

Rasha KHAYAT

Oh, Come On, Stop Pretending!

Dear X,

It was so great to run into you last night at the book fair party. Didn't you just love the opening remarks by the director? So eloquent, and humorous, too! Isn't book fair season simply the best time of the year? So lovely to meet all of our old friends in such a literary, pleasant environment. You haven't changed a bit, I have to say. I'm glad you're doing so well in your new job. Sure, writing for TV probably isn't what you wanted to do, but at least you don't have to worry about money like the rest of us, right? Since you said you don't get to read much these days, let me write down the books I told you about last night. Maybe when you're on holiday the next time, you have time to pick one or two of them up.

So I really enjoyed this novel, *The Eighth Life* by this German-Georgian writer, Nino Haratischwili. I think she's incredibly talented, and so young! Imagine, writing a 1300-page book, at that skill level. The whole construction is impeccable, the choice of characters, the metaphors and everything – perfect. A modern classic, if you ask me!

Another must-read, I think, is *Before the Feast* by Sasa Stanisic. I know you didn't like him when he first came out because you thought he was too pretty and all that, too handsome to be a good writer, which might be true for some, but let me tell you, X, not this one! With this book, he just excels, what he does with language, craft, and his imagination – very admirable. I thoroughly recommend this book, as one of the reviewers wrote – it's truly world literature!

And I remember we talked a little bit about Terezia Mora and the prize she just received; in my opinion it was about time she got recognized for all her literary achievements. Please try and give *Ungeheuer* another go. It is such an important book – the way she manages to track two plotlines just by using footnotes – marvellous!

Ok, X, I must run. I have some writing of my own to do, haha, my agent already called me twice since I started this email.

It was great to see you, please keep in touch!

Have a good one,

Yours,
Y

ICPL and the International Writing Program Panel Series, October 5, 2018
Khayat (Germany), Hakimi (Israel), Chow (Bohemia), Coman (Romania)

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Dear Y,

Yeah, it was interesting seeing you last night. I must say, you truly have changed since I last saw you. Maybe it's a writer thing, or a side-effect of being in this pretentious literary business for too long. I never heard you use terms like *modern classic*, *admirable* or *choice of metaphors* before, when we used to talk about books, back in the day! That's why I always liked you. You didn't give a shit about metaphors or critics or modern classics. You simply loved books because they moved you.

Remember when I gave you Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* and you told me how you read it in one night and couldn't stop crying? Or how you never shut up about *Anne of Green Gables* and how you identified with this strange red-haired, wild girl, how you felt less lonely as a child, because you had Anne with you in your room?

One of the best conversations we ever had, I remember very clearly, was when we both got really drunk on cheap whisky and you gushed on and on for almost three hours about *Sterne erben, Sterne färben* by Marica Bodrozic. You told me it changed your life, it changed how you looked at yourself, at your own use of language, and at words, period. You lend me your copy, which was full of notes in the margins, you had underlined whole paragraphs and the book wasn't even a book anymore, just a stack of papers hanging by a thread, because you've read it so many times.

You know, I think you really should go back to your old way of looking at literature. I have no doubt the books you recommended are good ones, maybe even *modern classics*, but I'm sure they have moved you, otherwise you wouldn't feel you want to talk about them.

There's no shame in passion, even for a successful writer like yourself. So just stop pretending. You'll be a much better writer for it! You are allowed to still love Jane Austen and can be respected by those douche-y critics. Who gives a shit about these people anyway! That is what we used to say, remember?

Yours,
X

The books mentioned in this correspondence are in fact all brilliant, I love them all and absolutely recommend reading them, because they all moved me:

- Nino Haratischwili: *The Eighth Life*. Transl. By Charlotte Collins and Ruth Martin.
- Sasa Stanisic: *Before the Feast*. Transl. By Anthea Bell.
- Terezia Mora: *Das Ungeheur* (no English translation available)
- Joan Didion: *The Year of Magical Thinking*.
- Marica Bodrozic: *Sterne Erben, Sterne Färben*. (no English translation available)
- Lucy Maud Montgomery: *Anne of Green Gables*.

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