

NOTES TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF THE IDEAL READER

The ideal reader is the writer just before the words come together on the page.

The ideal reader exists in the moment that precedes the moment of creation.

The ideal reader does not reconstruct a story: he recreates it.

The ideal reader does not follow a story: he partakes of it.

A famous children's book programme on the BBC always started with the host asking: "Are you sitting comfortably? Then we shall begin." The ideal reader is also the ideal sitter.

Depictions of St Jerome show him poised over his translation of the Bible, listening to the word of God. The ideal reader must learn how to listen.

The ideal reader is the translator. He is able to dissect the text, peel back the skin, slice down to the marrow, follow each artery and each vein and then set on its feet a whole new sentient being. The ideal reader is not a taxidermist.

For the ideal reader all devices are familiar.

For the ideal reader all jokes are new.

“One must be an inventor to read well.” Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The ideal reader has an unlimited capacity for oblivion. He can dismiss from his memory the knowledge that Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde are one and the same person, that Julien Sorel will have his head cut off, that the name of the murderer of Roger Ackroyd is So-and-so.

The ideal reader has no interest in the writings of Brett Easton Ellis.

The ideal reader knows what the writer only intuits.

The ideal reader subverts the text. The ideal reader does not take the writer’s word for granted.

The ideal reader is a cumulative reader: every time he reads a book he adds a new layer of memory to the narrative.

Every ideal reader is an associative reader. He reads as if all books were the work of one ageless and prolific author.

The ideal reader cannot put his knowledge into words.

Upon closing his book, the ideal reader feels that, had he not read it, the world would be poorer.

The ideal reader has a wicked sense of humour.

The ideal reader never counts his books.

The ideal reader is both generous and greedy.

The ideal reader reads all literature as if it were anonymous.

The ideal reader enjoys using a dictionary.

The ideal reader judges a book by its cover.

Reading a book from centuries ago, the ideal reader feels immortal.

Paolo and Francesca were not ideal readers, since they confess to Dante that after their first kiss, they read no more. Ideal readers would have kissed and then read on. One love does not exclude the other.

The ideal reader doesn't know he is the ideal reader until he has reached the end of the book.

The ideal reader shares the ethics of Don Quixote, the longing of Madame Bovary, the lust of the Wife of Bath, the adventurous spirit of Ulysses, the mettle of Holden Caulfield, at least for the space of the story.

The ideal reader treads the beaten path. "A good reader, major reader, an active and creative reader is a rereader." Vladimir Nabokov.

The ideal reader is polytheistic.

The ideal reader holds, for a book, the promise of resurrection.

Robinson Crusoe is not an ideal reader. He reads the Bible to find answers. An ideal reader reads to find questions.

Every book, good or bad, has its ideal reader.

For the ideal reader, every book reads, to a certain degree, as his own autobiography.

The ideal reader has no precise nationality.

Sometimes, a writer must wait several centuries to find his ideal reader. It took Blake one hundred and fifty years to find Northrop Frye.

Stendhal's ideal reader: "I write for barely a hundred readers, for unhappy, amiable, charming beings, never moral or hypocritical, whom I would like to please; I know barely one or two."

The ideal reader has known unhappiness.

Ideal readers change with age. The fourteen-year-old ideal reader of Neruda's *Twenty Love Poems* is no longer its ideal reader at thirty. Experience tarnishes certain readings.

Pinochet, who banned *Don Quixote* because he thought it advocated civil disobedience, was that book's ideal reader.

The ideal reader never exhausts the book's geography.

The ideal reader must be willing, not only to suspend disbelief, but to embrace a new faith.

The ideal reader never thinks: “If only...”

Writing on the margins is a sign of the ideal reader.

The ideal reader proselytizes.

The ideal reader is guiltlessly whimsical.

The ideal reader is capable of falling in love with one of the book’s characters.

The ideal reader is not concerned with anachronism, documentary truth, historical accuracy, topographical exactness. The ideal reader is not an archeologist.

The ideal reader is a ruthless enforcer of the rules and regulations that each book creates for itself.

“There are three kinds of readers: one, who enjoys without judging; a third, who judges without enjoying; another in the middle, who judges while enjoying and enjoys while judging. The last class truly reproduces a work of art anew; its members are not numerous.” Goethe, in a letter to Johann Friedrich Rochlitz.

The readers who committed suicide after reading *Werther* were not ideal but merely sentimental readers.

Ideal readers are seldom sentimental.

The ideal reader wishes both to get to the end of the book and to know that the book will never end.

The ideal reader is never impatient.

The ideal reader is not concerned with genres.

The ideal reader is (or appears to be) more intelligent than the writer; the ideal reader does not hold this against him.

There comes a time when every reader considers himself to be the ideal reader.

Good intentions are not enough to produce an ideal reader.

The Marquis de Sade: “I only write for those capable of understanding me, and these will read me with no danger.”

The Marquis de Sade is wrong: the ideal reader is always in danger.

The ideal reader is a novel’s main character.

Paul Valéry: “A literary ideal: finally to know not to fill the page with anything except ‘the reader’.”

The ideal reader is someone the writer would not mind spending an evening with, over a glass of wine.

An ideal reader should not be confused with a virtual reader.

A writer is never his own ideal reader.

Literature depends, not on ideal readers, but merely on good enough readers.