

How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read Quotes



How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read by Pierre Bayard

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“The books we love offer a sketch of a whole universe that we secretly inhabit, and in which we desire the other person to assume a role.

Like

One of the conditions of happy romantic compatibility is, if not to have read the same books, to have read at least some books in common with the other person—which means, moreover, to have non-read the same books. From the beginning of the relationship, then, it is crucial to show that we can match the expectations of our beloved by making him or her sense the proximity of our inner libraries.”

— **Pierre Bayard, How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read**

tags: [books](#), [compatibility](#), [imagination](#), [inner-lives](#), [interiority](#), [literature](#), [love](#), [readership](#), [reading](#), [relationships](#), [romance](#), [the-universe](#), [truth](#)

17 likes

“Criticism demands infinitely more culture than artistic creation.”

— **Pierre Bayard, How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read**

Like

tags: [books](#), [criticism](#), [reading](#)

9 likes

“When we talk about books...we are talking about our approximate recollections of books... What we preserve of the books we read—whether we take notes or not, and even if we sincerely believe we remember them faithfully—is in truth no more than a few fragments afloat, like so many islands, on an ocean of oblivion...We do not retain in memory complete books identical to the books remembered by everyone else, but rather fragments surviving from partial readings, frequently fused together and further recast by our private fantasies. ... What we take to be the books we have read is in fact an anomalous accumulation of fragments of texts, reworked by our imagination and unrelated to the books of others, even if these books are materially identical to ones we have held in our hands.”

— **Pierre Bayard, How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read**

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8 likes

“The paradox of reading is that the path toward ourselves passes through books, but that this must remain a passage. It is a traversal of books that a good reader engages in - a reader who knows that every book is the bearer of part of himself and can give him access to it, if only he has the wisdom to not end his journey there.”

— **Pierre Bayard, How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read**

Like

7 likes

“Reading is first and foremost non-reading. Even in the case of the most passionate lifelong readers, the act of picking up and opening a book masks the countergesture that occurs at the same time: the involuntary act of *not* picking

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up and *not* opening all the other books in the universe.”

— **Pierre Bayard, How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read**

7 likes

“To speak without shame about books we haven't read, we would thus do well to free ourselves of the oppressive image of cultural literacy without gaps, as transmitted and imposed by family and school, for we can strive toward this image for a lifetime without ever managing to coincide with it.”

[View quote](#)



— **Pierre Bayard, How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read**

tags: [books](#), [inspirational](#), [reading](#), [reading-habits](#)

6 likes

“Our relation to books is a shadowy space haunted by the ghosts of memory, and the real value of books lies in their ability to conjure these specters.”

Like

— **Pierre Bayard, How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read**

tags: [books](#), [reading](#)

4 likes

“The title of the work, its place in the collective library, the nature of the person who tells us about it, the atmosphere established in the written or spoken exchange, among many other instances, offer alternatives to the book itself that allow us to talk about ourselves without dwelling upon the work too closely.”

Like

— **Pierre Bayard, How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read**

tags: [books](#)

4 likes

“There is more than one way not to read, the most radical of which is not to open a book at all. For any given reader, however dedicated he might be, such total abstention necessarily holds true for virtually everything that has been published, and thus in fact this constitutes our primary way of relating to books. We must not forget that even a prodigious reader never has access to more than an infinitesimal fraction of the books that exist.”

[View quote](#)



— **Pierre Bayard, How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read**

tags: [books](#), [reading](#)

3 likes

“As may be seen, there is only one sensible piece of advice to give to those who find themselves having to talk to an author about one of his books without having read it: praise it without going into detail. An author does not expect a summary or a rational analysis of his book and would even prefer you not to attempt such a thing. He expects only that, while maintaining the greatest possible degree of ambiguity, you will tell him you like what he wrote.”

[View quote](#)



— **Pierre Bayard, How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read**

3 likes

“Fictional characters exert a great deal of influence over our choices in love by representing inaccessible ideals to which we try to make others conform, usually without success. But more subtly, too, the books we love offer a sketch of a whole universe that we secretly inhabit, and in which we desire the other person to assume a role.”

Like

— **Pierre Bayard, How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read**

tags: [books](#), [love](#), [reading](#)

2 likes

"It is only by maintaining a reasonable distance from the book that we may be able to appreciate its true meaning."

[Like](#)

— **Pierre Bayard, How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read**

2 likes

"What we are able to say about our intimate relation with a book will have more force if we have not thought about it excessively. Instead, we need only let our unconscious express itself within us and give voice, in this privileged moment of openness in language, to the secret ties that bind us to the book, and therefore to ourselves."

[Like](#)

— **Pierre Bayard, How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read**

tags: [reading](#)

2 likes

"The paradox of reading is that the path toward ourselves passes through books, but that this must remain a passage. It is a traversal of books that a good reader engages in - a reader who knows that every book is the bearer of part of himself and can give him access to it, if only he has the wisdom not to end his journey there."

[Like](#)

— **Pierre Bayard, How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read**

tags: [reading](#)

1 likes

"Reading is first and foremost non-reading. Even in the case of the most passionate lifelong readers, the act of picking up and opening a book masks the countergesture that occurs at the same time: the involuntary act of not picking up and not opening all the other books in the universe."

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— **pierre bayard, How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read**

1 likes

"Alors même que je suis en train de lire, je commence à oublier ce que j'ai lu et ce processus est inéluctable, il se prolonge jusqu'au moment où tout se passe comme si je n'avais pas lu le livre et où je rejoins le non-lecteur que j'aurais pu rester si j'avais été mieux avisé. Dire que l'on a lu un livre fait alors surtout figure de métonymie. On n'a jamais lu, d'un livre, qu'une partie plus ou moins grande, et cette partie même est condamnée, à plus ou moins long terme, à la disparition. Plus que de livres ainsi, nous nous entretenons, avec nous-même et les autres, de souvenirs approximatifs, remaniés en fonction des circonstances du temps présent."

[Like](#)

— **Pierre Bayard, How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read**

0 likes

"Au-delà de l'humour de certaines situations, il y a quelque chose d'effrayant dans la manière dont Phil s'y prend pour séduire Rita, puisqu'elle revient à supprimer toute la part d'indécision du langage. Dire sans arrêt à l'Autre les mots qu'il souhaite entendre, être exactement celui qu'il attend, c'est paradoxalement le nier comme Autre, puisque c'est cesser d'être un sujet, fragile et incertain, face à lui."

[Like](#)

— **Pierre Bayard, How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read**

0 likes

“Aussi conviendrait-il, pour parvenir à parler sans honte des livres non lus, de nous délivrer de l’image oppressante d’une culture sans faille, transmise et imposée par la famille et les institutions scolaires, image avec laquelle nous essayons en vain toute notre vie de venir coïncider. Car la vérité destinée aux autres importe moins que la vérité de soi, accessible seulement à celui qui se libère de l’exigence contraignante de paraître cultivé, qui nous tyrannise intérieurement et nous empêche d’être nous-même.”

[Like](#)

0 likes

“Да си дадеш време да изучиш грижливо знаковите книги на другия, като в крайна сметка те станат и твои, това е може би условието за истинското разбирателство в областта на културата и за пълното съвпадение на вътрешните книги. [...] И може би една идеално споделена любов би дала достъп и до най-тайните текстове, върху които личността на другия е изградена.”

[Like](#)

0 likes

“L’auteur n’attend nullement un résumé ou un commentaire argumenté de son livre et il est même préférable que ceux-ci ne lui soient pas donnés, il attend seulement, en préservant la plus grande ambiguïté possible, qu’on lui dise avoir aimé ce qu’il a écrit.”

— **Pierre Bayard, Comment parler des livres que l'on n'a pas lus?**