

Foreword

All humans die, but some books live forever. Every time a book is read, it is transformed into a new creature, understood in a new way, inspiring unexpected reactions. Jordi Nadal's book is by a very rare kind of reader: a publisher. He belongs to that tiny and mysterious group of people who decide which author's scribbles see the light of day. I had the good fortune of having three of my books translated into Spanish by his firm, Plataforma Editorial. It was an extraordinarily wonderful experience.

It showed me how one person's profoundest feelings about what is worthwhile in life can be expressed in a business that knows how to triumph over the merciless realities of earning one's daily bread. I have admired and been moved by his enthusiasm for noble causes, his numerous acts of generosity, his capacity for friendship, his dedication to truth and honesty, and his seemingly inexhaustible energy.

This book gives only a hint of his eclectic, multilingual, international knowledge and tastes. It is unusual in that it reveals how each book he has read has changed and illuminated his own life and ignited a passionate excitement. I am surprised by what he has chosen to emphasise in many of the items on his list of favourite readings. I interpret this as illustrating the impossibility of predicting what effect an author will have on readers, who very often find ideas in a book which are quite different from what the author intended. It is not only authors who give birth to ideas. Every new book one reads, or at least those books that

BOOK THERAPY

have ideas inside them, may lead to the unexpected birth of an unexpected new thought, a new interest, a new vision of what life is about.

So, book therapy must be distinguished from all other kinds of therapy. It does not diagnose, and it cannot promise a cure. Out of the two million books published each year in the world, many have no other ambition than to put the reader to sleep, or to amuse, or to instruct, or to help pass the time which would otherwise be devoted to fighting against boredom. For me, book therapy means the experience of meeting a stranger. A book is an opportunity to have a conversation with a stranger, a silent conversation which may sometimes continue for years. And though some authors who write many books may sometimes be repeating themselves, others may be evolving, expanding their horizons and discovering new hopes, so that each new book may have been written by a slightly different person. *Book Therapy* is an adventure into the unknown.

THEODORE ZELDIN,
Oxford, March 2021.