



PIERRE BAYARD & UMBERTO ECO WITH PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER:

How To Talk About Books You Haven't Read

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LILA AZAM ZANGANEH: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Lila Azam Zanganeh, and I'm the literary correspondent for *Le Monde* in New York. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you this evening Professors Umberto Eco and Pierre Bayard. Professor Eco, as we all well know, is a semiotician, Medievalist, and author of the super-blockbuster *The Name of the Rose*. This past August I visited Professor Eco in Milan for the *Paris Review*, and this is what I asked him, and what he confessed to:

“You are a great consumer of books,” I said. “Yes, but I am not a glutton that swallows everything.” “Have you read *The Da Vinci Code*?” “Yes, I am guilty of that.” “So, do you generally have time to read the novels of your contemporaries?” “Not so much, because since I became a novelist, I discovered I am biased. Either I think they are worse than my novels and I don’t like it, or I suspect they are better than my novels, and I don’t like it.” **(laughter)**

But other than the fact that he is not reading them, Professor Eco is very optimistic about the future of our books. “Every season,” he told me, “there is an article on the end of the novel, the end of literature, the end of literacy. The fact of the matter is, there are thousands of stores full of books and full of young people all over the world, and never, in the history of mankind, have there been so many books, so many places selling books, so many young people visiting these places, and so many people buying the books.”

Pierre Bayard, for his part, is a psychoanalyst and a professor of literature who just published a bestseller of his own, *How to Talk About Books You Haven’t Read*. I have not read his book yet, **(laughter)** but my sense is that it is a clever and witty opus, concerned with the sociology of reading and non-reading as a creative practice. And Professor Bayard, as it turns out, devotes one full chapter to Umberto Eco, to *The Name of the Rose*, to the part where William of Baskerville demonstrates that he knows full well the substance of the second book of *Poetics* by Aristotle, which in fact he is picking up for the first time, simply because he deduces it from the other Aristotelian pages. But then, Bayard, in fact, has introduced false information about *The Name of the Rose* in his own chapter, which Eco admits not to have noticed. **(laughter)** Of which, more later.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are very happy to welcome you to LIVE from the NYPL, directed by the marvelous Paul Holdengräber. The mission of LIVE—do we still need to state it?—to make the lions roar, to oxygenate the library and bring great cultural conversation of international stature to New York City. So, I would like to thank Bloomsbury Books and the cultural services of the French Embassy for their wonderful support, particularly Anne Sophie Simenel and Violaine Huisman, who is not part of the cultural services but who will be a French interpreter this evening. Thank you, Violaine. Our partners this season are *Metro* newspaper, the media sponsor for the fall LIVE series and 192 Books is our new bookseller partner. 192 Books is located at 192 10th Avenue.

After the event, both Pierre Bayard and Umberto Eco have agreed to sign books. Please join them in the lobby. Also, please consider becoming a Friend of the NYPL and receive discounts of all future LIVE tickets. In order to pull off speaking of many more books, join the email list of LIVE from the NYPL and find out about upcoming events. This Monday, a conversation with Cees Nootebaum, and on November 30, Nicholas Kristof on Darfur. After tonight's conversation, Pierre Bayard and Umberto Eco have agreed to sign books. A mike, also—they have agreed, sorry, to sign books and to respond to questions, so a mike will be passed out. It would be great if you could wait for it to reach you since we're actually recording the evening. It is now my great pleasure to bring to the stage Pierre Bayard, Umberto Eco, Violaine Huisman, and Paul Holdengräber. **(applause)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Thank you, Lila Azam Zanganeh, for that wonderful introduction. Yes, the lions roaring. So—sorry about that. These things are falling out of my pockets before I even ask you a question.

UMBERTO ECO: Why do you have a book of Pushkin?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: No, not Pushkin, Proust. *On Reading Ruskin*.

UMBERTO ECO: Ah, Proust. Okay. **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Should I begin with Proust? No, I'll begin with Bayard, instead. So, Pierre Bayard, let me wonder, first of all, why you think so many people have come here tonight? What do you think they are hoping to get from you?

PIERRE BAYARD: First of all, I should like to tell some words about my level of English. You will appreciate it's not quite good, but I will try to speak English, but I will be helped by Violaine to understand the questions and commentaries, because I think in front of Umberto Eco it's better to be two **(laughter)** because one, and I like answering—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: It's two against two. **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah. Oh! You are not the referee any more.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: No, now that I hear your English it's two against two.

PIERRE BAYARD: And I like avoiding questions, and I like answering beside the questions, but to answer beside the question it's necessary to understand the question, so Violaine will help me. Secondly, I like to be, I am in a strange state of mind in front of Umberto Eco, a kind of *unheimlich*.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: *Unheimlich*?

PIERRE BAYARD: Uncanny. Uncanny.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I know, I just thought, I didn't bring the German translator tonight. (laughter) So, yeah.

PIERRE BAYARD: Could you translate in both sides? (laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So you're in an *unheimlich* state of mind?

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah, *unheimlich* state of mind, because Umberto Eco lives in this book.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: He lives in the book?

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah, he is a creature of this book, he is a character of my book, in the third chapter of the first part. And so it's—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You have read this book... **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah, it's strange for me to see, excuse me, it's strange for me to see you here. It reminds me of this famous movie by Woody Allen, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, where the actor on the screen looks in the audience, Mia Farrow, and he closes the—

UMBERTO ECO: It happens also in **(inaudible)**.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Right.

UMBERTO ECO: In **(inaudible)**, in which they passed through the screen.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I'm sure you've never been likened to Mia Farrow. **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: No, I was Mia Farrow in the comparison! **(laughter)** So, anyway, our language complex, I'm going to recall that **(inaudible)**. It's when the character in the book crosses the frontier between fiction and reality and becomes a habitant of reality. So I'm leaving a kind of **(inaudible)** and it's a strange impression for me.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But we will get over that.

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah, and now I'll answer your question. Why so many people, and why did I write this book? I was surprised to see that there was no book about this very common situation. We know very often, when we are intellectuals, this situation is quotidian. The situation of having to speak about books you have not read. And there is no book about it. You have books about everything, about improving your English—I should have read it. About taking care of your garden, or how to kill your wife, and so on, but no one's book about this common situation of having to speak about books you haven't read. So we know the situation. You know it, Paul.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: No, no. **(laughter)** I mean I, but you said intellectual—

PIERRE BAYARD: So you are the exception, as Umberto is, as there are other exceptions.

UMBERTO ECO: --he has read, which is false, obviously, but. **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: But for each rule, there are exceptions, which founds the rule, so you are the first exception, Umberto Eco is the second exception. In my life, I am always in this situation, so I tried to help people.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So is it a self-help book, then? **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: The translation allows me to find a good solution.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: No, it's a scheme, it's a strategy.

PIERRE BAYARD: I was surprised, but in France, when the book was published, many people, many booksellers, you see, came to me and they told me, thank you. Because they have this kind of problem, they told me, I begin at 9:00, and 7:00 I don't have time to read, just a few books a

year, and each day people come to me and ask advice about books. And after they read this book, they are able to answer precisely, so. **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So, we, in one of your chapters, you speak about how we should confront living writers. And I'm wondering, since I'm confronting two of you tonight, I'm wondering if you could give me some advice. I mean, I know that part of the advice you give is that I should flatter you. **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: Of course, this first advice is well known. I give another advice. Because I had a very strange experience this year. A friend of mine who is a very famous writer in France—but I cannot give you his name—I was in the pub with him, and he explained me how much he loved my books, so it was a very narcissistic experience. I was happy, but I was only happy at the beginning of the encounter, because the more he spoke of my books, the more I was terrified, I was more and more unsettled, because what he loved in my books did not overlap at all with what I had tried to do. **(laughter)** So I gave two advices in the book. First of all, you have to praise the writer, who is so greatly extraordinary, but secondly, I think it's quite important not to be too precise, **(laughter)** because if you—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So, I mean, give—

PIERRE BAYARD: General—I can't explain why—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Help a little bit, give me the words, I should have rehearsed this with you before we got on stage, but how should I have begun the interview tonight?

PIERRE BAYARD: You can explain this book transformed your life, **(laughter)** for instance, no problem!

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: This book transformed my life.

PIERRE BAYARD: My friend, the writer, began explaining me that my books transformed his life, so I was very happy, but afterwards, as he saw I was happy, he began to be precise, and the catastrophe began too.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I imagine that—

PIERRE BAYARD: You seem to be unsettled. **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: No, I feel that this is very good advice, to be as general as possible and to evade as much as possible, that's what you're really suggesting, so that I should just say— but I can't say to you that your books have transformed my life and then say to Umberto Eco that his books have transformed my life. **(laughter)** I have to have something else to say, so maybe I should say, "Your books completely transformed the way I see reality."

UMBERTO ECO: Are you asking me? **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: No, I'm not asking you, I'm—

UMBERTO ECO: Because his book didn't transform my life, because I knew everything he was saying, and I completely agree, first of all. Even though his book has three parts, and I agree with the first two parts and I have some problems with the third one, but we'll speak later of that. The first part is what he said. Okay. Considering the number of books published in the world and the process of the evolution of mankind the lifespan of a single person is not enough read all of them. So we speak about a book we have not read. Okay. And at the school we study history of

American literature, history of French literature, which means to be informed about books that we have not read and that we shall never, never, read! **(laughter)** Anyway, anyway, I have never read some masterpieces of Italian literature—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Such as?

UMBERTO ECO: —but I know more or less what they are about, and—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But admit at least to one of the books you haven't read.

UMBERTO ECO: *Orlando innamorato* by Boiardo.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Really? **(laughter)**

UMBERTO ECO: But, as Boiardo say, I can, if not to make a complete lecture, at least speak for twenty minutes about it, according to its relationship with **(inaudible)** because—as he said—what I have learned through other books is exactly the position. You know, the—how do you say *autodidatta*?

AUDIENCE: Self-taught.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Self-taught.

UMBERTO ECO: Self-taught. There are self-taught people who are geniuses. But they have a weakness because they don't know how to put a certain book in the right place because school is exactly the institution that teaches you how to put that book that you have not read (**laughter**) but in—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So school helps us greatly in those ways, yeah. Thank God we have the schools.

UMBERTO ECO: The school is an institution that helps us not to read books but—I am not joking—it's very—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Do you believe this?

UMBERTO ECO: It's very serious what I am saying.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: No, I know. I mean, we have these classes here, you know, at Columbia—

UMBERTO ECO: (speaks in French)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I think we need a translator from—no, but I mean we have this—

UMBERTO ECO: I was just saying what I said before.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Okay, no, no—

PIERRE BAYARD: (speaks in French)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: —the courses here at the university, you know, at Columbia, where you study, you take a course from *Beowulf* to Virginia Woolf, or from the *Iliad* to *The Idiot*.

UMBERTO ECO: Have you read them?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Um, not recently. (laughter)

UMBERTO ECO: At the time of its publication. (laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Yes, yes, yes. I mean, it does remind me of a story that I've told before on this stage, but which I have to tell. I had a student at one of the universities where I taught who was very interesting and always said things that were slightly off. And it was wonderful to have him because he was very talkative and you know, sometimes I needed him to intervene. And we were reading *Bartelby, the Scrivener*, and I turned to him—there were a hundred students in the class—and I said, “Michael, have you in fact read *Bartelby, the Scrivener*?” And he said, “Not personally.” (laughter)

UMBERTO ECO: That is very important. That seems very important. Society and culture are a machinery by which and through which all the people read for us. That's absolutely true and important. Otherwise if we will be old *Robinson Crusoe* (**inaudible**). No, other people read for us.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And I decided, you know, in preparation for today, to actually read your book. And you know, I just, I wanted to prove it to you because I put a lot of—I did that very quickly.

UMBERTO ECO: Not a proof.

PIERRE BAYARD: No proof. (**laughter**) No proof.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: No, and I underlined. I underlined. I underlined in various places with notes and... But this brings me to something that your book—since you are a shrink, this brings me to something your book does, I think, stress, which is the role of shame. Shame is very important, a very important component of your book. And also fraud, and being fraudulent, and the weight of culture. So maybe you could talk about shame, which I think isolates us in the world.

PIERRE BAYARD: I will try to answer both to Umberto Eco and Paul. Of course, as a school learns us to be able or to locate books in our libraries, but perhaps not sufficiently. Who you have told, Umberto Eco, can be told by someone who knows this kind of keys. I think for many

people it's not evident that culture is a problem of locating books in the general libraries. And I answer your question: when I was young I was not in a family where there were many books, and to enter this country of books, this realm of books, this space of culture, for people who are outside, is not evident, because we have tendency in school and university in France to present books as a religious thing—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: As a religious...

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah, I think to all (**inaudible**).

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What's wrong with that?

PIERRE BAYARD: And—the result can be to terrify people. I was surprised by something in (**inaudible**) last year. In conferences, after I spoke of my books, very often the journalist or the bookseller came to me and told a story. And it was always the same story. Of course, words could be slightly different, it was the same story in four parts, and the story was: when I was young, when I was in school, when I was, etc. First part. Second part: I was obliged to read, to read Proust, to read James, to read Joyce, to read Umberto Eco, and so on. Third part: I did not succeed because it was too difficult, it was too long, I disliked, etc. And so the result was that I stopped to read Proust, James, or this kind of book. I stopped to read. And I heard many times this story, as if school and university created kind of slight wounds, injuries, of course it's not traumatism, but many people told me the same story because we present books as if we were—as if we had a very (**inaudible**) culture. And I think to explain this—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And so your goal is—instead of imprisoning people in a culture that they reject because they suffered such wounds in their years in school—your solution is just talk about books but don't read them. This is the counsel you're giving.

PIERRE BAYARD: To be clear, it is a first book of a series, of course I will not give all the advices, because if I give all the advices, first of all, people will not buy the book and secondly, I can't write the following books, see what I mean.

UMBERTO ECO: Share, share—

PIERRE BAYARD: I tried to open a new field of research, but as you told me, I really think there is a problem of guilt, and it's important to help people to light the burden of the guilt. It's not criminal to skim a book, it's not criminal to open a book and not finish it, it's not criminal to recognize you are not able to read Joyce or Proust—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But, but in certain situations, it's sometimes is extremely complicated—I mean, I only have heard this said by other people—but in certain situations, one finds it very difficult to admit that one hasn't read *Hamlet*. **(laughter)** And you speak about this in your book, that you have to find a way, I mean, you have to develop a very sophisticated way of being—you don't use the word, but really, hypocritical, or evasive.

PIERRE BAYARD: Perhaps the situation is not the same in Europe and United States.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: No, here we read most everything. **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: Voila! When I was in Paris last year, a Canadian friend told me, you are lucky in Europe because you can write books about the shame people feel when they have to speak about books they have not read. And he told me United States or Canada is finished. Perhaps it's not the same situation. But I think the shame is identical because we have this shame inside us.

UMBERTO ECO: Remorse. *Remords.*

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah, yeah. And very few people in France will accept or recognize they have not read the works of the canon, because school infuses us this shame.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So we have to bluff. Bluffing is—

UMBERTO ECO: No, no. Listen. He is delivering the third part of his theory. I would like to come back to the first part.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Please do.

UMBERTO ECO: We don't have read all the books we pretend to know. But, we know them pretty well. I want to—I have a small library of no more than 50,000 books and only 30,000 in

my main apartment in Milan. And it happens to everybody when an idiot comes there, he say, “How many books have you read, all of them?” So there are three standard answers. One was a friend of mine who said, “Many more, sir, many more.” **(laughter)** And the second is, “No. Why otherwise I should keep them here?” **(laughter)** The third is, “No. The ones I have read are at the public library. Those the ones I have to read the next week.” **(laughter)** So they are distraught that—okay. But, but. The second answer is the most, the most serious. Why otherwise I would keep them there. A library is a guarantee for your memory, huh? If you need something, you know it’s there. But you are continuously ravaged by remorse. I have not read that, I have not read that. Then, one day in your life, you pick up a book you’ve had there since thirty years, and you were convinced not to have read it. You open it, and you realize that you know it perfectly.

So there three theories. One is a sort of awkward theory. There is a sort of transfiguration, **(laughter)** what you’ve touched, you’ve touched it and the animal spirits of the book—yes. The second is that you believe not to have read it, but in the course of thirty years you have picked up, you know, the....you have opened it, you have read two pages. The third is that in the course of those thirty years you have read many, many books who spoke, talked about that. And so, at the final end, you discover that you know the book very well. So that is a way by which we know the content of many books we have not read. And that is a guarantee of knowledge and of advancement of learning.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You know, there’s a fourth way of answering the question, which is the way I answer it. I don’t know how many books I have, but I know that I have 16,000 pounds of books because when we moved here from Los Angeles the president of this library

called me up and said, “You know, it’s wonderful you’re coming, but, you know, we got the estimate for your move and there’s, you know, it’s quite heavy, the amount of books you’re bringing.” And in a moment of humor he said to me, “You know, I just want to tell you that we have—

UMBERTO ECO: That’s why I wanted my daughter to be an architect, to calculate the possibilities.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: The possibility—yeah, no but the president said, “You know, I just wanted to let you know that we actually have books here.” **(laughter)** Which I thought, you know, was rather shrewd. But when people to come my home and people ask me if I’ve read every book, I always say, immediately, “Twice.” **(laughter)** It’s another answer.

UMBERTO ECO: That is the fourth one.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: That’s the fourth one. Now, I’d like everybody—

PIERRE BAYARD: But my answer, my answer to this question, because we all know the story of someone who goes to a flat and is astonished, my answer is, “I did not read them, but I live with them.” And what you perfectly describe is the story of the man who lives with books and perhaps it’s what school does not teach, that it’s not the program of reading or not reading, it’s the program of living with books. And it’s quite different. It looks like, but it’s quite different, because it means sometimes you don’t read the book, it means you begin and not finish. But you

know the book is here, and when you have a problem, you can go to it and ask advice to this book, such as a companion. That's a great difference, and I think school should teach this difference between to read and to live.

UMBERTO ECO: School should teach that culture doesn't mean to know the date of the death of Napoleon by heart, but to be able to find it in three seconds, while usually school teaches people that they have to know it by heart.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Now, Professor Bayard, you have here at the start of your book—and I've given it to everyone here in the audience and above and I want to say hello to all the people who are watching us on simulcast—a list of abbreviations, which, you know, seems fairly serious. A list of abbreviations opposite works cited: (**inaudible**), ub, book unknown to me; sb, book I have skimmed; hb, book I have heard about; fb, book I have forgotten; ++, extremely positive opinion; +, positive opinion; -, negative opinion; --, I mean, we could continue obviously, extremely negative opinion.

Could you explain to us a little bit what the purpose of this was, and I know that some books, in particular, for instance, if we take *Les Illusions Perdues*, a book by, which most everybody here may have read at some point, by Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, it is both sb, if you could follow please, sb, hb, and fb, but only +. I mean, so it's many things at the same time. Could you tell us what the use of this classification, this taxonomy, might be?

PIERRE BAYARD: In this book I tried to be frank and honest with myself. And for each book I put in my book I precise with the abbreviation. If it's a book unknown, a book I have heard about, or a book I have forgotten, and of course these categories can overlap. And you can precise, I also give the feeling I have about the books I have not read, and I put two plus if I have a good opinion, and—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And, and, what is the criteria of the good opinion, just curious, how do you decide this? I'd like to learn from you.

PIERRE BAYARD: It's just a feeling, and of course this can change. But what is important in this list is not these categories, but the categories which are not in the list. Because you can find other categories, like for instance, three days ago I was in Harvard and Homi Bhabha proposed me a new category: he proposed the books on which you sleep.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: On which you sleep.

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah, I think it's a good idea, and I take it, and I was preface the note, footnote for Homi Bhabha, because what is important is that there is not the category "read books" and the category "unread books." Because we often consider there is a kind of straight line between read books and unread books. Sometimes this distinction can be useful but for many books, as Umberto Eco told, we are not in this distinction. For many books we are not able to tell if we have read them or not. For many books by (**inaudible**), Lacan, Freud, frankly, I can't tell. Perhaps I read them some years ago.

UMBERTO ECO: (inaudible)

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah, because—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So you have a—

PIERRE BAYARD: It's quite important not to forget the role of oblivion, forgetfulness. I look at Montaigne—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Yes. Yes, yes.

PIERRE BAYARD: Montaigne has a very bad memory. He forgot everything, the name of people, the faces, the books he had read, the books he had written, and I am in the same situation. People ask me, did you read this book? I am not able to answer this question. So what is important in this list is the fact that I did not choose two categories, read books and unread books—excuse me. New categories will be introduced in next tomes, of course.

UMBERTO ECO: I told this book is divided in three parts. This is the second part. Okay, we have read a lot of books but it doesn't mean we are remembering them perfectly. That is a very important remark. I could ask my audience, do you remember in *War and Peace* by Tolstoy the moment in which Natasha marries Prince Andrei. A lot of you, yes—no. She never married Prince Andrei because he died before, but it's not so easy—I am not sure that everybody of you

was remembering exactly that Natasha didn't marry Prince Andrei. And Bayard, in his book, makes the analysis of three books: one is *The Name of the Rose*, the one is a David Lodge novel, and the other is...

PIERRE BAYARD: Graham Greene.

UMBERTO ECO: Graham Greene. They are three books about the understanding of unread books. And at the end, he says, I made a trick, I'm certain in the summary of the three books, a mistake falls—personally I detected immediately the mistake for Graham Greene and for David Lodge. I didn't detect, **(laughs)** I didn't detect the mistake for my books. **(laughter)** You see, our way to remember books is very—is very adventurous, and that is a very, an absolutely important point in which I appreciated very much his book.

PIERRE BAYARD: I save the—

UMBERTO ECO: His book, I don't remember exactly, but... **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: I save the **(inaudible)** of milk from burning, because I think you could not destroy this **(inaudible)** and we have to discuss about this point but I am sure it was not destroyed. And so not the **(inaudible)** still exists.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And now to come back to Montaigne, which is part—

UMBERTO ECO: This is another story, which is the possible worlds created by books that have been there, but is another story. So, sorry. Another meeting, another evening next year.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Are you coming back?

UMBERTO ECO: Yes.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Thank you, thank you. **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: But there are other mistakes in the books. You have three mistakes but there are other mistakes. I decided when I began to write books never to speak about living writers, because I think it's too dangerous. I have a family, children, a business, so on.

(laughter) And for the first time I spoke about two living writers, Umberto Eco and David Lodge. You appeared in the circumstances I have described, and David Lodge wrote a letter to me to explain I had made a mistake about his book. So now I return to the old situation, I will never speak any more of living writers. It's too dangerous.

UMBERTO ECO: But that's curious, that David Lodge wrote a beautiful essay on *The Name of the Rose* and he didn't understand the mistake **(laughs)**.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But I'm—I'm—

PIERRE BAYARD: Because I suppose he skimmed and he went directly to the chapter devoted to him and found the mistake I had let!

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Writers do that sometimes.

PIERRE BAYARD: It's a true story, yeah.

UMBERTO ECO: Can I come to the third part, because I have some questions for you.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But before you come to it, can I—

UMBERTO ECO: You are the master, puppet master.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Thank you. **(laughter)** Thank you, no. I've never been defined so beautifully. **(laughter)** I, you put a quotation that has intrigued a lot of critics and alleviated a lot of guilt for these critics who are paid to review your book, and as you know, your book has been reviewed a lot, I must admit, mostly favorably, by the critics. And you put this quotation of Oscar Wilde that is quite wonderful, and we recognize Wilde immediately, don't we. "I never read a book I must review, it prejudices you so." **(laughter)** It is beautiful, do you—

UMBERTO ECO: It's very important for a university professor when he's a judge in a commission for chairs, never read the publication otherwise you could be influenced by that.

(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Absolutely. I remember a professor of mine who said, you know, when he was asked if had read a book, he said, “Read it? I haven’t even taught it.” **(laughter)** So, you know, there are these various ways of... But let’s come back to Oscar Wilde because it’s a wonderful quotation and I’d like you to talk a little bit about how Wildean it is.

PIERRE BAYARD: I see what you mean.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And we might turn to the end of your book.

PIERRE BAYARD: I had a problem with this quotation too, because I was very happy when I met this quotation. And you see, I am a naïve person, I trust people. If Umberto Eco explains me psychoanalysis is just a fake, I stop practicing psychoanalysis. **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What do you, what do you think?

UMBERTO ECO: It’s a fake.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: It’s a fake, okay. **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: Okay, so I stop.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You have more time to devote yourself to writing the second volume.

PIERRE BAYARD: I am just as Woody Allen in **(inaudible)**. Identify to person and follow that advices. And when Alberto Manguel was in *History of Reading* Oscar Wilde, told that, I quote Alberto Manguel, and I really thought it was Oscar Wilde's quotation, because he told. And it was not true, and a reader—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So, there, just before you get to that, the question of authority is very important, and you speak about this in the book. Alberto Manguel, in *The History of Reading*, says this Oscar Wilde, you as, obviously a very naïve person, **(laughter)** say this is Oscar Wilde...

PIERRE BAYARD: Because I am an autodidact, I come from the media explain you, so I respect and worship great prophets, so when Alberto Manguel told this quotation was from Oscar Wilde, I believed him.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Beautifully wrote it—

PIERRE BAYARD: And it was not from Oscar Wilde, it was from Sydney Smith. And so I put a footnote to explain the problem and I told this, perhaps Sydney Smith was the first to tell this, but is it possible to be sure that Oscar Wilde never said that.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: He said so many things. **(laughter)**

UMBERTO ECO: Listen, when writing my doctoral dissertation on the Aquinas aesthetics I was immediately faced with the fact that all the literature on the subject—centuries of literature—said that Aquinas said that **(speaks in Latin)**. It's not necessary to translate it.

(laughter) That is what—that definition. Then I discover that he had never said so. Never. He had said something different: **(speaks in Latin)**. And the entire posterity continued to discuss about the definition, taking it seriously, and he never wrote it. Is the same as, “Elementary, my dear Watson.” Conan Doyle had never written this line. And the entire Conan Doyle posterity is played upon, “Elementary, my dear Watson.” Sherlock Holmes never said, “Elementary, my dear Watson.”

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I mean, people can have tenure for years, based upon falsity. **(laughter)**

UMBERTO ECO: Yes. And Aquinas never said, “Elementary, my dear Watson.” **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: I'd like to end the story, so, but when I saw my problem, I decided to trust—Umberto Eco was not in Paris, so I could not ask—so what did I, I went to Google. And I—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You, too.

PIERRE BAYARD: I put the quotation. And the answer Google was: Oscar Wilde, Oscar Wilde, Oscar Wilde. Because my book was successful, so many journalists took the quotation and now it's an Oscar Wilde quotation, it's considered by everyone! **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But maybe it is, maybe it is, in a way.

PIERRE BAYARD: Perhaps. **(laughter)** I am unable to know.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I mean, he said so many things. You know, what is interesting is the note you put. I'll read it, it says, "Quoted in Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading*, hb ++."

PIERRE BAYARD: Plus plus, yeah. Only plus but I subtract one plus because he mistake and it causes must trouble to me.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Does he get a minus now?

PIERRE BAYARD: Only one plus now.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: One plus: hb +, so next edition hb +. "This remark is also attributed to the British writer Sydney Smith."

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And you know what is interesting. The *New York Times Book Review* of this Sunday—you will already be in France—has a letter from a reader who corrects you about this quotation. And what I found fascinating about that, is that obviously that reader didn't get much beyond the first page, because if they had gotten beyond, they would have seen the footnote! **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah, yeah, because—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: **(speaks in French)** You got that. I mean, it's mean of you.

UMBERTO ECO: There are quotations you can never find again the author, there is one of them that I find marvelous and I used as an excerpt in one of my books. "I used to be perplexed, but now I am no longer sure of it." Marvelous.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And who is it?

UMBERTO ECO: **Finally**, I found it, he's a certain **(inaudible)** quoted by a psychologist without any precise reference, but I find it marvelous. "I used to be perplexed, but now I am no longer sure of it." **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But the thing is, to some extent, and then maybe we'll come to the inner library and the relationship to books that you think we should—the relationship you think we should entertain with books. But for a very long time one can live with quotations like that. I

mean, I suffer from quotomania myself and very often I feel as though I've quoted something so many times and I'm convinced it's by that person—nobody has, for instance, corrected me on my favorite line from Oscar Wilde, I mean Wilde is wonderful in this way. He said, "It is only superficial people who do not judge by appearance." I mean, it may be by Wilde, it may not be.

UMBERTO ECO: But maybe this quotation is correct in your wildest desires. **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Right. Exactly. **(laughter)** And—thank you for that. But I mean **(laughter)** what I would like to talk about with you is, maybe—you've created a new taxonomy, a new concept, and one of them, maybe we can move in that direction and then get to the third part too—is the notion of the inner library. The perfect place to speak about it.

PIERRE BAYARD: I tried to invent some new concepts to describe our unconscious relationships to books, and I invented three concepts of—three types of books. Screen book, for instance, for example, inner books, and ghost book. One main important notion is a screen book. I tried to explain that when we are speaking of the same book and you find it's not the same book, because we place the book we are speaking of by another one. It's easy to make an experience, go to a movie or a book of your childhood, movie or book you cherished, you loved very much, but you have not read the book or seen the movie for years. Go and see it, or read it, and you'll be surprised because not the book or the movie you had in your head. And the most important scenes for you are not in the book or in the movie.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Where are they?

PIERRE BAYARD: It's a good question.

UMBERTO ECO: You put them aside.

PIERRE BAYARD: It is a screen books, and it (**inaudible**) shows how much unconscious is involved in our relationship with books.

UMBERTO ECO: For a psychoanalyst he is *la tarte à la crème*.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: How would you say *la tarte à la crème* in English?

UMBERTO ECO: A pecan pie.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: A pecan pie?

UMBERTO ECO: Yes. (laughs)

PIERRE BAYARD: I think it's important because when we are discussing a book, the same book, if you study with attention, what happens, it's not the same. I devoted a book to *Hamlet*, only, and the problem of the dialogue with death, and you know *Hamlet* is probably the book about most critics wrote, and when you study very precisely what happens in discussions about

Hamlet you discover the persons don't speak of the same, even when speak of the same excerpt or the same page, they don't speak of the same.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But this is a good thing.

PIERRE BAYARD: I think it's unavoidable. It's difficult to avoid it. And it's why the notion of read books is probably not a good notion to understand what happens.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I've noticed—I've noticed in your book whenever you use the word "read book" you do something that one does a lot in this country, in America, you may not be aware of it, but when people want to be ironic in this country, very often they go like that, you know. But you write the word "read" in quotation marks. Why that distancing? What does it mean to have "read" a book?

PIERRE BAYARD: Because—I—you see I heard very often a joke about this book. Many journalists told I am going to speak of this book, but I have not read it. Or they spoke of the book, and they ended the article by saying I have not read it.

UMBERTO ECO: I wrote that you had not read it. It was a defense.

PIERRE BAYARD: (laughs) But what does it mean—I told to some journalists who explain me they had not read the book—what does it mean, the same journalists who explains me he has not read the book begins to speak about his childhood and the complex relationships he had with

school and so on. It means there is a work inside him which has begun. So what does it mean to have read a book if just with the title or the cover or skimming, you have begun to reflect on important problems such as your childhood or your suffering? You see, to have read a book is not clear for me. I'm not able for many books to explain if they must belong to this category or the contrary category, you see.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So what is the importance of skimming? This is something that critics in this country have been insisting on, I think with some relish, because you've kind of helped them along. You've said that skimming is really a very important attribute of reading.

UMBERTO ECO: Certain books are written just in order to make the reader to skim a lot of pages. **(laughter)** I make always the example of the great masterpiece of Italian literature of the nineteenth century, the *I promessi sposi* by Manzoni. There is immediately after the first chapter a long, twenty pages of documents of the epoch, you know, that explain what the *bravi* that were contractors of the time, they were. And everybody confessed not to have read all the pages. That's exactly what Manzoni wanted. He wanted people to understand that they were losing a lot of time in this cause and to skip it! **(laughter)** Then, when you read it the second time, the third time, you come back.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And you skip other—

UMBERTO ECO: This part of the beginning, okay, and the author knew it. And encouraged you to do that.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: That's one form of skimming. But you talk about skimming in a slightly different way, I think.

PIERRE BAYARD: If you go to a French library, sit in a French library such as the great library of Tolbiac and you have students in front of you, they will begin—most of them will begin on the first line and end on the last line, and I think there is a deep relationship between the refusal of skimming because it's not allowed for young people and how French libraries... When I come to United States the first thing I do is to go to libraries, because it's a space of pleasure. Why? When you are in France, if you need a book, you go—you give the title of the book and you receive the book you have come to read. If you go to the United States you can make promenades inside the libraries, and wanderings and walking. You go to search a book and you look at the books.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And you have written about this. But—

UMBERTO ECO: Open shelves.

PIERRE BAYARD: And I think there is a deep relationship between the difference of libraries and our practice. I think we should teach our students to skim—of course, it cannot be the only way to the books. It's important to read books from the first line to the last line. But we intellectuals, we are obliged to skim to make research, you see?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Professor Bayad, just hold the thought for one minute. I'd like to say to my staff here, if they could make the room a bit warmer. It feels quite, I mean, I thought, you know, our conversation would heat things up enormously, **(laughter)** but somehow we haven't quite achieved that so if this room could be made a bit warmer that would be really wonderful. I mean, I know that by having it so cold I'm preserving you for a bit longer. This will give you the opportunity to read more books.

UMBERTO ECO: Cool. Keep cool.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Keep cool, yes, exactly. But if we could just make it a bit warmer I'd appreciate it, by at least two or three degrees. Maybe four even, why not. **(laughter)** You talk about the necessity of abstinence. Of actually—

PIERRE BAYARD: Sexual? **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Well, you know, your book never mentions sex.

PIERRE BAYARD: I forgot in my book, but—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But you do talk about the ability—that it's very hard not to read certain books and not to read, but you encourage people, and I think you use a few examples from some writers. I'm trying to remember now who they are. You see, I read the book yesterday and I've already forgotten. But you speak about abstinence, and the necessity of abstinence. And

I—are you lost? I can find the passage for you. It’s on page thirteen if you’d like to go to that page please.

UMBERTO ECO: He needs to remember, it doesn’t exist in the book.

PIERRE BAYARD: There is no page thirteen either! **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You see it? You see it?

PIERRE BAYARD: Where?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You see it? Musil, you say, in the second case **(inaudible)** abstains like Musil’s librarian. And you talk—abstinence comes up a few times in the book, and I’m wondering if you could talk about, I mean, it sort of reminds us of St. Augustine: “Give me continence, but not yet.”

PIERRE BAYARD: I find it—I find a very beautiful story by Musil, the story of this biblio—lib—?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Librarian.

PIERRE BAYARD: Librarian, who decides to stop reading because he wants to have a general perspective on the all the books of his library. Of course, it’s humorous from Musil, but I think

it's also a story with wisdom. And, because a cultural man has this perspective, the kind of perspective you can get when you wander through American libraries. And this is the meaning of abstinence. But of course I don't recommend abstinence. What I'd like to defend is a necessity for people who are outside the world of culture to know different ways to, different ways to the books. I think very often school teaches one way to reading: the respectable way to read from the first line to the last line. But we know other ways of reading, because we know books, we are in this world of culture, we know the keys. And I think we should teach the keys.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And you make a distinction, a very important one—I hope you'll recognize this one—between active and passive reading.

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah, I explain sometimes I have in libraries a student in front of me, and the same—it's quite different, someone does not read can be quite different from someone who does not read. Because you have a way of non-reading which is just absence of reading and you have a way non-reading which is a step to this perspective Musil teaches, you see. Hm. No, you don't see. **(laughter)** I don't see either, not.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Do you see?

UMBERTO ECO: I was always thinking about—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You were thinking about third part.

UMBERTO ECO: The third part. **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: You don't understand what I say?

UMBERTO ECO: I have since a long time, a theory, many books, about interpreting and using a book. And somebody has taught that I was privileged in interpreting against using. No. There are two ways of approaching a book. I always tell the story of my doctoral dissertation. I went to a point in which I couldn't go forwards. It happens when we make a research. I was completely lost. And at a book **(inaudible)** in Paris I found an old book of the nineteenth century, of a certain **(inaudible)**. I read it, it was very boring, it was on the subject matter of my dissertation, obviously. But at the page 133, I found the—a real idea that settled everything. And I remember to have under stressed with red pencil...so.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: It was your copy, not the library's. **(laughter)**

UMBERTO ECO: No, my copy. And so I finished my work, and then **(inaudible)**, somebody remembers at the beginning of *The Name of the Rose* I quoted a certain **(inaudible)** because I always worshipped the death of **(inaudible)**, who solved my problem. And once a friend of mine said, "But you invented **(inaudible)**, it never existed...I swear. And I went to look for the book, it was now on the upper shelves, and I picked it up. I remember exactly the page with the right side, and the right side, and I found it. And **(inaudible)** was not same. What I believed to have found in, it was saying something else! **(laughter)** Simply by reading it, I got my ideal. That is why what I call to use a book, it happened also yesterday, I was reading a book before sleeping,

at a certain point I interrupted. I followed my train of thoughts that was inspired by a single sentence of that book, but then I followed a person up till—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What was it, what was it yesterday?

UMBERTO ECO: Oh, a book of a friend of mine teaching mathematics at Harvard on the Foucault's pendulum, but the real one, not my own. So we use books. We can read a poem and then to fancy to our beloved, we can do everything. And this is the way defended by Bayard when he say, when he says the French school exaggerate in the text, to be obliged to know everything about a given text, let the students be free not to read the book but to invent the book they are reading or not reading. But that's to use books. Although the kind we have to interpret books, and I think that—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But for that we need to read them, you would say.

UMBERTO ECO: In our life we can use a lot of books, but there are at least a few books that we must really interpret. I quoted *War and Peace*, and I said that maybe a lot of you didn't remember whether or not Natasha married the Prince Andrei. But the greatness of *War and Peace* is that she didn't, is the lesson of destiny. Dealing with a book you cannot invent it. You cannot think that Pierre Bezukhov killed Napoleon as you want to. He didn't.

So you must surrender to the majesty of destiny. And that is a great lesson. And in order to do that, you have to select in your life few books that you must read completely and interpret

faithfully without inventing and without falsifying. I am sure is Bayard is of my own opinion, and he has his own book that he really interpret instead of using them. But I want to stress that important difference, otherwise there will be a **(inaudible)** or Stanley Fisher or American deconstructionist position by which you can do everything you want of the book. Yes, you can be everything you want, you can also wrap the pages and put instead the salami, **(laughter)** but books must be respected sometimes in their own.

PIERRE BAYARD: There are many important points in what Umberto Eco told. First of all, I think it's quite important to explain to the students what you did. When we create, when we practice research it's a succession of problems and difficulties and locks and holes. I think it's quite important to transmit it. Secondly, as you told me, as you told, in France there is something which is a catastrophe for me. It's what is called "book report," and it's the main exercise in the schools, and book reports, it's some kind of summary and very precise—

UMBERTO ECO: Analyze the text.

PIERRE BAYARD: No, no, it's not analyze the text, analyze the text is not a catastrophe. Book report, the—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You talk about it with your son, who's fourteen.

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah, in my family I am in charge of his book reports, because—
(laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You do them for him?

PIERRE BAYARD: We share activities and I cook and I practice book reports. **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: At the same time.

PIERRE BAYARD: And book reports, you have to summarize the book you have read very precisely, and you have to answer very precise questions.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Like?

PIERRE BAYARD: Like, what's the name and first name of all the characters, in which town the hero came through, and after the constitute **(inaudible)** very precisely, and sometimes—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: What's wrong with that? I mean, it is important to know the characters of the book you're reading.

PIERRE BAYARD: I know. Sometimes I am not able to answer the questions in this book report about books I have written on because they are so precise it's impossible. And once my son told me after we had made the book report, "It disgusted me from reading." And there is all representation of reading behind this book report. It's just a—we were just as if reading was a kind of scientific— *enregistrement?*

TRANSLATOR: Recording.

PIERRE BAYARD: Recording. The real reader does not proceed in this way. Sometimes he read the book and was fond of the book and he was unable give all this informations because he dreamt, he imagined, he stopped to see a girl on the street, and so on. That is reading. Not what we call, what we teach in schools, you see? And last point, of course, I agree with Umberto Eco about the fact some books have to be read from the first line to the last line, of course, it's evident, I am not an adverse of books. All my life is about books. But you have a very important—

UMBERTO ECO: He even read mine! **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Well let me, let me say something—

PIERRE BAYARD: I prefer we change the subject, I just was— **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Let's just say something about that, because when Pierre Bayard knew that you were going to be onstage with him—

PIERRE BAYARD: But—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: —he said to me that he was rereading your *oeuvre complet*, your complete works, according to his very particular methodology. **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: *Oui*, but in the Bayard method.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: *Oui, oui, la méthode Bayard.*

PIERRE BAYARD: What I have to say that this distinction, which is quite important, in your books between interpretation and use, it's a problem for me.

UMBERTO ECO: Why?

PIERRE BAYARD: Of course, at a conscious level, it's possible. But at an unconscious level it's a problem. Why? Because if I accept this distinction, it's as if you gave me a saw, a handsaw, and you proposed me to saw the Freudian branch on which I am sitting. And I am not masochist. And so I cannot accept this distinction between, for me, when you read, unconscious is dominant, but of course, other conscious never, I agree with your distinction between interpretation and use.

UMBERTO ECO: I have the same problem because I am sitting under the tree, and not on the Freudian branch. **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: *Oui*, but I will fall on you, if you saw the branch!

UMBERTO ECO: I know, I know, Bayard, I know that the interpretation and use are two ideal positions and then in life there is a continuous flow between the two and sometime we cannot distinguish when we are making the interpretation or use. But, you know, at least I read *Sylvie* by Gérard de Nerval, forty years. Every time this covering something new and then finally I translated it. Maybe I am wrong but I believe to have interpreted it, not used it. Maybe it was a wrong interpretation but it was a sort of interpretation, and I felt bound to a duty of faithfulness toward the book, toward the text. Maybe it happens few times in one's life.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Because one can't fall in—I mean, one can't fall in love with so many things simultaneously.

UMBERTO ECO: No, no, it happens few times to really read a book, but sometimes it happens, happily. And all the rest was—once somebody told me that my standards should be I can be can't.

PIERRE BAYARD: I think to—I completely agree with that.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You don't have to, though, I mean—

PIERRE BAYARD: Okay, but on this point there is no problem. I think if we could teach to the students and children that some books will play—determine or play some role in their life, that should be a good introduction to—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But Oscar Wilde had a different view, no? In your book you talk about—

PIERRE BAYARD: I quote many writers in this book who have paradoxical positions but—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Wilde wanted to come up with a hundred books—

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah, and they explained they never read, they hate reading, and the less you read, the best you are, but of course it's kind of humorous positions.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Wilde, you say in your book, was asked to give a hundred books one shouldn't read.

PIERRE BAYARD: But for everyone knows Oscar Wilde such as Valéry and other people were voracious readers, of course.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But this is where the problem comes up with you, because you're claiming on the one hand that we can talk about books we haven't read, and on the other hand you give very good and detailed analysis of some of the writers. And so you're caught in a paradoxical situation of on the one hand telling us you needn't know about the writers, on the other hand giving us a sense, maybe you're just bluffing, that you in fact have read these books.

UMBERTO ECO: I don't think objection is the—he says that there is a lot of books that we don't read but we can speak of them, and then in his life he read some books. **(laughter)** So there is nothing strange, nothing strange.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Okay. There's no paradox, actually.

UMBERTO ECO: He didn't read Joyce, but he read me! **(laughter)** Okay, I appreciate it! I appreciate it very much!

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: No, I think, you know, I mean, you have to choose carefully.

PIERRE BAYARD: My books are not written by myself.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: They're not what?

PIERRE BAYARD: Are not written by myself. My books are written by a kind of narrator, you see, a character, who explains his positions, and I don't—this character is not me, it's a part of me. If you are a novelist and you create a murderer—Umberto Eco did it with Jorge, he's sure Jorge killed her, but I am not sure, but when you create a murderer you are not this murderer but this murderer is a part of you, you see. It's exactly what I try to practice in my books. All my books are written by a kind of paranoid narrator, but of course I am not this paranoid narrator. I am not completely this paranoid narrator.

Everyone who is used to books immediately sees the book has been written by someone who is obliged to read. You know, I had to read dozen and dozen of books to write this one. Why? To find examples. They are very rare. There are very few books where people speak about the practice of reading. So I had to read much and much. And this narrator, this voice, who introduces a book, is not me. It's a part of me. And in France there was misunderstandings because some journalists did not perceive the fact that the **(inaudible)** was inside fiction. And the attacked me very widely.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: How did they—what was the reception of the book in France?

PIERRE BAYARD: It was very good. But some journalists began to attack me because they really thought I had decided to create a kind of international movement preventing people from reading! **(laughter)** And they explain, but you don't realize the situation of books in France, our children don't read any more, and now Bayard wants them to stop to read. Of course, it's absurd, it's absurd. This book has been written by someone who loves books. Books are my life. It's evident. But I insist on the point that it is a fiction, and there is a narrator, a paranoiac narrator, who is a part of me, an important part of me but only a part.

So you have differences of levels. Some sentences overlap what I think, and some sentences don't look. In France, in the fourth page, you have a sentence which is, "If you want to speak of a book accurately, first you have not to have read it, and you have to speak it with someone who has not read this book either." And people really thought it was my opinion. **(laughter)** I feel angry about people who are not able to distinguish levels of language and to see the humorous

part in a book, you see. So it explains the differences—of course there are differences, because there are many Pierre Bayards in the books. More than two. **(laughter)**

UMBERTO ECO: He's a split personality.

PIERRE BAYARD: In United States, split personality—in France, a split personality, there are only two persons. In the United States, sometimes twenty, twenty-four, because United States is large country. **(laughter)**

UMBERTO ECO: No, no, but they are the time **(speaks in French)**.

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah, they say inside one personality you have the grandfather, the grandmother, the sister, the brother, everyone speak to—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I wanted to speak to you about the Graham Greene story, *The Third Man*, because we find ourselves a little bit in this situation now. You might narrate it a bit for this audience.

PIERRE BAYARD: It's one of the stories I had when I began. When I began the book, when I had the idea, and I found the title, I only had three stories, and I had to find the others. And I found it was really a beautiful story. It's *The Third Man* by Graham Greene. The novel is a story—it's quite different from the movie by Carol Reed. And the hero, the name is Buck Dexter, and he is a writer, a kind of writer. He writes Western books.

UMBERTO ECO: Popular novels, yes.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: He doesn't get a very high—

PIERRE BAYARD: And he has to give a conference in Vienna, but he's confused with another writer, who is named Dexter, but Benjamin Dexter. And Benjamin Dexter belongs to a very elitist literature, it's a kind of Henry James. So Buck Dexter gives a conference to an audience which is very happy to meet Benjamin Dexter. And so it's a perfect dialogue of the—

UMBERTO ECO: Not only, but they ask him about Gray, Gray, and mix—they were intending Gray that the pre-Romantic poet, and he thinks of Zane Grey, the Jack London-like, that's a—

PIERRE BAYARD: When Burt Dexter speaks of Grey for him it's a famous Grey who wrote Western novels, but for the audience it's the poet Gray. You see, and the perfect dialogue of the deaf. But I think this dialogue shows with caricature what happens when we speak of books, and shows something which is quite interesting. It's the role of prior relationships. Because strangely, Buck Dexter does not understand the questions.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: No, I mean, I'd love to—forgive me for interrupting you, because the quotation you use here, which I do believe is from Graham Greene, at least you quote it that way—

PIERRE BAYARD: Which page?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: This is page sixty-six.

PIERRE BAYARD: Sixty-six.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Of *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read*. To make matters worse, Martins is not dealing with just any group of readers, he's giving a lecture," much like we're hearing in this auditorium, but "with a circle of admirers, literary enthusiasts of 'his' works, who delighted finally to have Dexter at their disposal and eager to pay homage, cannot resist showing off by asking highly specialized questions. A kind-faced woman in hand-knitted jumper said wistfully, 'Don't you agree, Mr. Dexter, that no one has written about feeling so poetically as Virginia Woolf, in prose, I mean?' Crabbin whispered"—the man who was next to him—"You might say something about the stream of consciousness.' 'Stream of what?'"

(laughter)

PIERRE BAYARD: But what is quite interesting is that although Dexter does not understand the questions, because he does not know Virginia Woolf, he does not know Joyce, he is perfectly unable to speak about the stream of consciousness, everything is all right. Why? Because he is considered a great writer. And the more—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: He's invited.

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah, he's invited, and he's a great writer, and a great writer can be paradoxical and so on.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So I mean I—and I've noticed that here I can invite people here, and simply by the fact of them being here, they respect you.

PIERRE BAYARD: And when he says, when someone asks, "What do you think of James Joyce," "James who?" **(laughter)** It's considered really of the great writer who is able to have this attitude and it shows—when you speak of the books, of course, there is the book, but there is also a complex context of prior relationships, which are **(inaudible)**. And it's what I try to explain about this experience of—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And it's an experience that happens quite often. There's a story about Irving Berlin and Isaiah Berlin. Isaiah Berlin—there was a confusion, Winston Churchill thought that he was inviting Isaiah Berlin, but in fact he was inviting Irving Berlin, and so he was asking Irving Berlin about the state of—you know, what is your biggest contribution, and he spoke about *White Christmas*. **(laughter)**

UMBERTO ECO: Sir Isaiah was a singer. He sang perfectly. So he could have played that role of Irving. **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But, seriously—

PIERRE BAYARD: I am sure Umberto Eco can tell us what he want about (**inaudible**) because he is Umberto Eco, everyone will appreciate what he says, it's quite important, even if he talks sentences in Proust or Mickey Mouse.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You mean, just simply being Umberto Eco is enough.

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah. Of course. It's what happens exactly in Graham Greene's novel.

UMBERTO ECO: But why Dexter in the movie was called Rollo Martins? The name of the writer in the movie was different than in the novel.

PIERRE BAYARD: No, I simplify the story. The name is the same. The name is Rollo Martins, and his name Rollo Martins in the movie and in the novel. But—

UMBERTO ECO: No, but Rollo in the novel but (**inaudible**) in the movie, there is something wrong—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You are not remembering the same thing—

UMBERTO ECO: The same movie, maybe you are thinking of (**inaudible**).

PIERRE BAYARD: Anthony Hopkins movie.

UMBERTO ECO: All right, let's check, let's check.

PIERRE BAYARD: But Buck Dexter is his name as a writer.

UMBERTO ECO: Ah, as a writer.

PIERRE BAYARD: Buck Dexter is (**speaks French**). But the sequence, it's quite different, the rare and beautiful scene is in the novel—

UMBERTO ECO: But even in the movie there is a certain tension, seeing which, he is unable to face the situation, he is very untenable—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: It must be anxiety.

UMBERTO ECO: But it can make a difference because probably you first read the novel and then saw the movie, and I first saw the movie and then read the novel.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But this is, this is an issue that Pierre Bayard doesn't bring up, but it's a—

UMBERTO ECO: Terrible issue, yes.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Terrible because...

UMBERTO ECO: I have stopped every possible translation of my novels into a movie after I was told that the girl entering a bookstore said, “Oh! They already transformed the movie into a novel.” **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: **(laughs)** I laugh with delay because I need translation. **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: No, I mean, the other day this was happening when I was interviewing Péter Nádas. There were a hundred Hungarians here, Péter Nádas is a Hungarian, and all the Hungarians were laughing before I understood what the novelist was saying to me. It’s a situation which can be very confusing. To now come to a—I think an issue which is quite serious in your book.

UMBERTO ECO: Yeah, let us try to be serious here.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Just for a moment, Professor, you talk about the dangers of reading. And I’d like you to elaborate a little bit on this. And then since I did bring Marcel Proust, in conclusion, I’d like to end with a line by Proust. You talk about the fact that maybe we should be cautious and not read too much.

PIERRE BAYARD: It’s Oscar Wilde who says that. Of course, a first level it’s humorous, but a second level perhaps it’s not so humorous. Many people, many writers, and many creators read

in a moment of creation, which as a result than they cross the book. I think it's Oscar Wilde and other people such as Paul Valéry tried to explain, it's not only humorous sentence—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But do you see the, the dangers of reading. I'll read this line by Proust because I'd like you to comment on it. It's in a preface that Proust wrote on a text of Ruskin, on reading, and Proust wrote a text on reading, on reading of Ruskin. And so it's a meta-text.

UMBERTO ECO: Ah, finally, that's why you have this book.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Oh, you think I just had it to impress people?

UMBERTO ECO: You have prepared a question before.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Well, you know, improvisation is something you prepare.

(laughter) So, this is what he says, and I think Pierre Bayard—

PIERRE BAYARD: There is only one mark in your book.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Well, it's the only page I read. **(laughter)** But I was following your advice. "So long"—and I think this is quite serious, and I think after this, we'll get I think to the main, what I think is perhaps the fundamental element in your book, which is, I would say that it is an ode to reading, it is a love letter to reading, your book.

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah, it is.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: (speaks in French) (laughter) I mean, if the French begin talking about love, you know. (laughter) I mean, we did speak about continents before. “So long as reading is for us the insighter whose magic keys open to our inner most cells the doors of abodes into which we would not have known how to penetrate, its role in our life is salutary.”

PIERRE BAYARD: Afterwards, you will read a page of *Ulysses* by Joyce.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But no, listen here, Bayard, you’ll get this. It’s from Marcel Proust. “But on the other hand, reading becomes dangerous”—*la lecture est dangereuse*—“when instead of waking us to the personal life of the spirit, it tends to substitute itself for it. When truth no longer appears to us as an ideal we can realize only through the intermittent progress of our thought and the effort of our heart, but as a material thing, deposited between the leaves of books like honey ready-made by others, and which we have only to take the trouble of reaching for on the shelves of libraries and then savoring passively in perfect repose of body and mind.”

Difficult?

UMBERTO ECO: Too long. I have already forgotten. (laughter)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Briefly stated, yeah, briefly stated here—

PIERRE BAYARD: I think it's quite important, many writers told that because there is a point where it is necessary to stop reading if you want to create.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And if you want to live, in some way.

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah. Sometimes I tell to students who are writing a thesis, now you stop reading. Because you can read all your life.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: No, I mean, I know it, my dissertation advisor one day said to me—

PIERRE BAYARD: There is a moment when it's necessary to stop reading to live, to live of course!

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: To write. Because if not you also live with everybody else in your head.

PIERRE BAYARD: Of course.

UMBERTO ECO: Elementary, my dear Watson. **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: My dissertation advisor once said to me, "You know, there are two kinds of dissertations: brilliant dissertations and finished dissertations." **(laughter)** But you do

talk about that, Bayard, in your book, the fact that reading is dangerous if it substitutes itself for living. But you do say something that I find highly suspect, and which worries me a great deal. Let me find it. I know it worried me this morning. You say at the end of the book, just before the epilogue. Epilogue. Epilogue? Epilogue, epilogue, epilogue. Before the epilogue.

You say, “Beyond the possibility of self-discovery, the discussion of unread books places us at the heart of the creative process by leading us back to its source. To talk about unread books is to be present at the birth of the creative subject. In this inaugural moment when book and self separate, the reader free at last from the weight of the words of others, may find the strength to invent his own text and in that moment he becomes a writer himself.” And tell me if I’m being too literal, but I mean, do we need more writers? **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: What I try to explain is about classes in school and universities, I say we don’t have to form passive readers but also readers who try to write and try to express themselves. Of course, just a little number will become real writers, but it’s important to explain that to be—when you were young, it’s exactly what I tried to explain about book reports. To read is not to register such as a machine, it’s to create, to create literate things, but to create. I think we should try to put our students in this position, you see. It does not mean everyone will become a writer, of course.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: You’re not encouraging that.

PIERRE BAYARD: It's not the problem. I don't have opinion about the number of books which are published. It's not what I try to explain. What I try to explain is to help people to find an own way, a creative way—

UMBERTO ECO: It's a matter of encouraging a practice.

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah, of course.

UMBERTO ECO: And in the sense of marks, in which everything should be a fisher, a hunter, that—we understand and appreciate a **(inaudible)** because we are able to see every day **(inaudible) (laughter)** we are able to do that. And we have the right to do that. And there was a sort of idea that instead, writing is reserved to a privileged minority, and you don't write. And so we get a lot of frustrated people who try to write, and then to send to the publisher, to receive the manuscript back, to suffer. Now it has finished with Internet. Everybody can write. We don't read it, okay. But everybody has the right to write. Has the right to write, and to practice, and that's beautiful. That's beautiful.

PIERRE BAYARD: He is for Internet.

UMBERTO ECO: Huh?

PIERRE BAYARD: He is for Internet.

UMBERTO ECO: Yeah.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And you?

PIERRE BAYARD: Why not, why not.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: In closing, on page one twenty nine, you say something that I find quite moving. You say, “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 strive towards the image for a lifetime without ever managing to coincide with it. Truth destined for others is less important than truthfulness to ourselves, something attainable only by those who free themselves from the obligation to seem cultivated, which tyrannizes us from within and prevents us from being ourselves.” **(speaks in French)**

PIERRE BAYARD: Of course, yeah. Yeah. Of course. Yeah. **(laughter)** I forgot I told it, but I think it’s true, yeah, yeah. **(laughter)**

UMBERTO ECO: What he’s saying is that what I have written, please respect it. **(laughter)** Which is against your theory. **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Yeah, yeah, very much so.

PIERRE BAYARD: The problem is—

UMBERTO ECO: (speaks in French)

PIERRE BAYARD: But I had forgotten I had written it, and we were lost, we had lost the page, and so I have discovered what I had told you.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Now, as you read it, written by a stranger, obviously, what, what, how do you interpret that?

PIERRE BAYARD: I think it's a good idea, yeah. (laughter) You gave me the page, I should like to read this passage, it seems interesting, yeah. (laughter) What does I want to say exactly?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I'm not sure. Thank you very much.

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: There are mikes on each side of the room. The room is a bit warmer, I think. And you will be able to ask questions. I will say that questions, unlike mine, can usually be asked in about a minute or less.

UMBERTO ECO: And followed by a question mark.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Followed by a question mark.

UMBERTO ECO: And not a statement.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Not a statement, I often say that. Please, if you could pass the mike over. Could we have the mike, please?

Q: I wonder if we could have just a little discussion on beauty and ugliness?

UMBERTO ECO: We got drunk about that evening—it was two days ago. **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Next year, what is it, you're going to write a sequel, maybe, to *Ugliness*?

UMBERTO ECO: Since we said that ugliness is infinite, yes.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Please let's get a mike.

UMBERTO ECO: You have a question.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Yes, one second, if you could wait one second, we're recording.

Q: Has either of you ever listened to a book on tape?

UMBERTO ECO: My answer: no. But many of my books are on tape, and I think they can be useful for commuters, blind people, and a lot of others—being not a commuter, no.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: And not blind.

UMBERTO ECO: So I'm not against, on the contrary, I'm for.

PIERRE BAYARD: I did not. But this book will be published in this form in Germany and the United States, and I'm in difficult situation because I dislike—there was a change of one change in the book which is exactly the contrary of position I have because I have teach necessary to scheme and transform books and improve, this concerns myself, I dislike if there is one change. So I am in a schizophrenic position about this point.

Q: Yeah, I wonder—you talked about skimming books, which is very interesting. You didn't mention in the conversation at least about methods of skimming books, and I find one that I use very often, I wonder what you think about methods or orders. I think it's common, many people do that, so I'm not unique. I would read some pages of the beginning, some pages of the end, and at random, one or two sections in between. And then I will decide either that I know enough about the book or don't know about the book, or I'll decide to read some sections more. Maybe at the end I'll read it from beginning to end, that's rare.

UMBERTO ECO: There are different techniques of skimming and they are depending on your needs, the context, if you are a scholar, if you are a novel-reader, (**inaudible**), if you can use the index. Index is an encouragement to skip, with Internet, now you can decide if you are interested in all the pages in which a book speaks of cats. You call for cats, and you skim—which is absolutely interesting. In my just-published book on turning the clock back there is a chapter on how many times Dr. Watson remembered his adventures in Afghanistan. It's obvious that before I would have been an ordeal. With Internet, I think now the entire work of Conan Doyle, I called for Afghanistan and I found in few minutes all the pages in which Dr. Watson was speaking of Afghanistan. Okay, that is a very correct way of using a book of skimming. So Internet encourages skimming more than before.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But are you worried that Google might be not an accurate source of information?

UMBERTO ECO: Internet is an absolutely, absolutely inaccurate source of information.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Yes.

UMBERTO ECO: That's another story. And we have to teach people how to criticize the Internet, the web of information. That's another story. But when the eternal links in Conan Doyle works tell me how many times Dr. Watson speaks of Afghanistan, this is an accurate source of information, so why to despise it? It's more precise than an index in a book in which the editor always drops something or made a wrong page, and so on and so forth.

PIERRE BAYARD: For me, skimming is not just jumping over pages, it's a kind of way of dreaming, a kind of promenade inside the books. You have many ways of skimming.

UMBERTO ECO: Also, the transverse—

PIERRE BAYARD: It's a way of living with books such as a companion, it's not only a technique to go further, it's a kind of liberation in comparison with what is taught in many schools, you see, it's just a technique of suppressing pages.

UMBERTO ECO: Not only, you know that here, in this country, there are many classes in quick reading, and once Woody Allen said, "I learned the quick reading, I read the *War and Peace*, it speaks of Russia." **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: **(laughs)** *War and Peace*.

UMBERTO ECO: Okay. But yes, there are many, many ways of going through, through a book, and so there is not a rule, that is absolutely instinctive, artistic, it can be artistic. It can be an art.

PIERRE BAYARD: I will be more precise in the next tome of this saga, this problem in the next tome will be with a forward by Umberto Eco. **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Did you hear that?

UMBERTO ECO: Provided I do not read the tome, yes. **(laughter)**

Q: I guess to your comment about the Internet being kind of inaccurate at the moment. The Internet as an inaccurate source of material at the moment, I mean, so much is digitized right now and becoming digitized in the future, my thought is, do you think the book is becoming a kind of a fetish item, something that's, something that's part of a personal library but not necessary in a future in which books are increasingly more digitized and more available. My thought is, in the way that books are unlocked through skimming, books are also unlocked through searching, and I'm just wondering if you can comment on whether you feel the book is going, really, to be valid, you know, in coming years.

UMBERTO ECO: The book will keep going, for occultic reasons.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: For which reasons?

UMBERTO ECO: Occ—occu—what is the doctor curing the eyes? Ophtha—ophthalmological reasons. **(laughter)** You cannot read the Bible on the screen, entirely on your screen. Otherwise your eyes will become two tennis balls. **(laughter)** And conjunctivitis will win. Therefore, the book will, even when Google will have digitalized everything, you ask for print on demand, you get your book and you go on your bed or in your bathroom, and you read your book. And you read your book. Believe me. I am living on that, so I am confident. **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: It's in your best interest to believe that. **(laughter)**

PIERRE BAYARD: I should make a distinction between books and texts. What should be for me a tragedy is a disappearance of texts. Perhaps books will change and adapt, but we are in a civilization where texts could disappear, and I think it should be the real disaster.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: A distinction is quite familiar here—

PIERRE BAYARD: Because it's not the same thing with books.

Q: I have a little question, Pierre, I will tell you in French if you want. I think there is a very interesting cultural—

UMBERTO ECO: That's good French! **(laughter)**

Q: (speaks in French)

PIERRE BAYARD: I will translate.

Q: (speaks in French) In France, we have a much bigger respect for the literate texts, as religious, as you said, and in the United States the student is much freer. **(speaks in French)** For

example—and I think you should write an American version of your book, Pierre. **(speaks in French)** For example—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But it's doing very well. **(laughter)**

Q: In the—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I mean, I wouldn't change anything—

Q: For example, Pierre, in the United States, there is one discipline taught in universities, which is creative writing, that we don't have in France.

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah. Yeah, it's—

Q: Do you understand what I'm talking—

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah, of course, I know that, and **(speaks in French)**.

TRANSLATOR: Do you want me to translate?

PIERRE BAYARD: Yeah, perhaps you can translate.

This is exactly what I'm talking about when I say at the end of my book that I want people to write, and I'm in a department of literature in Paris which is the only department where we teach creative writing. But it's very rare in France; it doesn't exist. I know that that's the way it is in the United States and I think it's a great thing. In France, it's almost unthinkable.

Q: —how unreliable it is to rely on the Internet, would you care to comment about relying on book reviews for knowing all about books.

UMBERTO ECO: Who are you asking, me or Pierre?

Q: Either of you gentlemen.

UMBERTO ECO: This is a country in which there are still good book reviews, I must admit, and in France too. In Italy book reviews are substituted more and more by interviews with the author, which are self-advertising, obviously. Which is crazy, but there are many, many newspapers that say, we don't make the book reviews if you don't give first an interview, and after you have given the interview, they say it is useless to make the book review. **(laughter)** So in Italy there is the absolute decline of the art of book review. In this country, no, no, absolutely not.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But he was asking if you can rely on book reviews. I would say that in your case, one can rely because book reviews are—

UMBERTO ECO: It's a matter of taste, it's a matter of taste! When you write a book you can please fifty percent of your readers so the only solution is not to read the reviews of your books.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: But in your case, Pierre, you would rely on the reviews of this book because they were very good.

PIERRE BAYARD: I think one has to be very understanding with literary critics, reviewers. To make a good review, one has to enter the author's world. One would have to read all the books he's read to understand his universe, to understand the world he creates. At universities one can do this, but one has more time and one is paid to do that. In my book, critics understand that, because they understood that part of it was serious and part of it was trying to be funny. But I was lucky, because it takes time usually to understand the universe of a book. The difficulty is that critics often have to talk about only one book, when to understand only one book one has to enter a universe; one has to understand many other books.

UMBERTO ECO: And then, this other countries, Italy is one of them, you feel compelled to speak of the book immediately after, if not, it's too late. Why, sometimes the reviewer should need six months in order to understand the book. Once, it was like that. It can happen like this, the *New York Review of Books* and certain publications, but less and less people compelled to speak immediately, so the poor reviewer is obliged to improvise.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: No, I mean, they just came up with another translation of *War and Peace*. You can imagine reviewing that for the next day's newspaper. **(laughter)** It's not easy.

PIERRE BAYARD: My book could be useful in this special case, huh. **(laughter)**

UMBERTO ECO: Buy it.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Buy it, yeah.

Q: I was interested, did any of you read all the Harry Potter books, and if you could explain what the phenomenon of the Harry Potter books is?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I read them twice, but what about you? **(laughter)**

UMBERTO ECO: Have you heard about the Brothers Grimm? Okay. In every century there were people writing fairy tales, according to the spirit of that century, and now we have Harry Potter. What's wrong about that?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Have you read all of them?

UMBERTO ECO: Two.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Two.

UMBERTO ECO: Two, you know, to understand that they were the same as (**inaudible**), as Grimm, as Snow White, as, I don't know, Little Red Riding Hood, or Pinocchio. So it's a normal magic literature for children. Okay. What's wrong?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: I don't think anybody said anything was wrong. (**laughter**)

UMBERTO ECO: Okay, okay.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: No, I mean, much made of the fact that.

UMBERTO ECO: I prefer *War and Peace* but that's—

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: A question of taste.

UMBERTO ECO: A question of taste.

PIERRE BAYARD: My children are ten and fourteen so I had to read Harry Potter, otherwise my position in the family would be very compromised. (**laughter**)

Q: Another thing—do you find it odd that a first edition of Harry Potter sells for over ten thousand dollars?

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: (speaks in French) I don't know why I'm translating for you.
(laughter)

UMBERTO ECO: Bruce! You are a rare books dealer! The fault is yours, not mine, if you overpriced the first editions! Listen, I don't buy from you the first edition of Harry Potter at that price! **(laughter)**

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: (speaks in French) I see, okay, I just thought, you would think Bruce—

UMBERTO ECO: They are responsible for, for those prices.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: So why do you price it so high?

UMBERTO ECO: Why did you price it—

Q: (inaudible) I like incunabula, sixteenth century, fifteenth century.

UMBERTO ECO: So you don't buy Harry Potter.

Q: I've never read a Harry Potter. And I've never seen the movie.

UMBERTO ECO: So buy his incunabula and not Harry Potter. They cost only a few thousand dollars.

Q: I believe that Umberto Eco wished to speak earlier this evening about the third part of the book of Pierre Bayard, so could we invite you to do that now?

UMBERTO ECO: No, I did it. The third part was a sort of indulgence shown by Bayard for a free reconstruction of books instead of reading them. And I said that sometimes for certain books it is indispensable to read them and interpret them; that was the point. That's all. We have dealt with that.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Bayard, the last point is yours now. I claim that in fact, in my view, your book is a love letter to the reader and to reading. First of all, tell me if I'm right, and second of all, if I'm right, why?

PIERRE BAYARD: As a psychoanalyst I've worked things out with Umberto Eco yesterday, as I sent peace signals, as Umberto Eco as a semiologist. We managed to find an agreement, so it was fine, the third part was. I'm very pleased that Paul would say this because, of course, some people thought I was against reading, and of course it is a love letter to reading. What I tried to say to young people is find your way to books and invent your own way through these books, invent your own paths across literature.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Thank you so much. (applause)