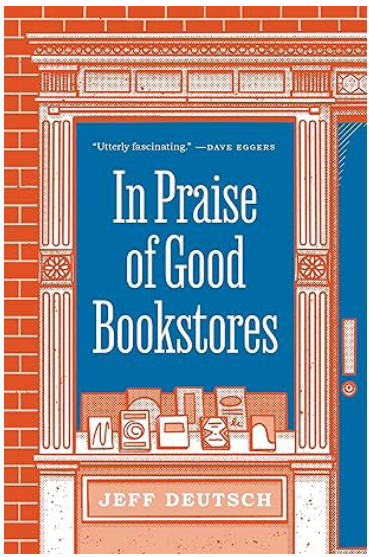
Book Review: *In Praise of Good Bookstores* by Jeff Deutsch

Reviewed by Brianna Lantz



In *In Praise of Good Bookstores*, readers find themselves learning about the intricacies of bookstores, both as a customer and as a bookseller. Jeff Deutsch argues that good bookstores are important places of cultural infrastructure and community building and has long-time readers reevaluating how they see and experience bookstores, bringing up a variety of questions about their own personal book shopping habits.

Are they the type to go in with no plan, prepared to spend hours moving slowly through the aisles, picking up every title that piques their interest? Or do they go in with a mission, searching for a specific book? Do they engage in conversation with anyone, be it other customers or booksellers, or do they keep to themselves, relishing the solitude in browsing? There is no correct answer to any of these questions, of course, but it is fascinating to recognize how many different kinds of shoppers there may be, and how each contributes to the experience overall.

> “We enter a bookstore for many reasons, in many moods. We enter a bookstore settled, but the ideas we encounter unsettle us. The company, however, is comforting and the connection provides a pleasant stirring.” – Jeff Deutsch

Deutsch himself is a lifelong bookseller, and it’s easy to see where the passion for his career comes from. Using the experience and knowledge gained from working as the director of Seminary Co-op Bookstores in Chicago, he celebrates and acknowledges what makes a good bookstore, even with the differences and variety between retailers. He recognizes that opening a bookstore isn’t always a financially based decision, and is often not the smartest thing one could do with their money, but those who do it, do it because they want to curate a space for readers and book lovers. There is often no monetary incentive, and in its place is simply a love for community. And while this might seem evident to almost anyone who has interacted with a bookstore in some capacity, it is increasingly important for people to curate spaces for community during a time when everything seems to be moving online. With in-person bookstores, it’s important to have a place for students to study, or grab a title last minute that’s required for a class. It’s important to provide spaces for people who are searching for connection, those who thrive on face-to-face conversations. To some extent, the internet is a useful tool when connecting long-distance friends, or hosting online book groups, but in the end, it doesn’t really fill the hole that in-person shopping does.

Regarding ethics in publishing, this celebration and conversation of bookstores and their physical inventories is incredibly important during a time when there are more options for book purchasing, specifically online. While companies such as Amazon offer books at a cheaper price with quick shipping, there is no “experience” while book shopping online. There’s no conversation with a bookseller, no wandering through the aisles, no flipping through potential buys. Furthermore, if one was to buy all of their novels from a website, there wouldn’t be as specific of a curation as there may be in person. Algorithms will recommend what’s popular within the genre you’re reading, or

what authors are similar, but oftentimes it's a lot of the same, and makes it more difficult to discover smaller authors or less popular titles – it is often more difficult to discover specific niches in an electronic space. Online book buying, especially from retailers that are not small businesses or are not book focused, does not provide the sense of community and connection often associated with independent bookstores.

I would recommend *In Praise of Good Bookstores* to anyone who wants to know more about the passion that goes into their favorite small businesses and independent bookstores, as well as those who are interested in the relationship between themselves, booksellers, and the titles they read and love.